

PHI 1700: Global Ethics

Session 19

April 20th, 2017



Young, "Five Faces of
Oppression" (continued)

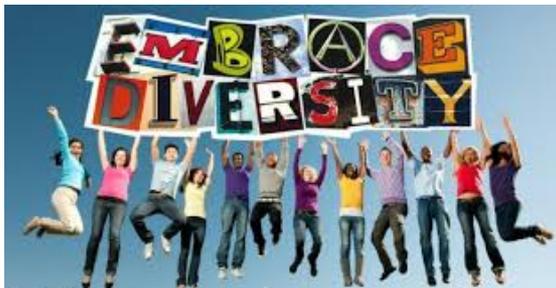
Young explains:

- “While I agree that individuals should be free to pursue life plans in their own way, **it is foolish to deny the reality of groups.**
 - ...Even when they belong to oppressed groups, **people’s group identifications are often important to them,** and they often feel a special affinity for others in their group.
 - Also, “**admitting the reality of social groups** does not commit one to reifying collectivities”: it **does not mean that one believes that groups must always be constituted the way they currently are, nor that the course of individuals’ lives are fully determined by the groups they belong to.**



» “I believe that **group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social processes.**

- ***Social justice...requires*** not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and ***respect for group differences without oppression.***”



In short, Young believes

the problem isn't that people form groups,

- *but rather that groups end up holding power & opportunities in an imbalanced way.*

Young does note that **one motivation for denying that social groups are real** is the observation that *they are heterogeneous*,

-and that whatever brings them together should not be regarded as the defining feature of every individual in the group.

➤ **“Oppression has often been perpetrated by a [mistaken] conceptualization of group difference in terms of unalterable essential natures** that determine what group members deserve or are capable of....”

- E.g., sexist behavior and policies are often underpinned by the attitude that all women (or all men) are the same, and they are this way permanently because it is part of their nature.

Young writes that **an important step in combatting oppression is “to conceptualize groups in a much more relational & fluid fashion”**, instead of positing that they have a common, unchangeable nature (or *essence*).

- “Although social processes of affinity & differentiation produce groups, they do not give groups a substantive essence. **There is no common nature that members of a group share.**”

» This view of social groups is called ***anti-essentialism***:

- the denial that group membership
 - a) is a reflection of its members’ shared *essence*,
 - and/or b) gives its members a shared essence.



Young introduces *five different “faces of oppression”*:

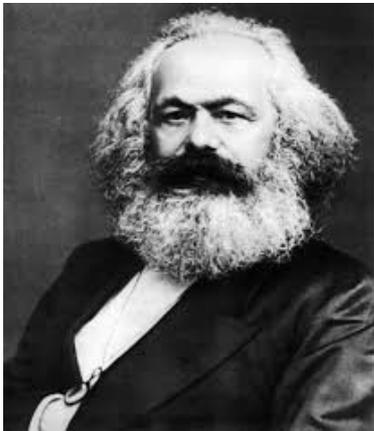
five (often overlapping) processes by which groups become oppressed (i.e., systematically inhibited in their ability to flourish).

1) exploitation: “...this oppression occurs through a steady process of **the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another.**”

- “Social rules about what work is, who does what for what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power & inequality.
 - These relations are produced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continually expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves.”

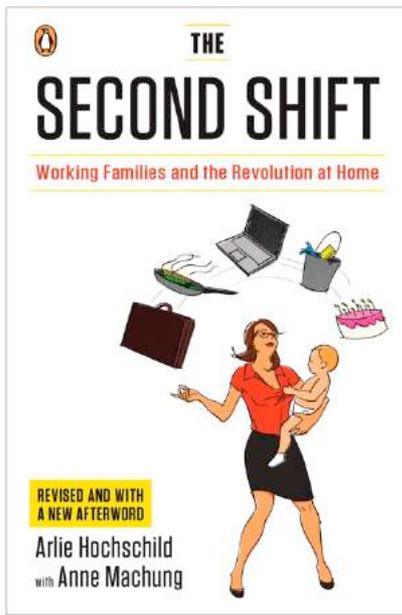
– **Karl Marx argued that capitalist societies are especially likely to exploit workers:**

- » In order to maximize profits, employers will try to eke out more value from their laborers without having to expend more on wages, benefits, etc.
 - Marx coined the term “**alienated labor**” to describe how workers’ efforts benefit their employers much more than it benefits the workers themselves. (**video:** bit.ly/1AEDcek)



example #1 of exploitation:

- “...women’s oppression consists partly in a systematic & unreciprocated transfer of powers from women to men...
 - The freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women work for them” without getting fairly compensated.
- **Women often perform physical & emotional labor without fair compensation:**
 - e.g., *traditional marriages require wives to take care of all the housework and childcare, so that the husbands are unburdened with responsibilities that interfere with their ability to perform and advance in their careers;*
 - *for many contemporary working women, this means that on top of their careers, they work a “second shift” at home.*



» “Women provide men & children with emotional care & provide men with sexual satisfaction, & as a group receive relatively little of either from men.”

- “...typically feminine jobs involve gender-based tasks requiring sexual labor, nurturing, caring for others’ bodies, or smoothing over workplace tensions...
[which] often go unnoticed and undercompensated.”

example #2 of exploitation:

- **the manual labor of workers of color is often exploited** in “a segmented labor market that tends to reserve skilled, high-paying, unionized jobs for whites”.
- “Whenever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of the oppressed racial groups are or ought to be servants of those, or some of those, in the privileged group.
 - In most white racist societies this means that *many white people have dark- or yellow-skinned domestic servants...*
 - ...In our society *there remains strong cultural pressure to fill servant jobs*
 - bellhop, porter, chambermaid, busboy, and so on – *with Black and Latino workers.*
 - **These jobs entail a transfer of energies whereby the servers enhance the status of the served.”**



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Normative ethical analysis of exploitation:

- Aristotle's ***virtue ethics*** does not include exploitation in its list of actions that are always wrong (unless you consider exploitation a form of stealing),
 - so presumably it requires that individuals use their reason to determine whether or not it is appropriate to exploit a person in a specific situation.
 - However, given that Aristotle believes that greed is a vice (an excess of the virtue ambition), it's likely that exploiting others out of greed is wrong most of the time.
- Hobbes' ***contractarianism*** says exploitation is wrong when the law says it is wrong.
 - *Does that mean it was ok to exploit slaves throughout the centuries in which slavery was not yet prohibited by law?*
- Held's ***care ethics*** probably prohibits exploitation as a violation of people's moral rights to have their essential needs satisfied through care.
- Mill's ***utilitarianism*** would say that the rightness/wrongness of exploitation depends upon its consequences: so it might be ok in some circumstances.
- Kantian ***deontology*** would say that exploitation is wrong if it amounts to using a person as a mere means (like a tool) instead of as a person with full autonomy.

2) *marginalization*:

- “...perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression.
 - » **A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life** and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination.”
- **“Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use...**
 - [an] underclass of people permanently confined to lives of social marginality, most of whom are racially marked”
 - » ...though the elderly, young unemployed people, single mothers, disabled persons, former prisoners, etc. are also often marginalized.

example #1 of marginalization:

- Ex-prisoners are often prevented from getting jobs and basic protections, no matter what kind of crime they were imprisoned for, or how they have tried to change their lives.
 - (This is also a mechanism of structural racism, since people of color are disproportionately sentenced with prison time.)



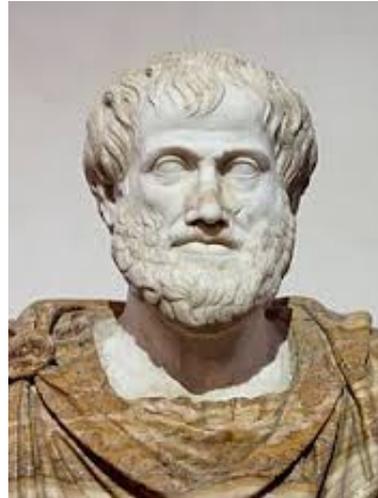
example #2 of marginalization:

- **People with disabilities are often marginalized** because physical structures are not designed to ensure the same level of accessibility that able-bodied individuals enjoy.
 - Only 92 of NYC's 425 subway stops are wheelchair-accessible;
image: bit.ly/2peEvkf
 - **video:** bit.ly/2nd63CG
 - If people can't physically navigate the world around them, they may struggle to make a living and can be forced into a life of poverty & solitude.



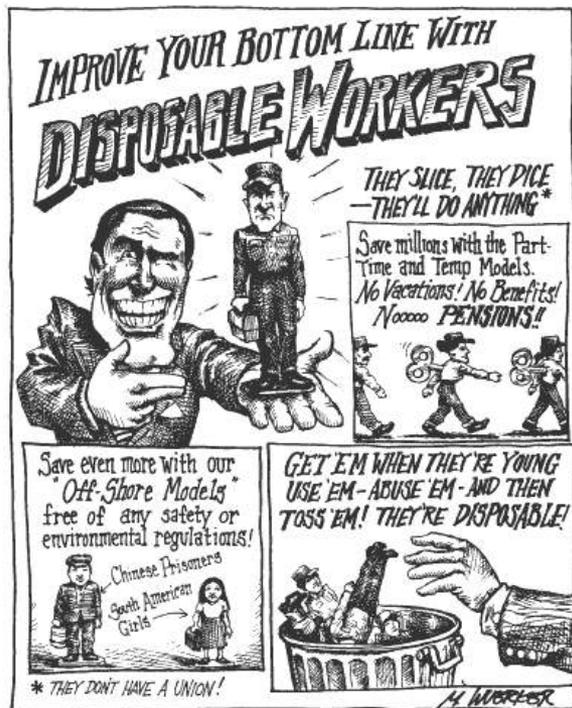
Normative ethical analysis of marginalization:

- Aristotle's *virtue ethics*...
- Hobbes' *contractarianism*...
- Held's *care ethics*...
- Mill's *utilitarianism*...
- Kantian *deontology*...



3) **powerlessness**: being prevented from “making decisions that affect the conditions of [one’s] lives and actions”

- Young explains that “**the social division of labor between professionals & non-professionals**” (‘middle class’ vs. ‘working class’) **often leaves non-professionals powerless**,
 - » because “they must take orders & rarely have the right to give them”



Powerlessness also “designates a position...that **allows persons little opportunity to develop & exercise skills.**

- The powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise...
 - [They] lack the authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have, have limited upward mobility, follow employers’ orders & policies without freedom of choice, [&] are treated with less respect.”

- **Disenfranchisement** (lack of voting rights, or inability to exercise one’s voting rights in practice) **is another way in which certain groups become powerless.**

4) **cultural imperialism**: “how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group & mark it out as the Other.

➤ Cultural imperialism **involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm...**

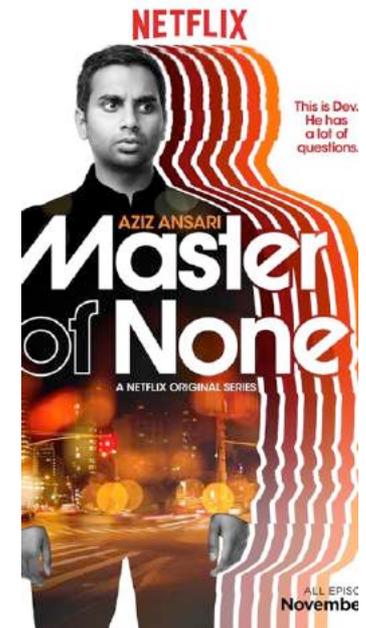
» As a consequence, the dominant cultural products of the society,...express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these groups.

– Often without noticing they do so, the **dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such.**”

...The culturally dominated undergo *a paradoxical oppression*, that **they are both marked out by stereotypes & at the same time rendered invisible.**

• ...Those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside...from those with whom they do not identify & who do not identify with them.”

» *Think about how rare it is to see TV shows & movies where people of color get to be leading characters instead of stereotypical, token minority side-kicks.*



- **example of cultural imperialism:**

- ***cultural appropriation:***
members of the dominant culture take stereotypical markers of a group identity as use them out of context

- » **video:** bit.ly/1NgbEvK



5) **violence:** “Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property, which have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person.



- ... I also include in this category less severe incidents of harassment, intimidation, or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members.

- **Violence is systemic because it is directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group.**



- Any woman, for example, has a reason to fear rape.
- Regardless of what a black man has done to escape the oppressions of marginality or powerlessness, he lives knowing he is subject to attack of harassment.
 - » *Just living under such a threat of attack on oneself or family or friends deprives the oppressed of freedom and dignity, and needlessly expends their energy.*

- **An important aspect of random, systemic violence is its irrationality:**
 - **[it is] motivated by fear or hatred** of those groups,” not merely insecurity about one’s own groups’ dominant status.

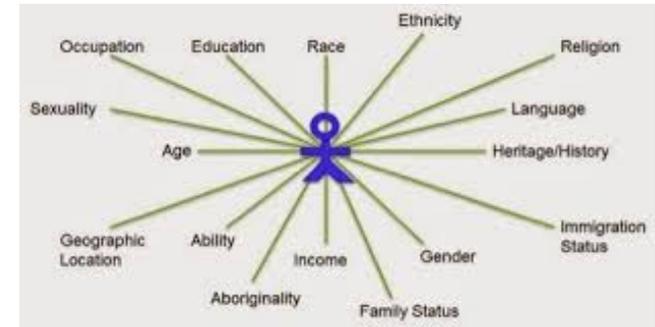
Young *does not* give “an account of separate systems of oppression for each oppressed group: racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, & so on”:

- because “this way of conceiving oppression fails to accommodate the similarities and overlaps in the oppressions of different groups.”
 - Also, it falsely represents the situation of all group members as the same.”

On Young’s view,

- **“The presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed.**

- But different group oppressions exhibit different combinations of these forms, as do different individuals in the groups.



- **This makes her concept of oppression *disjunctive*, rather than conjunctive:**
 - *One needs not experience all 5 faces to be oppressed (1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5); instead any single face or combination of faces is adequate (1 or 2 or (1&2) etc.)*
 - » ...Applying these five criteria to the situation of groups **makes it possible to compare oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another.”**