(EN)COUNTERING OPPRESSION:

AN ARGUMENT FOR SELF-SKEPTICISM

by

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ABSTRACT

(En)countering Oppression:

An Argument for Self-Skepticism

Master of Arts in Philosophy, 2017

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Political philosophy has a lot to say about oppression, but does it adequately address the issue? This project asserts that it does not. The primary goal of this thesis is to redefine how we look at this socio-political problem, and to create a new model for analysis and application. I begin with a discussion of social contract theory and the many ways it has changed in an attempt to properly address the issue of oppression. Following this, the project turns towards an ethico-epistemological analysis of the elements of oppression in the modern social sphere. In this analysis, I look at prejudice, bias, disagreement, virtue, and vice as they pertain to the problem of oppression. Notably, this project considers the epistemic effects/affects of both the oppressed's and the oppressor's viewpoint. Finally, the project culminates in the development of the *Argument for Self-Skepticism*, my alternative to current social contract theory.

discussed in their classes have shaped the way I interact with philosophy, and I deeply thank them all for this.

On a more personal level, I want to thank my classmates, friends, siblings, and parents for your support during this process. Be it studying with me to help keep my short attention span focussed, convincing me that "no, the world won't end if you don't finish that chapter tonight", or encouraging me as I made my way through various rounds of edits, their support was an incredibly important factor in my successful completion of this project.

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INTRODUCTION

As agents of the 21st century, we have many luxuries that previous generations did not. Some of these luxuries could not even be anticipated due to our socio-technological advances, thus creating paradigmatic shifts in the epistemic landscape between historical epochs. Despite these advances, we continue to face certain perennial problems. In this project, I will address the epistemology of oppression as it affects marginalised individuals' contribution to our collective body of knowledge. Given that the category 'marginalised' is necessarily vague and multifarious, and acknowledging the scope of this project, I will address the topic in its abstract form for the bulk of this thesis. Throughout this thesis, I also integrate several personal accounts to illustrate some of the more nuanced, denser topics I consider. I use these narratives because I believe that they can bridge the more difficult topics to the philosophical issues at hand. The hope here is that the analysis will lead to a model that has practical, applied implications; I will end the project with several case studies of a group that experiences particularly nuanced marginalisation to demonstrate these implications. The primary goal of this project is to explicate how I believe we should act when we recognise a situation of oppression, and how we can come to this action.

My project finds itself in the larger project of feminist epistemology and moral theory. Modern socio-political theory tends to create abstract characters who are sexless, raceless, and free of other qualifying properties and experiences to make models applicable to all who may engage with the field. I believe that this is naïve. Because we are embodied beings, and because we have no say in which bodies we inhabit nor the social structure in which we are raised and with which interact, we are not capable of adequately applying so-called neutral models. Whether we are cognisant of our actions, those with privilege perpetuate these privileges *even if we are vocal against injustice*. As Lisa Tessman asserts, "[g]iven the pervasive injustice of oppression, and

given the high level of participation in maintaining structures of oppression, I see unjust and other vicious people as fairly ordinary".[1] The ways in which ordinary people can be oppressors is incredibly diverse. Those microaggressions[2] caused by racism, homophobia, ableism, etc. are pervasive in how we interact with others in any social sphere. What is most concerning about this is that people who believe they are aiding marginalised communities can instead be perpetuating these very issues through their actions. An easy, vivid example of this is how so many well-intentioned Americans hold the belief that black neighbourhoods are inherently dangerous and need outsider intervention to 'save them from themselves'.

This clearly demonstrates that the problem of oppression is not only a current issue, but it also highlights how oppression is not monotypical in its implementation. This is to say that there is no one way to oppress an othered group. As such, a singular model which presupposes everyone can relate to a neutral party cannot work towards solutions to problems of oppression. What we need is a model that directly acknowledges our personal and social biases and privileges; only by consciously working with these will we be able to see the social power tied into these elements of our lives. My project concludes with the development of a model that I believe does precisely this. In so doing, I reject the social contract method of socio-political commentary and instead work within a social epistemic, virtue ethical framework. I believe that this is the proper trajectory for 21st century research on oppression because the current focus on ideal theory does not alleviate the

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[1] Lisa Tessman, "On (Not) Living the Good Life: Reflections on Oppression, Virtue, and Flourishing", in *Feminist Moral Philosophy*, ed. Samantha Brennan (Calgary, Alberta: Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 2002): 5.

[2] Someone may push against my usage of this word here, asserting that I should connect microaggressions with implicit racism, implicit homophobia, etc. because the explicit counterparts are *more than just* microaggressions. This is entirely true, and I fully recognise this; however, in this paragraph I am dealing specifically with microaggression as it occurs in both cases. If it is unclear how this term applies to both, consider this definition: "a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of **indirect, subtle, or unintentional** discrimination against members of a marginalised group."

social problems of oppression; instead, these ignore several highly important aspects of marginalised lives.

My project begins with a rejection of social contract theory because of its inherent inadequacies for addressing current issues of oppression. In chapter one I outline the modern, Rawlsian contract and how some have attempted to reshape it to include marginalised voices. As I demonstrate, such hermeneutic projects are necessarily incomplete because we cannot know all of the ways in which people are oppressed in an everchanging world; there is always the possibility that (1) those who belong to the dominant group will 'discover'[3] that they are oppressing another group, or (2) the possibility that a development in technology or social order will create a genuinely new category within which there will be new ways to be privileged and marginalised. Even if we were to focus our efforts on making a social contract which only focuses on those already identified as marginalised, this modified contract theory would be far too impractical to put into use due to the sheer number of ways in which an individual can be oppressed in the modern world. Thus, to properly engage in intersectional discourse I urge a rejection of social contract theory.

After clarifying this necessary rejection, I begin to build the groundwork for my model. Chapter two focuses on the epistemic factors present in oppression, and in so doing it offers further justification for why social contract theory is inadequate for addressing such concerns. The primary focus in this chapter is to develop an account of prejudice and testimonial injustice, and their relation to oppressive social systems. This will involve detailing the dangers of stereotyping, the model minority myth, and improper credential assignments, among other factors. This section also demonstrates in detail exactly how ordinary oppressors can be; we may unknowingly oppress

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[3] The use of 'scare quotes' here is intentional. More often than not, the dominant group is not the one who learns of a new group that is being marginalised. Typically, the marginalised group themselves bring this to the attention of dominant individuals, which constitutes the 'discovery'.

another, but that hint of doubt we grapple with when a female politician proposes legislation, or that unconscious tightening of our muscles when a black man approaches, or even that initial grip of pity we feel when we see someone with a physical disability, demonstrates our ingrained microaggressions. Another important element I acknowledge in this chapter is how a marginalised individual can nevertheless, and quite easily, oppress another marginalised individual. This is primarily because an individual's experience of marginalisation does not necessarily translate to an understanding of oppression of the sort another group experiences.

I then consider the reasons for a virtue-based approach to addressing oppression. Chapter three spends a significant time outlining the virtues of the oppressed, and the vices of the oppressors. Neither of these categories are meant to be absolutes; rather, they are wide-lens generalisations. In other words, we can observe a typical trend towards vice among privileged individuals, whereas marginalised individuals tend to develop moral and epistemic qualities we would otherwise call virtuous. The problem here is that these virtues develop out of severely problematic situations, and are thus a 'tragic dilemma' of sorts; while these individuals have virtue, their lives are irrevocably scarred from the oppression they have suffered. There is significant nuance to navigate in this chapter, as someone who is oppressed in one manner and an oppressor in another will arguably have a mixed understanding of virtue and vice.

The project culminates in chapter four where I develop my own model for addressing oppression that does not rely on social contract theory. As I have noted, this necessarily has to take account for bias and privilege, rather than result in another 'neutral' party model. After I finish developing my model, I apply it to a case study on bisexuality featuring two distinct considerations: the first, from a perspective of heterosexual-queer engagement, and the second from a monosexual-bisexual perspective.

Ultimately, the significance of this project is to offer a model with which academics can address issues that occur outside of the academy, without relying exclusively on thought-experiments. This is important because, while they can help situate our ethical, epistemic, metaphysical stances in the academy, thought-experiments often take social change to be uniform. In order to enact social change, we need to recognise that there will always be elements we cannot account for in our preparation, and abstract thought-experiments thus fail to apply how we need them to. The primary problem such theories face is dealing with the sheer power of bias, as well as the general reluctance to change how we live our lives. Many of us are well intentioned, and honestly want the best for everyone, yet we will still push-back against policy that forces us to change our way of life *even if it benefits our own predicament*. We are not automatically bad people simply because we push-back against such change, but we must be cognisant that our actions affect those around us. Resistance to change is dangerous, especially when it comes from a position of privilege, because those with privilege have political power. My project begins with this problem, and the contract that enables it.

WHY CONTRACT ISN'T ENOUGH

Philosophical discourse of social contract theory tends to begin with, at least by paying lip-service to, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Hobbes. Typically, this dialogue quickly changes to contemporary theorists, especially John Rawls, as well as the criticisms of these modern theories. If we want to understand the trajectory, however, it may be more appropriate to begin with Plato. In his introduction to the *Crito*, Harold Tarrant initially notes the difficulties scholars have in accepting Socrates' 'social contract theory', which informs their critique as to whether the Crito is even a Platonic dialogue.[4] Talk of contracts begins around the midpoint of this dialogue; Socrates responds to Crito's urgings with the question "[o]ught one to fulfil all one's agreements, provided that they are just, or break them? [...] If we leave this place without first persuading the state to let us go, are we or are we not doing an injury, and doing it to those we've least excuse for injuring?"[5] Socrates continues to assert that if the Laws of Athens were to interrogate him for fleeing his cell they would almost certainly accuse him of attempting to destroy them and the State as a whole.

The idea of owing your way of being to the State is not extraordinary, even in our modern political philosophy. Saving the details for later, even Rawls employs such a concept in arguing that "[w]e have no prior identity before being in society: it is not as if we came from somewhere but rather we find ourselves growing up in this society in this social position, with its attendant advantages and disadvantages, as our good or ill fortune would have it".[6] I will return to this below;

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[4] To be clear, he also acknowledges that it is not a social contract in the exact sense we use the term now; instead, Socrates' agreement is made with regards to the city and its laws, not citizens. (Harold Tarrant, "Justice and Duty: Socrates in Prison: *Crito*" in *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Trennedick and Harold Tarrant [New York: Penguin Books, 1993]: 71. See also: 207n2).

[5] Plato, *Crito*, 49e-50a [Tarrant, 85].

[6] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: expanded edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 41.

for now this citation serves to connect our current views to Plato's proto-contract discourse. Socrates' Laws continue:

> Are you so wise as to have forgotten that compared with your mother and father and all the rest of your ancestors your country is something far more precious, more venerable, more sacred, and held in greater honour both among gods and *among all reasonable men?* Do you not realize that you are even more bound to respect and placate the anger of your country than your father's anger?[7]

Here the Laws imply that they give all citizens life and identity, and that they must be respected by anyone who calls themselves a citizen. This is quite similar to Rawls' statement, and as such the connection is not something that should be taken as merely coincidental.

In this chapter, I will address the social contract as we encounter it today. I then demonstrate why I believe this form of political theory is an improper method for addressing social issues, and why it needs to be rejected. This rejection is due to the increasing call for intersectionality in social discourse; as I will show, contract theories cannot adequately address intersectionality because of their rigid structures. In section 1.1 I look at two attempts to diversify the contemporary contract: Carole Pateman's sexual contract and Charles W. Mills' racial contract. In section 1.2, I formulate my argument against contract theory and state my reasons for rejecting it in favour of developing my own method later in this project.

In modern times, the social contract has been revived by Rawls in his attempts to reinterpret the contract and apply it to contemporary political issues. His concept of the original position mirrors the state of nature found in previous contract theories, and he argues that in any attempt at finding some mutually agreeable background framework to our current society, "we must find

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[7] Plato, *Crito*, 51a-51b [Tarrant, 87] (emphasis my own).

some point of view, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached".[8] This deviation from the original position involves forming agreements between potentially disparaging groups. As such, Rawls also asserts that parties in the original position must be oblivious to the social position which they represent, otherwise their biases could infiltrate the decision making process.

Rawls ensures his readers understand that his concept of the original position is not meant to be some historical fact. It is a device that "must be regarded as both hypothetical and nonhistorical".[9] Rawls gives it this nature to ensure that we do not get fixated on particular facts of the parties, but instead simply entertain their possibility; in other words, it is not important whether they are real entities, what is important is what they can show us about our own reality. As such, the fact that the parties are unable to know which group they represent is not unimaginable because their existence is merely one which allows for them to stand in for an individual in any social group. This is an important metaphysical feature as it allows for the construction of Rawls' veil of ignorance: the position that "the parties are not allowed to know the social position of those they represent, or the particular comprehensive doctrine of the person each represents. The same idea is extended to information about people's race and ethnic group, sex and gender, and their various native endowments".[10] Not only do the parties not know what those they represent believe, but they do not know who they are; this makes it highly unlikely that a party member would be willing to play the social lottery and gamble on issues such as slavery.

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[8] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 23.
[9] *Ibid*., 24.
[10] *Ibid*., 24-25.

Rawls' theory is not entirely grounded in a state of nature like those of his predecessors', and indeed he asserts that the original position is something different than this so-called state. He asserts that:

> [I]n setting up an argument from the original position, [we can] introduce the state of nature in relation to the so-called nonagreement point. This point can be defined as general egoism and its consequences, and this can serve as the state of nature. […] All that is known in the original position is that each of the conceptions of justice available to the parties have consequences superior to general egoism.[11]

So, when discriminating between the state of nature and the original position, we need to consider this subtle egoistic element. The original position, as a hypothetical nonhistorical construct, directly relates to our current societal structures. Thus, it also demonstrates how we would want the parties to act under current conditions, while considering the macro-level implications of socio-political choices. The state of nature, as a non-society, would be a state of living focused around micro-level implications.

Despite not relying on a state of nature, and instead favouring an original position, Rawls still calls his work a social contract theory. His definition of a social contract is the following: "a social contract is a hypothetical agreement a) between all rather than some members of society, and it is b) between them as members of society (as citizens) and not as individuals who hold some particular role within it".[12] He qualifies this further by stating that he employs a Kantian approach to contract theory, and from there he refers to the approach as 'justice as fairness' instead of 'social contract'. In making this distinction he adds two additional criteria: "c) the parties are thought of as free and equal moral persons, and d) the content of the agreement is the first principles that are

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[11] *Ibid.*, 279.
[12] *Ibid.*, 258.

to regulate the basic structure".[13] In this sense, the Rawlsian contract is also a moral contract structured upon basic framework within which a society can build and change what constitutes their ideal way of life.

1.1 Two Attempts at Challenging/Changing the Contract

Social contract theory has become the lingua franca of political philosophy; however, much of its focus has been spent on developing definitions and thought-experiments, rather than applications to case studies and problems. When these theories are applied, they are typically treated as broad generalisations, as each theory claims to be applicable to every individual, equally, since all are individuals born 'free and equal'. The problem with this implementation is that our world does not actually treat all individuals as free equals, meaning these theories are addressing a completely different world than the one we live in. How can any generic theory hope to address the differing issues experienced by the various groups in our society? The closest any major theorist comes with their generalisations would be Rawls' concept of the comprehensive doctrine, which states that society must be set up in such a way that individuals can enjoy their own doctrine while honouring those of their compatriots. Recognising that trying to apply a generic theory to many individuals is problematic matters because we cannot expect embodied politicians and legislators to be able to grapple with inter-group differences without engaging with those groups. Even with a neutral-party model, a white man cannot expect to 'discover' what needs to be implemented to help racialised women with a generic model alone.[14]

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[13] *Ibid.*, 259.

[14] I will come back to this point later in this project. For now, this comment should serve to prime the reader for the upcoming discussion by providing reasons to doubt current social-contract models.

Because of the generalised nature of mainstream theories, I want to change directions and examine two attempts to challenge the discourse on contract theory. First, I will look at Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract*, written shortly after the resurgence of contract theory. In her short preface she asserts that her "discussion began to push against the confines of social contract theory by noting that the classic theorists had left a legacy of problems about women's incorporation into, and obligation within, civil society that contemporary arguments failed to acknowledge".[15] Pateman's work correctly highlights that generalised social contracts ignore, either implicitly or explicitly, the different challenges experienced by women. Following this analysis, I will look at Charles W. Mills' *The Racial Contract*, which he wrote about a decade after Pateman's contract. Mills aims to "adopt a nonideal contract as a rhetorical trope and theoretical method for understanding the inner logic or *racial* domination and how it structures the polities of the West and elsewhere".[16] As with Pateman, Mills' work demonstrates a lacking in traditional contracts when it comes to discussing racial differences. An important difference between Pateman and Mills is that the latter hopes to salvage contract theory, while the former seeks to throw it out. However, both situate their entire discussions within social contract theory, and the terminology and assumptions it uses. Additionally, both theorists recognise two types of contract: an ideal contract, which they denote with capital letters (Sexual Contract and Racial Contract), and a non-ideal contract denoted by lowercase letters (sexual contract and racial contract). Both seek to make their contributions to the field through non-ideal theory.[17]

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[15] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988): x.

[16] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999): 6.

[17] As this chapter is focused on the contributions and changes that have occurred to the social contract theory, I will be presuming the non-ideal contract whenever I mention the racial contract or the sexual contract. I make this decision because the focus of this chapter is not solely for exposition; rather, I am explicating only insofar as it is necessary to understand my critique of social contract theory in its modern state. Should the reader be interested in learning more about the differences Mills and Pateman draw between the ideal and non-ideal Racial/racial and Sexual/sexual contracts, see Pateman (1988) and Mills (1999) in greater depth.

1.1.1 Carole Pateman and the Sexual Contract

Immediately Pateman makes clear that the social contract is not purely social; there are additional elements to it that have been swept under the proverbial rug in order to maintain an air of generalisation. She asserts that the "original contract is a sexual-social pact, but the story of the sexual contract has been repressed. Standard accounts of social contract theory do not discuss the whole story and contemporary contract theorists give no indication that half the agreement is missing".[18] If a so-called 'mutual agreement' is made by a selective, or exclusionary, group on behalf of the whole of society, there will arguably be a great many holes in the stipulations considered. For example, biological men do not deal with the pressures of childrearing, nor are they biologically hindered by such processes. How can they draft social contracts, those which are meant to be generalised to apply to everyone in a society, if they have no lived experience of such issues? *The Sexual Contract* is an attempt to show political theorists exactly this.

If individuals are born free and equal in the state of nature, why would anyone agree to be subordinate to another? Pateman asserts that the classical theorists used the contract to address this concern in such a way that would legitimize the subordination of some by sweeping away any appearance of inequality. She writes that "[t]he point of the story of the social contract is that, in the state of nature, freedom is so insecure that it is reasonable for individuals to subordinate themselves to the civil law of the state, or, in Rousseau's version, to be subject to themselves collectively, in a participatory political association".[19] These contracts also sexualise the persons found within their pages. Pateman notes that both the traditional and the contemporary contracts almost universally follow this practice, with more contemporary contracts referencing Kant's

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[18] Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 1.
[19] *Ibid*., 40.

utilisation of 'merely rational individuals' supposedly without sex. This idea of 'sexless individuals' is incorrect, as Pateman asserts that the sexed elements are implicitly fed to readers.[20] She writes that "Rawls, of course, like Kant before him, inevitably introduces real, embodied male and female beings in the course of his argument. Before ignorance of 'particular facts' is postulated, Rawls has already claimed that parties have 'descendants' [...] and Rawls states that he will generally view the parties as 'heads of families'".[21] But heads of families are traditionally viewed as male breadwinners. As such, these 'sexless' individuals are implicitly understood by most political thinkers as being men, meaning our discussions implicitly assume the sex of parties despite our explicit attempts to remain gender-neutral.

This understanding, that men are the heads of households and thus the true individuals represented in the original position/state of nature is most apparent when discussing the social changes in modern years. Pateman writes that in the late 1800s:

> Adult male slaves were called 'boys' and adult married women were – and still are – called 'girls'. As befitted civilly dead beings, the slave was brought to life by being given a name by his master. [...] When a woman becomes a wife, her status was/is singled out by the title 'Mrs'. A wife was included under her husband's name and, still today, can be called 'Mrs. John Smith'.[22]

Wives were historically considered property and thus not full citizens, much like, though not to the same extent, as slaves owned by the same men. Indeed, Pateman asserts that "[t]he slave-master/husband was 'sole father of a 'family, black and white'', and protector of his family. The term 'family' is beautifully ambiguous here".[23] We do not need to look very far to see the

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[20] The exception to this rule, for Pateman, is Hobbes. She asserts that his theory saw no difference between men and women, and that all individuals need to be equally and mutually wary of each other.

[21] *Ibid.*, 43.

[22] *Ibid.*, 121.

[23] *Ibid.*, 122.

continuations of this mentality; toxic masculinity and social conditioning make men believe that they have a duty to protect the women in their lives, not out of altruism, but because the women cannot protect themselves. Additionally, we still use monikers such as "Mrs. John Doe" when referring to married women.

The sexual contract is also present in economics and familial life. While women are currently graduating with higher education degrees at rates above men, there is still a significant problem of representation in the workforce. This is true today, and it has been the case for a very long time as "everyday observation reveals that few women are to be found in highly paid positions in the professions or business".[24] Pateman follows this statement by asserting that this sexual segregation preserves fraternal patriarchy and solidarity *among men* in the labour force, and as such marriage becomes the most economically advantageous position for most women. As well, if a wife were to have paid employment it would "[threaten] both the husbands' right of command over the use of their services and the fraternal order of the workplace itself".[25] She argues that by remaining single and working, women have been societally recognised as a non-identity; they are not men so they do not belong in labour, yet they are not wives so they do not belong in the recognised domestic realm of women.

More recently, Pateman has taken up the challenge of making her critique of the actual sexual contract into a more complex system so that it can address the intersectional issues present in the world more efficiently. This development comes from the fact that "the three dimensions of the original contract – social, sexual, and racial – have cut across and reinforced each other".[26] She

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[24] *Ibid.*, 132.
[25] *Ibid.*, 139.
[26] Carole Pateman, "Race, Sex, and Indifference" in Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015): 134.

identifies the fact that racial attributes are essentially sexual in that they are tied to reproduction; if there was no active maintenance of a phenotypical group, there would be no such group. Pateman bluntly states that, for a population to continue, women must have babies. Thus, "[r]ace is about reproduction and sexual relations, about purity, denigration, and the right human stock".[27] This desire for phenotypic maintenance reinforces the creation of, and adherence to, social strata. Once this system was in place, regardless of individual views of race, everyone became caught up in its implementation. Whites, both men and women, are conscious that they are not black and both actively and passively benefit from this realisation.

This social benefit is apparent in social mobilisations, such as the suffragist movement at the turn of the 20th century. Pateman asserts that "[w]hite women who attacked the sexual contract could still compare their position favourably to that of the women of lesser races [...]. For white women to see black women as political equals was very difficult in a context of 'race' and colonialism".[28] If the women of the suffragist movement were to acknowledge their racialised sisters as equals in the pre-civil rights movement era, then they may have harmed their chances of successful social change. Thus, there was an element of 'woman-against-woman' conflict situated around the dominant views of race. This mentality then infected how they viewed their racialised sisters, as "[m]ost women in the movement, however benevolent and opposed to slavery they might be, failed to see blacks as other than in tutelage, waiting to be assisted by their white mother".[29] Indifference is bred by this mentality, and indifference can be more deadly than active arrogance. Unfortunately, this indifference still exists in some current feminist activism; it has been named by racialized individuals as 'white feminism' and criticised for its lack of

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[27] Pateman, *Race, Sex, and Indifference*, 141.
[28] *Ibid*., 148.
[29] *Ibid*., 149.

intersectionality. Frequently, this white feminism focuses on feminist change as if all women benefit from the same policy in the same ways. An example of this in action would be the critiques of the hijab by Western activists; some feminist circles assert that the hijab is inherently oppressive, and leave no room for Muslim women who assert that the hijab can be a feminist icon.

1.1.2 Charles Mills and the Racial Contract

Pointedly, Mills opens his book with the statement "[w]hite supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today. You will not find this term in introductory, or even advanced, texts in political theory".[30] Much like the sexual contract, and following in its footsteps, the racial contract is one that challenges the dominant view of contract theory by exposing that there are missing persons assumed to be under the same contract as everyone else. Mills asserts that this is particularly problematic in academic philosophy because it is one of the "whitest" disciplines. This white discipline has preoccupied itself with contract theory, and thus Mills seeks to develop the Racial Contract within this framework because, as he suggests the Racial Contract is "one possible way of making this connection with mainstream theory, since it uses the vocabulary and apparatus already developed for contractarianism to map this unacknowledged system. Contract talk is, after all, the lingua franca of our times".[31] In other words, Mills utilises the discourse of contract theory as an easy entry point into the political theory surrounding the issue of race.

The Racial Contract is divided into three primary claims: the existential (that white supremacy exists), the conceptual (that white supremacy should be considered a political system), and the methodological (that this political system is a contract of sorts, formulated between

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[30] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 1
[31] *Ibid.*, 3.

"whites").[32] Within this first claim, one of the more important aspects to understand is the distinction between who benefits from the racial contract and who participates in the contract. As Mills asserts, "[a]ll whites are *beneficiaries* of the Contract, though some whites are not *signatories* to it".[33] There are certain social privileges that the dominant, racist system automatically grants to white individuals which have nothing to do with those individuals themselves. These beneficiaries are not automatically blameworthy simply because they benefit from the oppressive system. It is only those who actively participate in maintaining the racist system who are blameworthy.

This racial contract is built upon the need for differentiation between 'us' and 'them' after it had been lost following the shift from religious rule to capitalist force. In early colonial expansion, the norms of social control were based upon "[a] Eurocentrically normed conception of rationality [which] made it coextensive with the Christian message, so that rejection was proof of bestial irrationality".[34] As the relationship progressed, some religious leaders granted upon the 'heathens' the capability of understanding the Christian doctrine. Additionally, as the Enlightenment gained momentum, the religious conviction among the white settlers began to waver. This did not affect the dichotomy of Christian/heathen *per se*, rather it "translate[d] it into other forms".[35] Race became the replacement for dichotomisation, as it allowed for the continued subjugation of those who were traditionally heathens (such as the First Nations or African-American slaves) regardless of whether they had converted to Christian doctrine. This shift was necessary because colonisers could not continue to justify the oppression of such individuals on a religious basis *because they now shared a common faith with their oppressors*. Racial

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[32] *Ibid.*, 7.
[33] *Ibid.*, 11.
[34] *Ibid.*, 22.
[35] *Ibid.*

marginalisation maintained the economic use of these bodies, while legitimising their conversion to Christianity.

The shift towards economics rather than salvation is directly involved in the colonialist movement out of Europe. With this in mind, Mills asserts that "[i]nternal national rivalries continued, of course, but this common identity based on the transcontinental exploitation of the non-European world would in many cases be politically crucial, generating a sense of Europe as a cosmopolitan entity engaged in a common enterprise, underwritten by race".[36] England and France may have held grievances for one another, but both were able to take solace in their shared identity as Europeans and in their mutual endeavours of colonialisation. As such, the world grew in such a manner that Europeans as a collective became the dominant norm which all others must now aspire towards, or bow down to. This is highlighted in the final paragraph of Mills' existential section when he writes "Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favouring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology [...] skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them".[37] White people have the luxury of not noticing this skew, nor of feeling pressured to aspire towards Euro-exceptionalism.

How is it that white people are able to exist in ignorance of the prevailing inequalities that are so easy for non-whites to cognise? To address this, Mills highlights a theory called 'epistemological ethnocentrism'.[38] This consists of three methods by which countervailing evidence can be treated in order to maintain the epistemological upper hand of white individuals:

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[36] *Ibid.*, 35.
[37] *Ibid.*, 40.
[38] Mills borrows this theory from Valentin Mudimbe, see: V. Y. Mudimbe (1988), *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

(1) the evidence can be destroyed, like the burning of Aztec manuscripts by Spanish conquistadors,

(2) evidence can be explained away, in other words attributing successes of an 'unknown' people

to the intervention of outsiders, or (3) the evidence may simply be appropriated by white

knowledge, without acknowledgement.[39] These methods are normalised in terms such as

"discovery" and "exploration", which imply that nothing of notable regard existed in a place before

the intervention of the Europeans. These norms then become intrinsically linked to individuals,

creating a hierarchy of personhood and subpersonhood.

Like Pateman, Mills has revisited his racial contract to consider the intersections between

both the racial contract and the sexual contract. He begins this analysis by asserting "Pateman and

I are saying that the history of gender and racial subordination requires a rethinking of how we do

political theory, that it cannot be a matter of some minor, largely cosmetic changes [...] before

continuing basically as before".[40] Thus he unpacks the social contract as a contract of domination;

one which is made by those with power, be it financial, racial, sexual, etc., over those who do not

hold social influence. Mills' critique remains one that applies to both the classic contracts as well

as the contemporary iterations as:

> [E]ven when the contemporary contract seems to drop the
> descriptive dimension, as in Rawls's thought-experiment, it
> continues tacitly to manifest itself, if only by default, in an
> underlying factual picture, a version of history, and a set of
> assumptions about society that continue to reproduce the inequities
> and obfuscations of the historic contract, and, correspondingly, an
> apparatus that retains many of its deficiencies.[41]

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[39] *Ibid.*, 44-45.

[40] Charles W. Mills, "The Domination Contract" in Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015): 79.

[41] *Ibid.*, 90.

Thus, even the abstract 'parties' which Rawls places behind the veil, and whom Rawls claims know nothing about who they represent, are inherently representative of the dominant social actors in modern society: the rich, white men. Mills explains that Susan Okin's feminist critique demonstrates exactly this, as Rawls has assumed the parties will be heads of families without critiquing the social construct of what a 'head of family' entails.[42]

From here, Mills seeks to develop a new theory: the racia-sexual contract.[43] While acknowledging that combining the two previous theories is a murky endeavour and that many have criticised the efforts[44], he asserts that this is necessary still because "[t]he contemporary idealized model, however pedagogically useful, retroactively sanitizes the gender and racial exclusions both in the classic social contract theorists and in the modern polities their work rationalized".[45] For Mills, the racia-sexual contract represents the racial patriarchy in which pre-existing patriarchal structures become modified by racial domination; however, although sexual subordination is older, the advent of racial subordination trumps gender in order of degree. Therefore, "the interaction of the two contracts does not produce a symmetry of race and gender subordination, but a pattern of *internal* asymmetries with the larger asymmetry of social domination".[46] In other words, we find ourselves in a contractual system wherein there is a hierarchy of power: (1) white men dominate all, (2) white women are subordinate to white men yet dominate all non-white individuals, (3) non-white men are subordinate to all white individuals yet dominate non-white women, and (4) non-

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[42] For Okin's analysis, see: S. M. Okin (1989) *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books).

[43] A small note on the name of this theory: Mills intentionally leaves off the final letter of 'racial' whenever referring to the joint theory. This initially looks strange when compared to Pateman's 'sexual-racial', and I have stumbled over it in my own analysis a few times. In an effort to remain as close to Mills' own theory as possible, however, I will remain with his terminology rather than change to a more readable 'racial-sexual' title.

[44] See: L. Brace (2004), M. Maynard (2001), and P. Schloesser (2002).

[45] Charles W. Mills, "Intersecting Contracts" in Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2015): 172.

[46] *Ibid*., 172-173.

white women are subordinate to all. Those who find themselves in (2) and (3) are subcontractors; those who are subpersons *but still persons to such a degree*. This reduced level of personhood allows for the marginalisation of some, while still being marginalised by others. Individuals who find themselves in (4) are noncontractors, or, perhaps more poignantly nonpersons. These nonpersons have no power.

1.2 Identifying the Problem with a Contract System: The Messy Web Argument

I do not hold the same optimism towards re-reading the contract that Mills has, nor am I optimistic about dismantling the contract from within, as Pateman is. While each modified contract theory appears to revolutionise the current lingua franca in a way that revitalises its use, there is a myriad of problems in attempting to salvage what is, in my view, a fundamentally flawed theory. I understand that I am making a rather extreme claim; that the Social Contract is *essentially* flawed, rather than flawed in application. To demonstrate this criticism, I will provide an analysis of both joint theories: the sexual-racial contract of Pateman, and the racia-sexual contract of Mills. I then tackle the first apparent criticism of my method, namely that I am not being charitable enough to the theories presented by contract theorists. Following this I will endeavour to demonstrate why it is impossible to salvage contract theories by formalising the *Messy Web Argument for Denying Social Contract Theory*; a quasi-Ockham's razor, logical breakdown of my complaints against this dominant political theory of social contracts. As this will demonstrate, intersectionality is too difficult to capture within hybrid revisions of social contract; however, to address our world today we need this intersectionality.

I will begin with Pateman's sexual-racial contract. As quoted above, she believes that *three* dimensions have reinforced each other over time and across contracts: social, sexual, and racial.

She claims that it is impossible to understand any civilized society today without an understanding of how all three of these are at play. Problematically, Pateman uses the words 'civil societies'[47] to describe those which are affected by these elements of contract, but then states that she "confined [her] argument to Britain, the United States, and Australia, societies that can plausibly be seen as contractual 'civil societies'".[48] She continues to acknowledge that Mills applies the modified contract to a global scale. She defends her maintenance of the sexual, and sexual-racial, contract to Anglo-America because this is the history she knows and is comfortable referencing. However, in so doing she's prioritising the European influence by implicitly making the statement that non-Europe is not 'civil society', or is incapable of understanding and working within the contract. Whether this is an intentional implicit statement, it is one that follows from how she has organised her argument; and this is problematic for the application of the sexual-racial contract itself.

Remaining within the sexual-racial contract, however, we can still identify fundamental problems which cannot be dismissed, nor explained away with further modification. Pateman's theory presumes that 'Man →Woman', where '→' indicates the flow of power felt by all within the contract, trumps 'White → Non-white'. This is problematic because it implies that a non-white man holds power over white women in social contexts. This is terribly difficult to seriously consider when we acknowledge how the world actually operates. Pateman does a good job providing plenty of examples where Man → Woman is the case; however, all of these involve

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[47] "The sexual and racial contracts have been intimately connected since modern states **(civil societies)** began to be…", "It is not possible fully to understand or analyze either the major institutions of **modern civil societies** or the…", and the text quoted later in this paragraph all demonstrate a prioritisation of civil societies along with a statement that civil societies are those from European colonialisation or influence. This prioritisation undermines societies that developed under distinct conditions from the European canon, such as Eastern societies, First Nations societies, etc. (Pateman, *Race, Sex, and Indifference*, 134, 135).

[48] Pateman, *Race, Sex, and Indifference*, 135.

white men presiding over both white women as well as non-white individuals.[49] Another example that Pateman provides almost undoes this Man → Woman idea: here she acknowledges that in the suffrage movement "[a] difficult political dilemma arose with the Fifteenth Amendment; should suffragists support the enfranchisement of the freed male slaves despite the fact that black women continued to be excluded from the ballot box?"[50] She continues to note that the movement fractured because some women, white leaders within the movement, opposed the Amendment. Non-white men certainly appear to be lesser than white women by this regard. Overall, my concern with Pateman's theory is that it is flawed in terms of order. It presumes that civility exists in a limited sense, and that the flow of power exists in a manner contrary to what we can observe in the actual world. Whether these were intentional implicit statements, or more likely accidental consequences, they provide reason for my rejection of this form of modification on the original contract.[51]

The remaining modification is the racia-sexual contract of Mills. He creates a series of diagrams to visualise how he envisions this modified contract; I rely on two of these figures in this section, and will also refer to them later in this chapter. In figure 1[52] Mills demonstrates why race trumps gender in terms of the locus of power: here he provides diagrams (a) and (b), of which (b) demonstrates the theory more in line with Pateman, which Mills believes is backwards. With figure 2, Mills builds an elaborate two-dimensional plane wherein we can locate white men, white women, non-white men, and non-white women and visually recognise their respective levels of

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[49] For instance, when discussing lynching Pateman makes use of the reality that white men were making most of the charges of rape against black men in the Southern states. She cites Wells-Barnett (2002) who states "[t]he Southern white man says that it is impossible for a voluntary alliance to exist between a white woman and a coloured man", and in so doing makes it apparent that men are presiding over women in these cases. What is not emphasised is that this is also a case of (white) Man → (non-white) Man.

[50] *Ibid*., 149.

[51] Another objection I have for Pateman's method is that she asserts that social contract needs to be thrown out, yet her theory is stuck within social contract itself. This is because she is trying to take it down from the inside; however, this has caused her arguments to take on contract terminology and structure. While both Pateman and I want to see the end of social contract theory, I will be tackling it from the outside so as not to get trapped by it.

[52] Figure 1 is taken from: Mills, *Intersecting Contracts*, 171. Figure 2 is from: Mills, *Intersecting Contracts*, 173.

power. This second model demonstrates the asymmetry in the racia-sexual contract by showing white women as marginally higher than non-white men on the "contractual status"-axis.

The racia-sexual contract establishes the white-supremacist patriarchal polity
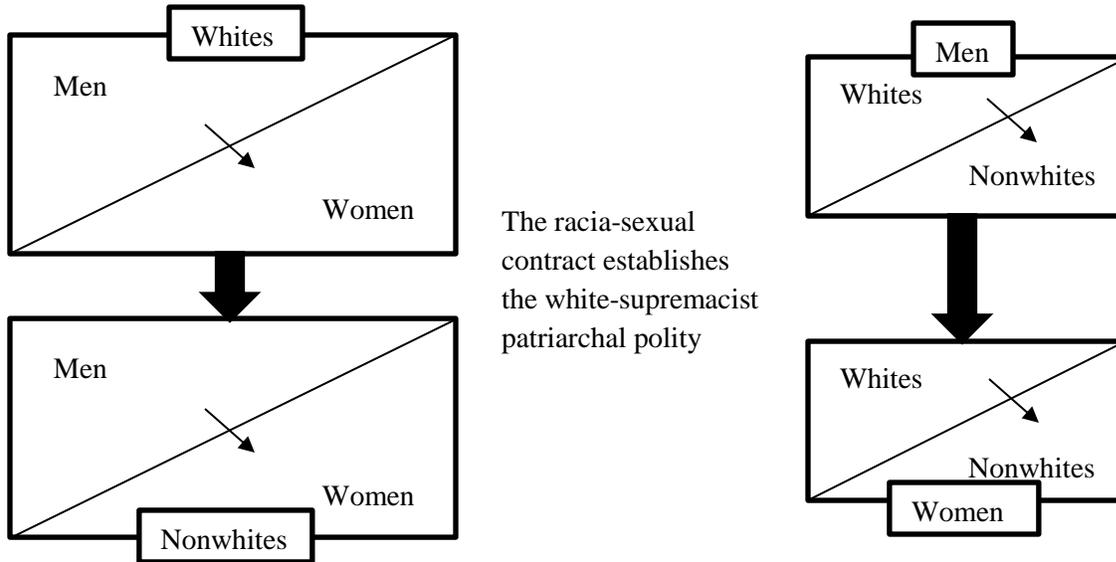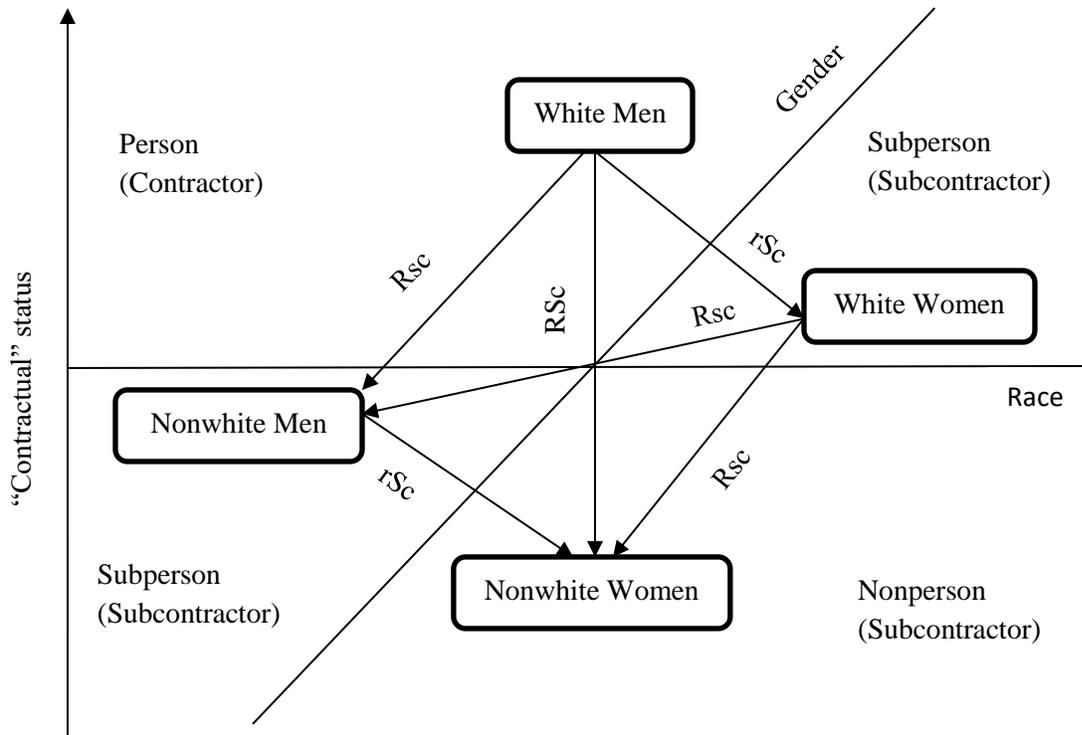
Figure 1

Figure 2

My primary concern with Mills' theory rests in this second figure and the presumption that we can graph social power dynamics using only two qualifiers: race and gender. No doubt, these are two very powerful elements of social being, and they certainly play a major role in power dynamics. However, additional elements play more than insignificant roles in social perception and power. For instance, neither contract even pays lip service to sexuality and the power inherent within this politicised element of individuality. There is no space on a two-dimensional graph to add this category, and as such we would need a third dimension. Three-dimensional graphs are simple enough to construct: we can add a z-axis, denoting 'heterosexual identified' as the dominant signifier (grouped together with 'white' and 'man') near the origin and 'queer identified' as the subordinate signifier (grouped with 'non-white' and 'woman') at the far-end of the axis. This diagram would be messy, much like a purely textual three element theory, but it would be manageable. What if we added 'able-bodied' and 'disabled' to our three-dimensions? This is now impossible to graph, but we could probably describe it adequately in words. Now what if we add ethnicity, or mental health? Quickly we see that neither Pateman's nor Mills' modified theories can withstand this many modifications and remain comprehensible because they will simply have too many moving parts to consider. The contract is impractical in real world applications because no one is simply defined by race and sex alone.

1.2.1 An Act of Kindness

Before continuing with my criticism, a word on charity is merited. Whenever one chooses to criticise another's work, instead of support or develop it further, there is always the worry that they are not being entirely charitable. Translation and interpretation, the latter of which will be my focus, are ways by which one individual comes to understand the ideas of another; however, this necessarily involves synthesising the work of another and internalising it. Willard Van Orman

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Quine asserts that fair translation preserves logical laws even when our translation involves no foreign language. In these cases, we can come across new meanings in familiar words which are contingent on how the other is using our shared language. He continues by stating that the "talk of meaning is intuitive, uncritical, and undefined, but it is a piece with translation; what it registers is our reluctance under such circumstances to 'translate' the speaker's English into our English by the normal tacit method of homophonic translation".[53] In other words, we have to be careful whenever we translate or interpret another's words because their meanings can differ vastly from the meaning we ascribe to the words on the page.

For my critique to function, I need to follow what many philosophers have called the *principle of charity*. Paul Thagard and Richard E. Nisbett assert that Quine's principle of charity claims that "translation should preserve logical laws: we should translate a speaker's utterances in such a way as to *avoid construing those utterances as contradictory or absurd*".[54] Being charitable means making sure we understand the other's words as they are and in their best light. These principles are basic level philosophy and commonly taught in introductory critical thinking courses. In an introduction to argumentation textbook, Richard Feldman asserts that "[w]hen reconstructing an argument, try to formulate a reconstruction that is well-formed, has reasonable premises, and is undefeated. In other words, make the argument as strong as possible".[55] Per this definition of charity, we need to evaluate arguments by making them as strong as possible with the given information, without making the argument stronger than it already is. In other words, we

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[53] Wilard Van Orman Quine, "Translation and Meaning" in *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T Press, 1979): 59.

[54] Paul Thagard and Richard E. Nisbett, "Rationality and Charity" in *Philosophy of Science* 50(2): 250 (emphasis my own)

[55] Richard Feldman, "Reconstructing Arguments" in *Reasoning and Argument*, reprinted in *CSSH105: Critical Thinking* (Toronto, Pearson Custom Library, 2015): 125.

cannot add in any information that we believe would make the argument better, even if this means leaving obvious holes in a theory.

But sometimes it is not enough to simply represent the strongest possible version of another's claims before analysing or criticising them. If a theory is inherently bad, we would not first seek to represent it as good before rejecting it; we would immediately and wholly reject it with little question. Sometimes, as I argue is the case with contract theory, the theories we come up against are so harmful that justifying their existence in a charitable manner can be harmful in itself. Theories of this class create negative space and harmful implications for those who become glossed over, or those who slip through the cracks in what appears to be a solid foundation. The history of contract theory presents itself as an equaliser seeking to ensure the equal and fair treatment of all individuals under one overarching set of conditions. But not everyone will fall neatly into this set. Lived experiences should not be overlooked, nor should they be amalgamated into a publicly shared, generalised theory. Sometimes it is better to kill the theory than salvage it for future usage.

Rawlsian contract theory presumes a veil of ignorance which can negate both the confirming and disconfirming effects of personal bias and lived experience. When the hypothetical parties are behind the veil they can make choices that affect policy, and how the society should act, and they do this free from any knowledge of those they represent. In other words, they can make unbiased decisions regarding the basic principles of justice for their society, which theorists in society can then apply to tough social decisions. But since these parties are merely constructs, we need to consider those who employ them. Philosophers who utilise the contract to demonstrate how individuals would act in these situations may claim to act free of bias; however, we cannot remove our own biases from our operations of thought experiments, no matter how we claim to

control for them. Thus, the theory which claims to 'presume no bias' is, understandably, deeply flawed. We cannot separate ourselves from our lived experiences.

To address potential objections, I want to clarify the importance of lived experience and how we cannot remove our judgments from our experiences. As humans, we are naturally embodied beings who must rely on our sense-perception, memory, and first-personal knowledge to navigate the world. Claiming that I can decide regarding some belief *p*, that I do not know exists as a proposition that can be believed, makes little sense. Asking an individual to form a belief without bias will encounter this problem; my biases are based on what I know and how I exist in the world. To believe without these elements is asking an individual to believe without first-personal evidence, memory, and sense-perception. As an embodied being, I cannot hold that *p*, nor that not-p, *nor even a suspension of my judgment whether p*, if I cannot rely on what I know and what I have been presented with. Thus, lived experience (be it first-personal evidence or evidence presented to us by another) is required for belief, and these lived experiences are necessarily tied to our biases.

At this point, and operating within this notion of charity, the most charitable action we can perform is to nullify the contract. There is no strongest version with which we can wrestle because we can never abide by the necessary condition of operating *sine* bias. Any outcome produced by the contract will be inherently bad; existing as some sort of quasi-corrupted construct which cannot sustain itself without breaking its own fundamental rules. The second tenet of the Principle of Charity is that we cannot make the other's words stronger than they naturally are; we cannot add anything to their original statement stronger than they are. Thus, any attempt to salvage the contract is necessarily doing it harm. Salvaging adds more than mere interpretation to the literature, as when we salvage we are adding further information in a vain attempt to save the theory from itself.

1.2.2 The Messy Web Argument

This brings me to the culmination of my criticism, what I have called *the Messy Web Argument*. It strikes me as irresponsible to continue salvaging the contract by simply adding more complexities, as Pateman and Mills both attempt. A hermeneutical re-reading can only go so far before becoming so extended that it is incomprehensible to proponents of the initial theory. Sometimes we need to scrap the theory because of its faults. The original social contract dealt with a specific sub-set of persons, who were given the title of full humans/citizens at the expense of other groups. By salvaging this theory with their once-modified theories, Pateman and Mills have hermeneutically extended it to those who were not originally considered full citizens. The more recent creation of a twice-modified contract was an attempt to update the theory to apply it to even more marginalised individuals. However, many aspects of individuals have been left out even with both layers of modification in place. Class, disability, socio-economic status, queer identity, and ethnic contracts[56] invariably all exist, and all necessarily affect how an individual operates in society. Who is championing thrice-modified contracts for the queer, black, woman? What about the poor, neurodivergent, Jew? Quickly it becomes clear that contracts with three (or more) elements are far too messy to provide any substantial, manageable, or even functional information for policy, and social, change.

Thus, my contention with contract theory; I believe that complications beyond a reasonable extent necessarily call it into question. When dealing purely with idealistic cases and thought experiments social contract theory may be a tool for determining the proper launching point; however, as soon as we try to apply the contract to real life, to the people 'on the ground', we run

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[56] To name an extremely limited set.

into immediate issues. In the case that the above arguments above are not clear enough, below I will present the *Messy Web Argument* in a more formalised way:

> MW1: Contemporary social contract theory abstracts away from observable power relations in the actual world.[57]

> MW2: If a theory abstracts away from observable power relations, then it needs to be modified to correct for these abstractions.

> Therefore,

> MW3: Contemporary social contract needs to be modified to correct for abstractions.

> However,

> MW4: If modifications to a theory render it too difficult for any lay-person to follow and implement, then it is better to terminate and replace with something clearer.

> MW5: To correct contemporary social contract theory for observable power relations, our modifications would become too messy for the any lay-person to follow and implement.

> Therefore,

> MW6: It is better to terminate contemporary social contract theory and replace it with something clearer.

In this argument, MW1 - MW3 represent the social contract theory up to, and including, Rawlsian theory as well as the attempts to modify the theory to account for race and sexual differences.

MW4 – MW6 represent my criticism that the contract will become too messy to implement outside

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[57] Per Rawls, protests of abstraction are ill-formed. He asserts that "[i]n political philosophy the work of abstraction is set in motion by deep political conflicts. […] We turn to political philosophy when our shared political understandings […] break down, and equally we are torn within ourselves". He thus claims that political philosophy does not withdraw from society, and instead abstraction allows for cooperative understanding on political issues. I find this defence lacking, as there is a difference between abstraction and breaking something down into digestible parts. I believe the former necessarily removes itself from the world, as I have explained above. The latter, the reduction of complex thoughts to simpler elements, I believe is adequate, and I will employ something along these lines later in this project. Perhaps this is a misunderstanding between myself and Rawlsian theory; however, until I can be convinced otherwise I believe this is a serious problem.

of academic thought-experiments if we continue to add modifications, instead of shifting our focus to creating a new system.

Surely, this argument will garner objections: I will now consider the two I believe would be most common. The first of these objections is that my argument is itself very messy. I will admit the formalised version above does initially come across as such. The difference is that my argument is not one which attempts to prescribe onto individuals in the actual world; mine merely addresses another theory as inadequate. I am not playing with power relations, nor am I interacting with the lived experiences in the same way contract theory is; the stakes my argument is involved in are much lower, so it can afford some messiness. My argument seeks to call attention to the fact that contract theory is incapable of addressing very important issues in contemporary politics, and as such we should consider moving to something new. If this argument calls social contract theory into doubt, even if only marginally, then it has done what it was intended to do, despite the apparent messiness. This is to say, the appearance of my argument is not detrimental to its implications.

A more substantial objection to my argument would be the following: if the current method of modification creates a messier web of contracts, why not keep the idea of contracts and change our approach to modifications instead? Rather than adding elements in, such as race or gender, maybe a more beneficial modification would be to create a more abstract contractual theory; in this sense, we would not tie it to any individuating descriptors and thus it could be tailored to each case as it arises. In a way, this was Rawls' original project when he created the parties behind the veil. Recall that "*the parties are not allowed to know the social position* of those they represent, or the particular comprehensive doctrine of the person each represents. The same idea is extended to information about people's race and ethnic group, sex and gender, and their various native

endowments".[58] As such, the most appropriate response to these problems would not be to terminate the contract, but to return to the original Rawlsian conception.

In response to this I want to recall why I have taken up my criticisms in the first place. I believe that the abstraction provided for in the contemporary contract theory is too ambiguous regarding whom it applies to and who can make the ultimate decisions on political policy. Certainly, Rawls wants to say that we theorists are not making any decisions as individuals; rather, the parties behind the veil are making these decisions on how to structure society in the fairest sense. As constructs behind the veil, these parties appear incapable of bias because they possess no knowledge whatsoever of whom they represent. How can someone have a bias if they do not have knowledge of how that very bias will affect their own lives, or the lives of their friends and family? However, while the parties may be unbiased behind their veil, the theorist employing the thought-experiment is not. As human beings who possess lived experiences, it is unfathomable what a purely unbiased view would, or even could, entail. Following from this, we cannot claim to be able to understand what an unbiased construct would deem the correct decision in any regard.

1.3 Conclusion

At this point my project may seem like an overcritical analysis of social contract theory with little else of substance. In the following chapters I will show how this assumption may be incorrect, as I build my own system for analysing social and political issues from a basis of ethics and epistemology. This may raise the question of why I even bothered to write about social contract in the first place. Surely, I could have just begun my project without first tackling anything found above. If my project is not one of social contract, why waste time and space on discussing it? The

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[58] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 24-25 (emphasis my own).

short answer: I felt it necessary to provide an analysis of what dominates the field in order to demonstrate why my method is better.

The long answer is that my project could have survived without this analysis, but providing a strong assessment of social contract and the contemporary modifications it has undergone will help strengthen my justifications for creating a new model in the final chapter. My project seeks to assert that an approach based in both ethics and social epistemology is a more appropriate manner of addressing political issues than the current lingua franca of political philosophy. In other words, I am asserting that when addressing issues which pertain to life outside of thought-experiments and academic inquiries into ought-structures, we cannot approach political issues with political philosophy as it currently exists. The dominant view is inadequate yet comfortable, and many socio-political philosophers may not be ready to leave it behind. Hence spending time addressing the contemporary social contract: I needed to understand the beast to put it to rest.

THE EPISTEMIC FACTORS

If social contract theory is inadequate for addressing the ills of contemporary society, what model can deal with these issues? Is this even something that a model can adequately address? For the remaining three chapters I will argue for an epistemic-ethical model of oppression. This is because contract theory is so entwined with contemporary socio-political thought that theorists would need to rebuild the discipline to avoid the pitfalls of social contract theory. I choose this ethico-epistemic combination because to address social issues involves knowing how the social body acts, as well as maintaining a careful consideration of how our theories will affect others. This chapter is oriented towards the epistemological factors present in oppression. I begin this discussion in section 2.1 by highlighting the 'what' of the epistemological project: namely, that I am addressing prejudice and testimonial injustice. These are trickier than they initially appear, as there are numerous routes which lead to either receiving, or causing, prejudice in our interactions. To understand the ways in which this kind of interaction is possible, in section 2.2 I will endeavour to outline a moral psychology of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Finally, in section 2.3, I seek to outline the concepts of bias and disagreement and how each plays a significant, though potentially overlooked, role in the grander scheme of oppression.

2.1 Prejudice and Testimonial Injustice: The 'What' of the Epistemological Project

Whenever we interact with another individual we necessarily make certain judgments regarding their character, their intentions, and the content of the information they are providing. The epistemology of testimony recognises that there is a complicated relation between how we make our judgments about a person's character and intention and how we then take up the content of their testimony. Miranda Fricker asserts that "[i]n face-to-face testimonial exchanges the hearer

must make some attribution of *credibility* regarding the speaker".[59] In other words, we need to be able to take the content and intention expressed by our interlocutor and accurately judge whether there is adequate reason to believe their claims. This is not as easy as it appears; indeed, it is terribly difficult and humans have a rather poor capacity for being able to decipher elements of each other's psychology.[60] When applied specifically to credibility assessment, this difficulty creates situations in which we can fall into three different categories: credibility excess, credibility deficit, and the rarer, though ideal, perfect credibility.

Fricker has connected the first two categories to prejudicial dysfunction in testimonial exchanges. She defines these as follows: "[e]ither the prejudice results in the speaker's receiving more credibility than she otherwise would have – a *credibility excess* – or it results in her receiving less credibility than she otherwise would have – *a credibility deficit*".[61] Here, Fricker asserts that either an excess or a deficit can be given to the speaker by the hearer in testimonial exchange, and that when this occurs the hearer's prejudices create a knowledge vacuum; the hearer loses out on a piece of knowledge they otherwise could have benefitted from. She continues her argument in defending the notion that testimonial injustice exists as a function of credibility deficit, and not from a granting of credibility excess. The principle premise of her argument is that credibility excesses function as testimonial injustice *only when their effects are cumulatively measured*. This condition is defended in her assertion that "[i]t is only if enough [excesses] come together in the semi-fanciful manner described that each moment of credibility excess takes on the aspect of

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[59] Miranda Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice" in *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Toronto: OUP, 2007): 18 (emphasis original).
[60] As evidenced in studies which looked at our ability to consciously, or unconsciously, discern when others were lying to us (see: ten Brinke, Stimson, and Carney [2014]), or when we are being flirted with (see: Hall, Xing, and Brooks [2015]). It is no logical leap to assume we are also terrible at discerning credibility since it, like the two examples above, involves being cognisant of another's intentions.
[61] Fricker, *Testimonial Injustice*, 17 (emphasis original).

something that contributes to the subject's being epistemically wronged over the long term".[62] Since no single excess can be considered testimonial injustice on its own, according to Fricker we can only consider credibility deficits when discussing such injustice in general.

To give more weight to the harm that continual credential excess can cause, we can look at the model minority myth as an example. Samuel D. Museus and Peter N. Kiang define the myth in their discussion on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as the following: "[t]he model minority stereotype is the notion that Asian Americans achieve universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success".[63] Museus and Kiang note that while the myth is often viewed as harmless, or at times even beneficial, it is also associated with a myriad of negative effects, citing the following ramifications: the myth has been successfully employed by opponents of equal opportunity policies to support meritocratic ideals, the pressure to conform to stereotypical actions and ideals of the myth is a substantial pressure for Asian Americans, and, related to the second, Asian American students can see a lowered desire to engage in learning processes.[64, 65] With this example, we can tease out a more generalist conception of the myth:

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[62] *Ibid.*, 21.

[63] Of course, there are several other 'model minorities' I could choose to work with; I have chosen the Asian American instance because of the nature of Museus and Kiang's article. Other model minorities include, but are in no way limited to: high-functioning mental health sufferers, white gay men, and light-skinned bi-racial individuals. (Samuel D. Museus and Peter N. Kiang, "Deconstructing the Model Minority Myth and How It Contributes to the Invisible Minority Reality in Higher Education Research" in *New Directions for institutional Research* 2009(142): 6).

[64] *Ibid.*, 6

[65] Arguably, these are not the only negative aspects that such a model minority myth could produce. If we take the white gay man as another example, we can postulate further negative examples: (1) the support of homonormative agendas (more on this in chapter four), which can be highly harmful for many individuals in the queer community, and (2) a heteronormative-patriarchal system of socialising, wherein femme men and butch women (and non-binary individuals as a group) are stigmatised for not adhering to heteronormative ideals. Clearly, there is something disturbing at play when this myth is utilised by opponents of social liberties, such as equal opportunities or affirmative action.

The General Model Minority Myth

GM1: There exists some widely accepted 'positive' stereotype S of group G.

GM4: Those not in the minority group only see the so-called 'positive' aspect, thereby enforcing the stereotype.

GM2: Individuals can use S to privilege their own agendas, whether explicitly or implicitly.

GM3: From the use of S by those with privilege, individuals within G experience negative ramifications.

GM4 connects directly back to GM1, and thus we can see that the myth creates a feedback loop within itself that is difficult for all parties, the oppressed minority and the oblivious majority, to escape from. This may seem unfortunate, yet tolerable, while in this abstract form. However, consider that this model minority myth is how everyone you meet expects you to function. Then consider the disappointment, or worse, that these individuals would hold against you if you were not able to live up to what the stereotypical credibility excess assigned to you. Quickly we can see that this is a very real problem.

Departing from this example, I want to posit that there is at least some logical space for contention on the question of epistemic harm in credibility excess. I believe that Fricker's analysis of such excesses as only being harmful when they occur over prolonged periods is short-sighted. Recently, José Medina has made a similar criticism of this short-sightedness, stating "[i]t should not be surprising that there is no immediate harm that can be detected at the very moment of a

credibility assessment, as a direct consequence of it. For, after all, epistemic injustices are not always direct and immediate harms; they tend to have temporal trajectories and to reverberate across a multiplicity of contexts and social interactions".[66] Where Fricker appears to be concerned only with the compounding nature of credibility assessments, Medina acknowledges that the temporality of injustice is not this simple. While a credibility excess may occur as a singular event, the basis through which it negatively harms the individual is spread over the temporal plane such that the effect of injustice cannot be ascribed to such a singular instance. Injustice in this manner of thinking is necessarily atemporal, meaning that there is no connection to the historical flow of time as past → present → future. In other words, even a single credibility excess can engrain itself into the individual in more than one way, and it can combine with previous interactions[67] to create new metaphysical ways of interacting with the world that would not have been possible had the individual not received such an excess credibility assessment.

Medina continues his re-conceptualising of credibility excess by focusing on the effects it has on the hearer; in other words, how credibility excess affects the individual engaged in the credential judgment. He begins this by stating, "I, as a hearer, can wrong myself by attributing a credibility excess to all those who are different from me and thus, comparatively, an implicit credibility deficit to those who are like me. This pattern is grounded in, but also perpetuates an inferiority complex".[68] By granting this excess to the speaker, Medina notes that the hearer can begin to lower the way they judge their own credibility assessments; they create a feedback in which the excessive credibility afforded to the other causes their own beliefs to become secondary.

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[66] José Medina, "The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary" in *Social Epistemology* 25(1): 16.
[67] Including those which are unrelated to the specific credibility assessment at hand.
[68] Medina, *The Relevance of Credibility Excess*, 18.

When this excess is coupled with a power inequality, such as a heterosexual speaker and a queer hearer, then this also creates a system in which oppression gets woven into the mix creating a case where a single credibility excess becomes coloured by a history of oppression unrelated to the specific, one-time excess itself.

There is also a third-party effect these credibility excesses create such that other interlocutors in the future will be affected by the current, singular instance. This is where we can find ourselves in a grey zone between the one-off excess as harm and Fricker's acceptance of multiple excesses as harm. On this, Medina asserts "I can also wrong other interlocutors of the speaker I am assessing with the disproportionate epistemic trust allowed to him, by implicitly encouraging/echoing/backing up his authority in an arbitrary way while at the same time (at least indirectly) undermining and creating obstacles for dissenting voices".[69] This form of epistemic injustice can occur just as easily as any other, even in one-off circumstances, because these injustices link themselves to the underlying framework of oppression.[70] When we afford someone more credibility than is merited, it can reinforce these background systems. For instance, if I were to give more credibility than merited to a friend who is essentially a perfect peer of mine, with the caveat that he is heterosexual and I am not, my action may: (1) reinforce his subconscious bias that heterosexuals are epistemically superior, and (2) subconsciously lower the credibility I afford my own judgments because of the dominant system of oppression active in society.

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[69] *Ibid*.

[70] A note here: I continue using the notion of an underlying, or background, framework in which the speaker is already in some sort of privileged position. Some may argue that this would discount the idea of a one-off credibility excess playing any role – I will speak more on this in a later paragraph. However, it is important to note here that everyone, regardless as to where one falls on the spectrum of privilege, operates in some sort of 'background conditions'. This is one element of the Rawlsian theory I discarded in my previous chapter that I tend to agree with. For more in depth discussions than I will provide in this chapter, see: Rawls (2005).

Notice that both effects I am highlighting are subconscious; this is a slight parting from Fricker's analysis of an epistemic injustice whereby the epistemically harmed likely knows when a harm has occurred. Certainly, her theory allows space for subconscious effects; however, I argue that the one-off credibility excess harms explicitly on a subconscious level. If an individual notices there is some harm being committed in such a testimonial exchange, I doubt that the lasting effects of the harm would necessarily translate to an epistemic injustice. I make this assumption because, in noticing the credibility deficit, an individual can process the harm as a one-off event and buttress their mind against the harm.[71] This may be why Fricker asserts with surety that credibility excesses are not epistemic injustices; in other words, Fricker, Medina, and I may be discussing the same phenomenon, and yet two of us are approaching it with a different set of distinctions in mind.

This discussion of epistemic credibility merits a further exploration, specifically into the idea of epistemic trust. Gloria Origgi gives a concise definition of the necessary background requirements for such epistemic trust:

> The amount of trust we allocate to our interlocutors depends on many factors: a complex of judgments, heuristics, biased social perceptions and previous commitments we rarely take the time to unpack when we face the decision to accept or reject a piece of information.[72]

In other words, there are a myriad of background factors affecting our ability to trust the statements of our interlocutor. These factors play a crucial role: without some manner of determining what information we can trust we would arbitrarily assign our levels of credence. This may seem like a leap at first; why would my lack of background factors have any bearing on the statement I am

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[71] Again, here we are dealing with one-off effects of testimonial harm. Were this to continue on a regular basis, then even the conscious addressing of this event would not be enough to protect against the subconscious effects.
[72] Gloria Origgi, "Epistemic Injustice and Epistemic Trust" in *Social Epistemology* 26(2): 223.

currently judging? The reason for this is because we cannot decide what is worth accepting as true without evidence; we need at least a semblance of a justified belief to trust our interlocutor.[73]

So, what does epistemic trust look like? Origgi defines it as "a *default trust*, which is the minimal trust we need to allocate to our interlocutors in order for any act of communication to succeed; and a *vigilant trust*, which is the complex of cognitive mechanisms, emotional dispositions, inherited norms, reputational cues we put at work while filtering the information we receive".[74] This sort of definition dictates that there is a baseline for trust, otherwise we would not be able to communicate at all with other individuals. This makes sense. Origgi's definition also explains how the background information we all possess, and not just background prejudices, affect whether we give adequate credibility, or an excess/deficit, to our interlocutor. On her account, when we are vigilant towards the information we receive from a speaker, we are actively engaging with this background information, or at least as much as we can consciously engage with it[75], to determine whether it is worth trusting.

In an article predating her book, Fricker details the notion of testimonial sensibility. She defines this as "something that governs our responsiveness to the word of others so that, given the sensibility is properly educated, we may gain knowledge that *p* simply by being told that *p*".[76] This sensibility is thus the ability to inferentially synthesise the statements of a speaker into our knowledge base simply by hearing it, rather than experiencing a full argument for such a statement.

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[73] I am ignoring the debates regarding whether a justified, true belief is sufficient for knowledge in this paper. However, as this is a large debate within epistemology, it would be beneficial to explore the following sources for further discussion: Gettier (1963), Lehrer and Paxon (1969), Thalberg (1969), Goldman (1979), Zagzebski (1994).
[74] Origgi, *Injustice and Trust*, 224.
[75] As there are inevitably background prejudices, biases, etc. which are inaccessible to the conscious mind, such as those formed early in childhood, or created through socialisation.
[76] Miranda Fricker, "Epistemic injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing" in *Metaphilosophy* 34(1/2): 154.

For example, I could verbally tell my friend that there is a notable speaker coming to the city next Tuesday, and using her epistemic sensibility she could evaluate that statement without asking for justification. This is nuanced and contextual in a manner quite similar to the notion of epistemic trust described in Origgi's definition.

The question then becomes one of determining exactly how epistemic sensibility is brought about in agents. Fricker asserts that sensibility "introduces the idea that our responses to the testimony of others are learned and internalized through a process of *epistemic* socialisation – a social training of the interpretive and affective attitudes in play when we are told things by other people".[77] To compare this further to Origgi, our epistemic trust is an active perception of our background information, while our testimonial sensibility is the passive[78] engagement with the world which creates our background information. Regarding our testimonial sensitivity, Fricker further asserts that our perception "comes to be informed by an inductive conditioning relating to what sorts of people are likely to convey truth about which sorts of subject matters, just as in the ethical case our perception of agents and their actions comes to be informed by a motivational conditioning relating to what sorts of actions are ethically called for in which sorts of situations".[79] By linking this epistemic sensibility to ethics, Fricker gives us an additional avenue for understanding exactly how powerful this sensibility is in how we make judgments.

There are some contentions with using this testimonial sensibility as a basis for responsible action to counter prejudices we may, or may not, be immediately aware we possess. One such

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[77] *Ibid*., 161.
[78] To be fair, Fricker does note that our individual input regarding our socialisation is not always passive, but can be "sometimes-passive-sometimes-active individual input from the hearer's own experience". I acknowledge this, but for the sake of my use I will only be drawing upon the stark active-passive distinctions and not the nebulous in-betweens (*Ibid.*).
[79] *Ibid*.

account is provided by Linda Martín Alcoff, who asks whether "volitional epistemic practice" can "correct for non-volitional prejudices".[80] To accept Fricker's model without caveat would be to imply that active volitional practices are sufficient for altering the subconscious in all cases. Thus, it is necessary to refine how we responsibly react to our biases and sensibilities. Krista Hyde asserts that proper credibility assignment will require a level of mindreading: "the cognitive capacity by which we predict human behavior and explain that behavior in terms of mental states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions".[81] Hyde believes that epistemic injustice occurs when there is a breakdown of our mindreading capabilities.

Hyde asserts that mindreading is the manner through which we "understand another's mind: how we come to know the emotions, intentions, and mental states of others without the person testifying to those states. We use mindreading to perceive others and to explain their behavior by reference to their mental states".[82] This can be done in both mundane and complex situations. For instance, when we see someone grab a glass and head to the sink we can 'mindread' to know they desire something to drink; likewise, when trying to speak with someone I do not know at a conference I am engaging in a complex 'mindread' to ensure I understand their intentions and can carry a conversation without straying too far from our desired topic. In other words, we take what are often (though not always) non-verbal social cues, either directly from our interlocutor or indirectly from our experiences, to build up a judgment of what we do or do not believe.

An important aspect of this mindreading is that it works on two levels.[83] For the remainder of this analysis, I am interested in low-level mindreading which Hyde defines as "sub-personal

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[80] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Epistemic Identities" in *Episteme* 7(2): 128.
[81] Krista Hyde, "Testimonial Injustice and Mindreading" in H*ypatia* (forthcoming): 2.
[82] *Ibid*., 5.
[83] For discussion on these levels, see: Goldman 2006; Carruthers 2015.

and not available to consciousness"[84]; however, as the high-level mindreading is directly informed by culture I will return to it later. Hyde muses that it is not clear that low-level mindreading can be corrected by epistemic virtue, or even be implicated in testimonial injustice at all. She notes that "[i]f low-level mindreading is innate and not informed by culture and theory, then it seems it would not be involved in cases of testimonial injustice, since these kinds of injustices are a result of *cultural* stereotypes".[85] The qualifier 'cultural' is important, as Hyde presents the case that environmental conditions can be sufficient for creating issues with our low-level abilities. The difference between cultural and environmental can be easily conflated, which is not helped by Hyde's use of a racially segregated community as an environmental condition. I believe she uses this example because it is a condition into which one is born that is not explicitly factoring into an individual's development.[86] Whereas cultural conditions would be more actively created by society, environmental conditions are those static conditions we have very little say in determining.[87]

2.2 Perspective: Why Does It Matter?

It is not enough to discuss prejudice and testimonial injustice alone as these concepts require a certain moral psychology, on the part of the speaker as well as the hearer, to have any significant impact. In this section I seek to explicate how a speaker can find themselves numb enough to the requisite societal sensitivities to be capable of committing prejudicial harm. I will

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[84] Hyde, *Mindreading*, 7.

[85] *Ibid*.

[86] Conditions that more explicitly factor into an individual's development might be factors such as: parental views on social issues, the daycare parents choose to send their children to, media and literature that the child is allowed to engage with, etc.

[87] Surely, one could argue that environmental and cultural conditions operate in a feedback loop of sorts. I would not deny that this relationship probably does exist, despite Hyde not explaining how it operates. This distinction, which is notable and important, is unclearly defined in Hyde's work.

also endeavour to highlight the mental status of the epistemically harmed; this will include a discussion regarding how these marginalised individuals may be epistemically advantaged despite their social marginalisation. This is an important divergence from the ideal social contract outlined in chapter 1. In this section, I begin to outline how the reality of our lives is harder to qualify in contractual terms. Here I demonstrate how we do not operate in the manner dictated by proponents of social contract theory, even when we may think we have successfully compartmentalised our views from our suggested policies. This dissonance between what we want to follow (an ideal social contract) and how we act (a non-ideal set of contracts, much like Mills' and Pateman's lowercase 'social contract') is apparent when we take up our various reactions and moral perceptions in situations of oppression.

2.2.1 Meta-Numbness and 'X-Talk'

Medina argues that there is a key difference between how the privileged and the marginalised view their worlds. He states that "[m]embers of hermeneutically marginalized groups have a special motivation to look at things differently, to listen to people differently; they have a special sensitivity to insensitivity. By contrast, the hermeneutically privileged have a pronounced *insensitivity to insensitivity*, or a sort of *meta-blindness*".[88] In other words, these privileged individuals have a deficient ability to perceive issues that factor into the every-day cycle of oppression as experienced by a marginalised individual. To exemplify, consider an opposite-sex

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[88] While Medina uses language such as 'meta-blind', 'meta-deaf', etc., this use is rather ableist. This is because it suggests that blindness, deafness, etc., are morally connected and/or conflated with oppressive mentalities regarding knowledge and responsibility. A connection/conflation that is, clearly, ill-placed. Thus, for any discussion on these topics I will be using alternative phrasings. I will keep the original terminology in all direct quotations. (Medina, "Resistance as Epistemic Vice and as Epistemic Virtue" in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Toronto: OUP, 2013): 75.)

couple and a same-sex couple who are out in public.[89] How these two couples experience the world is vastly different; the same-sex couple must continuously watch for microaggressions in passersby as well as consciously lower the extent of public displays of affections. For the opposite-sex couple, this is not the case and they are at liberty to hold hands and embrace each other in any manner deemed acceptable for public spaces.[90] The opposite-sex couple is (at least initially) unable to perceive the privilege they are afforded by society. This inability translates to a deficiency in perception if such individuals refuse to acknowledge their privilege.

This deficiency is a significant problem to tackle when engaging with social issues of systematic oppression. Medina notes that the problem is that "meta-blindness blocks paths to repair the hermeneutical gaps and fight the injustices that result from them. If one is not even able to recognize one's blind spots, if one is blind to one's own blindness, how is it possible to embark on a journey to improve one's epistemic perspective and sensitivity?"[91] He continues to acknowledge that this equally involves a more general notion of meta-numbness; thus, it would be uncharitable to attribute this privileged position to only one kind of deficiency in perception. This is a crucial turning point when separating my work from social contract theory. This is because, as I have stated above, social contract theory operates with the hypothetical parties being unaware of their social position *but* the theorist is not removed from their social position. By bringing in meta-numbness, we can account for how a theorist may believe their 'parties' are making the most

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[89] I use the terms "opposite-sex" and "same-sex" to refer to these couples because it is not the case that every man-woman (or for that matter, man-man or woman-woman) couple is heterosexual (homosexual). This is an issue faced by bisexual, pansexual, intersex, trans*, etc. communities; for the sake of brevity I will not consider these cases in this short example.

[90] While many countries have moved toward inclusion of same-sex relationships, societal views have been (and remain) shaped through media and various cultural beliefs. Additionally, while a country may have moved towards equality, this does not mean every county, nor every city, nor every community within a single city, has accepted the cultural shift. Same-sex couples in countries who have formally accepted their relationships must nonetheless remain vigilant for such community-based pockets of resentment; opposite-sex couples will never experience this (barring, of course, other factors of oppression – such as interracial relationships, class-crossing, etc.).

[91] Medina, *Vice and Virtue*, 75.

beneficial decisions, despite the theorist's lack of recognition regarding their own prejudicial biases. Medina continues introducing this concept by discussing how credences are afforded to professors by their students in America, and noting that non-English speakers are likely to be afforded a deficit simply because of their accent. He clarifies that "not all foreign accents carry with them a deficit in epistemic authority, and there are some that in some contexts carry the presumption of higher authority (this is often the case with French and German, but not with Spanish or Portuguese)".[92] Thus, we need to understand that this kind of deficiency in perception is not the only way in which one can be meta-numb.

To explain what is meant when I say that how we speak is just as influential for privileged judgments I will work through an image described by Ingrid Piller in the introduction to her book. She asks that we consider the figure of Lady Justice, the traditional allegory for the rule of law who is blindfolded while holding her scales. Piller then asserts that we need to imagine Lady Justice with earmuffs because "the way we speak is an integral part of who we are. Some of those who come before Lady Justice will be able to make their case in eloquent Standard English […] while others will make their case haltingly, searching for the right words, or in accents of those who have not had the privilege of formal education".[93] Our language shows more about who we are as individuals than we tend to think. Without earmuffs, Lady Justice's blindfold is moot. Similarly, without a recognition of the importance spoken language plays in our credential assessments, we rob marginalised individuals of a proper and fair judgment.

Individuals in the privileged linguistic majority may not recognise the differential assessment they give to linguistic minorities. However, as Piller states "[i]t has long been known

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[92] *Ibid*., 63n2.
[93] Ingrid Piller, "Introduction" in *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics* (New York: OUP, 2016): 4.

that speakers of non-standard varieties [of language] are frequently deprived of equal opportunities".[94] This includes accents within the same language. There is an idea of a 'proper' way to speak English, for instance, and the fact that this is something that needs to be cultivated to move forward in the professional world. There is a marked difference between writing how I have been thus far, 'n writin' like I'd pronounce words in a chat with friends, eh? I'm usin' the same language, english, but like, it seems less professionul. But whad'if this was how I talked 'cause 'a where I grew up, lived, 'n worked? Someone might think I'd be less reliable, or intelligent, or maybe even professionul, no?[95]

I have learned not to write the way I may speak with people close to me, and I have cultivated a more sophisticated manner of speech precisely for those professional settings in which the more laid-back accent is improper. Recently, my mother voiced concern over the phone because she was worried I was letting my accent get "too much of a twang" and that I needed "to curb [my] accent because it is coming back, and no one will take [me] seriously as a professional". I am privileged in this linguistic regard because I have learned to slow my speech and remove the harshness from my vowels. I am also privileged because I grew up speaking English as a first language and I have an 'English sounding' name. These are both elements that the linguistic majority can be deficient in perceiving; they may not be aware when they are forming prejudices against someone who stumbles over their words; or when forming negative biases against a job application that reads José, but not the one that reads Joe.

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[94] *Ibid.*

[95] If this text-based 'accent' is not clear, picture harsh vowels and several elisions and crases throughout sentences, sometimes at points where it does not seem appropriate, and the mental estimate will be close. Alternatively, picture a strong Nova Scotian accent (a mixture of Cape Breton parents and a mainland childhood).

Meta-numbness can create the idea that 'we are all the same', which masks the true meaning of those words: 'you are all just like *me*'. This kind of gaze is coined by Elizabeth Spelman as 'boomerang perception' wherein "I look at you and come right back to myself".[96] This is an especially concerning meta-numbness because it allows for a privileged individual to never consider that their own epistemic position in the world must be challenged. This is not a matter of the privileged individuals 'being right' and all others 'being wrong'; rather, and much more dangerously, it is a matter of there being a null perception towards any view divergent from that of the privileged. Perceptions that fail to match exactly with the privileged individual's own *simply do not exist*. There is no credential deficit towards an other because there *is no other*.[97]

A major factor in how this boomerang perception affects others is the societal conception of normalcy and how it affects stereotypical generalisations. Medina asserts that these attitudes "that often guide social perceptions make the normal go unmarked and unnoticed, resulting in social phenomena such as the invisibility of whiteness, of Christianity, of heterosexuality, and so on – not because these things are not perceived at all, but rather, because they are seen everywhere".[98] This is an essential piece in understanding the significance of meta-numbness; privileged individuals are not tied up in their perspective because they cannot find commonalities with the oppressed. Rather, privileged individuals are so lost in their own invisible phenomena that they cannot notice anything that goes against the majority social conception. This numbness is

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[96] Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988): 12.

[97] While this may look like simple ignorance, it is more dangerous than this. This is because ignorance requires a subject to ignore, but this failed perception does not acknowledge a subject; how can an individual ignore something which they do not acknowledge exists?

[98] José Medina, "Epistemic Responsibility and Culpable Ignorance" in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Toronto, OUP, 2013): 152.

exacerbated when privileged individuals get defensive when these conceptions, which are entirely invisible to them[99], are called into question as points of criticism.

The boomerang perception extends even farther than this credential deficit; through the reflection of ourselves in others, those who find themselves in privileged groups can become arrogant towards the actual needs of marginalised individuals. In analysing 'white talk', Alison Bailey remarks that "white talk also serves to construct the speaker as an imagined non-racist self. That is, it gives us a sense of ourselves as well-meaning white people to whom we can boomerang back when we feel that our perceived sense of ourselves as not racist is being challenged".[100] Quite easily, this white talk can be generalised into what I will call *x-talk*:

> X-Talk: Dialogue used by members of a privileged group to make themselves appear non-x-ist. This appearance can be intentionally or unintentionally constructed, depending on the context and privileged individual in question.

This x-talk can be seen in a plethora of common phrases, for example, when an individual says 'I'm not homophobic, I have a gay friend'. This reasoning is used to excuse any comments or words that are homophobic in situations where the privileged individual does not want to come across as a homophobe. Likewise, this can be seen when individuals romanticise mental illness, or in those who use words such as 'retarded' as derogatory terms.

Bailey makes an interesting claim regarding this speech-based numbness by associating 'fluttering' with white talk. By extension of my argument above, I believe it is important to

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[99] It may be objected that, if something is invisible, then the claim that someone could get defensive over it is nonsensical. To clarify this, these 'invisible' aspects are invisible only insofar as they are so pervasive to society that they are not perceived. So, when these elements are brought to attention, and forcibly ripped from their invisible, background existence, individuals in the majority feel defensive because they do not feel they need to justify their own existence.

[100] Alison Bailey, "'White Talk' as a Barrier to Understanding the Problem with Whiteness" in *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?* (London: Lexington Books, 2015): 42.

investigate fluttering in tandem with x-talk. Bailey notes that "[t]he verb 'to flutter' is etymologically linked to 'float', which connotes the sense of remaining on the surface, failing to go deep".[101] She then connects this to the action of white talk by arguing that we "flutter when we resist lighting upon or dwelling in spaces where we feel unsafe and vulnerable. We flutter when we look for detours, distract ourselves, and pull into our bodies. We flutter when we become defensive, or treat people of color as our confessors. We flutter to avoid hearing people of color's histories, experiences, and testimonies".[102] This fluttering can manifest when privileged individuals hush their voices when discussing uncomfortable topics, or even when using specific words that illustrate the differences between their privilege and the others' oppression.

Interestingly, and from first-personal experience, I want to argue that this phenomenon of fluttering is: (1) not exclusive to racial contexts, and more concerning (2) not limited just to those in privileged positions, but rather can be found in anyone in a society where a specific way of being is privileged over all others.[103] The first point is relatively easy to accept; it takes very little argumentation to accept that heterosexual individuals flutter around words like 'queer', 'gay', and the like, or that wealthy individuals flutter around working-class individuals. The point that is more difficult to see is (2). For this argument, I must rely solely on self-knowledge, and knowledge I have gained from my own lived experience, rather than from articles. Because the social sphere is constructed in such a manner that heterosexuality is not only considered the norm, but is a rewarded norm, there is a pressure for queer individuals to 'pass' for heterosexual. As such, whenever possible, it can be advantageous to flutter around words like 'queer' because it makes an individual appear to be part of the x-talking majority rather than the marginalised minority. I

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[101] *Ibid.*

[102] *Ibid.*, 42-43.

[103] For example, heteronormative societies, patriarchal societies, etc.

believe this pressure is so engrained within the societal system that marginalised individuals do not even need to be cognisant of this false fluttering; I will sometimes hush my voice on words and then retroactively question my reasoning. This self-criticism is an important element to recognise when trying to construct a virtue-based model for oppression as it can highlight areas of societal pressure we may not initially consider problematic.

2.2.2 Meta-Lucidity

In contrast to meta-numbness, the vantage point of the marginalised affords the epistemically virtuous ability Medina calls meta-lucidity. He arrives at this through grappling with the idea that marginalised individuals develop a double consciousness, which is an idea Medina takes from W. E. B. Du Bois. Within this double consciousness "racially oppressed subjects know what they do not know, while those who are not oppressed are blind to their own ignorance, *insensitive* to it, that is, cognitively and affectively ill-equipped to confront, or even detect, their ignorance".[104] In other words, those who find themselves marginalised by the dominant perspective take it upon themselves, either actively or passively, to bifurcate their mind in order to understand not only their own perspective, but that of the advantaged as well. This is best exemplified in James Weldon Johnson's novel when he writes "I believe it to be a fact that the colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them".[105] As this quotation suggests, racially oppressed individuals develop

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[104] José Medina, "Meta-Lucidity, 'Epistemic Heroes,' and the Everyday Struggle Toward Epistemic Justice, in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Toronto, OUP, 2013): 196.

[105] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Boston: Sherman, French & Company, 1912): 10.

an understanding of the privileged that the privileged individuals will never reach due precisely to their societal status. Meta-lucidity is this higher ordered awareness of society.

It quickly becomes obvious that this doubled consciousness of Johnson's will not be enough for an adequate analysis of injustice. This is for precisely the same reason that the social contract fails to account for injustices:

1. There need to be more qualifiers than race (or sex) alone to properly map the interconnected, intersectional relations found in the social sphere.
2. However, any attempt to add qualifiers creates a messy web of relations.
3. Therefore, consciousness (of privilege and oppression) cannot be expressed to any discernable n number of perspectives.

So, the question becomes one of how we can keep this split consciousness concept while simultaneously maintaining a connection to reality instead of ideal theory. Medina has a concept that I feel addresses exactly this: the *kaleidoscopic consciousness*. He argues that "[i]nstead of an infinitely pluralized consciousness, what is needed is a kaleidoscopic consciousness that has built into it a flexible and dynamic structure so that it can always adapt to the possibility of excess, that is, of there being more ways of experiencing the world than those considered".[106] Much like a kaleidoscope, this form of consciousness would be highly mutable, able to shift to best address situations in question at any given time. This is beneficial over a webbed consciousness to any n number of perspectives because it can address a situation wholly and without any unnecessary

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[106] Medina, *Meta-Lucidity*, 200.

analyses. For example, in the case of a queer, white, middle class woman this kaleidoscopic consciousness would not require we consider religion or race.[107, 108]

A note of caution for this meta-lucidity: simply being oppressed in one manner does not guarantee a full or perfect meta-lucidity in the face of oppression. Medina highlights this fact in stating "subjects who are oppressed in only one respect […] are more likely to have a limited lucidity with respect to multiple oppressions and with respect to the heterogeneous forms of social insensitivity and diverse blind spots created by social injustices".[109] So, this compartmentalising aspect of lucidity, wherein the marginalised develop sensitivity to only those oppressions that directly involve them, is something that needs to be accounted for in the model with which I seek to replace social contract. To understand exactly why, consider the Black Lives Matter demonstration in Toronto's 2016 pride parade. At this event, a group of individuals who are marginalised on multiple fronts halted the flow of the parade to demand that racially marginalised queer groups receive funding that would allow for sufficient programming in future pride weeks. This came as a result of funding cuts to racialized events, such as the Southeast Asian stage, and reduced hiring of non-white organisers, among others. However, a significant portion of the public response, both at the event and online afterwards, criticised the group and insinuated that *they* were oppressors for halting the celebratory parade. The public criticising the Black Lives Matter protest were largely comprised of white queers; those who are meta-numb to the privileges that their

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[107] Barring, of course, that we are discussing a problem of oppression directly involving her. For any societal analyses, we would necessarily need to consider this woman's socio-economics and race as these are areas in which she has epistemic privilege. However, this is messy and unnecessary for this simple example.

[108] I should distinguish whether my view here is one of an additive account or an interactive account. By stating that the kaleidoscope works by shifting our view to only what is most important, it appears like I am privileging a view in which we can simply subtract those elements which are not immediately relevant to our question. However, this is not my view. I believe these axes of privilege and marginalisation are interactive, creating situations where every individual necessarily has a different experience. Thus, religion would affect how this white, queer, middle class woman take up her privileges and marginalisations. The work I am suggesting the kaleidoscope does, rather, is to help us focus on the primary issues in a way that a consciousness of nth degree could not.

[109] Medina, *Meta-Lucidity*, 202.

whiteness grants in the social world. Many such critics forget that pride parades began as a means of halting the regular flow of traffic within a city as a means of ensuring those in the majority were made viscerally aware of the marginalised presence. As such, the Black Lives Matter protest was more in line with the meaning of such demonstrations than modern parades.

An important epistemic factor that needs to be clarified is exactly how far one's experience of marginalisation can extend when trying to develop a kaleidoscopic consciousness. Merely being a queer individual does not necessitate an understanding of racial oppression, as the example above makes painfully clear. Our specific meta-lucidities can be constraints upon how we view the world; however, we can also use these to our advantage when attempting to engage with others. An example of this from Medina is that "the experience of sexual stigmatization of a gay man *may not* necessarily make him more sensitive to the ways in which female sexuality has been pathologized and rendered opaque by the *same* (hetero)sexist culture; but he can draw on that experience […] as the starting point".[110] In other words, this gay man can use his experiences of oppression to begin his understanding of his female others. This would be nothing more than a beginning to his quest of opening a further lucidity as a fuller picture would require interactions with women who have been pathologized.

We need to keep this in mind when building a virtue based model for oppression because individuals are necessarily simultaneously privileged and oppressed to some degree.[111] There are, of course, thought experiments where we could consider the purely oppressed individual (the working-class, black, lesbian, with a disability, in a poor or economically disadvantaged

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[110] The full quote ends "… but he can draw on that experience, and his special sensitivity and critical openness with respect to some sexual matters can be used as the starting-point of a cognitive-affective learning process that will require the interaction with relevant others who have been sexually stigmatized in other respects" (Medina, *Meta-Lucidity*, 204).

[111] For further discussion, Medina recommends: Bordo and Jaggar (1989); Narayan (1989); Zinn and Dill (1996).

geographic region, for example) or the purely privileged individual; however, these fail to address the reality of marginalisation outside of the idealised conceptions of many academics. As Medina asserts "even the most extreme forms of privilege or oppression are not homogeneous and one-dimensional".[112] When we leave the idealised world of thought-experiments and shift our focus to the ground we necessarily see that there is always something that differentiates individuals who otherwise appear similar in oppression or privilege.

2.2.3 Epistemic Friction and Social Location

Meta-numbness and meta-lucidity alone cannot propel the discussion on oppression; there must be an interaction between the two and society writ large. This is where the concept of epistemic friction enters the picture. Medina defines this friction as follows:

> [T]he external epistemic resistances one encounters can be positive insofar as they offer *beneficial epistemic friction*, forcing one to be self-critical, to compare and contrast one's beliefs, to meet justificatory demands, to recognize cognitive gaps, and so on; but they can be negative insofar as they produce *detrimental epistemic friction*, censoring, silencing, or inhibiting the formation of beliefs, the articulations of doubts, the formulation of questions and lines of inquiry, and so on.[113]

Clearly, each of these frictions can be linked to a corresponding meta-*something*: meta-lucidity is connected to the beneficial friction and meta-numbness with detrimental friction. Making these linkages, we can also generalise the state of beneficial friction to the experience of marginalised individuals, and detrimental friction to the state in which the majority resides.

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[112] Medina, *Meta-Lucidity*, 205.
[113] José Medina, "Active Ignorance, Epistemic Others, and Epistemic Friction" in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Toronto, OUP, 2013): 50.

Beneficial friction occurs when an individual has become aware of the discrepancies between their own perception of the world and another's perception of the world. An example of this could be that "Aha!" moment a white person experiences when the stories and narratives of the persistent, left-over harms that the Residential Schools caused for Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis peoples finally sinks in. This experience can cause a process of self-criticism and self-reflection which alerts this privileged individual to the fact that something is wrong with their society. By recognising that there is something amiss with the dominant perception, an individual can translate their own experience into a starting point for understanding an oppressed group. If this evaluative response becomes habituated, then we approach the notion of epistemic open-mindedness.[114] On the other hand, the detrimental friction attaches itself to the oppressor's point of reference, silencing anything that appears to brush against their comfortable worldview or that reveals uncomfortable truths. As seen above, this coincides with x-talking about a marginalised group; the fluttering expressed by x-talkers is a form of censoring, silencing, and blocking the formation of new beliefs about the world in a closeminded, epistemically vicious manner.

Previously, I discussed how trust is related to prejudice; here, I seek to connect the concepts of friction to how trust affects our social location. Nancy Daukas argues that "epistemic trustworthiness is socially inculcated, complex character-based, veritistic virtue that supervenes on a relation among first-order beliefs, and (often tacit) second-order beliefs about one's own and others' epistemic competencies".[115] Per Daukas, these tacit second-order beliefs can be linked to broader social practices as well as to social problems such as x-ism. She asserts that this link is a significant cause of epistemic exclusion based on social location. This exclusion "is expressed

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[114] More on epistemic virtues, what they are and how they are cultivated, will be discussed in the following chapter.
[115] Nancy Daukas, "Epistemic Trust and Social Location" in *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3(1-2): 109.

through a frequently normalized pattern in epistemic interaction in virtue of which epistemic authority is granted to, or withheld from, individuals on the basis of their perceived membership in a socially constructed group".[116] This perception may either be challenged (beneficial epistemic friction) or maintained (detrimental epistemic friction) by an individual depending on how critical they are towards their prejudicial judgments.

2.3 Bias and Disagreement: How Perspective Can Differ

To talk about prejudicial judgments in an abstract manner is uncharitable to the nature of social interactions as they occur in everyday experience. There is a multiplicity of various effective and affective dimensions that ought to be considered to portray the reality of judgmental behaviour properly. However, two elements feature prominently in an analysis of epistemic oppression: bias (both explicit and implicit) and disagreement. In an epistemic sense, bias and disagreement are tricky concepts to wrest with; certainly, it is no stretch to attribute some level of bias to every individual, and certainly it is not irresponsible to claim that every individual disagrees with others, including others who are considered experts in their respective fields. As such, and while this section may seem obvious at first, it is prudent to afford a discussing on how these two affect our perceptions.

2.3.1 Categorisation, Stereotypes, and Biases

A basic definition of bias states that it is an inclination of sorts that interferes with impartial, objective judgment. For those of us who employ abstraction in our work, this impartial and objective method is greatly preferred. However, as Deborah K. Heikes writes "[t]his notion of bias or partiality has been of central concern for feminists because historically the cultural and

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[116] *Ibid.*

institutional norms of so-called objectivity and impartiality have served to elevate (and mask) a particular standpoint that privileges men and Western culture. The ideals of disinterested inquiry and impartiality have […] been anything but disinterested or impartial".[117] What is most concerning about biases is their invisibility to those who tend to hold them; in other words, many may believe that they are ridding themselves of biases in performing their analyses, yet still maintain such problematic implicit beliefs. Indeed, anyone who claims to work 'without bias' is deceiving themselves as no such perfectly unbiased perception exists.

While biases may be good or bad, their existence is not inherently either. Tamar Szabó Gendler explains that the ability to categorise and stereotype is a tool that allows us as cognising beings to navigate a world which is much more complex than our finite minds can comprehend. Indeed, she asserts the strong claim that "categorization is not an optional way of making sense of the world: it is our means of dealing with the problems of global complexity and experience [sic.] poverty".[118] The ability to rapidly differentiate, classify, and understand objects in our world is fundamental to how we experience and make sense of our world. Our minds are imperfect, and we have maintained this quick classification strategy when making snap judgments regarding other individuals, not just objects. We view another individual as an object, even if only for the moment this process takes, in order to differentiate them from others, classify them in relation to others, and 'understand' them in relation to those in the immediate vicinity. In doing so, we create, and more importantly maintain and reinforce, stereotypes involving those who are perceived as different.

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[117] Deborah K. Heikes, "The Bias Paradox: Why It's Not Just for Feminists Anymore" in *Synthese* 138(3): 316.
[118] Tamar Szabó Gendler, "On the epistemic costs of implicit bias" in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 156(1): 39.

A disturbing feature of stereotypes is that an individual need not adhere to the alleged 'truth' in prejudicial bias for the stereotype to be maintained or reinforced. Indeed, Gendler states that mere "*awareness* of these stereotypes is sufficient to give rise to the relevant associative chains".[119] Such associations can be triggered by recognising that an individual belongs to group X and, regardless whether the perceiver is x-ist, can enforce a worldview of x-ism. Gendler highlights the distinction between *aversive racism* and *dominant racism*, as defined by Joel Kovel in the 1970s, to demonstrate this associative phenomenon. The latter is the straightforward, blunt endorsement of racially biased discrimination. Aversive racism, on the other hand, is slightly more nuanced. This she defines as:

> [C]haracteristic of those who "sympathize with the victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as non-prejudiced" but who, because of their explicit or implicit awareness of the negative traits stereotypically associated with members of the dominated racial group, exhibit behaviors indicative of "negative feelings and beliefs about blacks, which may be unconscious".[120]

Thus, averse x-ism creates a state wherein an individual may firmly believe they are non-prejudicially judging a member of a marginalised group; and yet, there is a detrimental friction at play at the unconscious level which prevents them from engaging in beneficial friction.

2.3.2 The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement

Regarding disagreement, I first need to define the status of the epistemology of disagreement as it stands, and then extend it to the problem I seek to address in this chapter. It is generally agreed upon that to have an epistemically significant disagreement necessitates that both

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[119] *Ibid.*, 43.
[120] *Ibid.*; quotations from Joel Kovel (1970).

interlocutors are epistemic peers. This term has various definitions, though generally it includes an assumption that the individuals involved have cognitive parity, evidential equality, and have fully disclosed their evidence with one another.[121] In addition to these, Jennifer Lackey differentiates between two forms of disagreement: idealised and ordinary. This distinction is important for works discussing topics such as prejudice because the ordinary form of disagreement does not require that the interlocutors are *identical epistemic peers*. Rather, "A and B disagree in an ordinary sense if and only if, relative to the question whether *p*, (1) A and B are aware that they hold differing doxastic attitudes, and (2) prior to recognizing that this is so, A and B take themselves to be roughly epistemic peers with respect to this question".[122] An important element here is the recognition that interlocutors are roughly equals with respect to the disagreement. Thus, even if one individual has a (marginally) better pool of evidence, or cognitive capabilities, we can still entertain the epistemic significance of some disagreement between them.

In addition to the two forms of disagreement, there are two distinct responses to what we ought to do in situations where we disagree with a peer: revisionism or anti-revisionism. One of the more widely referenced definitions for revisionism comes from Richard Feldman:

> [I]n situations of full disclosure, where there are not evident asymmetries, the parties to the disagreement would be reasonable in suspending judgment about the matter at hand. There are, in other words, no reasonable disagreements after full disclosure.[123]

Thus, any reasonable individual, upon learning that their equally qualified interlocutor disagrees with them, would feel the epistemic obligation of a necessary doxastic revision. Some revisionists

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[121] See: Kelly (2005), Christensen (2007), Feldman (2007), Lackey (2010)

[122] Jennifer Lackey, "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance" in *Social Epistemology*, eds. Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard (OUP, 2010): 304.

[123] Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious disagreement" in *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. L. Anthony (OUP, 2007): 235.

maintain that this entails a "meeting in the middle" whereby both parties revise towards each other, while others explicitly state that this doxastic ought entails a revision to full suspension of judgment for both parties. Thomas Kelly offers a definition of anti-revision which defines the view as follows: "[t]he mere fact that others whom I acknowledge to be my equal with respect to intelligence, thoughtfulness, and acquaintance with the relevant data disagree with me about some issue does not undermine the rationality of my maintaining my own view".[124] In other words, the anti-revisionist is not epistemically obligated to revise merely because they disagree with a peer. This does not mean they *never* revise; rather, this view states that there is no compulsion to revise *merely because* an equal disagrees.

So, why does disagreement matter for cases of epistemic prejudice? Or, more pointedly, where does disagreement factor into epistemic friction? An individual engaged in fluttering and x-talk, or one who is meta-numb, will fail to see that what they are doing is problematic. Indeed, they will more than likely become quite hostile to the idea that they have done anything wrong. These individuals will disagree with marginalised voices on what counts as marginalisation. Further, because of the nature of x-talk and detrimental epistemic friction, these individuals will likely take an anti-revisionist stance when engaging with someone they view as a peer. I recently was involved in a disagreement with a fellow masters student who believed that the situation involving (clinical psychologist and tenured professor) Jordan Peterson and his vehement, outspoken stance on not using preferred gender pronouns was ridiculous. My fellow student argued that the government absolutely should not interfere with whether one individual uses another individual's preferred pronouns since language is a source of political and social power. When I

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[124] Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement" in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 1, eds. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (OUP, 2006): 192.

brought up the realities of transphobia, linguistic-centred dysmorphia, and that a prominent public figure voicing such a stance incites trans* related violence (whether this is the public figure's intention or not is irrelevant), my interlocutor refused to acknowledge my points because it involved a fundamental shift in their viewpoint that they were not willing to concede.[125] This is a worldview that a cisgendered, heterosexual individual has and will never need to engage, and thus it is very difficult for them to revise their opinion in light of peer disagreement.

Disagreement is a risky factor that needs to be accounted for when building a model for epistemic oppression. The case I briefly alluded to above is one in which myself and my interlocutor were roughly epistemic peers. I shared my evidence regarding trans* experience to demonstrate information that my fellow student lacked prior to our engagement, and they shared their evidence for why government should not interfere. After this sharing of information, we met the criteria for rough peerhood, though certainly not ideal peerhood. What we now need to consider is what can happen when the disagreement is between an epistemically privileged individual who has no lived experience and an epistemically marginalised individual who lives oppression daily. Per the current literature on disagreement, these individuals are *in no sense* epistemic peers. Instead, the epistemically privileged would be (and I believe erroneously so) considered to be the epistemic superior, to whom the marginalised individual is required to revise their belief towards regardless of which camp, revisionism or anti-revisionism, that they adhere to *simply because they are in a* (perceived) *epistemically inferior position*. This decision is made because, while the marginalised individual has lived experience, the privileged individual is taken by society as the authority on most issues/disputes because of their epistemic upper-hand. This cannot be the proper

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[125] This fundamental shift was the given reason, not an assumption made by myself.

manner to treat such disagreements, and thus I will need to wrestle with this problem when I build a model in chapter four.

2.4 Conclusion

So, what does this analysis mean? Why bother going through these epistemic situations if this analysis still has not resulted in creating a new model for oppression? Simply put, these epistemic situations are factors that the social contract theoretical model cannot address; I do not mean the weaker cannot *adequately* address, rather I mean the much stronger cannot address *at all*. Thus, this chapter has served to further illuminate the issues at hand and the need for building a new model entirely.[126] Prejudice and testimonial injustice can be thought of as the 'what' in this chapter. These elements were the focal point of my analysis throughout as they are the direct implications of an oppressive system on both marginalised, as well as privileged, individuals. As I demonstrated above, these two are not as simple as one may first assume. There are issues within both concepts which can compound and create an unbearable epistemic situation in which individuals begin to see themselves as lesser knowers, incapable of fulfilling their full roles in society.

Following this, I developed an analysis of perspective and how it influences self-realisation in oppressive social systems. This involved defining meta-numbness as the default for privileged individuals and meta-lucidity as the default for those marginalised by the majority. Like prejudice and testimonial injustice, these are not black and white, one or the other; instead, there are nuances which must be highlighted to appreciate the full impact of both stances. The most important take-

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[126] This chapter has been dense, and many topics within it could easily be extended to create entire chapters in their own regard. As fruitful as that would be, that endeavour is not suited for a project of this size. I have intentionally curated several important fields into this space because each element factors into the overall societal structure of oppression and must be wrested with to truly move from a prejudiced society.

away is that an individual can be marginalised in one sense and have a level of meta-lucidity *and still be meta-numb in another regard*. Oppression does not entail one automatically understands all oppression, but it does offer an outlet through which one can become self-critical and begin to understand.

I concluded this chapter with a discussion on bias and disagreement, not in an attempt to add anything to this discussion, but instead to highlight the significance their roles will play in the model I develop in chapter 4. In the chapter that follows, I will turn away from the epistemic factors of societal oppression and towards an ethical and virtuous analysis of how we ought to respond to societal prejudices. This analysis will centre around the development of virtues, both those of a moral character and those of an epistemic nature.

VIRTUE, VICE, AND OPPRESSION

When dealing with issues of oppression, understandably there will be questions regarding ethical inquiry and practice; primarily, how should we make decisions within socially oppressive systems, and how can we know those we do make are the right ones? I believe that a virtue based approach is preferable for these considerations. Aristotle asserted there were two kinds of virtue: "[v]irtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching […], while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit".[127] In this chapter I seek to delve into issues regarding both kinds of virtue, the ethical virtues and the epistemic virtues, and then address how these interact with oppression. This is a difficult endeavour, as everyone has their own moral priorities, and no one likes to think they are ignorant to proper ethical practices.

This chapter is oriented towards developing and outlining how we can approach knowledge and morality through the virtues. I begin in section 3.1 with virtue ethics and the implications of using a moral theory grounded in an understanding of virtue and vice. This is difficult as, for the better part of modern virtue ethical scholarship, its proponents have been on the defensive against deontic and consequentialist objections, rather than developing the theory and applying it to social problems. These other ethical traditions, while possibly effective in some areas, are lacking when it comes to how an individual acts and reacts to oppression. In section 3.2 I define what epistemic inquiry gains from an analysis of intellectual virtues. This is an often-overlooked area for virtue scholarship, yet it is essential to understanding how a knower could fall into prejudicial, or

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[127] Aristotle 1103a10-1103a20 [All references to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are taken from: Aristotle, *the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised by Lesley Brown (Toronto: OUP, 2009)].

testimonial, injustice. I conclude in section 3.3 with an analysis of how these virtues and vices can manifest in everyday life outside of typical scholarly analyses.

3.1 Ethical Virtues and Vices

What kind of ethics is required for an analysis of oppression? Classically, the two options one had for any ethical inquiry were: deontology, which places emphasis on the connection between duty and morality, typically regardless of the consequences, and consequentialism, which places the moral value of an action on its consequences (of the relevant class in which it falls). There is a another ethical theory, which until recently has been mostly forgotten, which focuses on the virtues.[128] Modern virtue ethics took a while to get off the ground; as Rosalind Hursthouse notes "[o]ne explanation of why the first supporters of virtue ethics had such a hard time getting their audience to hear their claim that virtue ethics really did offer a third type of normative approach is the exceptionally pervasive – and deleterious – influence of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*".[129] She asserts that a difficulty Rawls creates for virtue ethics comes from his definition of Aristotle as a 'teleologist', a term associated with consequentialism, which Hursthouse notes is an uncharitable reading of Aristotle. Rawls' theory also creates problematic, uncharitable slogans for deontology ("deontology defines the good in terms of the right") and for consequentialism ("utilitarianism defines the right in terms of the good").[130] These simplistic distortions are easy to grasp by his followers, as well as other writers, which makes the proposal for a third form of ethics (namely, virtue ethics) much more difficult than it already was.

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[128] There are a few other recognised forms of ethics, including care ethics and pragmatic ethics. However, as my focus is on virtue ethics, and the primary objectors to this family of theories come from deontic and consequentialist camps, I will only be focusing on these three for this project.

[129] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Are Virtues the Proper Starting Point For Morality?" in *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory*, ed. James Dreier (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006): 100.

[130] *Ibid*.

With these distortions in mind, it is prudent to provide a brief, non-Rawlsian interpretation of Aristotle's ethics before continuing with modern virtue ethical interpretations of social issues. On Aristotle's account, virtue "is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by reason, and by that reason by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect".[131] Aristotle continues this development by noting that this creates three dispositions, two vices and one virtue, where all three are in opposition with each other.[132] These oppositions are not equal in degree, as one extreme will be more vicious than the other.[133,134] Additionally, finding the mean is a tricky matter; Aristotle asserts "in everything it is no easy task to find the middle […] but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, *that* is not for everyone nor is it easy".[135] In this sense, there is no means through which we can codify virtue, and every situation must be individually considered from the perspective of an individual who possesses a virtuous disposition. This is not a teleological argument.[136]

An additional benefit to using a virtue ethical approach is that we can pre-empt, and avoid, many issues that would arise from problems like the messy web I outlined in chapter 1. By focusing on the 'right' principle outlined in the above paragraph, we can centre our analyses on only what

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[131] Aristotle, 1106b35-1107a5 [Ross, 31].

[132] Aristotle, 1108b10-1108b20 [Ross, 34].

[133] There is also no direct method of denoting which is more vicious, the excess or the deficit. For courage the lesser of two evils may be in brashness, an excess, whereas in humility the lesser might take the form of too much modesty, a deficit. For Aristotle's explanation, see 1109a30-1109b30 [Ross 36].

[134] Related to this inequality from the mean, the virtues are supposed to be corrective. For more on this corrective nature, see: Foot (1997), particularly section II.

[135] Aristotle, 1109a20-1109a30 [Ross, 36].

[136] This is, admittedly, a very brief synopsis of modern virtue ethics, and it does not consider the differences between the neo-Aristotelean and non-Aristotelean camps. Since this is not the purpose for this chapter I will instead refer my reader to the following works and discussions: Slote (1995), Anscombe (1997), Stocker (1997), Louden (1997), Hursthouse (2001), Swanton (2003) and (2013), Russell (2013), Chappell (2013).

is most critical at the given time. This principle also leaves room for shifting from one set of considerations to an updated set without having to completely redraw our model every time we shift. Thus, by mixing virtue ethics with a kaleidoscopic mind, we can address oppression in a way that thought experiments (such as the veil of ignorance) are simply incapable of accomplishing.

3.1.1 Virtues and Vices of the Socially Conscious

So, what does virtue ethical theory say about oppression? Unfortunately, not much. Cheshire Calhoun opens a recent paper by stating that "[o]ne of the deficiencies of much moral and political theory is that it fails to take much notice of the fact of oppression, the effect of oppression on agents' moral capacities, and the kinds of moral and political problems that are constitutive of oppression".[137] I gave a brief account of the fact of oppression in the preceding chapter regarding testimonial injustice, prejudice, and the like. The moral implications of oppression differ from the epistemic implications[138], though both are still clearly tethered to common systematic, oppressive social structures. Calhoun states that "not only is virtue sometimes exceedingly costly under non-ideal conditions but the 'virtues' that one must cultivate in order to resist or survive oppression – for example unyielding anger at oppressors or a capacity to lie – are also ones what one should morally regret having to cultivate".[139] Indeed, on the Aristotelian conception of virtue, neither incessant anger nor a capacity to lie are typical of the virtuous. However, there are situations where these can be considered the proper reaction. Recalling the 'right action, at the right time, to the right person, etc.' principle the virtuous agent intuitively understands, it is entirely plausible that anger in the face of enduring injustice, or selectively telling

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[137] Cheshire Calhoun, "Reflections on the Metavirtue of Sensitivity to Suffering." *Hypatia* 23(3): 182.
[138] For example, the moral implications of oppression could be a reduction of self-worth *qua* person, whereas the epistemic implications of oppression could manifest as a reduction in self-trust *qua* knower.
[139] *Ibid*.

the truth, are consistent with virtue. Calhoun's criticism that we should morally regret cultivating these virtues is thus short-sighted, as both can be explained within the proper cultivation of the virtues of gentleness and honesty.

What might appear as another strange virtue is that of sensitivity to the suffering of others. As Lisa Tessman articulates, this trait "even in moderation – is odd as a virtue, because it is an intrinsically painful disposition".[140] Here, she makes explicit reference to two elements of Aristotelian virtue ethical theory: (1) that the virtues are a mean between two extremes, and (2) that the virtue of sensitivity to others' suffering necessarily involves taking on the pain of others. This second point it especially interesting because Aristotle clearly noted that virtues are pleasant, never painful: "and that too with pleasure or without pain; for that which is virtuous is pleasant or free from pain – least of all will it be painful".[141] Tessman articulates that Aristotle's conception of being pained by another's suffering is best correlated with our conception of pity. She explains that "the term for him carries no connotations of condescension, but it is limited in some different ways, including that one can only feel it in response to someone's suffering if one fears being subject to similar suffering oneself".[142] Tessman then notes that there is one other morally prescribed virtue in Aristotle's account which involves facing pain in the right way: courage.[143] Just as the virtuous agent is to be courageous and strive towards the noble (which is pleasurable) at the risk of death (which is painful), so too could the virtuous agent approach others' suffering in moderation.

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[140] Lisa Tessman, "Between indifference and Anguish" in *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Toronto: OUP, 2005): 90.
[141] Aristotle, 1120a25-30 [Ross, 61]
[142] Tessman, *Between Indifference and Anguish*, 91.
[143] *Ibid.*, 93.

If we accept this account of sensitivity to the suffering of others, then we have an argument for the virtuous nature of seeking to struggle against injustice and oppression. We now have sufficient grounding for staking some form of normative claim; however, this needs to be cautiously articulated. Such a virtue needs to be crafted in a manner that does not leave the agent subject to being "characterized as too indifferent – for to choose a moderate level of response to great suffering is to choose to let masses of people suffer as a result of one's own failure to choose a higher level of response".[144] We need to be careful of where the extremes are, so we can accurately determine the mean we are searching for in this virtue. So, what could a virtuous level of sensitivity look like? My hope is to show that this is a necessary virtue for those engaged with the discussion on oppression, despite the required assumption of burden.

Before continuing with this development, I want to address an objection Calhoun lodges against Tessman's view that this sensitivity to the suffering of others is a burdensome virtue. This is accomplished by first circumnavigating Tessman's argument in noting that there is a conception wherein the "morally normative response to suffering is burdensome *under nonideal conditions* in a way that it is not under ideal conditions", and how this comes to bear on our conceptions of the duty of beneficence.[145] By this she means that there is so much strife in the world that a virtuous agent who tries to act in accordance with the virtue of sensitivity to the suffering of others, as such, will quickly become overstretched. She then continues to describe Tessman's argument as posing a moral problem that inadvertently demands far too much restriction on the action of moral agents, and that this disposition is "itself exceedingly burdensome under nonideal conditions".[146] Calhoun continues her objection by agreeing with Tessman that there are several other virtues, such as

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[144] *Ibid.*, 90.
[145] Calhoun, *Reflections on the Metavirtue of Sensitivity to Suffering*, 184.
[146] *Ibid.*, 185.

courage, which have the unusual relation to pain found in sensitivity to others' suffering. At this point, she begins her actual objection:

> But under nonideal conditions, virtuous agents find themselves so continuously confronted with situations eliciting painful responses that virtue itself comes to impede on the agent's flourishing. The persistent painful anguish of sensitivity to the widespread and severe suffering of the oppressed puts the person with this virtue in a position similar to the virtuous agent on the rack […]. In short, the psychic pain intrinsic to the virtue of sensitivity disjoins this virtue from an agent's flourishing.[147]

In other words, she is asserting that there is no virtue that comes without pain. This is because, on her view, the mean is set up in such a way that there almost always will be some kind of painful decision made to achieve it.

This objection, while initially difficult to synthesise, provides an interesting problem for the argument for painful virtues. Later in this chapter I will be arguing for additional painful virtues, as well as pleasant vices, both of which appear to go against Aristotelian virtue ethics. Calhoun admits that she is "dubious that we are psychologically so constructed that we typically feel sorrow and anguished pain at such abstractly conceived suffering".[148] Following this she asserts she believes that the more a virtuous agent is attuned to the systemic nature of suffering, the less likely they are to feel guilt about not helping particular individuals. This is because the focus will be on alleviating the systemic cause of the problem, rather than assisting the individual persons in need. She asserts that we should not analogise the 'virtuous resister' with the triage doctor because, while the doctor is directly causally related to the deaths of patients, the resister is not directly causally related to the continued sufferings of individuals. Thus, when we choose not

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[147] *Ibid.*

[148] Some abstract sufferings which she lists include: global poverty, institutionalised rape, domestic abuse, and sex slavery (*Ibid.*, 186).

to help in the event of one injustice, we are not individually responsible for the suffering it causes; rather, we are responsible as a member of a collective 'we' which has failed to address the moral problem.[149]

Thus, Calhoun does not believe what burdens virtues in non-ideal, oppressive situations is a psychic pain because we are not individually responsible for collective actions. I am unconvinced by this objection and the implications it draws for my own views. This is because I fail to understand how to get the collective 'we' to act without experiencing individual pains brought about by such burdened virtues. If the argument rests as Calhoun has presented it with no painful empathy towards systemic injustices, then how can we hope to motivate our collective body? Will we not just succumb to collective apathy? Due to the apathetic nature of individuals I have experienced in my own life, and in my own struggles for resistance, I cannot accept the idea that the collective body will deal with systemic issues while individuals are relegated to handle specific individuals. I will address this further in the chapter that follows.

3.1.2 Painful Virtue

I am specifically interested in the non-ideal. As such, I believe that there is no way we can fully escape pain when pursuing the virtues; especially since some virtues may conflict with each other.[150] I find the concept of burdened virtues especially interesting for this project due to the necessity pain plays in locating their mean. Tessman asserts that her conception of the burdened virtues includes "all those traits that make a contribution to human flourishing – if they succeed in

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[149] *Ibid.*

[150] Consider, for instance, the possible tension between friendliness and patience. To avoid the deficiency of cantankerousness and proceed to the mean of friendliness, one needs to be less irascible and more attentive. To avoid the deficiency of a lack of spirit and proceed to the mean of patience, one needs to be less dispassionate and more irascible.

doing so at all – *only* because they enable survival of or resistance to oppression (it is in this that their nobility lies), while in other ways they detract from their bearer's well-being, in some cases so deeply that their bearer may be said to lead a wretched life".[151] Protests and social movements against oppressive regimes, institutions, and customs involve taking on the pains of the oppressed; or, if one is themselves the oppressed individual, movements involve the shedding of light upon their own pains of oppression. Doing so expresses the urgency of the problem, and viscerally links oppressors to the realities of the oppressed. However, and in so doing, the socially conscious are risk being unable to live a life of happiness. This is because there is a lot wrong in our current social system that requires attention. Making progress in oppressive sexism alone will not make significant social gains if there is still institutional racism, ageism, ableism, etc. If this seems tough to swallow, it is because we like to conceive of these institutionalised x-isms as separate from each other. The reality is that these are intersectionally intertwined; if we claim to be able to imagine a world where ageism is entirely eradicated we are fundamentally missing the role that sexism and ableism play in society's conception of ageism.

Taking virtue in this manner may initially seem rather negative. If protesting and resisting potentially means having a wretched life, as Tessman suggests may happen, then why bother with it? Indeed, some may suggest that this cynical outlook on protest takes away from the meaning which many individuals derive from acting against their oppressors in this manner. I believe this is a mistaken reading of Tessman, and a mistaken reading of my arguments in this project. I do not wish to say there is no meaning to be found from resistance and other, painful acts against oppression. Some marginalised individuals may feel validated through protest movements finally giving them words and actions to demonstrate the pain they have been dealing with, finally

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[151] Tessman, *Between Indifference and Anguish*, 95.

showing them that they are not 'crazy' for seeing their current situation as painful and oppressive. In this and similar ways, resistance can be positive. However, the positive aspects of resistance are not the focus of this thesis. I avoid discussing these in what follows because I believe that without proper exposition (of the kind this project unfortunately lacks room for), there is the danger of conflating (resistance to) oppression with such positive aspects. I believe leaving room for this accidental conflation is more dangerous than including a limited discussion of the positive aspects of (resistance to) oppression.

In perhaps a controversial manner, and in line with Tessman's arguments, I want to argue that there are virtues which arise from situations of oppression which simultaneously hinder or altogether halt the progression towards an Aristotelian eudaimonistic life. In these cases, agents are bordering on the threshold of being virtuous, and yet due to situations beyond their control they can only ever achieve what I will call an 'atypical virtuous character' and not the typically conceived 'virtuous character'. This is not a controversial claim itself, as Hursthouse, Foot, Tessman, and others have all considered this possibility.[152] Essentially, these agents would be virtuous if it were not for some event or choice in their life that forced them into a life-marring situation. Due to this unfortunate event, they are no longer able to achieve eudaimonia. My potentially controversial addition is that, when luck has given situations in which eudaimonia is impossible on the Aristotelian conception, having an atypical virtuous character is more important than achieving a virtuous life. To put it differently: it is more important to act virtuously in spite of a marred existence brought about from struggling against oppression, than it is to be an unmarred virtuous agent. As such, an agent who has been through a tragic dilemma[153] is more

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[152] See: Foot (1997), Hursthouse (2001), Tessman (2005).

[153] A tragic dilemma is an event in which an agent is presented with a choice between two terrible options, yet must decide between them. A classic example is 'Sophie's Choice', wherein a mother must choose between her two

important for successfully resisting oppression than an agent whose moral luck has led them through a life without such dilemmas.

A deontic or consequentialist, or perhaps even virtue ethical, objector may push-back against this claim by asserting it makes overcoming oppression into a self-defeating task. To be fair to those who would push-back in this manner, I understand how my claim may take on this appearance at first. However, I want to strongly resist this cynical stance for a simple reason: it assumes we are operating with ideal conditions in mind. As I clarified above, I do not want to situate my project in ideal philosophy because I believe it misses the point of lived experience on the ground. There is no person who is completely without mar in our world, no matter how saintly they may be; often we experience tragic situations and dilemmas that are entirely out of our control. If no one is wholly unmarred by negative events in life, then this objection fails. Those who overcome their oppressive situations will be changed from the experience, admittedly sometimes for the better. If this is difficult to imagine, recall the discussion following my introduction of the kaleidoscopic consciousness in chapter two.[154] Just because someone has overcome their oppressive circumstances does not entail that they are entitled to escape burden; if they feel this way, they may simply be operating under a limited lucidity.

To make my assertion clearer, I will again rely on Tessman's burdened virtues. In responding to the notion of tragic dilemmas, she asserts that "these cases, in disuniting virtue and flourishing, display what I have been calling the burdened virtues; they show that there are virtues whose exercise is, due to bad (including unjust or oppressive) conditions, not conducive to their

children which lives and which some Nazi kills. If she does not choose, they both die. For more on tragic dilemmas, see Stocker (1990) and Hursthouse (2001), especially chapter three within each text.
[154] See page 53 of this document.

bearer's flourishing".[155] The morally strong agent knows that they need to come to a decision, and that this decision will inevitably morally mar their character. Yet, it is wholly understood that deciding between two terrible choices is better than not deciding at all. This 'choosing the lesser of two evils' is sufficient for creating a moral blockage that disavows the eudaimonistic life; however, this disavowal is more important because it is these agents who make change possible. It is true that such marred agents will incur repercussions on their psyche that makes full virtue impossible, but they simultaneously become a step toward dismantling the oppressive regime responsible for the tragic dilemma.

It is possible for moral convictions to collide, and thus the virtuous life and the life of resistance do not need to be reconciled in some quasi-Hegelian thesis, antithesis, synthesis move. Indeed, Tessman argues that:

> The traits that enable resistance and the traits that enable human flourishing often fail to coincide. This does not suggest abandoning radical resistance for, in a context of great injustice and widespread oppression, if this sort of resistance is what can overcome oppression (a possibility that I am taking seriously), then it may be morally required, though since it is not all that may be morally required, other values may take precedence.[156]

This assertion can additionally function to demonstrate why some individuals, despite knowing that oppression is occurring, fail to act and yet can still be considered morally good agents. It may be that some moral conviction, religious or secular, prevents an agent from active resistance in the face of oppression. Failing to actively resist and not resisting at all are unequivocal. Not-resisting

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[155] Lisa Tessman, "The Burden of Political Resistance" in *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles* (Toronto: OUP, 2005): 111.
[156] Tessman, *The Burden of Political Resistance*, 114-115.

is active concession to the oppressive system, whereas failing to actively resist, while it can look like not resisting, can also simply be passive resistance.[157]

However, in making this argument, it is important not to merely 'preach to the converted'. Marilyn Friedman comments on Tessman's book that we cannot take it for granted that anyone who occupies a position of privilege does so because of the oppression of others. While we may argue that this is true, she asserts that we need arguments to prove this fact. She argues that there are two possibilities for such arguments: "[f]irst, privileged persons may have gained or maintained their privileges by acting wrongly as individuals towards unprivileged persons. Second, privileged persons may have gained or maintained their privileges by benefitting from social institutions that embody injustices".[158] This second case allows for an opening to convince others that they have their privileges because of oppressed others because it does not directly accuse them of committing any direct, individual injustice. It simply shows how those who benefit from an oppressive system have come to acquire such benefit. Arguments that successfully accomplish these two possibilities can address oppression in ways that even a non-ideal social contract could not, due to the lack of adequate moral perception involved in such contractual theories. By speaking in a way that privileged, yet well-intentioned, individuals can understand the interconnected consequences of the system they operate within, we enable these privileged individuals to access social facts they otherwise may have (unintentionally) missed.

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[157] My goal in this chapter is not to sketch what active, passive, and not resisting look like. Though, briefly, passive-resisting could be something such as avoiding using derogatory language or not purchasing from x-ist companies. I believe active-resisting and not-resisting are self-explanatory.

[158] Marilyn Friedman, "Virtues and Oppression: A Complicated Relationship" *Hypatia* 23(3): 193.

3.2 Epistemological Virtue and Vice

At this point it is necessary to discuss how a knower can come to recognise, or ignore, facts of oppression. As such, I will discuss how the virtues can play a significant role in epistemological endeavours. To be clear, virtue epistemology differs from traditional analytic epistemology in that it is agent-centric instead of belief-based. Heather Battaly differentiates the two as follows:

> In *belief-based epistemology*, beliefs are the primary objects of epistemic evaluation, and knowledge and justification, which are evaluations of beliefs, are the fundamental concepts and properties in epistemology. In contrast, in *virtue epistemology*, agents rather than beliefs are the primary objects of epistemic evaluation, and intellectual virtues and vices, which are evaluations of agents, are the fundamental concepts and properties.[159]

Now, this is not to say that knowledge and justified beliefs are unimportant to virtue epistemology; rather, they are subordinate to the virtues.[160] This basic kind of epistemology is attractive for a few reasons: proponents can resolve key debates in epistemology (such as the Gettier Problem) and, as Linda Zagzebski argues, it can address often neglected areas of epistemology.

Virtue epistemology, much like virtue ethics, does not need to follow any specific theory to function properly; instead, it can be approached in what can be called an anti-theoretical manner. What differs with these anti-theoretical views is that "they deny that knowledge and justified belief can be systematically defined in terms of the virtues".[161] There are two forms of anti-theory: virtue-eliminativism, which argues that epistemological projects focusing on anything other than virtue should be eliminated, and virtue-expansionism, which argues that there is room for analyses of

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[159] Heather Battaly, "Virtue Epistemology" in *Virtue Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*, eds. J. Greco and J. Turri (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012): 4.

[160] The two most prominent virtue theorists in epistemology are Ernest Sosa and Linda Zagzebski, both of whom defend this prioritising of intellectual virtue about belief and justification. For a more in-depth understanding of their arguments, see Sosa (1991), (2003), and (2007), and Zagzebski (1996).

[161] Battaly, *Virtue Epistemology*, 7.

intellectual virtue and analyses of knowledge, but that the two projects will not have any systematic connection.[162] As should be clear from how I have structured my project, I fall into this virtue-expansionism camp. I believe that there is merit to investigating the epistemic significance of the virtues, but agree that there need not be any necessary connection to every other analysis in epistemology. However, I am not entirely exclusive, as in the above definition, because I believe areas such as oppression merit a commixing of traditional epistemology and an agential analysis based in an analysis of virtuous characteristics.

In the remainder of this section I will explicate the different virtues and vices that result from systemic oppression; these are borrowed from Medina's comprehensive book *The Epistemology of Resistance*. The question that I must now address is why epistemic virtues and vices are important at all in a discussion regarding oppression. My response is that, to construct an adequate response to the problem with current socio-political models I identified in my first chapter, I need to understand the value of, and access to, knowledge that each agent has within the oppressive system.

Before discussing what the epistemic virtues and vices resulting from oppression could be, I must make a preliminary statement. The fact that an oppressed or marginalised individual develops specific virtues because of their oppression is in no way meant to romanticise their social position. However, Medina asserts "as we will see, these epistemic character traits do have a distinctive sociogenesis for subjects who occupy a particular social position. There are epistemic virtues and vices with distinctive lines of social development, and all of us, from our own social positionality, can learn some lessons from an examination of these epistemic character traits and

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[162] Battaly notes that Miranda Fricker, who has featured heavily in this project already, is a virtue-expansionist. (*Ibid*., 7-8).

their formation".[163] As such, we must recognise that there is no guarantee that an individual in a marginalised position will develop virtue X, *though it is more likely that they will because of their social position*. Medina does not go so far as to say that these are burdened epistemic virtues; however, I believe that this connection to Tessman's conception of burdened moral virtue is important. These virtues of the oppressed are good insofar as they help with survival and the development of resistant narratives. Nonetheless, these burdened epistemic virtues hinder how the agent flourishes. Any virtues of this kind could be developed in some other, non-oppressive situation, but the fact that they arise in such negative circumstances limits how the agent will interact with the rest of their world. For example, I could develop humility from being oppressed (explained further below), or I could develop it from acknowledging I am not always correct. It is the same virtue in both scenarios, but when it develops from oppressive situations I now have to question how those experiences of oppression have shaped other aspects of my life.

Medina identifies three primary epistemic vices, and their corresponding virtues, which he makes use of throughout his book. Admittedly, there are more than three. I am inclined to believe, for the scope and function of this project, that the three he identifies are also the most important for my analysis and eventual model. His three vices are: epistemic arrogance, epistemic laziness, and closed-mindedness. When an agent "[grows] used to carrying with them the presumption of knowing, of speaking authoritatively, of not being cognitively suspect, [they] have but rare opportunities to find their own limitations".[164] This results in epistemic arrogance. He asserts that when this vice is taken to its extreme we come to blows with someone who is pathologically

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[163] José Medina, "Active Ignorance, Epistemic Others, and Epistemic Friction" in *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Toronto: OUP, 2013): 30.
[164] *Ibid*.

incapable of acknowledging any mistake and who indulges in a delusional omniscience. From here, Medina makes the following powerful statement:

> This arrogant and narcissistic perspective can even be linked to an interesting version of skepticism about the external world: a version in which the external world has been swallowed up by the all-encompassing perspective of the arrogant subject who does not recognize any other authoritative perspective.[165]

This skepticism allows for x-ist biases to go undetected within the mind of an individual and for them to operate within lacunae that negatively affect the individual's opportunities for intellectual advancements.

The second vice, epistemic laziness, arises from the idea that, as those with greater access to the beneficial aspects of social life (such as education, financial stability, etc.)[166], privileged individuals often ignore the most violent and difficult to process aspects of oppression. Medina develops this vice in stating "[a] habitual lack of epistemic curiosity atrophies one's cognitive attitudes and dispositions. Continual epistemic neglect creates blinders that one allows to grow around one's epistemic perspective, constraining and slanting one's vantage point".[167] We are all lazy given the circumstances. However, epistemic laziness as vice occurs when this laziness becomes habitual and diminishes our diligence in seeking knowledge. What is particularly interesting for social epistemologists is that the epistemic laziness of a single individual affects more than just their own knowledge. Medina asserts that "epistemic laziness also has a negative impact not only on the subject's cognitive perspective, but also on the cognitive perspectives of those around the subject and on the social knowledge that becomes available or unavailable to the

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[165] *Ibid.*, 32.
[166] Though, as I argue in various areas within this project, privileged individuals lack access to aspects of social life such as: experience of oppression, inter-/intra-personal communication within current social structures, etc.
[167] *Ibid.*, 33.

relevant communities".[168] If a privileged agent is too lazy to search out information they could otherwise disseminate to other privileged agents, their individual laziness affects a larger community.

It is possible that laziness is too weak, or too passive, of a term for why a privileged individual may fail to seek out information regarding oppression. Perhaps they know the information and simply do not care about who is hurt by privileges they possess. I am compelled to put this uncaring person in the category of epistemic laziness; however, in these cases they would fall into a strong epistemic laziness. Such people are lazy insofar as we consider the word's synonym 'negligent'. Strong epistemic laziness could thus be described as: those who fail to take proper epistemic care of others with whom they share a society or space. This is clearly a more active laziness than the more passive idleness of the definition provided by Medina. Regardless, I maintain the definition of laziness for such individuals.[169]

Finally, the vice of closed-mindedness is a more active issue. Instead of passively being lazy, or uncritically being arrogant, this vice involves an active preservation of privilege. Medina defines this as "a needing not to know that creates blind spots of a different kind: not just areas of epistemic neglect, but areas of an intense but negative cognitive attention, areas of epistemic hiding – experiences, perspectives, or aspects of social life that require an enormous amount of effort to be hidden and ignored".[170] It is important, as in laziness, to recognise that we are all closed-minded at times given the circumstances; it would be supererogatory, and nearly impossible at that, to be

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[168] *Ibid*., 34.
[169] Perhaps the problem is with the most common definition of laziness involving a lack of movement, or care, or desire. This definition surely does not fit the strong epistemic laziness I have defined above. It is not my intention to assert that privileged individuals who fall into this category are anything but actively uncaring of the sufferings of others.
[170] *Ibid*.

open-minded about all things at all times. We are not capable of running simulations and processing data at the level of a computer, and in order to move throughout the world we need to allow our minds to focus by closing itself off to some things. Closed-mindedness only becomes an epistemic vice when allowed to become habitual, uncritically so. The dangerous aspect of this vice is how narrowly it can be "an epistemic vice that becomes narrowly circumscribed in a much more specific way: for example, having one's mind closed off to the evidence surrounding a particular historical event (such as genocide), or to a particular set of experiences (such as the suffering of victims of date rape)".[171] This epistemic closing-off of one's mind is a developed defense mechanism that allows the privileged to avoid the facts that would otherwise prove they indeed possess privilege. A salient example of this is the small-town conservative white man who vehemently denies that he has privilege because 'affirmative action puts less qualified people in jobs'[172] instead of himself, and he thus refuses to believe that white privilege exists.

The epistemic virtues relevant to both my project and Medina's are simply the opposites of the vices: humility, curiosity/diligence, and open-mindedness. Like the vices, Medina makes it quite clear that these virtues are not exclusive to the oppressed, nor are they universal features of the epistemic characters of the oppressed, nor are they automatic features.[173] Epistemic humility comes from a regular attentiveness to one's own cognitive limitations and deficits, when such attentiveness does not erode one's character in a pathological manner. Medina writes:

> Having a humble and self-questioning attitude towards one's cognitive repertoire can lead to many epistemic achievements and advantages: qualifying one's beliefs and making finer-grained

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[171] *Ibid.*, 35.

[172] I have had a more drawn out, more jumbled version of this argument passionately given to me by someone I knew from high school. I have also heard arguments of this kind from family members, in the media, and online, which demonstrates how pervasive the vice of epistemic closed-mindedness can be.

[173] *Ibid.*, 43.

> discriminations; identifying one's cognitive gaps and what it would take to fill them; being able to formulate questions and doubts for oneself and others; and so on.[174]

Epistemic humility is virtuous because it allows us to question how and why our cognitive abilities are what they are. Through questioning, we can strive to recognise implicit biases, prejudices, and the like, and move towards actively changing these inclinations. Improving our cognitive limitations is the method through which we can combat meta-numbness, and eventually change oppressive systems which create certain limitations to begin with.

The second virtue builds on the first as it requires the knowledge that one does not know everything; this is also why it is more difficult for agents with epistemic arrogance to achieve. Medina defines intellectual curiosity/diligence as being both a motivational and a performative virtue. Curiosity is virtuous when an individual is especially motivated to fill any cognitive gaps they discover; this is important because "not all such subjects feel an intellectual curiosity that motivates them to fill their cognitive gaps and to overcome their cognitive limits".[175] When this virtue is applied to oppressive systems, there is a special motivational element within the psyche of the marginalised individual. Medina writes that oppressed subjects frequently "find themselves forced to acquire deep familiarity with certain domains, developing expertise than [sic.] no one else has. They often need to know more than they are supposed to […]. They are often forced to anticipate outcomes and moves in the social game; *and sometimes they are also forced to hide this knowledge and render it invisible*".[176] Oppressed individuals often learn much more than they appear to know because having this additional knowledge ensures that they can survive, or resist, for another day. An example of this from personal experience is the knowledge of minutiae in

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[174] *Ibid.*
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] *Ibid.*, 44 (emphasis added).

body language, and how to manipulate my own to appear more dominant or more passive depending on the needs of the scenario. Individuals who are not marginalised, particularly straight, white men[177], likely do not develop this as there is no need for them to do so.

Finally, Medina notes about open-mindedness that "[o]ppressed subjects tend to feel the need of being more attentive to the perspectives of others. They have no option but to acknowledge, respect, and (to some extent) inhabit alternative perspectives, in particular the perspective of the dominant other(s)".[178] This means that oppressed individuals often are forced to see reality through not only their own eyes, but through the eyes of others. This connects back to the kaleidoscopic consciousness I discussed in the last chapter; those in a position of social marginalisation need to be open to seeing the world through multiple lenses, simultaneously. This talk of multiple lenses is important because we cannot assume that the epistemic position of the oppressed, or the oppressor, are monolithic. Medina cautions that "[w]e cannot generalise and talk about *the* epistemic perspective of the oppressed or *the* epistemic perspective of the oppressor".[179] Being able to see multiple perspectives at the same time, and how each is implemented in, or affected by, some form of oppression is incredibly important for dismantling such systemic injustices. This is because such lucidity allows for resistant agents to change their approach if it comes to light that their current method is harming some unknown other.

Before continuing to a less abstract application of virtue ethics and virtue epistemology as defined above, I want to address one criticism of grounding a response to oppression in virtue. In

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[177] This example assumes that sexuality is the only factor for which oppression can occur. I acknowledge this here simply because I have been highly critical of singular examples so far in this project. I suppose, hypocritically, I could simply say that there is a 'time and place for everything'. Whether this pacifies objectors will have to remain to be decided.

[178] *Ibid.*

[179] *Ibid.*, 45 (emphasis original).

a paper responding to Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice*, Benjamin R. Sherman asserts that "it is quite likely that we would do a better job of avoiding epistemic injustice if we do not suppose there is any such virtue as testimonial justice".[180] The first part of his objection comes from his assertion that, while theories regarding virtue may explain elements of life that consequentialism and deontology cannot, these theories come at their own costs. Specifically, he notes that harms created through social structures and historical situations cannot be improved merely through the acquisition and development of virtue within an individual.[181] Additionally, he claims that even if some virtue theory is correct this assumes that we are capable of attaining virtue, which he defines as stable dispositions of character that are reliable in achieving the right outcome in the right situations. He doubts this as outcomes are systematically difficult to recognise or achieve, especially under circumstances of oppression.

Sherman's argument comes down to a critique of the way virtue ethics and virtue epistemology assert that we need to train and habituate a virtuous change to improve. He argues:

> If you are aiming for testimonial justice, you are aiming for a state in which you do not frequently notice yourself committing epistemic injustices without rectifying them. But, of course, there are two ways to achieve this aim: You could achieve testimonial justice, or you could stop noticing your uncorrected testimonial injustices. The trouble is, since your own present judgments will always seem correct to you, you will be unable to distinguish those two outcomes.[182]

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[180] Sherman makes his argument pertinent to the discussion on a single virtue; namely, epistemic justice. However, the reasoning he employs occurs rather frequently in critiques of various virtues in ethics and epistemology. As such, while my response directly pertains to epistemic justice, it can and should be considered a general response to this line of reasoning. (Benjamin R. Sherman, "There's No (Testimonial) Justice: why Pursuit of a Virtue is Not the Solution to Epistemic Injustice" *Social Epistemology* 30(3): 230.)

[181] *Ibid*., 233.

[182] *Ibid*., 239.

My response here is: Sherman appears to have a faulty understanding of how the habituation process functions in virtue theories. To demonstrate what I mean, I will rely on Hursthouse's response to the application problem. The problem begins by placing us into some situation where we have elected to take a virtue ethical approach to its solution. We then realise that the only instruction virtue ethics gives us is to find a virtuous person and do as they would in the situation. Here we are met with a problem like Sherman's as "it might occur to me that anyone sufficiently confident, *whether virtuous or corrupt but self-righteous*, could give me that answer".[183] If anyone can give us an answer, how can we be sure we are able to make a virtuous decision? Thus, virtue ethics fails.

This seems pretty damning for the virtue ethicist, as well as the virtue epistemologist. However, in an almost embarrassingly straightforward response, we can knock this argument down. Hursthouse asserts that "[b]y and large, we do not need to find a virtuous agent, because in one way, we know what she does and would do. She does, and would do, what is virtuous, not vicious".[184] An immediate objection to this response is that it is merely circumventing the question by begging the question 'What does a virtuous agent do? The virtuous act'. Surely, this is ideal theory, the very type of theory I have been critical of throughout this project. However, this is too quick of a dismissal, as a brief analysis can show how excellently this response stops the initial objection. We would all admit that the purely virtuous agent would necessarily do the virtuous act. If an agent cannot tell the difference between testimonial justice and simply not noticing their injustices (to bring it back to Sherman's language), then they need to defer to a virtuous agent as an expert and maintain agnosticism about whatever conclusion they have come to on their own.

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[183] Hursthouse, *Are Virtues*, 106.
[184] *Ibid.*

When first beginning the process of virtue habituation, no one should assume that they are capable of learning alone. Therefore, any agent who is far enough in training their virtues to be trusted to make decisions on their own will necessarily have already incorporated into their conscience what the virtuous agent would do in their situation. So, Sherman's objection falls flat because it fails to recognise that an agent following a virtue ethics is not monolithically in a state choosing between pre-set options.

3.3 Action and Reaction; or, How Virtues and Vices Work in the World

To understand how this capacity for virtue/vice functions in the world, we need to understand how the virtues are connected to the psychological make-up of an individual.[185] Hursthouse asserts that the virtue ethicist must recognise the moral significance of the emotions; this is an element I would like to extend to all virtues, moral or epistemic. To assert her point, she makes the following claims:

1. The virtues (and vices) are morally significant.
2. The virtues (and vices) are all dispositions not only to act, but to feel emotions, as *re*actions as well as impulses to action. (Aristotle says again and again that the virtues are concerned with actions *and* feelings.)
3. In the person with the virtues, these emotions will be felt on the *right* occasions, towards the *right* people or objects, for the *right* reasons, where 'right' means 'correct', as in 'The right answer to "What is the capital of New Zealand?" is "Wellington".'[186]

The most interesting claim is the second, which asserts that the virtues are contained within reactions, not merely actions, and that these reactions are emotionally charged. As such, not only

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[185] This includes any mental states, beliefs, dispositions, and mental comportments towards the world the individual lives in. Essentially, I will now be exploring how the capacity for virtue/vice exists in tandem with these psychological elements of an individual's inner life.

[186] Rosalind Hursthouse, "Virtues and Emotions" in *On Virtue Ethics* (Toronto: OUP, 2001): 108.

do we need to habituate our actions considering oppression, we also need to train our feelings. This makes sense if we look at Fricker's case of the new feminist.

The case goes as follows: imagine a woman who has managed to remove her previously held sexist beliefs and adopt a feminist stance on women's issues. Despite her new attitude towards feminism, imagine that her psychology retains some of the stereotypical influences from her previous worldview, and when caught unprepared in many contexts these still act as her default reaction. Fricker asserts that in a case like this "[s]uch a figure exemplifies the phenomenon of (what we might call) residual internalization, whereby a member of a subordinated group continues as host to a sort of half-life for the oppressive ideology, even when her beliefs have moved on".[187] Clearly this woman does not believe in the dominant sexist ideology anymore, so how can she remain affected by internalised sexism? This can be explained by recognising that the actions she now takes in line with her feminist beliefs are differently habituated than those internalised judgments she formed as a younger woman. Fricker notes that it is possible to change this, and while she does not use the language of habit her description does work in tandem with the virtue ethical idea of habituation. Fricker writes "[i]n a spirit of optimism, let us imagine that she confides her feelings and suspicions to others and gradually arrives at an enhanced self-awareness that helps limit the impact of the prejudicial residue on her credibility judgments".[188] I want to make note of two elements within this quotation: first, we can see how this description links to habituation by Fricker's choice to use 'gradually arrives' as the process of change. Gradual change in this active sense implies some sort of learning and habituating. Second, note that Fricker asks us to consider this habituation as an optimistic outcome. Making such a change to one's internalised psychology

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[187] Miranda Fricker, "Prejudice in the Credibility Economy" in *Epistemic injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Toronto: OUP, 2007): 37.
[188] *Ibid*., 38.

is a difficult task; one that many cannot fully accomplish.[189] In making such changes through habituation, an agent can bring themselves at least to the point of atypical virtue.

So, it is absolutely necessary to consider the emotions a significant element of a virtuous person. The question now becomes one of how to properly cultivate these virtues and emotions. Hursthouse notes that we "are taught to use sentences which contain the words (equivalent to) 'good' and 'evil' and their cognates and species from a very early age, at the same time as we are taught how to conduct ourselves. And a central aspect of this teaching is the training of emotions".[190] There is an emotional, moral connection to the words we use, and how we use them. This is something that we acquire the ability to synthesise at a very early age, even before we can properly discriminate any discernable difference between words such as 'bad' and 'evil'. Hursthouse then turns to a paradigm case of bad emotional training; that of the incubation of racism. She justifies this example by asking her reader to recall "how extreme racism expresses itself in emotion, the way it generates not only hatred and contempt, but fear, anger, reserve, suspicion, grief that one's offspring is going to marry a member of a rejected race, joy when evil befalls them, pity for members of one's own race who are bettered by them [etc.]".[191] Clearly racism has emotional significance. But it is a special, learned significance that the emotions play in this case; no one relatively free from racist emotion would disagree that this emotional connection must be taught, and must be taught young.

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[189] This is supposing that the individual has reasons for wanting to change their disposition. A reader may question how this will translate to the privileged individual who may not feel they are required to adjust. Certainly, this poses a problem for my current analysis. I ask that any reader who has come to this objection keep their concern in mind as they encounter my further chapter.

[190] Hursthouse, *Virtues and Emotions*, 113.

[191] *Ibid.*

Undoing the emotional connection to racist ideology is a difficult topic filled with questions regarding whether it is even feasible. Hursthouse admits it may not be entirely possible; thus, the life marred by the bad moral luck of being raised in a racist manner will forever prevent the individual from reaching the same level of virtue as a fully virtuous person per the current conception in Aristotelian virtue ethics. This does not mean we should not try to climb as close to virtue as we can; to fail to do so would be admitting that we do not care about the virtues. The argument for why it is difficult to retrain, relearn, and rehabilitate comes from the recognition that the emotions cannot be neatly divided into rational and non-rational applications. Hursthouse asserts that "given the emotions' non-rational face, it may be that reason cannot entirely unseat bad training in childhood, and that relationships of love and trust formed in adulthood cannot entirely undo a kind of unconscious expectancy of evil which still manifests itself in racist emotional reactions".[192] So, if undoing the emotional ties to prejudicial thought is a near impossibility, we must strive to inculcate virtuous emotions from infancy. It is for this reason that we need to strive to be as morally strong as possible, to undo as much as we can, so that when we educate the next generation and help them form emotional virtues they can grow beyond our capabilities. Virtue is difficult, and developing such dispositions is a multi-generational task.

3.3.1 Case Study Application: News Media

I have not yet provided a substantial case study for how these virtues and vices interrelate out in the world; rather, I have provided short cases to demonstrate the various moving parts as they arose in my discussion. These are all still abstract enough that to someone who does not already believe what I am saying they would remain unconvincing, which is especially risky if I

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[192] *Ibid.*, 116.

want to stand my ground and place my theory in opposition with something as large as social contract theory.[193] For the remainder of this section, I will be looking at how the news media affects the lives of victims of tragedy, and how this practice demonstrates both virtues and vices in everyday applications. When I say the words 'reporter', 'journalist', or 'television anchor', many people envisage the same kind of person: someone who is pushy, will not take 'no' for an answer, and someone who will do whatever it takes to get a sensational headline. The paradigm of this is someone akin to J. Jonah Jameson, Jr. from Marvel Comic's Spiderman series.

In everyday journalism, there is an interesting dichotomy between viewers of a news broadcast and those directly involved in the story. This is best captured by the training film *The News Media's Coverage of Crime and Victimization*, produced for the purposes of training social workers on media-victim relations. Early in the film, narrator Mario Caballero makes the following salient assertion: "Television viewers have the choice of watching the tragedy play out from the safety and comfort of their living rooms. But victims have to respond to the pressure of the media while still in shock. It's the type of scene that's becoming all too common".[194] We as news consumers are far removed from the field; however, the reporters and the victims are often interacting with each other in the heat of the moment, while the event is still fresh. How the media conduct themselves is immensely indicative of what virtuous or vicious dispositional traits they have come to possess through their lives and trainings. Reporters function as intermediaries; they

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[193] These examples remain abstract because they only consider one level of oppression; sexism and racism, respectively. What is not demonstrated in these examples is that there are various other levels are play in how these cases fail to address reality. To demonstrate, consider that the new feminist does not tackle the heteronormative power behind the sexism she faces, nor does this example consider how femininity is constructed differently for a white woman and a black woman, nor does this example consider that femininity is constructed based on a classed system wherein a higher class woman is expected to be more dependent (or 'dainty') than her lower class sister, etc.

[194] United States Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crimes and National Victim Assistance Academy, "The News Media's Coverage of Crime and Victimization" (District of Columbia: Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crimes, 2000): 5:24-5:38.

traffic the information about an event from the location where it occurred to the screens and papers of potential knowers. They also function as quasi-mouthpieces for the victims, as often they are the only interaction we as consumers have with victims. Thus, reporters must manage their epistemic and ethical responsibilities to both consumer and victim.

Sometimes one of these considerations outweighs the other, depending on what is most important to the news media at a given moment. Their ethical responsibilities are often at odds with their epistemic responsibilities because on the one hand, they need to treat victims properly or risk losing their privileges and credibility. However, on the other hand, if they do not produce enough tantalising information, at a fast-enough rate for consumption, they will lose their audience. Carroll Ann Ellis, a victim services director in Fairfax county, Virgina, recounts that when pressed by the media:

> [Victims] talk about feeling wounded, rewounded, revictimized –
> they talk about having their insides gutted for the sake of passing
> information on and the public's right to have information about their
> private lives. At that point, initially when the event happens, there's
> little time to think about those things that people would like to have
> remain private, other than the fact that nothing seems to be private
> at that moment.[195]

In the heat of the moment, if the reporters and journalists have not taken it upon themselves to habituate epistemic and ethical virtue, they can cause more harm to the victim in their relentless search for a story. In this situation, reporters place more value in their epistemic oughts than those

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[195] *The News Media's*: 6:39-7:08.

ethical oughts which must also be considered.[196] To virtuously respond regarding developing situations, reporters need to balance these competing oughts.[197]

How is it that this balance is so difficult? As Caballero states in the voice over following Ellis' interview, "[p]art of the problem no doubt exists because the media justify their actions as serving the public's right to know. And in doing so, some journalists go to extremes".[198] Thus, the justification to prioritise the epistemic ought is that it affects a wider group of people; namely, the constituents of whichever news outlet the reporter works for. In the following interview, Greg Luft states that the problem of reporters going to extremes comes from an arrogant disposition that not all journalists have. Regarding those reporters who are respectful, he asserts that the main difference is that they can accept 'no' for an answer and recognise when a victim does not want to talk. If we recall the epistemic virtues detailed above, it is no stretch to assert that these respectful reporters have cultivated epistemic humility. They recognise when they reach certain limitations and can work within their means to create a compelling headline.

To reach a point in which the reporter can practice epistemic humility the individual needs to determine how to navigate the field while avoiding the competitiveness such a fast-paced profession brings. Luft asserts that these competitive instincts compound upon professional pressures to push journalists into undesirable behaviours. As such, the differentiation between the

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[196] Epistemic oughts would be those directives, impulses, or obligations which arise from the need to provide some sort of knowledge to an individual (who can be the person themselves, or another individual external to the situation). Ethical oughts are those directives, impulses, or obligations which arise from moral, rather than legal, necessities when dealing with other individuals.

[197] A reader may comment that the mere weight of the economic influence on reporters could undercut any attempts at promoting virtue in the news media. While this does appear to be a problem for my imperative that new media should follow a virtuous model of acting and reacting to tragedies, I believe I can dismiss the concern. In short, this economic imperative is a systematic problem of our current social structure. My analysis is meant to critique all such structures in general; this new media example is merely a digestible case study of an application of this view (recalling, of course, the scope and ability of this project).

[198] *The News Media's*: 7:11-7:21.

habituation of virtuous actions and that of virtuous emotions is evidently a necessary distinction. A reporter could cultivate the most excellent ethical and epistemological actions in their own being, but then crack under the pressures of their profession and resort to less than desirable actions on the job simply because they have failed to consider the role that their emotions play in the overall virtues of the self.

That the epistemic oughts of the news media tend to be prioritised over the ethical oughts occurs at all is problematic. However, there is something more concerning than this regarding the epistemic factors under consideration. In an interview near the midpoint of *The News Media's Coverage of Crime and Victimization*, Anne Seymour notes that victims have doubts and concerns about whether the news media even report some crimes at all. To illustrate, she asks the viewer to consider the following: if she were a white, middle class male who was murdered in Washington, D.C., she would be headline news; however, if she were a black, mother of four in the same city, it would be surprising if she was even on the back page of the newspaper. Following this, Seymour states that she thinks "the media sometimes tend to reflect societal biases, and I think that's a concern for all of us".[199] To get more views, better ratings, and more fiscal benefit, reporters may overlook stories that deviate from a societally constructed 'norm', even if that means obfuscating knowledge that is relevant to more individuals. Thus, the ethical and epistemic responsibilities of reporters can fall into question when prejudices and biases operate without critical analyses.

A social contract theorist may respond that, while this analysis has merits, social contract theory has a simple answer to this problem: the reporters are harmful, so we should get rid of them because they are wrong. My response to this does not have to reject the idea that the reporters

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[199] *The News Media's*: 13:49-14:18.

should be removed; indeed, they are wrong and I do believe that they need to be replaced with better reporters. However, this does not map onto the real world. In part, this is why my model will need to operate under a non-ideal framework; reality is structured in such a way that we do not have the option of just removing bad reporters, so we need to create a method with which to address these negative individuals. Instead of using a testing-model to see what works and what does not, we need to use a balancing-model which accounts for the virtues and vices of real agents.

This training video is roughly sixteen years old, yet my analysis is still relevant to the more advanced developments we use today. With the recent introduction of fast-paced social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, we are constantly bombarded with information from all kinds of sources. Discriminating between what constitutes a good source and what does not is incredibly difficult, and fake news distributers continuously update their methods to confound the unsuspecting masses. Accusations are lodged against company after company regarding liberal or conservative bias, and any measure on behalf of these companies to curb biased and fake news inevitably comes up wanting due to the multifarious nature of the internet. Facebook has released statements about fake news and propaganda, yet these epistemically and ethically vicious stories continue to occur. It takes a virtuous agent to decipher what can be trusted, and virtuous agents are difficult to find.

3.4 Conclusion

Hopefully this case for the epistemic and ethical importance of the virtues has been compelling. I firmly believe that it is not enough merely to recognise that we need to abide by proper epistemic and ethical actions; we also need some manner of cultivating how to perform

these actions. I do not believe that there is one proper method or theory for this endeavour, and as such I find the idea of the habituation and training of virtues makes the most sense.

In this chapter I began with a recounting of modern virtue ethics. This quickly shifted to a discussion regarding the virtues and vices of the socially conscious; those which Tessman considers burdened virtues. This kind of virtue is enigmatic: not only do they defy the conventional understanding of virtue as pleasurable and vice as painful, but they are also virtues that we should not want. Burdened virtues are those which arise out of necessity for survival or resistance, yet were we in an ideal world they would either come about through different means, or not at all. This discussion on the virtues is important as it helps piece together the epistemic factors discussed in chapter two. Through an analysis of closed-mindedness, arrogance, and laziness we can begin to piece together how meta-numbness and meta-numbness take hold in the psyche of an individual. This understanding is crucial for the following chapter, which will address how we can break these elements apart.

I will now move to develop my own account of how to address oppression, and the method which I believe is better suited than social contract theory to tackle this problem. Remember that social contract theory falls prey to the messy web argument, but we must also make the connection to meta-numbness here. Social contract theory operates in ideal conditions, which abstract away from how the world operates day-to-day. Abstraction itself is not the problem, as my analysis thus far has relied on it at points. But abstraction to the point of something like the veil of ignorance is particularly dangerous. The following chapter will involve a synthesis of the epistemic factors from chapter two and the virtues from this chapter. Now that we have explored the underlying reasons for addressing oppression in a new way, I will demonstrate how I envision this endeavour unfolding.

AN ARGUMENT FOR SELF-SKEPTICISM

In this chapter I will take the discussions from each of my previous chapters and demonstrate how these three topics create the groundwork for a model to address oppression. I will begin in section 4.1 by reviewing the main themes from each chapter: first, the social contract and how it fails to adequately grasp the problem of oppression; second, the fact of prejudice and testimonial injustice, and how our individual perspectives play a role in how we perceive these issues; third, my model's focus on the cultivation of virtue and how we as biased agents need to strive towards a mean of sorts. Following this review, I build my model and demonstrate how we need to be aware that in any situation there will always be some unpossessed evidence that, were we to know it, should compel us to be doubtful of our current beliefs. Then, in section 4.2 I take my model and apply it to an issue that I have significant investment in: bisexual health and representation in Canada. In this section I follow my model step-by-step as it applies to two specific problems within this topic, and how the model could significantly change to how we address oppression.

4.1 The Model

Building from my analysis in the first chapter, we must reject a contractual model of oppression; failing to do so would render our model susceptible to the *messy web argument*.[200] This rejection is based on (MW4) – (MW6), which state that any continually modified social contract theory that becomes too difficult to render in practice must be terminated rather than further amended. As I explained above, this runs contra to what theorists such as Mills and Pateman

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[200] See 21 of this document.

have argued.[201] A dismantling of the contract is in direct opposition to someone like Mills because he asserts that contractual language is the lingua franca of political philosophy and that through using it we can engage with those already theorising in the field. I do not find this a sufficient reason to continue using what I perceive to be a broken theory. To give a less theoretical analogy: if my friends and I were on our way to a party and the car broke down it would not make sense to formulate arguments pertaining to how we might try to modify the way we drive to get there in a prompt fashion. We would instead get out and walk.[202]

Contractual models pose the problem of treating individuals as cogs in a system. I believe this is far too reductive; people are complex and cannot be trusted to follow a system of this kind. As hard as the law tries to create 'equality' under its restrictions, there will inevitably be negative friction from individuals for whom a shallow 'equality' does not help.[203] One reason, as I hinted to in my first chapter, is because no matter what system of equality we try to implement we are necessarily bound by our own experiences and cannot escape this bias. A Rawlsian veil of ignorance can only get so far removed from bias; while the party behind the veil may be ignorant of whom they represent, the theorist utilising the thought experiment is not, and cannot ever be. So, a model responding to oppression necessarily must be built from the bottom up through an

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[201] Recall that Mills believes in salvaging the contract, whereas Pateman attempts to take it down from the inside. I say that this 'runs contra' to both theorists because I believe we need to take down the contract system without entering into it; doing so muddies our distinctions and traps us within the lingua franca of social contract theory.

[202] One could assert, of course, that we may argue about how to fix the vehicle and that this would be the better analogy in that it supports modifying the social contract rather than disposing of it. Certainly, in the above example we would not want to dispose of the broken car. We would go back for it. However, the way I am envisioning the example is not with the actual vehicle as the object in question; rather, the analogy regards the mode of transport. It is between 'social contract' – 'vehicle' and 'my model' – 'walking'.

[203] By 'shallow equality' I mean the appearance of equality without its actual implementation. Essentially, this is a qualification of my critique against ideal theory; equality in contractual policy does not necessarily translate to equality in application, precisely because of the epistemic and ethical implications I have outlined in the previous two chapters. Consider the fact that marriage equality is legal at the federal level in America as of 2015 and yet in several states refuse to recognise this law, and several caterers, officiates, planners, etc. refuse to recognise the law. Here we have 'equality' under the law, but no such equality in practice.

acknowledgement of the biases in the world, rather than the assumed conditions of ideal theory. In applying the model, we need to be able to recognise that theorists are incapable of separating our biases from our work, and thus the model needs to have fail-safes built in to account for this.

If we cannot rely on contracts because individuals with agency are unpredictable, then my model will need to be able to address these unpredictable actions. Such action is often irrational, or at least 'rationally' based on some false belief. By this I mean to emphasise that we act without certainty quite often, and we can be very wrong when doing so. However, in these instances we have acted rationally according to the evidence we had; we just did not have enough of the right type of evidence, and thus acted upon a false belief. As such, my model will need to deal with the prejudicial worldviews and the testimonial injustice that arises within these dispositions. In my second chapter I called these the 'what' of the epistemological project, and the 'why' and 'how' were attributed to an individual's perspective and the fact of disagreement, respectively. There are too many aspects of modern theories that lend themselves to the benefit of the already privileged; one of these was within Pateman's critique earlier in this project.[204] Recall that she highlighted that the parties are referred to as heads of their families, which contains the assumption of their being male. In shifting this dialogue, the goal should not be to bring marginalised individuals to 'become like' the majority; this is not some matter of differentiating between group A and group not-A, then finding a way to move the not-As into the A camp. Instead, we need to be comfortable with group A and group B dynamics, wherein neither is preferentially treated and both can maintain their unique characteristics without detriment.[205] Political theory was built by As, and as such Bs will never be treated as anything more than not-As within current systems.

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[204] See page 13 of this document.
[205] I borrow the A, not-A, and B concepts from Marilyn Frye (1996).

As I argued in chapter two, dealing with the 'what' is not enough to adequately address oppression. Such a model will need to address unique perspectives and how they differ from one another due to individuated lived experiences. Quite possibly this will be the hardest element to develop as it involves finding something that can apply to people on a case-to-case basis while still being universally applicable. Surely something of this level lends itself to hubris; no theory can accurately apply to everyone. Thus, it may be a misnomer to refer to my model as a 'model' (or even as a theory). I will be working within an anti-theoretical method to negatively define a skeletal framework upon which individuated situations can be structured for analysis.

In addition to a negative definition, my model is necessarily founded upon an anti-theoretical understanding of epistemology, and indeed of the virtues in general. As discussed in chapter three, I fall into the virtue-expansionism camp of anti-theory; in other words, I believe that there is work to be done in epistemology and in the intellectual virtues, but that the two do not necessarily need to be connected. However, for this project I want to join the epistemology of oppression with the discussion of virtue. I make this move because, as Medina has shown[206] there are epistemic virtues and vices of the oppressed and the oppressors. To account for this, my model will need to incorporate these epistemological aspects of our mental lives to present an adequate account of the lived experience of oppressed or oppressor.

And finally, my model will need to work toward a mean. But what does this 'mean' look like when dealing with the issue of oppression? I argue below that, as with other (Neo-) Aristotelian virtues, there are two extremes and one mean regarding the virtue I call 'social awareness' and that all three of these are mutually exclusive. This move will inevitably garner

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[206] See page 80 of this document.

push-back, as objectors may insist that action within the social sphere is broken neatly between "action" and "inaction". As I hope will become clear below, this should not be assumed to be the case. I want to stay away from this bipartite distinction because it leaves my model prey to objections surrounding ignorance; the claim could be lodged that the model breaks down because actions through ignorance surely are not virtuous, though a model with two poles would necessarily have to assert they are. An Aristotelian could combat this objection by repeating the lines "[s]ince that which is done by force or by reason of ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action".[207] I am not comfortable addressing this objection by claiming ignorant (in)actions are involuntary. Instead, my virtuous principle will attribute this to a deficit of virtue.

4.1.1 The Argument for Self-Skepticism

So, how does this model take shape? To build this, I will rely once more on the literature regarding the epistemology of disagreement. The subject of this disagreement will be: how to act in the face of oppression. Ought we to continue to hold our currently held beliefs in the event that someone disagrees with us, or must we revise once we learn there is a possibility we have acted viciously? In a similar vein, how should we react in cases of disagreement with counterfactual philosophers; those philosophers who do not exist and yet, were they to exist, they would have very good defeaters for your view? This can be further problematized if we consider the fact of unpossessed evidence. The concern regarding disagreement is iterated nicely by Lackey in her *Justificationist View*, and the issues of counterfactual philosophers and unpossessed evidence are

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[207] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111a20-25 [Ross, 41].

articulated by Nathan Ballantyne in two of his recent papers. In this chapter I will apply my stance

on these issues and apply them to the discussion of oppression.[208]

Lackey's justificationist account seeks to reject the dichotomy of revisionism and anti-

revisionism by creating another model altogether different. She adamantly defends that this view

is not a hybrid of the other two, and that indeed she ultimately rejects:

> [B]oth nonconformism – because the absence of doxastic revision
> in the face of peer disagreement is never justified merely by virtue
> of the fact that beliefs are either mine or are the product of correct
> reasoning – and conformism – because substantial doxastic revision
> in the face of peer disagreement is never justified merely by virtue
> of equal weight being given to my own beliefs and to those held by
> my epistemic peers.[209]

Lackey asserts that we should instead work within a system that holds the epistemic power of peer

disagreement to be dependent on the degree of justified confidence in the belief in question. An

initial objection might assert that this seems like a modified definition of anti-revisionism: both

views assert that there is (1) no immediate requirement to revise in the face of peer disagreement,

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[208] In an unpublished paper, I developed a view I called *Anti-Revisionist Revisionism*, inspired by, and with elements borrowed from, Jennifer Lackey's *Justificationist View* and Nathan Ballantyne's argument from counterfactual philosophers and unpossessed evidence. My anti-revisionist revisionism goes as follows:
U1: If I am in a disagreement with a peer and we have both critically evaluated the available *p*-relevant evidence, then I am rational in maintaining my level of credence in *p*.
U2: I am in a disagreement with a peer and we have both evaluated the available *p*-relevant evidence as critically as we can.
Therefore, U3: I am rational in maintaining my level of credence in *p*.
However, U4: If I become aware of the fact that there is some unknown *p*-relevant evidence that is either unpossessed or counterfactual or otherwise unknown, I am rationally required to revise my level of credence in *p*.
U5: I am aware that such unknown evidence exists (either as unpossessed or counterfactual or otherwise unknown evidence).
Therefore, U6: I am rationally required to revise my level of credence in *p*. (For both sources of inspiration, see: Lackey (2010) and Ballantyne (2014), (2015). For my unpublished paper, I can be contacted for a draft copy.)
[209] Lackey uses the term 'conformism' to denote revisionism and 'nonconformism' to denote anti-revisionism. (Lackey, *A Justificationist View*, 320).

and that (2) any revision that does occur comes from the evaluation of the evidence presented to an individual.

This is a mistaken objection because it ignores the fact that Lackey's justificationist account does, at times, assert that revisionism is the proper approach. An agent decides whether to revise by combining the presence of personal information with the level of justified confident belief they have, which creates two guiding principles:

> No Doxastic Revision Required: In a case of ordinary disagreement between A and B, if A's belief that p enjoys a very high degree of justified confidence, then A is permitted to rationally retain her same degree of belief that p if and only if A has a relevant symmetry breaker
>
> Substantial Doxastic Revision Required: In a case of ordinary disagreement between A and B, if A's belief that p enjoys a relatively low degree of justified confidence, then A is rationally required to substantially revise the degree to which she holds her belief that p.[210]

It is important to note that Lackey has placed her view within ordinary disagreement and not ideal disagreement. As discussed above, ordinary disagreement does not require both interlocutors to fully satisfy the requirements for peer disagreement.[211] Instead, the agents merely need to take themselves as roughly epistemic peers. This is a contentious point for my model as I will be dealing with cases where the oppressors most certainly do not see themselves as equals, and for this reason I use Lackey's model as inspiration instead of direction.

Clearly an objection to this point is that any epistemic power disagreement holds is reserved solely for when both parties see their interlocutor as a rough equal. Yet in cases of

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[210] *Ibid.*, 319.
[211] See page 60 of this document.

oppression the power dynamic exists in such a way that one individual necessarily degrades the capabilities of the other. I agree with the latter half of the objection; however, I reject the former. I do not believe the interlocutors need to see each other as equals for disagreement to have epistemic power. To justify this claim I want to recall Medina's virtue of epistemic humility, and how oppressors can be meta-numb to the consequences of their actions. Simply because someone is numb to the consequences of their actions does not excuse those actions; but more importantly it does not dismiss the significance of the disagreeing responses from the oppressed voices who are without any social power. Indeed, I believe that in these cases where the oppressor has all but dismissed the possibility that someone can be their peer is *exactly* the element that causes these cases of disagreement to be so epistemically powerful. They become lessons for those who are willing to listen, and they demonstrate exactly how stubborn and numb oppressors can become. Both realisations can be used by the oppressed voices to strengthen their arguments and propel social movements forward.

How can disagreement be significant in this way if only a single interlocutor sees the encounter as one with epistemic importance? I will make use of epistemic counterfactuals to demonstrate how I believe this to be true. Ballantyne defines these statements as "any proposition that if some contrary-to-fact state had obtained, then our evidence or reasons or rational support would or might be different".[212] An example of such a proposition would be the following: If I had been introduced to counterfactual statements from a different author, then I would not be quoting Ballantyne's definition above. Regarding my argument for oppression, this means that if an individual can imagine a case that is contrary to their current privileged situation (for example, if someone who was born wealthy could imagine they were born into abject poverty), then they

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[212] Nathan Ballantyne, "Counterfactual Philosophers." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88: 369.

should consider this counterfactual situation to be evidence against their current oppressive beliefs. Immediately two objections can be raised: (1) that anyone who is in some position likely cannot imagine themselves in a different situation that they have no first-personal knowledge about (or, those who say they can are often bad at adequately doing so), and (2) that we should not bother with imaginary contrary-to-fact propositions when there are real conflicts we could focus on instead.

I want to assert that neither of these objections present a problem to my argument; rather, both present themselves as inherently compatible with the argument. However, to demonstrate why I believe this to be the case I first need to explain the second theory I take from Ballantyne and how it applies to this project. He describes his view on unpossessed evidence as "a kind of 'real-world' skepticism, a brand of skepticism drawn from the experience of life. It begins with our recognition that there is evidence against our views that we know about but do not have […]. [T]hinking about unpossessed evidence often delivers *defeaters* – roughly, *prima facie* reasons to give up beliefs".[213] This begins to solve issue (2) because it presents an idea similar to counterfactual evidence that is grounded in the actual world. No doubt, as I am writing this chapter, there is evidence I lack that could greatly support or even decimate my arguments. Thus, as I write I ought to remain at least the slightest bit skeptical of my own arguments because there is no way for me to necessarily know there are no knock-down arguments against my theory. Likewise, I believe that this kind of skeptical attitude ought to have some epistemic force for individual agents when asserting their beliefs. Oppressors ought to (though often do not) consider that their position

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[213] Nathan Ballantyne, "The Significance of Unpossessed Evidence." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65(260): 316.

regarding oppression (or lack thereof on their account) is necessarily founded upon incomplete evidence.

In a sense, recognising that there is evidence against your position, even if only counterfactual, should be considered an epistemic virtue. A virtuous stance towards unpossessed evidence would be one that incorporates elements of epistemic humility, curiosity, and open-mindedness. As individuals who are inherently tied to our individuated experiences, we need to be open to taking in evidence we do not already possess and using it to question our current beliefs. Sometimes, perhaps often, this unpossessed evidence will not change our view; however, a virtuous individual would make the evaluation instead of disregarding non-confirming evidence. As discussed in chapter three, oppressors tend to err towards epistemic laziness and closed-mindedness. These epistemic vices cause individuals who live with privileges to function in society without needing to question their position. These individuals can use the vice of ignorance to dismiss any unpossessed evidence. When challenged on their stance, these privileged individuals can assign credibility deficits to disregard the testimony of oppressed individuals who try to present such disconfirming evidence. Thus, an anti-revisionist stance can be supported by bootstrapping through high levels of confidence in their previously held beliefs.

Objection (1) appears harder to dismiss. However, I have already discussed a concept which I believe can help demonstrate how this objection supports a virtuous model. It seems clear to state that privileged individuals who have never experienced oppression cannot understand what it is like to be oppressed; any claims to understand are just romanticised fantasy of how these privileged individuals imagine life to be like for marginalised groups. An example of this can be seen in how able-bodied individuals view differently-abled people as needing pity and having a

'less-than-ideal life'. Many doctors even hold positions like this.[214] However, if one takes the time to ask someone in this marginalised group how they perceive their life, a significant majority would assert that they are fine and that their able-bodied counterparts need to stop treating them differently. So, clearly this demonstrates how objection (1) obtains and defeats the plausibility of my argument, right?

I want to push-back by recalling the kaleidoscopic consciousness I discussed in chapter two.[215] Through direct experience with privileged individuals, marginalised agents can splinter their consciousness in such a way that they can understand both their own perspective and that of the other. In some ways, they are able to understand an other better than this other individual can understand themselves. Obviously, a particular kaleidoscopic consciousness cannot understand another mind in its entirety, but a basal understanding is enough to bring about an awareness of how to (re)act in social situations. This basal understanding of an other's mind is brought about by those virtues I discussed earlier in this project. If an individual is epistemically humble then they will be able to understand that there is more to the world than their own views. This naturally leads to the curiosity an agent needs to investigate their interlocutor's perspective on the world. The aspect of diligence in this second virtue comes from the acknowledgement that they need to be careful with how they take up this curiosity, as the person they are investigating is an individual agent. Finally, epistemic open-mindedness allows for the oppressed agent to understand aspects of the privileged individual's reality that fail to adhere to their currently held worldview.

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[214] For this information, I thank the audience members, and several presenters, at the 6th Annual Western Michigan Medical Humanities conference, which occurred in September 2016 at the University of Western Michigan.
[215] See page 53 of this document.

I argue that privileged individuals can develop a similar consciousness through direct exposure and interaction with individuals who do not share their privileges.[216] An important point to recall is that an individual who is oppressed on only one dimension is not necessarily already a virtuous agent capable of splintering their mind to understand another person. An able-bodied woman will not necessarily understand, nor be able to apply her virtues to, a man with a disability. As such, a virtuous agent ought to strive to understand other individuals at a virtuous level, and this should spark a desire to help those with fewer, or different, privileges. The desire to resist against oppression works against the meta-numbness the virtuous agent may be exposed to in the world. As such, (1) seems to support the direction I am proposing, rather than work against it.

With this, I am finished setting up the groundwork for my model. To respond to instances of oppression as they occur, we need to understand that not every situation will be identical; thus, there is no way to formalise the exact method with which to tackle these issues. However, it is possible to lay the outline for how to react and piece the model together with information from each individual situation. I call my model the '*Argument for Self-Skepticism*', which begins as follows:

> SM1: Every individual necessarily has only their own lived experience to draw upon[217], and
>
> SM2: Any individual can only use what they can draw upon[218] to make any kind of credential judgment.

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[216] Whether or not this similar consciousness works at the same level of the kaleidoscopic consciousness of the marginalised individuals is a debate for another project. For my argument to work I do not necessarily need both splintered consciousnesses to be identical.

[217] Someone's lived experience can include the testimony of someone else's lived experience. However, testimony of an other's lived experience, and the actual lived experience of an other, are two separate entities.

[218] This 'drawing upon' can include things that one can imagine, as we can only ever imagine things from our own perspective. For example, I can imagine what it is like to be heterosexual, and I can form beliefs based off that imagining, but I cannot *know* what is like as I only have imaginings and testimony to work with.

These two conditions explain the world as it is. With our current level of technological advancement, we are unable to enter fully into the mind of another. Many have proposed thought experiments that purportedly do this (or similar). However, as I have already stated, we need to reject that this kind of thought experiment does what it claims because, while the abstract agent in question may be completely unaware of biases, the theorist is not (and ultimately cannot ever be).

Considering this fact of the reality of our minds (presently), my argument continues:

> SM3: When individuals can only use what they can draw upon to make credential judgments, necessarily there will be cases in which individual experience conflicts with those experiences of others who share the same social sphere.

> SM4: To solve disagreements, we rely on the sharing of evidence for and against some proposition *p*.

> SM5: Whether we revise in light of disagreement, or whether we hold to our beliefs without revision, depends on the level of justified credence available to an individual in combination with their personal experiences.

These three conditions highlight how an application of a *justificationist* model is employed by individuals within disagreement, whether they claim to be revisionists or anti-revisionists; Lackey's model is naturally prior to arguments for either camp. However, if we leave disagreement as this stands, we leave loopholes through which oppressors can claim that their personal experiences, in concert with what they view as justified credential factors, validate their oppressive x-ist behaviour. Therefore:

> SM6: A *justificationist* model alone cannot address the fact of oppression because it leaves open loopholes which oppressors can exploit to maintain their privileged status by arguing that they have no rational requirement to revise when disagreeing with marginalised individuals.

However, we should not stop our analysis here for two reasons: (1) so far this is not much of a change to the existing literature on disagreement, which is currently also unable to address oppression, and (2) we need some kind of framework to develop arguments against oppressive x-ist action, not just dismissive arguments.

As such, we need to be able to account for evidence that we do not have or do not possess; this is where the kaleidoscopic consciousness, epistemic counterfactuals, and unpossessed evidence comes to bear on the argument. To do so, we need to recognise that the virtuous action in cases of disagreement regarding oppression may be:

> SM7: In cases of disagreement which involve oppression, privileged individuals without sufficiently in-depth first-hand interaction and experience with a marginalised group *ought to embrace a skeptical outlook on the situation* (rather than merely revise towards, or stand their ground against, their interlocutor).[219]

This is the crux of my argument; in cases of identified oppression, those who occupy the privileged group must feel the moral pull towards self-skepticism in light of their beliefs. This is because those who occupy the privileged position, and who have not had explicit and direct exposure to marginalised individuals and their realities, have not had to splinter their consciousness, have not truly considered epistemic counterfactuals, and have not considered the significance of that evidence which they do not already possess. These privileged individuals thus do not have the requisite access to evidence, and especially the testimonial evidence from the oppressed perspective, to adequately assess their own role in oppression or privilege. This self-skepticism

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[219] I am intentionally using skepticism to define my model, as opposed to something like deferral, despite the negative baggage it may come with for various readers. This is because I am arguing that a privileged individual ought to become skeptical of their own preconceived beliefs when faced with the fact of oppression. The scope of this thesis is not to direct where to go following this realisation; that is another large project worthy of its own full exposition. Even if I were to point in the direction I want to move following this project, that pointing would require more exposition than the scope of this paper can afford. Thus, and despite the baggage the term carries, I will be using skepticism to define my model.

should not be taken to be the final development of a virtuous agent's progression; to believe so would be to ignore the corrective nature of the virtues and to settle for a consequentialist reading of my argument.

I believe this skeptical position would appropriately be considered the turning-point for an agent's virtuous development. As Aristotle claimed, "the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts".[220] Likewise, in order to be virtuous in our actions towards the realities of oppression, we need to practice virtuous action itself. My skeptical argument does not bring about these actions; however, it does neutralise the excesses of full revision and full non-revision. This in-turn allows the newly 'agnostic' agent to seek out and accept education regarding the issues at hand. Doing so consciously, and within this skeptical starting point, allows the privileged individual to develop a splintered kaleidoscopic consciousness, thus opening them to the realities of marginalised individuals. This process would occur because they would now have to embrace the fact that their own privileged position is not *the only* position worth consideration. Through this acknowledgement, and through seeking out education and interaction with marginalised groups, these individuals would be able to develop and understanding of others they could not gather from their original position. This process then creates a space where privileged individuals can come as close as they possibly can to the facts of oppression, without living through these oppressive

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[220] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a30-1103b1 [Ross, 23]

experiences. In so doing, and in developing a kaleidoscopic consciousness of their own, the privileged individual can become an ally for the fight against such oppression in the future.

Before moving on, I want to take a moment to further distinguish my *Argument for Self-Skepticism* from the Rawlsian veil of ignorance, pre-empting any accidental assumption that they appear similar. The Rawlsian model claims to place a hypothetical person behind the veil and thus remove all their biases. However, while it is theoretically possible for the party member to be completely and wholly unbiased, it is *not possible for the philosopher running the thought experiment*. We are all entirely tied up in our lived experiences, and as (SM1) and (SM2) demonstrate, these lived experiences are *all* we have to make decisions with. The philosopher placing the party member behind the veil to determine 'what should be done regarding issue X' is entirely bound by their own biases, both explicit and implicit. The very idea that we could make objective decisions completely removed from the tarnish of bias is itself a biased belief. The veil of ignorance is necessarily created from bias as the reliance on heads of households demonstrates. Conversely, my model *expressly recognises that biases cannot be separated from an agent*. Virtually every decision we ever make will be coloured by our lived experiences and only *our experiences*; I cannot know the experiences of a racialized woman and thus this can *never* truly inform my decisions.[221] It is precisely because we cannot separate ourselves from our own biases that my model is one of self-skepticism. Until we have sufficiently educated ourselves in how to deconstruct our oppressive biases, we ought to doubt our currently held beliefs.

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[221] I can, through education and direct experience and dialogue with racialized women, come to recognise aspects of these experiences. However, *recognising* the experiences is completely different from *living* the experiences.

4.2 Case Study Application

At this point I want to employ a case study to demonstrate my theory in practice. This case will be a personal one: bisexual[222] health and representation in Canada. I have chosen this topic because, as Manon Tremblay states, "non-heteronormative sexualities are always the target of regulation, not to mention repression, in Canada. In fact, there are always a wide range of ideological and practical mechanisms the deployment of which as the consequence of (over)valuing heterosexuality and making LGBTQ sexualities less desirable – *unless they become respectable by homonormalizing*".[223,224] I specifically chose bisexuality because even within the queer community we receive discrimination for a myriad of reasons, some of which include: not conforming to monosexuality (the attraction to only one gender)[225] and causing tensions with the mainstream heterosexual social sphere because of the perceived deviancy that has plagued the identity since the late 1900s. Being queer brings about a slew of negative experiences which affect individuals in their ability to be within the social world at all. As Tremblay asserts, "[w]hen social characteristics are the cause of inequality, injustice, marginalization, or oppression, they may

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[222] While I use the term 'bisexual' explicitly, in doing so I am referring to any sexuality that falls under the bisexual-umbrella and not simply 'bisexual full-stop'. I also define bisexual in the more commonly used sense of 'being attracted to same and other genders'; it is an extremely common misconception that 'bisexual' refers to 'attracted to men and women'. This incorrect definition is extremely transphobic as it erases a great multitude of gender identities *and* presupposes the existence of no more than two genders.

[223] Manon Tremblay, "Introduction" in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2015): 3.

[224] 'Homonormalising' can be defined as "the acceptance of heteronormative values by gay people and movements. It guides the ideology of the GGGG movement [gay, gay, gay, and gay movement; used to denote how the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement panders specifically and exclusively to its gay members] and is often used to further marginalize marginalized LGBTQ groups" (Shiri Eisner, "Bisexuality and the GGGG Movement" in *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* [Berkeley, California: Seal Press, 2013]: 288).

[225] A common enough phrase to demonstrate monosexism would be "bisexuality doesn't exist", which is often said to insinuate that any man who claims the identity is 'really just gay' and any woman who claims the identity is 'looking for attention'. Both of these have a more detrimental, though implicit, statement within them: these demonstrate a societal value for men over women because in both cases the queer individual is assumed to eventually move towards a relationship with a(nother) man; the 'bisexual' man will end up gay, and the 'bisexual' woman will eventually stop seeking attention. For a more in-depth look at monosexism, see Eisner (2013), specifically chapter two.

inspire in the people who bear them a sense of belonging to a minority or of being a second-class citizen".[226] As such, so-called 'transgressive' identities are a political act.

Within the queer community there are groups who are othered. As I mentioned above, bisexuals are one of these groups; others include trans+ individuals and anyone who does not fit into the categories 'lesbian' or 'gay' (for example, asexuals, intersexuals, two-spirited individuals, etc.). Another reason for choosing bisexuality to examine is because of this doubled-othering. Even in the comprehensive book *Queer Mobilizations*, there is no explicit reference to bisexuality outside of footnotes, and when it is mentioned in passing it is combined with other identities in a generalised sense. This includes the section of Tremblay's introduction chapter which specifically details the history of queer activism "addressed through the perspective of groups with more targeted identities within the queer movement".[227] I will demonstrate how my model works for privileged individuals living outside of a community, but also for privileged individuals living within a marginalised community. This is something I believe my model can perform which the existent 'messy-web' of social contract theory cannot adequately handle.

So how can my model assist in this doubled othering? To adequately demonstrate this claim, I will look at these two cases separately: first, I will consider the case where heterosexuals are the privileged group, and second, I will consider the case where monosexuals are the privileged group. Necessarily these cases will be relatively straightforward in that they will not go beyond the scope of this marginalisation in tandem with the racial and sexual marginalisation I discussed

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[226] Tremblay, *Introduction*, 5.
[227] Tremblay devotes an entire paragraph to lesbian sources, combines First Nations and trans people into another single paragraph, and then moves on to outline regional histories of Canadian activism. There is no explicit mention of anyone under the bi+ umbrella, and the coverage of the groups that are presented is very small in relation to the 'gay' paragraph(s) which precede (Tremblay, *Introduction*, beginning at 25).

in chapter one.[228] Per (SM1) and (SM2), we need to recognise that any individual will only be able to build beliefs from the experiences from their own identity. This means that white individuals, both men and women and both heterosexual and queer, cannot directly understand the marginalisation of people of colour; nor can men, both white and coloured and both heterosexual and queer, directly understand the oppression faced by women. Similarly, heterosexual individuals of any group cannot directly understand the realities faced by queer individuals. As outlined above in the discussion on the kaleidoscopic consciousness[229], simply belonging to one already marginalised group does not necessitate a sympathy or understanding for another group. However, belonging to a racialized group, or being a woman, or even more likely when an individual belongs to both, *does* make it easier to engage with the oppression of queer individuals because they can apply aspects of their own experiences to the issues. A queer man may know what it feels like to be called derogatory terms by passersby on the street; and while this does not mean he understands the discomfort or fear that a religious minority may experience from their own street-level interactions, it does mean he has some ability to conceptualise the fear and discomfort present in these situations. From this conceptualisation, he can then practice epistemic curiosity and diligence by dialoguing with religious minorities and actively listening to their narratives. Through this diligence, he can come to a fuller understanding by relating through similarity, whereas an individual who is not oppressed will not be able to share such understanding.

From here, (SM3) demonstrates how the experiences of individuals who are not queer come into conflict with those of queer individuals. This can happen for a myriad of reasons; however, the most commonly understood reason is because of conservative and/or religious

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[228] I maintain, however, that my model is adequately suited for even further breakdowns that would include socio-economic status, ethnicity, and the like.

[229] See page 53 of this document.

convictions that label queer identities as deviant lifestyles. (SM4) and (SM5) then demonstrate how disagreement between the privileged heterosexuals and the marginalised queer individuals arises; specifically, (SM5) notes that revision of a previously held belief (which exists because of personal lived experiences) can only be successfully challenged by the level of *justified credence* available. This is where the disagreement gets murky, as individuals who are dogmatically against queer identities will argue that nothing a marginalised individual can present them is sufficiently justifiable to merit a revision. As such, we can see why (SM6) holds true. There are too many loopholes regarding mere justificationism that allow privileged individuals to dismiss any attempts to engage with them by holding firm to their original beliefs.

Hence the moral and epistemic power of (SM7). In order consider themselves a virtuous individual (something that is oft touted as a reason for acting in such a conservative/religious manner), individuals who have not allowed themselves sufficient first-hand experience with marginalised individuals *morally and epistemically ought to suspend their judgment regarding their currently held beliefs*. In other words, through not engaging with first-hand narratives from the perspective of the oppressed, these privileged individuals are not accessing all the relevant evidence necessary to make a credential judgment on the fact of oppression. Note that this conclusion does not enforce that, to become a virtuous person, the privileged individual *must revise* their original view; it simply states that they *ought to suspend judgment until they have sufficient counter-evidence to their own view to make the judgment*. Of course, in practice this conclusion will inevitably require that the privileged individual revise their view in the end, as once they have encountered the oppressions of the marginalised they ought to understand their original position is oppressive. We can make this claim because the privileged individual will be forced to grapple with their apparent epistemic vices. In acknowledging these vices, any rational individual ought to

see that shifting towards humility and open-mindedness allow them to critically analyse their own position and the position of the oppressed individual. In theory this is not required, though in practice, this might be necessary.

The second case is tougher to argue, despite following a similar pattern. As with above, (SM1) and (SM2) describe how individuals come to their beliefs from lived experiences, and (SM3) demonstrates how the lived experiences of monosexuals can differ, and come into conflict with, those of bisexuals. The similarities get muddier here since (SM4) and (SM5) involve privileges, and this case deals with two groups of marginalised individuals.[230] Many monosexual queer individuals argue that bisexuals have more privileges because they can 'pass' for heterosexual, thus granting them heterosexual privileges in *and out* of different-sex relationships. If this is the case, how can (SM4) and (SM5) hold any weigh for the argument? If these no longer function as stated in the model, clearly this must be because there is no oppression of the kind claimed and thus the case needs to be thrown away.

To show why this is not the case I need to more clearly define privilege in the context of the inter-queer community, and how the messy webs of connection create a nightmarish plane for analysis. Shiri Eisner makes an excellent note that I wish to employ here. When discussing a dichotomy between monosexuality and bisexuality we need to recognise that not all individuals within either group are homogeneous; there will be some with far more privileges than others because "[p]ower inequalities exist all over the social map".[231] Thus, an individual who is white, male, and bisexual has more overall privileges than another who is racialized, female, and a

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[230] As I will argue below, this privileged/marginalised distinction is not as simple as it may appear. This is because each group of individuals will experience the amalgamation of their privileges and marginalisations in an interactive manner.

[231] Shiri Eisner, "Monosexism and Biphobia" in *Bi: Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* [Berkeley, California: Seal Press, 2013]: 88.

(monosexual) lesbian. However, because of society's desire for non-deviant homonormalising, the bisexual will have considerably less privilege *in this specific regard*.[232] The web regarding who is privileged and who is not is extremely messy as it clearly shows that we are all oppressors (actively, passively, or even elements of both) and many are oppressed. For this reason, the kaleidoscopic consciousness is an integral part of the virtuous individual's tool-kit against oppression because it allows for a perpetually shifting view that can change as soon as they are aware of some group to whom they have more privilege. This ability to shift requires that the individual have at least begun to develop the virtue of open-mindedness; otherwise, how are they to decipher when a group is being marginalised? Equally important, they need to be epistemically humble enough to admit that they are privileged in comparison to this group, of which they have just become aware.

As such, (SM4) and (SM5) *can* function much like in case one above, in that monosexual individuals (even those who are oppressed in one, two, or all three of the ways considered in this project) frequently disagree with bisexuals regarding the shared evidence of oppression, and per (SM5) these individuals can hold that they are not required to revise because there is insufficient justified credence presented to merit such a shift. As in the above example, this shows how (SM6) obtains in situations of disagreement between monosexuals and bisexuals. Thus, as in the first case, (SM7) shows that privileged individuals who find that they disagree with oppressed bisexual individuals, and who have not considered the experiences of this marginalised group *despite their own potential marginalisation on gendered, racial, or sexual grounds ought to embrace a skeptical stance to their own prior beliefs*. These individuals ought to remain skeptical until they have

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[232] Eisner has a comprehensive 'monosexual privilege checklist' that demonstrates 29 factors which exist in monosexism and cause oppression towards bi+ individuals on pages 89-91.

accrued enough counter-evidence to their current position to make the judgment regarding revision or non-revision. The keyword here is 'enough', as someone who has not faced oppression as a lived experience will never have all the relevant evidence. But such an individual can pass a threshold of understanding wherein they have sufficient evidence to evaluate against their own, previously conceived claims. Thus, there is no definitive answer for what 'enough' constitutes as the threshold will differ between contexts.

Regarding both cases there is a potential concern regarding how we could convince someone who does not already believe that oppression is a problem of the merits of such self-skeptical model. My response to this comes in two parts. First, regarding those who are too closed-minded, too epistemically lazy, or too arrogant to recognise that they need to change, my model arguably will not apply. I am more concerned with a second group: those who do not recognise the power dynamic created by oppression and privilege, but who are (at least minimally) epistemically prepared to listen. By this I mean that my model seeks to target those privileged individuals who have at least a minimal level of epistemic open-mindedness, curiosity/diligence, and/or humility. It is this group of individuals who can be swayed by my *Argument for Self-Skepticism*. Recalling that the model does not necessitate a revision in their beliefs, rather it simply necessitates that they suspend their judgment on previously held beliefs until they can critically assess them.

4.3 Conclusion

Suffice it to say, I believe that the *Argument for Self-Skepticism* is more appropriate than social contract theory regarding how to handle such social issues. The principle reason for this project is to demonstrate that there are alternatives to the dominant language of socio-political

discourse when discussing oppression. I believe that the integral element that sets my model apart from the many others in the field is how it specifically addresses agential biases. Instead of trying to explain away, mask, or otherwise prevent bias from playing a role in the theory, my model affirms that bias is a real and tangible part of our lived experiences. This aspect in each of us ought not be eliminated because doing so would remove the unqualifiable aspects of who we are as individuals. Instead, we need to work with, and at times push against, our biases.

In this chapter I began by demonstrating the significance of each of my preceding chapters; I showed why contract theory was insufficient, why we ought to care about the epistemic factors of oppression, and why a virtuous model is the appropriate path to take. Following this, I explicitly outlined my *Argument for Self-Skepticism* and explained how it is affected by the level of justification we can produce, as well as how the fact of unknown evidence should be compelling reason to follow such a model. This led to my analysis of a case study from the 'real-world'. I took this route instead of creating a thought experiment because, as a work of applied philosophy, I believe it is crucial to my argument for me to demonstrate on an actual example.

CODA

In this project, I sought to address the problems of social contract theory through the creation of the *Argument for Self-Skepticism* – an ethico-epistemic model founded upon the imperative to strive towards being a virtuous agent. This was no easy task, as the literature is dominated by social contract theory. Despite my arguments against it in chapter one, I will acknowledge that the social contract is not inherently bad. There are significant benefits to using this model as opposed to many others in socio-political thought. However, as I have argued above, we have approached a point where we need to move past this model and towards another that has the capability of being more open-ended. To properly engage in intersectional discourse today, we need to move beyond discussions of contracts because they are too messy to capture the intricacies of social relations. Any attempt to revise the social contract by adding considerations, or by reducing it to further abstraction, only makes this model harder to apply to real instances outside the academy.

In chapter two, I built an analysis of the epistemic factors present in cases of oppression and outlined why these further demonstrated how social contract theory is inadequate for addressing such concerns. My primary focus in this chapter was to work towards a detailed account of prejudice and testimonial injustice and their relation to oppressive systems. Marginalised individuals suffer stereotyping, the pressures of model minority myths, and improper credential assignments from their oppressors. Frequently, these oppressors are peers who have not realised what they are doing constitute micro-aggressions which have the power to alter self-perceptions among those suffering the injustices. This numbness comes in many kinds, but can be adequately summarised as a meta-numbness on the part of those who are privileged by the dominant society. I also demonstrated how meta-lucidity, or the ability to see the positions of others, is somewhat of

a default position for marginalised individuals. However, this default can only be granted with an important caveat: we must recognise that an individual can be oppressed *and still act as an oppressor*. Being oppressed does not entail that one understands the trials faced by all marginalised individuals; however, it does offer an important opportunity for self-critical reflection.

These factors are important, but alone they do not demonstrate why we need to change our perspective away from the lingua franca in socio-political thought; they merely defend the claim that social contract is not the ideal model. To strengthen my argument for a shift in perspective, chapter three was devoted to virtuous approaches to ethics and epistemology, and the benefits of approaching oppression in a virtuous manner. This chapter outlined the virtues of the oppressed, and the corresponding vices of the oppressors. Neither of these categories are meant to be absolute generalisations; rather, they sought to describe trends found in the social consciousness of both groups. This is also a highly-nuanced chapter, as someone who is oppressed for their sexuality and yet oppresses others on racist grounds will have a mixed understanding of these virtues and vices.

This project culminated in chapter four as I developed the *Argument for Self-Skepticism*. In no way is this model meant to be the final point in an agent's virtuous development; instead, my argument is that we need to break down our prejudiced views to a skeptical level to rebuild ourselves in a virtuous manner. As such, I have left this project at an intermediary conclusion. A further, and longer, project is required to describe the trajectory from this skeptical point towards a virtuous life. However, I fully believe this admission should not detract from the work I have completed. The *Argument for Self-Skepticism* has significant application on its own, and without the further developments that could be afforded by a longer project. To demonstrate how accessible this model is, I applied it to the troubling case of bisexual representation – both within, and outside

of, the LGBTQ community. These case studies involved an acute application of the epistemic factors of oppression as well as the ethico-epistemological virtues in tandem with my model.

If my arguments have not convinced my readers, I at least hope to have elicited serious reflection on currently held beliefs. It is terribly easy to ignore social issues that do not directly affect our lives on a personal level. I believe this tendency is dangerous and must somehow be defeated. Whether an individual agrees on the conclusions to the many examples I have used in this project is not important; what is important is that there is now a space for dialogue in which we are able to consider those stances for which we do not, and cannot, have first-personal knowledge. I can only request that dissenting voices humour my requests for discussion, and that through this discussion we can acknowledge that a kaleidoscopic consciousness of sorts should be an epistemic goal for all of us, regardless of whether we are ourselves privileged or marginalised in our shared society.

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