

(In)Justice in Nonideal Social Worlds

Dominick Robert Cooper

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Philosophy

Michael Moehler
Lydia Patton
Daniel Wodak
Christian Matheis

26 April 2017
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: political philosophy, justice, injustice, nonideal theory, oppression

(In)Justice in Nonideal Social Worlds

Dominick Robert Cooper

ABSTRACT

While there is an abundance of philosophical literature on justice, there is far less literature within political philosophy on the topic of injustice. I think one common assumption these approaches share is that injustice is simply the absence of justice; call this the *absence thesis*. This assumption becomes more peculiar juxtaposed to social and political struggle for justice, which quite commonly begins with cries of injustice. Injustice is an importantly distinct philosophical notion from justice – it can explain how justice fails to be realized in interesting and sophisticated ways, and, I argue, track our efforts to realize just social worlds, in ways that paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice by themselves cannot. In this essay, I focus specifically on the question of how theories of justice can guide action in social worlds with systematic oppression. I ultimately argue that action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate worlds with systematic oppression must represent features of injustice. If a theory fails to represent features of injustice, it will fail to guide action in these worlds. That representation of such features is necessary gives us reason to think, in certain circumstances, that the absence thesis is false.

(In)Justice in Nonideal Social Worlds

Dominick Robert Cooper

ABSTRACT

(General audience)

While there is an abundance of philosophical literature on justice, there is far less literature within political philosophy on the topic of injustice. However, I think that injustice is an importantly distinct philosophical notion from justice – it can explain how justice fails to be realized in interesting and sophisticated ways, and, I argue, track our efforts to realize just social worlds. In this essay, I focus specifically on the question of how theories of justice can guide action in social worlds with systematic oppression. In answering this question, I argue that we must take knowledge about particular phenomenon of injustice and oppression seriously when thinking about how we can progress from nonideal worlds ripe with injustice – like our actual world – to more just worlds. I bring into conversation more traditional ideal theory in political philosophy with theory that focuses more on the nonideal – the actual conditions of injustice – especially the thought of W.E.B DuBois. When thinking about what makes our societies just, or thinking about what is important to *know* when we attempt to go from our own nonideal circumstances to create a more just world for ourselves, knowledge of *justice* or what an ideally just society will look like is not enough to guide us to those circumstances. Until we understand the circumstances of injustice, we will not know what ideals can guide us to more just circumstances.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Oppression, Justice, and the Social World.....	3
III. Action-Guiding Justice.....	5
IV. The Interdependency Problem.....	11
V. Conclusion.....	16
Works Cited.....	17

I. Introduction

While there is an abundance of philosophical literature on justice, there is far less literature within political philosophy on the topic of injustice. There are, perhaps, several intuitive reasons why this is the case. One might think that even if we take injustice seriously, we can still best grasp the demands of justice in the context of a given society by first understanding justice through theoretical inquiry that is highly ideal, or context-independent. Even for those that employ a nonideal approach that rejects the necessity of an ideal conception of justice, meliorating injustice focuses nonetheless on making comparative judgments about justice. I think one common assumption these approaches share is that injustice is simply the absence of justice; call this the *absence thesis*.¹ This assumption becomes more peculiar juxtaposed to social and political struggle for justice, which quite commonly begins with cries of injustice. Indeed, Naomi Zack claims, “before we can talk about justice, more needs to be understood about the specific injustices that keep recurring.”² If we take Zack’s claim seriously, we must question the veracity of the absence thesis.

The intuitive reasons supporting the absence thesis, I argue, are misguided. Consider two examples of contrasting states: light and darkness, and health and sickness. If the absence thesis is correct, justice and injustice are much like light and darkness – the latter has no source, and is the absence of the former. And while it may seem initially plausible to think that sickness is the absence of health, we know from scientific and philosophical literature alike that it is, in fact, quite the contrary. Sickness has a source distinct from health, and requires a great deal of attention, sometimes even more so than health. One cannot cure a virus, for instance, without adequately understanding it (i.e., causes, behaviors), and discussion of healthy habits or states of being by themselves fall short in this endeavor. Injustice, I argue, is much like sickness in this regard; more specifically, the worst form of injustice, oppression, operates in ways that often resemble that of a virus.

Injustice is an importantly distinct philosophical notion from justice – it can explain how justice fails to be realized in interesting and sophisticated ways, and, I argue, track our efforts to realize just social worlds, in ways that paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice by themselves cannot. In this essay, I focus specifically on the question of how theories of justice can guide action in social worlds with systematic oppression. I argue that action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate worlds with systematic oppression must represent features of injustice. If a theory fails to represent features of injustice, it will fail to guide action in these worlds.

The recent debate in political philosophy regarding ideal and nonideal theory has, in some ways, rendered the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘nonideal’ somewhat ambiguous; in spite of the various distinctions and categorizations philosophers have made, there remains no consensus about what the terms necessarily signify.³ In this essay, I refer to ideal and nonideal theory as representing paradigmatic instances of the two approaches to justice,

¹ Shklar (1990, Ch. 1) points to absence as well when examining several theories of justice in the history of western political philosophy.

² Zack (2014), p. 29.

³ Hamlin and Stemplowska (2012). For more on the ideal/nonideal debate, see Simmons (2010), Stemplowska and Swift (2012), and Valentini (2012).

considering Rawlsian ideal theory as a paradigmatic example for the former, and Amartya Sen's approach as a paradigmatic example of the latter.⁴

Insofar as one is interested in theories of justice that evaluate nonideal social worlds, one important feature of such theories is what I will call a theory's 'action-guidingness.' Simply put, if we know where we are in the social world, and we know where we want, ideally, to end up, a theory of justice that is action-guiding will provide a theoretically possible avenue to get us from where we are, to where we want to go. However, recent work from Gerald Gaus (2016) provides some compelling arguments to think that taking seriously the notion of action-guidingness thus saddles paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice with insurmountable problems.

In this essay, I make a distinct and independent argument to support a similar conclusion with respect to the problems paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice face when evaluating social worlds with systematic oppression. I focus specifically on what I call the *interdependency problem*. In short, the interdependency problem represents the general phenomenon that systematic oppression adapts to, or is merely displaced by, progressive efforts to effect just change in the social world. Rather than relegating this phenomenon as, intellectually, strictly an empirical concern, or chalking it up to the partisan politics of inevitable reactionary backlash, I argue that this consideration is philosophically significant. Action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate social worlds with systematic oppression must represent features of injustice in order to overcome the interdependency problem, and thus successfully address (guide action) actual injustices in the real world.

I take this thesis to have implications for the *content* of theories of justice -- however, I do not take a stand on the content of any theory of justice in this paper. I am concerned with, for any theory of justice, the necessary features it must represent in order to be action-guiding in certain nonideal social worlds. The extent to which a theory fulfills this requirement will depend upon the content of the theory, and moreover, the force of the requirement for any theory to be action-guiding, which will ostensibly vary quite widely, depending on the aim of the particular theory. The argument I give here will especially concern those who take action-guidingness to be an important feature of a theory of justice.

In the first section, I explicate some paradigmatic features of systematic oppression, and use W.E.B. DuBois's analysis of racial oppression during reconstruction to illustrate their relevance to justice; I also offer some initial reasons to think the absence thesis is misguided. In the second section, I outline two conditions any action-guiding theory must fulfill -- the *realizability* and the *optimization* condition -- and show how the representation of features of injustice in social worlds with systematic oppression can substantially affect whether or not an action-guiding theory can fulfill such conditions. In the fourth section, I pose one problem for action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate social worlds with systematic oppression: the interdependency problem. I show how my approach can overcome these problems. Action-guiding theories of justice that do *not* represent features of injustice will not overcome the interdependency problem. Insofar as one values theories of justice that are action-guiding, any theory of justice that fails to overcome the interdependency problem will fail to guide action in social worlds, like our actual world, with systematic oppression.

⁴ Rawls (1996, 1999, 2003). Sen, (2005, 2008). For a contemporary defense of Rawlsian ideal theory, see Simmons (2010).

II. Oppression, Justice, and the Social World

A. DuBois on Racial Injustice

The year is 1865. The Civil War has ended, and the United States Congress has ratified the 13th Amendment of the federal Constitution. Within the next five years, the 14th and 15th Amendments are ratified as well. W.E.B. DuBois's analysis of Reconstruction makes it clear that despite the ratification of these Amendments, African-Americans (in the South especially) were continually faced with racial oppression on numerous fronts. DuBois addresses the disenfranchisement of African-Americans in spite of the passage of the 15th Amendment, and the economic exploitation and social degradation of African-Americans through the imprisonment and labor exploitation of many African-Americans at the time, made technically legal by a provision in the 13th Amendment.⁵

DuBois's analysis here gives us reason to think that injustice, here in the form of racial oppression, is quite different than the idea that injustice is the absence of justice. Despite the fact that there seems to be substantial improvement in justice via the ratification of these amendments, forms of oppression here are not so much negated as they are *displaced*. With the abolition of chattel slavery, the general form racial oppression manifested itself in other ways. Racial oppression 'adapted' to the ratification of the amendments by manifesting itself in new forms and in different dimensions of the social world. So far, it seems like this fits the comparison of oppression to a virus – oppression systemically adapts to various attempts to eradicate it.⁶ Moreover, it seems as though we have initial reason to think that social worlds with systematic oppression will pose interdependency problems to action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate such social worlds; I take here the general phenomenon of the 'displacement' or 'adaptive' nature of racial oppression that DuBois illustrates as an exemplar of an interdependency problem.⁷

You might think that the paradigmatically ideal approach can still win out – perhaps drawing attention to the displacement of injustice here merely shows that the ideal has not yet been fully realized, so all we have to do is continue working towards the

⁵ DuBois observes that efforts to continually disenfranchise black voters were brought about by "force, by economic intimidation, by propaganda designed to lead him to believe that there was no salvation for him... Then came the series of disfranchisement laws discriminating against poverty and ignorance and aimed at the situation of the colored laborer, while the white laborer escaped by deliberate conniving and through the 'understanding' and 'Grandfather' clauses." Moreover, DuBois also observes that "[i]n no part of the modern world has there been so open and conscious a traffic in crime for deliberate social degradation and private profit as in the South since slavery."⁵ Since slavery, or 'involuntary servitude' was still legal under the 13th Amendment as a form of criminal punishment, African-Americans were arrested in large numbers, often on faux or trumped up charges, imprisoned, and subsequently forced back into labor, some to work for the same plantations they were emancipated from after the Civil War. "Since 1876 Negroes have been arrested on the slightest provocation and given long sentence or fines which they were compelled to work out. The resulting peonage of criminals extended into every Southern state and led to the most revolting situations." (DuBois, 2007. p. 568-572).

⁶ To be clear, I do not intend my use of the virus comparison to be an argument by analogy – I merely employ the comparison to illustrate certain feature of oppression, as well as the interdependency problem.

⁷ To be clear, I do not intend to take a firm stance on the nature of the improvement in justice in this case as a result of these Constitutional amendments. It seems that in some substantive way, this was an improvement. The point of this example is to illustrate the adaptive nature of oppression in response to any effort to change the justice-relevant features of society. Whether the changes to the features in question result in improvements, or to what extent we think the 'justice score' (per Gaus) has changed, do not prevent us from examining the case as speaking to the nature of the social landscape. This is a question we can answer that is upstream from our more substantive evaluative judgments about the justice score of the world, before or after the changes have been made.

ideal. Or perhaps all we must do is continue to make local improvements in justice based on comparative judgments of which options going forward are more-or-less just than the current state of affairs. If we make these comparative improvements enough times, we will eventually realize an optimally just world. Both approaches, however, will still fail to guide action in worlds containing oppression – to think they will eventually succeed is misguided. Despite the differences of ideal and nonideal approaches to justice, they both remain committed to the absence thesis. However, if an action-guiding theory of justice represents features of injustice (and thus rejects the absence thesis), it can overcome the challenges of a world with oppression. Before I begin these arguments, however, we need to understand more about oppression and how it is specifically relevant to justice.

B. Oppression and the Basic Structure of the Social World

Among a wide range of perspectives, scholars and activists generally consider oppression a type of injustice.⁸ As Cudd (2006) observes, it is one of the “most painful forms of harm a person can suffer.”⁹ I also assume that there is no ‘justifiable’ form of oppression – that it is always unjustifiable is characteristic of the severe forms of material and psychological suffering it causes, thus no defensible rationale can be designed that reconciles the existence of oppression.¹⁰ As many in the literature on oppression point out, the harms of oppression extend beyond what we typically think of physical or psychological pain, to notions such as the ‘substantial cruelty,’ that maims the dignity of the oppressed; indeed, this maiming of dignity is captured in so many words by DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk* as “that dead weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem.”¹¹ Such cruelty is in part made possible and certainly magnified by the structural imbalance of power, “institutionalized cruelty,” that systematic oppression creates and perpetuates.¹²

While I explicate some paradigmatic features of oppression I take to be highly relevant to justice, it is important to note that I do not suggest that these features are exhaustive or attainable a priori.¹³ I also do not suggest that oppression is a univocal concept.¹⁴ I simply aim to name some paradigmatic features of oppression particularly salient to justice, as opposed to for instance, purely ontological, epistemic, or moral projects that examine oppression. More specifically, I argue that insofar as the basic structure of society is an important concern for a theory of justice, (whether we are concerned with the society as a whole or simply its basic institutions) the existence of oppression in such a society shapes the basic structure in a way that is relevant to

⁸ There are a variety of philosophical concerns about how one should go about defining oppression; suffice it to say, most accounts share the paradigmatic features I sketch in this section. For genealogical discussion of oppression as it is used in the history of political philosophy, see Cudd (2006) pp. 3-26.

⁹ Ibid. pg. ix.

¹⁰ See Cudd (2016) p. ix, pp 23-26.

¹¹ DuBois (1994) pg. 5. Indeed, DuBois opens *The Souls of Black Folk* with a question centered such a maiming of dignity of black identity in the United States. “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I seldom answer a word.”

¹² See, for example, Hallie (1981) and Frye (1983).

¹³ Haslanger (2012) pp. 311-312.

¹⁴ Young (1990) p. 40, cf. Cudd (2006) pp 25-26.

justice.¹⁵ That oppression is structural in some meaningful way is important to the idea of action-guidingness I explicate in the next section, as an action-guiding theory of justice must model marginal changes in the basic structure of the social world in order to successfully guide action.¹⁶

III. Action-Guiding Justice

It is clear that some ideal approaches to justice are simply not concerned with any nonideal world, let alone worlds with oppression, so we can't expect them to provide much guidance here.¹⁷ But what about other ideal approaches? Rawls insisted that ideal justice is “the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems”¹⁸ Sen's (2005, 2008) nonideal approach neglects entirely a guiding ideal of justice and focuses on making the comparative judgments about justice also fails to be action-guiding, albeit for different reasons. I explicate here two pertinent conditions of what it means for a theory of justice to be action-guiding; the *realizability condition* and the *optimization condition*. These conditions are necessary for a theory of justice to be action-guiding if the path to justice is especially difficult to traverse – if the landscape of the social world is what Gerald Gaus calls ‘rugged.’

This discussion is not new to the recent literature on ideal and nonideal theory in political philosophy.¹⁹ What I do show in this section is that these conditions extend in a unique way to social worlds with oppression. In social worlds with oppression, the representation of features of injustice can substantially affect whether or not the theory is action-guiding; that is, whether or not it fulfills these two conditions. To see in greater detail the force of this claim, I introduce Gaus's notion of a *similarity ordering* as an important way theories of justice fulfill the proximity condition and argue that representing features of injustice would add a *third* dimension to the similarity ordering. Insofar as the similarity ordering of a theory is a crucial part of the predictive model that the theory represents, this would indeed have action-guiding implications, should the features of injustice become distinctly valuable in guiding action to more just social worlds. Insofar as this claim is true, we can reject the absence thesis and thus have a

¹⁵ One paradigmatic feature of oppression is that it is structural in some important ways. It is structural in the sense that it is systemic. Oppression ‘targets’ the oppressed by continually perpetrating unjust harm by ranging over various dimensions of the social world – institutions (e.g., educational, judicial, healthcare), public policy, social practices, and public discourse, to name a few. (Frye (1983) and Haslanger (2012: Ch. 11) have used this term to help illustrate the systematic nature of oppression.) Oppression is structural in the sense that oppressive structures – institutional level oppression, for instance – do not have to be intentionally created, nor must oppressive harms require the moral culpability of an individual agent to exist. (Haslanger, pp. 317-324) Going forward, I use the term oppression to stand in for the stipulations I make here, and to be clear, I restrict ‘social worlds with oppression,’ to liberal-democratic societies (like the United States) with oppression. I use the phrase ‘liberal-democratic’ in the nontechnical sense of the word, roughly similar to a term like ‘western democracy,’ though not geographically specific.

¹⁶ There is no danger of an objection about collectivism, even if our theory takes seriously structural features of oppression in the social world. Haslanger and Cudd both offer accounts of oppression compatible with liberal-democratic societies. For a different take on how we can maintain focus, ontologically, on individuals without reducing such commitment to *explanatory* sufficiency, see Epstein (2014, pp. 101-114, 176-180).

¹⁷ See Estlund (2014).

¹⁸ Rawls (1999) pp. 8-9 Although Rawls does not mention oppression, he discusses civil disobedience, just war, revolution, and civil and militant resistance, as the types of “things that we are faced with in everyday life.” Moreover, he includes in this category of partial compliance questions of compensatory justice and institutional injustice. I think it is safe to assume here that oppression within the context of a liberal-democratic society, like the United States, would classify then as one of these “pressing and urgent matters.”

¹⁹ While I draw mainly from Gaus here, prior discussion of ‘action-guiding’ theory can be found in Swift (2008).

compelling reason to think that traditional ideal and nonideal approaches to justice will not guide action in social worlds with oppression. This claim will become clear once we unpack the idea of action-guidingness.

A. *The Realizability Condition*

What does the concept ‘action-guidingness’ mean? And how can a theory of justice we use guide action nonideal conditions? Let’s build up from the intuitive idea that action-guidingness refers to the realization of a normative conclusion.²⁰ In other words, if we know where we are in a given social world, and we know where we want, ideally, to end up, a theory of justice that is action-guiding will represent a theoretically plausible avenue to get us from where we are, to where we want to go. Take, for instance, the following statement. We ought to ϕ ; so, we ϕ .²¹ For a theory of justice that is action-guiding, “we ought to ϕ ” also implies that we have to start from somewhere. We must understand first where we are before we can assess where we ought to go. Moreover, this commits an approach to justice that evaluates justice on a comparative basis, rather than a categorical one.²² In other words, the theory must represent inherent justice of social worlds in terms of degrees of *more-or-less* just, rather than rendering a binary judgment of ‘just’ or ‘unjust.’ Thus, a theory of justice must represent the social world it aims to justifiably organize, so that it can represent possible alternatives (a set of social worlds) from which we might choose. A theory of justice, then, must represent the basic structure of the world it evaluates in order to model a set of possible social worlds. This enables the theory to represent marginal changes in the basic structure of the social world. The set of possible social worlds is ordered by structural similarity, which constitutes the first part of what Gaus calls a *similarity ordering*.²³ The set ranges from worlds that represent small marginal changes, very close to the basic structure of the actual world, to those worlds farther off, which differ to a greater degree in basic structure.

A final caveat: the theory must not only represent the basic structure of the social world it evaluates, but it must also represent the basic structure of the social world that is *relevant to justice*. The similarity ordering is not just based on the structural similarity of the set of possible social worlds, but arranged according to the justice-relevant world-features that a theory of justice picks out in those worlds. For example, two theories of justice with different justice-relevant world-features (e.g., freedom of movement, private property rights, a certain wealth distribution pattern, etc.) will generate different similarity orderings, even if they begin from the *same* social world. This is the basic sense in which action-guiding refers to the realization of a normative conclusion. Call this the *realizability condition*.²⁴

²⁰ I use the phrase ‘normative conclusion’ specifically to broaden the scope of what is realizable for justice beyond principles of justice. Because I am concerned here largely with the two conditions I stipulate and especially how they bear on the similarity ordering, by ‘realize a normative conclusion,’ I refer only to the theoretical predictability of its realization, which I will point out, depends on the theory’s accurate representation of the social world, in addition to the relevant world-features it picks out. See 2-B for further detail.

²¹ To be clear, I do not intend this intuitive idea to be construed as referring specifically to perfect compliance with normative conclusions of justice.

²² Gaus (2016), pp. 45-47.

²³ Gaus, pp 51-56.

²⁴ I draw heavily from Gaus, pp 39-41 in establishing this condition, but I do not simply endorse his version of this condition wholesale, in part because Gaus only writes with paradigmatically ideal justice in mind. While I do use the term ‘paradigmatically ideal theory’ in the same way that Gaus conceives of ideal theory, my own nonideal approach is clearly different from such ideal approaches, yet I argue nonetheless that they can fulfill these action-guiding conditions. I don’t

With that being said, there are multiple ways to productively talk about how a theory of justice derives normative conclusions that are realizable, and I want to specify here the way that is relevant to my argument, although I do not intend the account I give here to be a sufficient account of action-guidingness. I do not, for example, address feasibility concerns, and though I take them to be serious concerns for a theory of justice, addressing them is beyond the scope of this essay.²⁵ I am also not arguing here that theories that are not action-guiding cannot be *useful*; almost any theory of justice, no matter how ideal, could probably be useful, in the sense that it can ‘apply’ to nonideal circumstances, or be useful insofar as knowledge of ideal justice (e.g., political utopias) is intrinsically useful for any social world.

B. The Optimization Condition

For an action-guiding theory of justice, satisfying the realizability condition is not sufficient. An action-guiding theory of justice not only represents normative conclusions that are realizable, but also guides action towards the best, or the optimally just social world. Call this the *optimization condition*. So when picking between, for instance, two options, it not only picks the option that is *comparatively* better, but also the one that is closest in proximity to the ideal social world. As Gaus shows, when evaluating two possible social worlds *a* and *b*, we must consider not only the inherent justice of each social world but also “*a*’s and *b*’s relative distance and direction in relation to *u*,” if *u* were the optimally just social world. The optimization condition gives us the final piece to the important similarity ordering. The similarity ordering, then, is (1) based on the structural similarity of the set of social worlds set by the justice-relevant world-features, *in addition* to what Gaus calls a (2) distance metric, namely the distance in proximity to the optimally just social world.

Consider an analogy. Suppose that reaching the optimally just society is like climbing a mountain. If the mountain only has one peak, then the task should be relatively easy. You climb the mountain solely by ascending it, one step at a time. And because we know there is only one peak, we know that *any step upwards* necessarily leads us to the top of the mountain. In terms of justice, then, we can climb the mountain by picking the option that is comparatively more just. Indeed, in rejecting the necessity of any guiding ideal conception of justice, Sen’s nonideal approach to justice advocates this view. Social worlds in which local improvement always increases overall justice would be ‘smooth landscapes.’

Smooth Landscapes: Marginal changes in the structure of a social world always result in marginal changes in overall justice if the landscape is smooth.

If we can locate injustices relatively easily and identify the structural changes we must make to meliorate them, than those marginal changes will always lead to an increase in overall justice of that society. To be clear marginal changes in structure might not always be local *improvements* in justice – they could result in a step *down* the mountain. But the

consider this a direct criticism of Gaus, because the scope of his project does not extend to oppression or historical injustice, but in drawing from his work, I modify them to suit my purposes. My thoughts here extend to the *optimization condition* as well.

²⁵ I do follow Gaus (2016) here. For further discussion on feasibility, see Gilibert (2012), Gilibert and Lawford-Smith (2012), and Wiens (2012, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

marginal changes still directly affect overall (or global) justice (positively or negatively) in this way. In progressing to more just social worlds, we could feel confident proving, for instance, a constitutional amendment, court ruling, or policy that reflects more generally a theoretically just improvement (satisfies a justice-relevant feature) will necessarily move us closer to our optimally just social world.

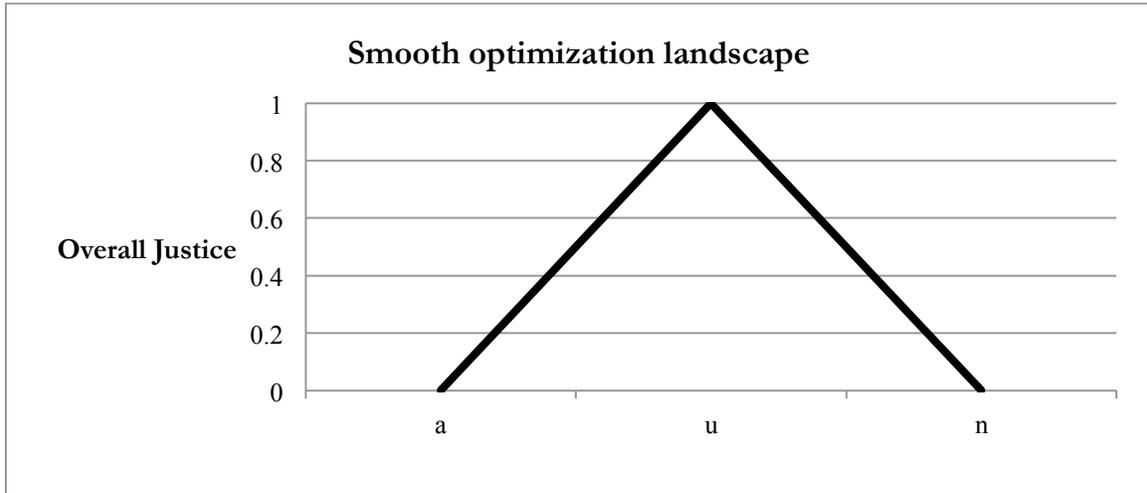


Figure 2-A.

Let's examine figure 2-A to clarify the relationship that the similarity ordering and our two action-guiding conditions have to the landscape of the social world. The x and y-axes above jointly contain what Gaus calls an 'evaluative perspective' of a theory of justice, or Σ . The y-axis contains Σ 's understanding of the inherent justice of a given world a through n . Part of what constitutes Σ 's understanding of the inherent justice in a given world depends on the justice-relevant world-features that Σ picks out. The x-axis concerns Σ 's understanding of the basic structure of worlds a through n , where those worlds are ordered based on their similarity ordering, and with u being the ideal or optimal social world. Σ 's understanding of a given social world, then, is dependent upon how well the world-features that Σ picks out map on to the actual structure of the social worlds a through n .²⁶

In figure 2-A, changes in structure in social worlds a - u will always result in improvements in justice, just as changes from u - n will always lead to decreases in justice. "Finding the ideal, u , is theoretically simple. First move from where you are. If you get to a more just social world, keep going in that direction. If and when you get to a less just social world, stop, and move back in the opposite direction: keep on moving in that direction until a marginal change yields a less just world. Finally move one step back and

²⁶ It is worth pointing out that skepticism regarding the claim that we can identify 'justice scores' of social worlds as seen in the y-axis of figure 2-A is understandable. Perhaps it seems gratuitously quantitative or formal; indeed, perhaps modeling landscapes of social worlds in general is subject to such a criticism. With that being said, I think it is important to note here that this approach allows a certain amount of clarity to the inquiry of action-guidingness with respect to theories of justice. Moreover, the model is also able to reflect the implications of endorsing an approach to justice that takes seriously that some social worlds can be more or less just than others (rather than only rendering a binary just/unjust judgment), and that this also has importantly to do with the basic structure of the social world. It is my hope that the mountain analogy, as I discuss it here and as it appears frequently in the literature on ideal and nonideal approaches to justice, renders the modeling of rugged landscapes fairly intuitive to readers unfamiliar with Gaus's book.

you will have arrived at the ideal, the most just social world!” If the landscape of the social world is smooth, then the optimization condition is superfluous. Both conditions, however, are necessary if the landscape is rugged.

Rugged landscapes, then, are landscapes where marginal changes in the structure of a given society do *not* necessarily entail marginal changes in the overall justice of that society. Recall, for example, DuBois’s analysis of Reconstruction; when one considers the 13th and 15th Amendments as changes in the basic structure of the social world, and the displacement of systematic racial oppression that followed, and continues to presently even in some of the same forms that DuBois originally identifies (e.g., mass incarceration, voter suppression), we have at least plausible reasons for thinking the landscape of the social world here is rugged. We can say the following.

Rugged Landscapes: Marginal changes in the structure of social world do not always result in marginal changes in overall justice if the landscape is rugged.²⁷

Consider figure 2-B.

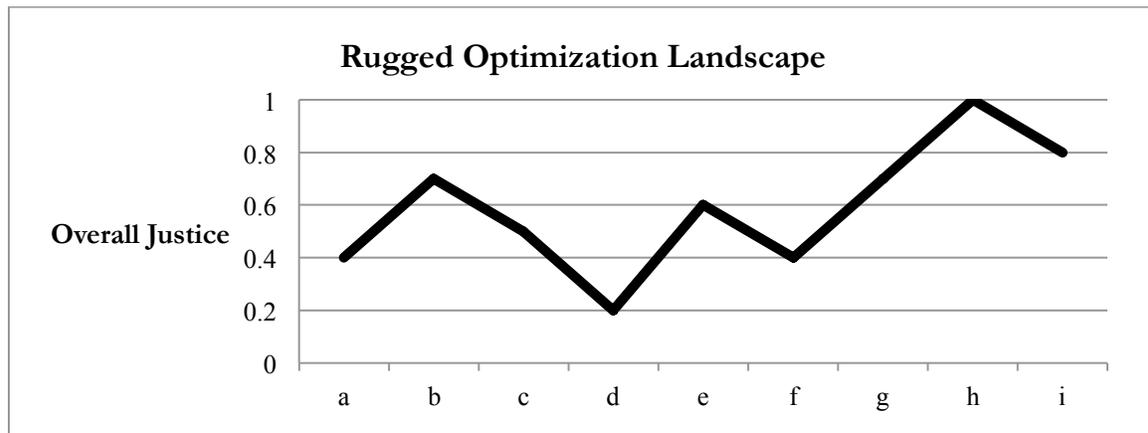


Figure 2-B.

Landscapes are rugged when a given Σ employed by a theory of justice generates an (rugged) optimization problem. Unlike figure 2-A, the landscape is rugged because there are *multiple peaks*, many of which are ‘sub-optimal’ justice peaks – social worlds *b* and

²⁷ The case can be made that one cannot know about global (overall) improvements in justice without assuming the content of a particular theory of justice. There are two responses to this worry. First off, I do not speak to the content of any theory of justice here – I merely discuss formal aspects of any theory tasked with guiding action in nonideal social worlds. Moreover, the *fact* of interdependencies alone can tell us if the landscape is rugged, and thus we can analyze the importance of rugged landscapes and the overall improvements in justice required to overcome optimization problems even in the absence of any specific theory of justice. In any given case we examine, hypothetical or historical, the *details of the case* (e.g., the policy or amendment proposed, the way it was implemented, and the results of such actions) are what tell in favor of interdependencies, *not the content of the theory of justice*. Once interdependencies have been determined, however, some theories will be suited to guide action, while others will not. A second point: even if we assume that the content of the theory of justice is necessary for determining whether global improvements are available or achieved, the mere fact that the landscape is rugged will mean any theory of justice will have optimization problems. If we decided to plug in different theories, we could ascertain for each of them if global improvements could be made. In this sense, we have to assume content, but because *any theory* will have optimization problems, I do not “smuggle in” any one theory of justice in my discussion of global improvements and rugged landscapes. And I take the smuggling objection to be the worry, not the fact that we may have to determine the possibility and success or failure of global improvements (a) on a case by case basis and (b) by plugging in actual theories of justice.

e, for instance. There are valleys in the landscape as well – consider social world *d*, for example. The challenge for an action-guiding theory is to guide the social world to the *optimal* justice peak, (here social world *h*) rather than being fooled by traversing the sub-optimal peaks. So, when climbing the mountain, we could be *ascending*, but perhaps ascending a *sub-optimal* justice peak. Or we could be *descending*, but perhaps this would actually bring us in closer proximity to the optimal justice peak. In either case, the fulfillment of the optimization condition ensures that a theory can ‘navigate’ the rugged landscape and successfully orient us towards the optimal justice peak – it ensures we can successfully, all things considered, climb the mountain.

C. Adding a Third Dimension to the Similarity Ordering

We’ve seen now that the two dimensions of the similarity ordering incorporate the two particularly relevant conditions of an action-guiding theory. Ultimately, then, the similarity ordering must have the right ordering, as it is the predictive model of the action-guiding theory that successfully (or unsuccessfully) navigates the rugged landscape.

The representation of injustice-relevant world-features affects an action-guiding theory of justice because it adds an additional dimension to the similarity ordering. It would thus include not only (1) structural similarity by justice-relevant world features and (2) distance to the optimal social world but also (3) structural similarity based on injustice-relevant world-features, or rather, the *lack* of such features in social worlds closer to the ideal social world. The addition of this third dimension also changes the distance metric in an interesting way, because the distance metric now includes distance to an optimal social world that is completely absent of injustice-relevant features, yet, I contend, no necessary justice-relevant features. In other words, experience with and data about oppression indicate the need to remain pluralistic with respect to the justice-relevant features a given Σ may represent (I address this further in §3.C). If there exist optimal justice peaks that specific evaluative perspectives can realize with only justice-relevant features – property-owning democracy, or left-libertarianism, for example – I would argue any such perspectives must reach the optimal social world completely absent of oppression. So perhaps it is better to say here that the ‘optimal peak’ to which I refer here is either *the* optimal justice peak, or the *only* optimal peak we can hope to realize while beginning from liberal-democratic societies with oppression.

D. Navigating the Rugged Landscape

The question that remains for my purposes in this essay is whether or not social worlds with oppression are rugged or smooth landscapes, and additionally, if the former is true, than whether or not the phenomenon of oppression specifically is the cause of such rugged optimization problems. I argue that social worlds with oppression cause at least one distinct rugged optimization problem – the interdependency problem – and the only way to overcome such problems will be for the theory to represent injustice-relevant world-features.²⁸

²⁸ To be clear, Gaus criticizes both paradigmatically ideal theories and the nonideal approach of Sen for their inability to attain the ideal, and to consistently realize greater levels of overall justice, respectively. I do not attempt to argue here whether or not his criticisms are successful. My contention is that, notwithstanding Gaus’s criticisms, which do not address social worlds with oppression, the presence of oppression in a social world – give us independent reasons for coming to the same conclusion.

Before moving on, it is worth giving preliminary answers to two pertinent questions: for an action-guiding theory of justice that represents injustice-relevant world features, what could possibly constitute the ideal? And how can this action-guiding theory navigate the rugged landscape when paradigmatically ideal theories of justice cannot?

The guiding ideal of the action-guiding theory of justice I explicate here is simply the vision of a society completely absent of oppression. This sense of the ‘ideal’ – what Charles Mills calls ‘realizing the ideal through the nonideal’ – is ubiquitous in some of the literature of feminist and critical race theory, though much less so in mainstream theories of justice.²⁹ This sense of the ideal differs from paradigmatic sense of the ideal in two important ways. First, while the paradigmatic sense includes a robust account of justice-relevant features, including for instance, principles of justice, and especially specific features of wealth redistribution (or the lack thereof) the sense of the ideal in my approach is laden with modeling injustice-relevant features, remains agnostic with respect to the justice-relevant features that could constitute the optimally just social world. Second, while most theories of justice maintain specific evaluative perspectives (recall Σ) my approach here remains pluralistic – thus only establishing a *criterion of eligible* Σ , where the criterion is such that Σ is action-guiding and represents injustice-relevant world features.³⁰

IV. The Interdependency Problem

In this section, I argue that social worlds with systematic oppression are rugged landscapes. One such optimization problem is the interdependency problem.³¹ In order to navigate this particular rugged landscape, an action-guiding theory that evaluates these worlds must represent injustice-relevant features – systematic labor exploitation, or marginalization of political power, for example – rather than only justice-relevant world-features. More specifically, injustice-relevant features allow a theory of justice to be action-guiding in the sense that those features *explain* the interdependencies that arise from how various dimensions of the social world adapt to marginal changes in basic structure. It is these adaptations that cause interdependencies, which result in the rugged landscape of the social world.

A. Oppression as an Interdependency Problem

One way in which landscapes are rugged are when they contain what Gaus calls NK rugged optimization problems – in other words, when the N dimensions that Σ evaluates (laws, institutions, rules etc.) are so interdependent (containing K interdependencies) with one another that marginal changes to the structure of a world no longer result in marginal changes in overall justice. (For smooth landscapes, we can say that $K=0$).

²⁹ See Mills (2005) and Pateman and Mills (2007).

³⁰ Thus, my approach would be compatible with a variety of approaches that take seriously oppression and emancipatory theory as the ‘ideal’ to achieve.

³¹ There are many other kinds of interdependency problems; I focus on what I take to be a central problem, although I think the arguments I give here can extend to other rugged optimization problems we might face in a social world with oppression.

The interdependency problem: Σ generates an interdependency problem when there exist K interdependencies of N dimensions such that the optimization of Σ 's justice-relevant world-features does not entail the optimization of overall justice in the social world it evaluates.

Now recall our discussion of DuBois's analysis of racial oppression in §1.A. While there is, understandably, some ambiguity as to what might constitute a change in the basic structure of a given social world, constitutional amendments in liberal-democratic societies are paradigmatic examples of such changes. If the landscape were smooth, it would seem that racial oppression in the form of chattel slavery should end once the formal legislative, executive, and juridical changes in the basic structure of society, the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, are made. But this was (and is) not the case. Surely, however, we can say that there was a local improvement in justice with the ratification of these amendments – the question is, however, why this local improvement does not *translate into a global (overall) improvement* in justice. The answer lies in the interdependencies that arise as oppressive systems *adapted* to the changes in the basic structure of the social world. This adaptation explains why local improvements can fail to be global improvements in justice.³²

Though Gaus, to the best of my knowledge, is one of the first political philosophers to incorporate interdependency problems, and rugged landscapes more generally, into a theory of justice, the formal models of these optimization problems have existed for much longer in other academic fields. Gaus specifically draws from theorists working in evolutionary biology, who applied the idea of interdependency problems to understand 'fitness landscapes' of certain species, most notably to explain why species that evolved over time would often not hit fitness 'peaks,' or if they did, why they would not maintain them for long.³³ Gaus explains their relevance here to interdependency problems for justice.

When we face a simple optimization problem, the more of each element the better, and each act of local optimization puts us on a path toward global optimization, or the realization of an ideal. Not so when K begins to increase (as in evolutionary adaptation). When multiple dimensions (in our example, institutions) interact in complex ways to produce varying justice scores...we are faced with a rugged landscape in which optimization is much more difficult.³⁴

³² To be clear, I am not claiming that the local improvement is not a global improvement simply because racial oppression did not end after the marginal changes in the social world were made. The fact that marginal changes do not end injustice outright does not mean that they cannot effectively meliorate injustice. In regards to our example, DuBois shows how there was no accountability for the way racial oppression adapted to local improvements in justice in the United States. Indeed, the fact that many of the forms of racial oppression he identified are still present in the United States today give us reason to think that his analysis of Reconstruction is a paradigmatic example of how marginal changes in the basic structure of the social world will not result in global improvements in justice – will not guide action towards just social worlds – without a principled focus on the actual injustice that occurs. With respect to theories of justice that evaluate social worlds with systematic oppression generally, the failure to guide action – the failure of local improvements to translate to global improvements in justice – stems not just from the adaptation of systematic oppression, but also the *continued* adaptations that will arise, should the theory not represent injustice-relevant world-features in the similarity ordering, enabling the theory to continually explain and accommodate for such adaptations. This is the crux of the interdependency problem, and the representation of injustice-relevant world-features is the solution to overcoming it as it arises in social worlds with systematic oppression.

³³ Kaufman (1993).

³⁴ Gaus (2016) p. 65.

Just as interdependencies increase after local optimization due to evolutionary adaptation, they analogously increase in justice. Oppressive systems *adapt* in certain ways *after* local optimizations are made. These adaptations generate interdependencies among the dimensions over which a theory of justice ranges to evaluate the social world. The resulting interdependencies cause this particular rugged optimization problem in the social world.

Likewise, racial oppression ranges over various dimensions including institutions such as legislative bodies, the criminal justice system, and the court system, in the form of the coercion and intimidation of African-American voting rights, economic domination and exploitation, wrongful imprisonment, and the inability for judges and juries to convict their white peers, protect important witnesses subject to intense intimidation, or even hear cases brought up to begin with.³⁵ The interdependencies are possible because racial oppression can range over such dimensions of the social world, and the interdependencies arise after we make marginal changes in the basic structure of the social world.

Let's revisit our example of the virus. If systematic oppression is what is really causing the interdependency problem, then we can say not only that the absence thesis is false, but we can also assume that focusing on understanding oppression (for our purposes this is accomplished by representing features of injustice) is the crucial task at hand in navigating the rugged landscape. Viruses, then, clearly cause interdependency problems. They adapt, or mutate, in our bodies, and they do so in different biological 'sites' of our bodies. Biologists have successfully been able to model this type of behavior using the same NK model that Gaus draws from, and causes what I call here the interdependency problem.³⁶ If a virus is like oppression, then, how do we stop it? One way to do this, in the case of the virus, is to introduce antibodies that can eradicate the virus. Because, however, the virus adapts, scientists must first test and model antibodies that mutate *with* the virus – most antibodies, based on their biological composition, will mutate a fixed number of times,³⁷ so some antibodies will, after testing, be more fit to attack certain viruses that they can 'track' so to speak. This analogously explains why there can be local improvements that do not translate to global improvements – perhaps the antibody is not fully equipped to mutate, or track, the virus with each adaptation of the virus.

It follows the antibodies that can in some sense 'predict' the adaptation of the virus can take into account the interdependencies that arise after the mutation of the virus. We can say the same about oppression, then; if our similarity ordering can predict and explain the interdependencies that arise, then it can theoretically guide us to social worlds that advance the eradication of oppression, and thus, navigate the rugged landscape. Insofar as the representation of injustice-relevant features – the third dimension of the similarity ordering – *changes* the similarity ordering and subsequently the distance metric necessary for fulfilling the *proximity condition*, my approach fulfills this action-guiding condition in the context of social worlds with oppression in ways that both paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice do not.

³⁵ DuBois (2014), 568.

³⁶ Kauffman and Weinberger (1989).

³⁷ Cervera, et al. (2016).

So, what reason do we have to think that the representation of injustice-relevant world features will *successfully* explain and predict the interdependencies that occur in social worlds with oppression? The features of injustice, I think, can be quite successful in such predictions, even more so than any justice-relevant features. At present, we have a wealth of knowledge from a variety of academic disciplines about the nature and causes of oppression. Moreover, oppression, because it is in part a structural phenomena, often governed by ideologies, that ‘targets’ the oppressed, can also help one predict how it behaves because such systemic social forces require an internal logic in order maintain itself in the social world. With respect to racial oppression in the United States, we still see systemic racial domination, exploitation, and marginalization, in strikingly similar dimensions of the social world. Mass incarceration and voter disenfranchisement, for instance, remain just as salient to DuBois’s analysis of reconstruction as they do the analysis of contemporary scholars.³⁸

B. Representing Injustice-relevant World-features

How would a given Σ within the theory of justice I propose in this essay look like? We could begin by sketching out which might constitute various injustice-relevant world-features of a social world with oppression – a theory of oppression compatible with the theory of justice could offer up such various features. Here’s what one example would look like. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young sketches what she calls ‘five faces of oppression,’ whereby each face indexes a distinct manner in which an oppressor can harm the oppressed. We could, then, take each face to be an injustice-relevant world-feature, such that for a given Σ $\{a=\text{exploitation, } b=\text{marginalization, } c=\text{powerlessness, } d=\text{cultural imperialism, } e=\text{violence}\}$.³⁹ Of course, these are not features to optimize, but to minimize. For the sake of the model in this paper, however, we could simply say that for an Σ with Young’s injustice-relevant world-features, $a, b, c, d,$ and e, Σ would evaluate worlds based on their *lack* of those features, such that the justice score of a given world would *negatively* correlate with those features.⁴⁰

Of course, this is not quite enough. Recall that rugged landscapes require a given Σ to not only evaluate actual and possible social worlds based on their relevant world-features, but also their proximity to the ideal. While the action-guiding theory of justice I propose in this essay is compatible with a variety of evaluative perspectives, so long as they adequately represent injustice-relevant world-features, the guiding ideal largely remains the same. For any Σ of the theory of justice, the ideal state of affairs u is a social world completely absent of systemic oppression.⁴¹

³⁸ See, for example, Alexander (2011) and Murakawa (2014).

³⁹ Young, (1990) pp. 48-62.

⁴⁰ Or the features could be reworked as negative features, such that $x=\text{the absence of exploitation, and so on.}$

⁴¹ An interesting question here arises: if representation of injustice-relevant features is necessary, how will the similarity ordering deal with conflict between injustice and justice relevant features? One salient example is a ubiquitous normative ideal of liberalism – impartiality with respect to agents and their conception of the good life – and the partiality that may be required in nonideal circumstances towards members of oppressed social groups. While this conflict lies beyond the scope of this paper and is downstream from my central argument, it is certainly an issue that needs addressing on a more substantive and clearer expression of my views here. To speculate, however, I would take the injustice relevant features to have priority, for both moral and epistemic reasons, when conflict arises. It could also be the case, I think, that evaluative perspectives that represent features of injustice will often come from the standpoint of the oppressed, and as such, the currency of *justice* claimed in those perspectives will not lead to conflict, as they arise from social conditions of inequality and injustice themselves. My thanks to Michael Moehler for raising this example, and for discussion of the implications, as

C. *The Sensitivity Constraint of Justice-relevant World-features*

A possible objection might be that adding injustice-relevant features to the similarity ordering will ultimately not be effective in overcoming the interdependency problem if the justice-relevant features are not the right sorts of features that will lead us to the ideal social world. In the following, I answer that concern here and argue theories of such justice-relevant world-features must be sensitive to injustice-relevant features.⁴² In other words, any justice-relevant world-features of given Σ are action-guiding only insofar as they are sensitive to the successful representation of the injustice-relevant world-features. Call this the *sensitivity constraint* on what justice-relevant features a given Σ can represent.⁴³

Consider equality; a justice-relevant feature any theory of justice for a liberal-democratic society must represent. I'll give two (albeit oversimplified) examples of a justice-relevant world-feature based on different conceptions of equality and show how one satisfies the sensitivity constraint, while the other does not. Let's begin with the latter.

Imagine if our theory of justice incorporated a version of luck-egalitarianism when evaluating a social world with oppression. This luck-egalitarian feature would focus on the distribution of resources from the 'lucky to the unlucky,' so as to correct for unearned material advantages accrued by lucky members of society.⁴⁴ It is difficult to see how this satisfies the sensitivity constraint. For instance, an ideal of equality centered on corrected *unearned* distributions of resources would be difficult to realize in our social world. Generally speaking, Stanley (2015) argues that societies with substantial levels of inequality impede our ability to capture what accumulations of wealth or political power are unearned.⁴⁵ To revisit our example of racial oppression in the United States, Lebron (2013) has argued that there exist in our social reality 'legitimizing myths,' whereby social hierarchies that result from any inequality (wealth or otherwise) rather than existing as "merely stratification," actually become "grounded in superiority and inferiority and formal distinctions become laden with norms."⁴⁶

Now imagine if our theory of justice incorporated an ideal of democratic equality. As Anderson (1999) explains, democratic equality "guarantees all law-abiding citizens effective access to the social conditions of their freedom at all times."⁴⁷ Moreover, Anderson argues that democratic equality expresses the "proper negative aim of egalitarian justice," which is not to correct the impact of luck on our lives but to "end

well as to Christian Matheis for the point about where and whose terms the currency of justice will be defined, i.e., the method and starting point of the justification of the evaluative perspective in question.

⁴² Sensitivity in the ideal/nonideal debate originally focused on the question of whether or not principles should be fact-sensitive. See Cohen (2003). Consider the sensitivity constraint here as specifically a question about sensitivity with respect to social facts about oppression, historical injustice, or the like.

⁴³ One potential area in the literature where something like the sensitivity constraint is at play is the discussion of the right *kinds* of abstractions and idealizations one ought to use when modeling the social world, specifically with respect to oppression. See Mills (2005), Swartzmann (2006), cf. O'Neill (1989).

⁴⁴ See, for example, Dworkin (1981) and Arneson (1989). Let's also bracket for the sake of argument other objectionable features of luck-egalitarianism as (usually) couched in a highly idealized theory of justice.

⁴⁵ Stanley (2015: Ch. 5-6). Stanley even recounts a recent study that showed even lottery-winners came to justify the desert of their (by definition!) luck-based winnings (pp. 226-228).

⁴⁶ Lebron (2013) p. 57.

⁴⁷ Anderson (1999) p. 289.

oppression, which by definition is socially imposed.”⁴⁸ This version of equality allows one to critically assess unjust social relations, including oppressive social hierarchies.⁴⁹ Anderson’s ideal of democratic equality, then, would satisfy the sensitivity constraint of the theory of justice I put forth in this essay.⁵⁰

V. Conclusion

In this essay, I argue that action-guiding theories of justice that evaluate social worlds with oppression must represent features of injustice. In doing so, I prove injustice to be a substantive and distinct philosophical notion from justice; when it comes to guiding action in nonideal social worlds with oppression, focusing on representing injustice can theoretically guide action towards the realization of a just world completely absent of oppression. To this end, focusing solely on features of justice cannot successfully guide action, because such approaches fail to overcome the interdependency problem. My approach, which involves application of a criterion for any evaluative perspective that represents features of injustice, and is pluralistic with respect to justice-relevant features (notwithstanding the sensitivity constraint) overcomes the interdependency problem specifically because of the addition of a third dimension to the similarity ordering, one that represents features of injustice, and thus navigates the rugged landscape in ways paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches cannot. Insofar as the third dimension changes the similarity ordering and subsequently the distance metric necessary for fulfilling the *proximity condition*, my approach fulfills this action-guiding condition in the context of social worlds with oppression in ways that both paradigmatically ideal and nonideal approaches to justice fail to fulfill. My approach, then, renders a theoretical solution for theories of justice that evaluate social worlds with oppression; in navigating the rugged landscape, or climbing the mountain, we can only realize a society absent of oppression, (or any ideal society beyond this) if we take seriously the injustices we currently and will continue to face.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 288.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 318-319 and 336-337.

⁵⁰ For another example of a justice-relevant feature that satisfies the sensitivity constraint, see Cudd (2006: Ch. 8) on freedom.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow*. The New Press, 2010.
- Anderson, Elizabeth S. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109.2 (1999): 287–337.
- Arneson, Richard J., 1989, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare," *Philosophical Studies* 56, pp. 77–93
- Cervera, Héctor, Jasna Lalić, and Santiago F. Elena. "Efficient Escape from Local Optima in a Highly Rugged Fitness Landscape by Evolving RNA Virus Populations." *Proc. R. Soc. B* 283.1836 (2016): 20160984.
- Cohen, G. A. "Facts and Principles." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31.3 (2003): 211–245.
- Cudd, Ann E. *Analyzing Oppression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print. Studies in Feminist Philosophy.
- DuBois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America (The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois)* Oxford University Press, 2014.
- . *The Souls of Black Folk*. Dover Press, 1994.
- Dworkin, Ronald. "What Is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10.4 (1981): 283–345.
- Epstein, Brian. *The Ant Trap*. Oxford University Press, 2015. Print. Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Science.
- Estlund, David. "Utopophobia." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42.2 (2014): 113 – 134.
- Frye, Marilyn. *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. The Crossing Press, 1983.
- Gaus, Gerald. *The Tyranny of the Ideal*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Gilbert, Pablo. "Comparative Assessments of Justice, Political Feasibility, and Ideal Theory." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15.1 (2012): 39–56.
- Gilbert, Pablo, and Holly Lawford-Smith. "Political Feasibility. A Conceptual Exploration." *Political Studies* 60.4 (2012): 809–825.
- Hallie, Phillip. "From Cruelty to Goodness." *The Hastings Report*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Jun., 1981), pp. 23-28.
- Hamlin, Alan, and Zofia Stemplowska. "Theory, Ideal Theory and the Theory of Ideals." *Political Studies Review* 10.1 (2012): 48–62.
- Haslanger, Sally. *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Kauffman, Stuart A. *The Origins of Order Self-Organization and Selection in Evolution*. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Kauffman, Stuart A., and Edward D. Weinberger. "The NK Model of Rugged Fitness Landscapes and Its Application to Maturation of the Immune Response." *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 141.2 (1989): 211–245.
- Lebron, Christopher. *The Color of Our Shame: Race and Justice in Our Time*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Mills, Charles W. "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology." *Hypatia* 20.3 (2005): 165–184.
- Murakawa, Naomi. *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
- O'Neill, Onora. "Abstraction, Idealization and Ideology in Ethics." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* 22 (1987): 55–69.

- Pateman, Carole, and Charles W. Mills. *Contract and Domination*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.
- . *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Print. The John Dewey Essays in Philosophy.
- . *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Schwartzman, Lisa H. *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.
- Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.
- . "What Do We Want From a Theory of Justice?" *Journal of Philosophy* 103.5 (2006): 215–238.
- Shklar, Judith. *The Faces of Injustice*. Yale University Press, 1990.
- Simmons, A. John. "Ideal and Nonideal Theory." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38.1 (2010): 5–36.
- Stanley, Jason. *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. Print.
- Swift, Adam. "The Value of Philosophy in Nonideal Circumstances." *Social Theory and Practice* 34.3 (2008): 363–387.
- Wiens, David. "Against Ideal Guidance." *Journal of Politics* 77.2 (2015): 433–446. Print.
- . "Assessing Ideal Theories: Lessons From the Theory of Second Best." *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics* 15.2 (2016): 132–149. Print.
- . "Political Ideals and the Feasibility Frontier." *Economics and Philosophy* 31.3 (2015): 447–477. Print.
- . "Prescribing Institutions Without Ideal Theory." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20.1 (2012): 45–70. Print.
- Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press. 1990.
- Zack, Naomi. *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015.