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Distinguished Lecture: Social structure, narrative and explanation

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Recent work on social injustice has focused on implicit bias as an important factor in explaining persistent injustice in spite of achievements on civil rights. In this paper, I argue that because of its individualism, implicit bias explanation, taken alone, is inadequate to explain ongoing injustice; and, more importantly, it fails to call attention to what is morally at stake. An adequate account of how implicit bias functions must situate it within a broader theory of social structures and structural injustice; changing structures is often a precondition for changing patterns of thought and action and is certainly required for durable change.

Keywords: implicit bias; structural explanation; social meaning; social justice; narrative

1. Introduction

Recent work on implicit bias seems to provide a key ingredient in the explanation of persistent inequality in societies where, although substantial progress has been achieved, there is still far to go.[1] Clearly, not all discrimination is *explicit*. Our cognitive systems are constructed in such a way that perception, thought, and action are substantially influenced by cognitive structures that are not normally evident to us. Even those who are explicitly committed to equity and justice may, nevertheless, act in ways that are problematically discriminatory, for explicit deliberation enters the process for deciding how to act quite late, or only in special circumstances, if at all.

Although I am convinced that implicit bias plays a role in perpetuating injustice, I will argue that an adequate account of how implicit bias functions must situate it within a broader theory of social structures and structural injustice; changing structures is often a precondition for changing patterns of thought and action and is certainly required for durable change.

2. Structural injustice: basics

One important tradition in the theory of social justice argues that it is a mistake to focus on the actions and attitudes of individuals as the primary source

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of injustice, for racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are structural. Very roughly,

(1) Racism, sexism, and the like are to be analyzed, in the primary sense, in terms of unjust and interlocking social structures, not in terms of the actions and attitudes of individuals.
   a. Although individuals may have racist or sexist attitudes, these are neither necessary nor sufficient for race or sex oppression.
   b. The *normative core* of what is wrong with racism/sexism lies not in the 'bad attitudes' of individuals but in the asymmetrical burdens and benefits and inegalitarian relationships that societies impose on such groups.

(2) Correcting the wrongs of racism, sexism, and the like is not best achieved by focusing on the 'bad attitudes' of individuals.
   a. The structural injustices may persist even when attitudes change.
   b. People are resentful when they are blamed for problems much bigger than themselves. Resentful people are resistant to change.

Against this backdrop, it is unclear how to situate recent work on implicit bias. First, is implicit bias introduced into the debate as part of a normative analysis of the wrongs of racism/sexism, or simply as a factor in the causal explanation of persistent inequality? Second, if the best explanation of social stratification is structural, then implicit bias seems at best tangential to what is needed to achieve justice. Why the recent emphasis on implicit bias as a solution? My concern in this discussion will be primarily on the explanatory rather than normative role of implicit bias.

Even if oppression is a structural phenomenon, a recognition of implicit bias is a more significant advance than the argument just offered acknowledges.

Re 1a and 2a: Although racism and sexism can occur without *explicit* racist and sexist attitudes, injustice will always involve problematic behavior on the part of individuals, and often this behavior is the result of *implicit* racist and sexist attitudes.

Re 1b: Implicit bias may be part of the normative story, for insofar as we can change our implicit attitudes, we are plausibly responsible for them.

Re 2b: Although the charge of *implicit* bias is personal, it avoids blaming individuals of bigotry. Moreover, it is collective: we *all* suffer from implicit bias, so no one is singled out as the evil perpetrator.

I think this first response is helpful, but does not go far enough.

3. Individualism, psychologism, and standard stories

Charles Tilly has described a common form of narrative explanation that is ubiquitous in everyday life, and also in philosophy. A narrative explanation works by providing a 'standard story':

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> To construct a standard story, start with a limited number of interacting characters, individual or collective. Your characters may be persons, but they may also be organizations such as churches and states or even abstract categories such as social classes and regions. Treat your characters as independent, conscious and self-motivated. Make all their significant actions occur as consequences of their own deliberations or impulses. Limit the time and space within which your characters interact. With the possible exception of externally generated accidents – you can call them "chance" or "acts of God" – make sure everything that happens results directly from your characters' actions. (Tilly 2002, 26)

Tilly goes on to summarize the key elements. Standard stories provide a

> (1) limited number of interacting characters, (2) limited time and space, (3) independent, conscious, self-motivated actions, (4) with the exception of externally generated accidents, all actions resulting from previous actions by the characters.

Standard stories of social stratification have several forms. Here are two examples:

> *Standard Story of Social Stratification:* Greg is an employer who is considering three candidates for a job: Kwame, Kathy, and Eric. Greg is (explicitly) sexist and racist and although Kwame and Kathy are better qualified than Eric, Greg hires Eric because he is a white male, rather than Kwame or Kathy. Repeat this scenario – including cases of applications for educational opportunities, access to health and financial resources, etc. – and this provides an explanation of social inequality along lines of race/sex.

The Standard story is no longer plausible. Suppose we move from explicit to implicit bias in the story?

> *Nouveau Story of Social Stratification:* The same as the Standard Story, except Greg is not explicitly racist, but only implicitly so. Greg's actions (and those of others like him) are neither consciously or intentionally discriminatory, nevertheless, repeated occurrences of implicit bias explain systematic inequality along the lines of race/sex.

My target in this paper is the use of implicit bias in Nouveau stories as an explanation of social injustice, or, more specifically, as an answer to certain questions about the occurrence and persistence of injustice. Although Nouveau stories do not rely simply on conscious intentional action, they remain very limited and, I will argue, are not sufficient to repair the weaknesses of Standard stories. As Tilly notes:

> . . . whatever else we have learned about inequality, social scientists have made clear that a great deal of social inequality results from indirect, unintended, collective, and environmentally mediated effects that fit very badly into standard stories. (Tilly 2002, 28)

Neither Standard nor Nouveau stories are able to accommodate the kinds of explanations that Tilly has in mind. But wait . . . what sorts of explanation are those?

4. Three (of many) ways structure can be explanatory

In a previous work on social structures, I have argued that social structures are best understood in terms of a network of practices, and practices, in the relevant

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sense, consist of behavior that conforms to *cultural schemas* in response to *resources* (Haslanger 2012, Ch. 15, 17). Roughly, schemas are clusters of culturally shared (public) concepts, propositions, and norms that enable us, collectively, to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect.[2] When internalized by individuals, schemas store information and are the basis for various behavioral and emotional dispositions. Although schemas are variable and evolve across time and context, their elements are sticky and resist updating. Resources are things of all sorts – human, nonhuman, animate, or not – that are taken to have some (including negative) value (practical, moral, esthetic, religious, etc.). In social reality, schemas and resources are both causally and constitutively interdependent. Structures, and their component schemas and resources, are key to explaining social stratification.

Structures, and their component schemas and resources, can be responsible for injustice, without implicit bias or ill-will on the part of the participants in a milieu. In short, much of the injustice around us cannot be explained by either Standard or Nouveau stories. To see this, let us consider three examples: one that locates the problem in interacting structures, another that focuses on schemas or social meanings, and one that highlights the role of resources. I do not claim or even want to suggest that these examples exhaust the types of social explanation.

4.1. Structural constraints/enablements (simple case)

Individuals exist within social structures; we are part of social structures. We work for organizations, we play on sports teams, we raise children in families. In the case of structured wholes, the behavior of their parts is constrained by their position in the whole, and such constraints are relevant to explaining the behavior of the parts (See also Haslanger 2015).

> *Parental Leave:* Larry and Lisa are employed at the same company in comparable positions and make the same salary. They have a child, Lulu. They desire to be equal co-parents of the child; however, Lisa is eligible for paid maternity leave and Larry is not eligible for any paid parental leave. They cannot afford to have Larry take unpaid leave. Lisa takes parental leave and because of her experience in the first three months, she becomes the primary caregiver; when she returns to work chooses a more flexible schedule. Ten years later, Larry's salary is significantly higher than Lisa's, which gives him more power at home and in the workplace. (See Cudd 2006; Okin 1989.)

A crucial factor in such a scenario is that Lisa and Larry's decision-making is relationally constrained (Garfinkel 1981; Haslanger 2015). They are not in a position to make decisions that are independent of each other's and the context defines what options are available to each, i.e., their behavior is constrained by the fact that they are constitutive parts of a family system, and that system exists within a broader structure.

It may be useful to sketch Garfinkel's example to make this point. He says,

> Suppose that, in a class I am teaching, I announce that the course will be "graded on a curve," that is, that I have decided beforehand what the overall distribution of

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> grades is going to be. Let us say, for the sake of the example, that I decide that there will be one A, 24 Bs, and 25 Cs. The finals come in, and let us say Mary gets the A. She wrote an original and thoughtful final. (Garfinkel 1981, 41)

Garfinkel argues that in this case, when we ask, 'Why did Mary get an A?' the answer: 'She wrote an original and thoughtful final' is inadequate. Why? Because in order to earn the single A, one would have to write the *best* final, and being the *best* final is a fact about Mary relative to her classmates; the grades are relationally constrained. If the instructor had not decided to grade on a curve, many students could have earned A's by virtue of writing thoughtful and original finals. Garfinkel says, 'So it is more accurate to answer the question by pointing to the *relative* fact that Mary wrote the best paper in the class.' (Garfinkel 1981, 41) Mary earned the A not simply by virtue of her performance, but also by virtue of her performance in comparison with others *and* the particular grading structure that made the comparison the key factor in determining who earned the A.

Lisa and Larry's decisions are constrained by the fact that they cannot both continue working, given the lack of affordable childcare, family support, etc. and the demands of childcare. One must work and one must quit. Although in this context it is rational for Lisa to take leave and Larry to continue working, if we want to know why Larry accumulates economic and relationship power, what matters is the distribution of labor: Why a modified caregiver–breadwinner distribution rather than equal co-parenting? The answer should be in terms of the workplace policies, the structure of employment, demands of childcare (Lulu cannot raise herself!), and the lack of other options (cheap excellent childcare at work?). We can also then ask other questions about the structure: why does childcare not earn greater economic rewards? Why is there only paid maternal leave rather than paid parental leave? The interacting structures of work and family life and their component practices are what explains Larry's accumulation of power in the relationship – and male accumulation of power in similar relationships – rather than implicit or explicit attitudes. The source of the problem is structural rather than individual.

4.2. Social meaning

Words have meaning, of course, but other things have meaning as well. A wedding ring has a meaning. A choice to wear (or not) a bike helmet has meaning. Pink 'means' girl and blue 'means' boy. As Lawrence Lessig maintains, 'Any society or social context has what I call here social meanings – the semiotic content attached to various actions, or inactions, or statuses, within a particular context . . . ' (Lessig 1995, 951–2). Social meanings, on my view, should be understood in terms of the cultural schemas that guide our responses to and constitute the social world.

In general, words and actions have meanings that go beyond the agent's intentions. (Burge (1979) on arthritis; Lessig (1995) on seatbelts.) In spite of the possibility of change and contestation, the effects of social meaning are 'in an

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important way non-optional. They empower or constrain individuals, whether or not the individual chooses the power or constraints.' (Lessig 1995, 955; see also 1000; Anderson 2010) Buying a BMW has a different meaning from buying a Ford, whether the consumer intends it or not.

Social meanings can pose a serious challenge to successful interaction. Elizabeth Anderson describes a case of stigma (which I take to be one kind of social meaning):

> One late night in 2007 I was driving in Detroit when my oil light came on. I pulled into the nearest gas station to investigate the problem when a young black man approached me to offer help. "Don't worry, I'm not here to rob you," he said, holding up his hands, palms flat at face level, gesturing his innocence. "Do you need some help with your car?" . . . This encounter illustrates the public standing of racial stereotypes as default images that influence the interactions of black and white strangers in unstructured settings, even when both parties are prepared to disavow them. A little ritual must be performed to confirm that both parties *do* disavow the stigma, so that cooperative interaction may proceed. (Anderson 2010, 53).

On Anderson's view, even though she did not implicitly or explicitly endorse the stigma, and even if the young man came away from the interaction with a positive feeling, he suffered a harm of racial stigmatization:

> The harm consists in the fact that he walks under a cloud of suspicion in unstructured encounters with strangers. To gain access to cooperative interactions, he must assume the burdens of dispelling this cloud, of protesting and proving his innocence of imagined crimes (Anderson 2010, 53; see also Steele 2010).

Note that the harm of stigma does not depend on its psychic effects on the victim (one may be very effective in warding off stigma, or avoid stigmatizing contexts), though stigma typically has substantial psychic effects. Nor does the harm depend on even implicit acceptance of the stigmatizing meanings (one might be unaware of the stigma that one triggers or, as in the Anderson example, explicitly reject the meanings in question). However, the risk of being 'read' through the stigma is substantial, and typically where there is stigma, there is mistreatment. The harm of stigma, and the correlative advantage of being unmarked or wearing a cultural 'halo,' is, as Anderson argues, not private or psychic. It is a matter of public standing. Such social meanings are the threads in the fabric of culture. They matter. Social meanings have a significant effect on how we interact with each other and distribute power, opportunity, and prestige. Individual bias is not actually necessary for the bad effects.

Sometimes even disavowal of a schema does not mitigate its effects. And in cases where meanings are contested or different groups rely on different schemas for interpretation, further problems can arise. For example (I discuss this example also in Haslanger 2014):

> *Dismissed from class*: Rashaan and Jamal are public high school students in a history class together; race relations in the school and surrounding are fraught. The teacher, Ms. H., and about three quarters of the class are white. In a discussion of the assigned material, Rashaan repeatedly interrupts Ms. H. to disagree with her and

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talks over the other students when they try to answer her questions. Ms. H. asks Rashaan to stop interrupting and to wait his turn, but this just makes him more agitated. Eventually Ms. H asks him to leave and report to the Assistant Principal's office. Jamal and other non-white students in the class interpret Ms. H. to be calling out Rashaan because he is black, and stop trusting her. As a result, they do not engage the material and do poorly in the class.

For the purposes of the example, let us suppose that Ms. H. has a strict policy of dismissing students from class who disrupt the discussion and prevent others from sharing their views; she has made this policy explicit, and let us grant that she applies the policy fairly to Rashaan. She is not acting toward Rashaan in a way that is biased; plausibly she behaves in a way that is morally permissible, even morally responsible and fair. It is an important part of her job to maintain an orderly classroom where learning can occur. Nevertheless, her action has social meaning that she does not control. Moreover, I would argue, Rashaan, Jamal, and their friends are not unreasonable in their disaffection. We can suppose that they have repeatedly been the targets of racial stereotyping and trips to the Assistant Principal for minor infractions, or less, are not uncommon. They did not count the number of times Rashaan interrupted the discussion, and to them the policy seems too rigid anyway.

Such examples suggest that social meaning – when occurring together with common psychological responses to frustration and disrespect, e.g., mistrust, ego depletion, effort pessimism – is potentially a factor in explaining the academic achievement gap. (Haslanger 2014) The problem is that in a particular setting, the participants may not themselves hold biased attitudes. Their responses to each other may be based on good evidence; and they may be reasonably interpreting the other in light of the social meanings of the actions that have been performed. The source of the problem, I submit, is cultural rather than individual.

4.3. Material conditions, resources

Consider a fairly familiar set of circumstances:

Bus schedule: Jason has a job at a factory in the suburbs. His shift begins at 6 am. He is poor and relies on the bus to get to work. He takes the first bus from his neighborhood in the morning and after a 45 min commute arrives at his job on time. Due to cut-backs, however, the city has decided to reduce the bus service and there is no bus leaving the city in the morning that will get him to work on time. He asks for a shift change, but it is not eligible. He loses his job. [Variant: lack of bus at any time that will accommodate a wheelchair.]

Lack of access to resources (wealth, technology, skills, transportation, and other concrete social goods) is a huge factor in explaining social inequality. If we want to explain why Jason lost his job, a good answer will be that he lacked transportation. The transportation changes may be inequitable because it has a greater effect on certain neighborhoods than others. Jason's boss may be constrained by rules about shift changes; the city may be constrained by the tax base, and perhaps bus going to the factory from Jason's neighborhood is not well

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utilized. Jason, and those in a similar position, is clearly constrained by the lack of resources. There may be no explicit or implicit bias on the part of those who are distributing the resources.

The cases just sketched should be familiar, and are intended to be a reminder of some factors – other than individual discrimination or bias – that explain persistent inequality. The point is not that discrimination has never played a role at any point in the history of the policies, norms, meanings, or distribution of resources. Rather, my (perhaps obvious) claim is that a narrative explanation of the sort modeled in the Standard story or the Nouveau story misses the important factors in the persistence of social inequality.

5. Relational/cultural (material/symbolic) loops

There is a tendency among those who endorse structuralist accounts of injustice to claim that social relations determine culture or ideology. Recall Marx:

> The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1859/1977)

If (explicit/implicit) bias is simply ideology that is internalized while occupying the social structures it supports, then individual attempts to correct for implicit bias is not only beside the point, but is futile, as long as the structures remain.

However, there is a broad consensus in recent sociology (and related fields) that social explanation requires attention to the interdependence of structure, culture, and agency (though there is controversy over how each is defined).[3]

> . . . if inequality is 'structural', that is, linked to the distribution of goods and resources and embedded in everyday rules and interactions, but is also continually reactivated through agency, then neither 'structural' changes nor changes in 'consciousness' will on their own disrupt the mutually reinforcing facets of domination: We can neither 'think ourselves' out of oppression nor will freedom result automatically from a redistribution of goods and resources, although both are important contributors to freedom. (Einspahr 2010, 17)

We are agents, both informed by culture and entrenched in social relations.

The pessimistic take on this is that the relational and cultural dimensions of social life reinforce each other by forming feedback loops. For example, stigmatizing meanings generate mistrust that alienate nonwhite teens from school; the lack of education and concern with professional success reinforces the stigmatizing meanings. The optimistic take is that the violent appropriation of the means of production may not be necessary in order to bring about social change (!), for resistant agency and countercultural movements make a difference. Drawing attention to and correcting implicit bias can be part of this effort; but without structural change, cultural contestation, and redistribution of resources, the biases will persist and the most profound injustices will remain entrenched.

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6. Individualism as ideology

If attention to implicit bias is valuable, why then the long paper full of doubts? And if individual agency can disrupt unjust structures, why the complaints about Standard (and Nouveau) stories? Some readers may have even noticed that although Section 3 I raised doubts about the usefulness of stories, Section 4 I relied heavily on stories about Larry and Lisa, Rashaan, Ms. H., and Jason to make my points. Doesn't this show that stories *are* valuable in explaining persistent inequality?

Note that neither Tilly nor I is claiming that narrative, in general, is at odds with explaining inequality. The problem is the focus on *Standard stories*. The first problem with Standard stories is their thoroughgoing individualism. (And, I would add, their tendency toward *psychologism*.) As we have seen, social life consists of individuals embedded within complex social relations governed by culture and both constrained and enabled by resources made available through those very social relations. As Tilly acknowledges,

> The problem [of social explanation] as a whole requires attention to the interplay between cognitive processes and social transactions; to questions of epistemology and ontology; to the influence of social networks on political action; to the tension between individualistic and collective accounts of social processes; to the relative importance of deliberate means-end action, on one side, and indirect, cumulative, unanticipated, and environmentally mediated causes in social life, on the other. (Tilly 2002, 6)

This social web is interlaced with stories that do as much to guide individuals as reported on their activities:

> Stories emerge from active social interchange, modify as a result of social interchange, but in their turn constrain social interchange as well. They embody ideas concerning what forms of action and interaction are possible, feasible, desirable, and efficacious, hence at least by implication what forms of action and interaction would be impossible, impracticable, undesirable, or ineffectual. Even if the individuals involved harbor other ideas, the embedding of stories in social networks seriously constrains interactions, hence collective actions, of which people in those networks are capable. (Tilly 2002, 9)

The second problem with Standard stories is, in a way, their power to capture our imaginations. Standard stories may be irresistible for humans. They are one way we create and reproduce social meanings. They also have special value because they focus on the autonomy of persons and enable us to locate and judge moral responsibility: '[People] ordinarily carry on their moral reasoning in standard story mode; they judge actual or possible actions by their conscious motives and their immediately foreseeable effects.' (Tilly 2002, 36) This is a problem because we, as theorists, lose track of the fact that stories are produced in and through social processes. We are drawn in and accept the stories on their own terms. But as noted before, social processes rarely, if ever, conform to the plot of a standard story. So it is part of the work of a social theorist to provide a critical distance on such stories and not to assume that they are accurate chronologies or adequate explanations. (Tilly 2002, 9)

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Examples from the previous sections suggest that there are different kinds of stories. And the social theorist's relationship to stories is complex. Stories are part of the social theorist's object of study: telling stories is something people do and plays a role in social interaction. They are also the product of theorizing: both participants in the phenomena under study and theorists tell stories to describe and explain events. Moreover, the questions we ask and answers we give provide agents understanding of their social milieu that affects their participation in it; challenging individualistic understandings of social injustice can be a first step toward collective action.

How might we improve the kinds of stories we tell – both as participant and as theorist? When Tilly speaks of 'superior stories,' his comments are vague and unsatisfying (Tilly 2002. xiii–xiv). The basic idea seems to be that a superior story should accurately represent the central events, the major actors, and their causal relations, and give enough information to connect the story with related (off stage) actors, events, and other causes and effects that are 'indirect, incremental, unintended, collective, and/or mediated by the nonhuman environment' (Tilly 2002, xii). He is more helpful when he characterizes how theorists can improve their stories. He suggests that social theorists should *contextualize* the stories people give by placing them within their 'nonstory contexts' and 'seeing what social work they do' (Tilly 2002, xiv), and *generate* new stories that account for the form and content of the stories relied upon in the context. Given the limits of individualism, we might also add that stories that make explicit how individuals are located within structures, which highlight the role of social practices, social meanings, culture, and material resources, provide better explanations of inequality.

I suggested at the beginning of this essay that implicit bias might play a role in the causal explanation of inequality or in its normative analysis. Thus far I have focused on its explanatory role. But even if an explanation of persistent injustice depends on broad structural features of a society and its history, it may be that the normative focus should be on individuals and their attitudes – both implicit and explicit. This would allow Standard/Nouveau stories to play a central role in philosophical discussion of injustice. However, given the examples considered in Section 4, I think we are warranted in concluding that Standard/Nouveau stories are an execrable guide not just to social explanation, as Tilly suggested, but also to what is morally relevant. The focus on individuals (and their attitudes) occludes the injustices that pervade the structural and cultural context and the ways that the context both constrains and enables our action. It reinforces fictional conceptions of autonomy and self-determination that prevents us from taking responsibility for our social milieu (social meanings, social relations, and social structures).

There is a danger, however, that stories situating the individual within unjust structures make the problems seem overwhelming. It is not uncommon for individuals to despair when they begin to see the depth and breadth of injustice. They are overwhelmed and implore, 'But what can I do?' 'How can I change social norms (or: the educational system, the economy, immigration policy, the prison industrial complex, etc.). The despair, I think, is tied to the tendency to

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focus on the individual (or state?) as the moral (or political?) agent. The question 'What should I do?' is not the only moral question. 'What should we do?' is often the more apt. Stories can function both to constitute the 'we' of collective action and to create opportunities and language for contestation.

Tilly has argued extensively for the historical significance of stories in contentious politics. On his view, contentious politics – the 'collective, public making of claims that, if realized, would affect the interests of those claims' objects.' (6) – is an important mechanism for social change. Contentious politics depends on a repertoire of contention wielded by groups with contentious identities, i.e., groups that can provide "collective answers to the question 'Who are you?' 'Who are we?' and 'Who are they?'" (Tilly 2002, 6). He suggests:

> Social movements link two complementary activities: assertions of identity and statements of demands . . . . As compared with strikes, revolutions, coups d'état, and many other forms of contentious politics, nevertheless, social movements stand out for their emphasis on identity assertion. They emphasize public assertion of identities whose possessors are worthy, unified, numerous, and committed. They do so because social movements grew up in the nineteenth century as means by which people currently excluded from political power could band together and claim that powerholders should attend to their interests, or the interests they represented. (Tilly 2002, 121)

Contentious identities are created and maintained by political identity stories; these, in turn, are formed through contentious conversation. Collective identity work is an improvisational effort achieved in conversation that draws on 'the previous histories of the relations among the parties, previous representations of those relations, and previous shared understandings' (Tilly 2002, 13). Claim-making presumes but also constitutes the parties to the dispute. (Tilly 2002, xiii)

> Political rights and obligations themselves depend on negotiated claims linking members of established political categories, which means that they, too, involve identity claims. Battling out accepted answers to the questions "Who are you?" "Who are we?" and "Who are they?" with widely accepted stories to back those answers is no self-indulgence; it plays a consequential part in public politics. Available answers to the questions affect the very feasibility of democracy. (Tilly 2002, 207–8)

By resisting the individualism of standard stories, both in ordinary discourse and in theory, we can enter into the negotiation of contentious identities and recast problems of justice as issues of contentious politics. The normative attention, then, is not confined to the actions of the individual or the state, but is enlarged to include social movements, and claims for recognition, redistribution, power sharing, cultural inclusion, human security,[4] and, more generally, a politics of claim-making by and on behalf of social groups.

7. Conclusion

Thus far I have suggested that although there is space for attention to implicit bias in social critique, it is only a small space, and implicit bias should not simply be invoked in a Nouveau Story mode of explanation. The problem is twofold:

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- Even if bias involves over-generalization and distortion, it is learned. If we attempt to change how we perceive and think without changing the social reality that is responsible for the schemas we employ, our efforts are unlikely to be sustainable.

Some may respond that our only (or best) option for changing social reality is by taking responsibility for our own thought and perception and encouraging others to do the same. This, however, is an impoverished approach.

- Social change requires contestation, organization, and activism. Working to correct our own biases may be a minimum requirement on us. But we are each complicit in the perpetuation of unjust structures, practices, and institutions. Morality responsibility concerns not only what I can and should do, but also what we can and should do together.

I would also like to suggest that Standard stories (and the particular individualism they presuppose) warrant a place as proper *object* of theorizing. A longstanding issue in social science is the relationship between first-person understandings of action and social processes (and the edification that comes through interpretation) and third-person explanations of them. Attention to material/symbolic feedback loops, however, suggests that there is a dynamic relationship between explanation and edification. On the one hand, our first-person understandings of action and social processes, e.g., in Standard stories, are culturally formed, and critical distance is necessary in order to gain both descriptive and normative purchase on them. Common sense social phenomenology cannot trump explanation. On the other hand, social explanation also offers resources to change our understandings of action and social processes. Explanation itself is a tool, and importantly, a tool for social self-understanding and, we might hope, emancipation. Social explanation should engage not only our scientific, but also our interpretive and normative projects, i.e., our way of life. This interdependence between explanation and emancipatory agency is at the heart of critical social theory.

At this point it is reasonable to ask whether there is *something* about discussions of implicit bias that has been left out of my discussion. Why is it so compelling, especially for philosophers, to latch onto implicit bias as a significant source of injustice? There are a variety of practical reasons that are not at all trivial, some of which I have mentioned before: drawing attention to implicit bias can be strategically useful as a starting point for discussion of social injustice because there is empirical evidence to support the claim that we are all biased; insofar as we are able to control or change our biases, it is a potential site for moral responsibility and moral improvement; attention to implicit bias is philosophically interesting because it challenges philosophical views about the transparency of the mind, human rationality, and other related assumptions; it helps explain why social injustice is so intractable in spite of substantial efforts to bring about legal and institutional change.

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Combining these ideas with some ideas already discussed yields a picture of human agents as socialized beings whose responses to the world are significantly conditioned by their local social-cultural-material context. Persons, on this view, are not simply sites of intentionality (even embodied sites of intentionality), and the social world does not just consist of sites of collective intentionality (Epstein 2014; Epstein 2009). I am a professor, a homeowner, a mother, a consumer; also a role model, a target of advertising, a political constituent. Social 'identities' are relational; who I am is not just a matter of my attitudes and consciousness (See also Alcoff 2005; Witt 2011). I may not even be aware of or care about some of the identity categories I belong to. And the social relations that constitute who I am have potentially profound effects on my action, relations to others, and opportunities. In effect, we enact or 'perform' our social positions unconsciously and often irresponsibly. And in doing so we perpetuate the very systems we decry. As I see it, this is at the heart of what investigations into implicit bias are uncovering.

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Notes

1. There is, as one might expect, substantial disagreement on the best account of implicit bias. I will not take a stand on that issue in this paper. For example, I will not distinguish between theories that account for implicit bias in terms of psychological attitudes or those in terms of traits (Machery forthcoming), though I favor the trait account. On the trait account, there is an awkwardness in speaking as if the bias is 'implicit' since the implicit/explicit distinction is only apt for the attitude account. I gloss over that here and use the term 'implicit bias' for the broad phenomenon over which there is ongoing disagreement.
2. The notion of schema has been used for decades in psychology (Valian 1998; Hollander and Howard 2000). How exactly we should understand schemas is at least partly an empirical matter. I consider myself as using the term as a kind of placeholder for a theoretical notion that calls for further investigation. I assume that an account of schemas will link them to traits.
3. Arguably, this is *the* theoretical issue occupying social theory for the past three decades (Ortner 1984; Sewell 1992; Hays 1994; White 2008; Martin 2009).
4. In 2005, the UN recognized human security to include 'the right of all people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair.' http://unocha.org/humansecurity/about-human-security/human-security-all

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