Subversive Humor

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ABSTRACT
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Oppression is easily recognized. That is, at least, when oppression results from overt, consciously professed racism, for example, in which violence, explicit exclusion from economic opportunities, denial of adequate legal access, and open discrimination perpetuate the subjugation of a group of people. There are relatively clear legal remedies to such oppression. But this is not the case with covert oppression where the psychological harms and resulting legal and economic exclusion are every bit as real, but caused by concealed mechanisms subtly and systematically employed. In many cases, those with power and privilege use cultural stereotypes in order to sustain an unjust status quo. This is so even if the biases are implicit, automatic, and contrary to the consciously professed beliefs of the stereotyper. Furthermore, since many of these biases are not consciously reasoned into one's system of beliefs, and since they are notoriously difficult to bring to consciousness and dislodge via direct, logical confrontation, some other creative means of resistance is needed.

I argue that an indirect and imaginative route through subversive humor offers a means to raise consciousness about covert oppression and the mechanisms underlying it, reveal the errors of those with power who complacently sustain systematic oppression, and even open those people up to changing their minds. Subversive humor confronts serious matters, but in a playful manner that fosters creative and critical thinking, and cultivates a desire and skill for recognizing incongruities between our professed ideals and a reality that does not meet those standards. Successful subversive wits create fictional scenarios that highlight such moral incongruities, but, like philosophical thought experiments, they reveal a moral truth that also holds in the real world. Such humor offers opportunities for "border crossing" where the audience is encouraged to see from the perspectives of marginalized people who, because they inhabit ambiguous spaces in between the dominant and subordinate spheres, are in an epistemically privileged position with respect to matters of oppression. Subversive humorists open their audiences to the lived experiences of others, uncover the absurdities of otherwise *covert* oppression, and appeal to our desire to be truthful and just.

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INTRODUCTION

On the face of it there is nothing amusing about oppression; what has humor to do with systemic subjugation? In this dissertation I make the case that a subset of humor that I will refer to as "subversive humor", can be used as a means to combat oppression. This requires an analysis of the sort of oppression I have in mind and a specific view of humor.

In the first chapter I am concerned with the ambiguity that exists between what I will refer to as *overt* and *covert* oppression. The term "oppression" is both ambiguous and vague, as there is more than one way in which an individual can be oppressed and there are degrees of oppression. Oppression can refer to systematic constraints on people belonging to social groups that are maintained by violent force found in slavery or colonization, e.g., or by the everyday practices of well-meaning people (Young 41), or both. The former constitute overt oppression while the latter are covert. It can be quite difficult to completely separate these kinds of oppression, but the key differences I am interested in have to do with the manner in which repressive mechanisms become manifest. Violence, or the constant, and clearly *intentional* threat of it, plays a causally efficacious role in overt oppression. This is not the case with covert oppression. This type of psychological oppression persists even without the use of explicit physical violence or legal constraint against those without power or privilege.[1]

The goal of the first chapter is not to offer a complete analysis of oppression as such, but to start with a general descriptive account of the interrelation between violent and overt instances

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[1] The term "privilege" is also ambiguous and vague. Briefly, privilege, like oppression, comes in degrees. In the context of this work, I view privilege as both an inheritance from either overt or covert oppression, and as an ongoing element that sustains oppression. It is a lot like money; it helps to have some in order to make some. The more you have the easier it is to get much more. I follow Shannon Sullivan (2006) and Peggy McIntosh here: "Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do. Access to privilege doesn't determine one's outcomes, but it is definitely an asset that makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has will result in something positive for them" (McIntosh 1988). The term "privilege" is ambiguous and vague, and thus, so too is "underprivileged." In addition, "underprivileged" makes little sense without an "overprivileged", but as Tim Wise sagaciously notes (2008, 63), we do not even have a word for the latter, as my Spell-check confirms. When I use "privileged" and "underprivileged" I am referring to oppressor and oppressed respectively, well aware that such terms are vague.

of oppression and the less visible, even at times nonconscious, forms of psychological oppression.[2] The explicit kinds of harm are in some ways easier to resist, certainly to recognize, as there is little question as to who is responsible for the oppression, who benefits from it, and who suffers from it, while non-violent psychological oppression can be much more subtle, and of paramount importance here, there is often an incongruity between the repressive actions/words of oppressors and the professed egalitarian beliefs of those same people.[3] I will use the existential-phenomenological concepts of "spirit of seriousness" and "ontological expansiveness" as explanatory motifs throughout this dissertation, focusing principally on the psychological harms of oppression because in many ways they can be as damaging as blatant oppression. Moreover, due to remaining hidden within everyday practices and stereotypes, these harms can continue unchallenged, especially if the violent facet of oppression has dissipated or was never even a factor.[4] But, there are similar mechanisms at play in both visible and psychological manifestations of oppression, and the background from which these underlying forces emerge is the focus of the first two chapters.

In Chapter 2, I will continue the analysis of covert oppression by incorporating an investigation into stereotypes (cultural implicit stereotypes in particular) and their roles in creating and sustaining psychological oppression. While the concepts of implicit bias and stereotyping are well-known among psychologists, cognitive scientists, and social scientists generally, it is only recently that they have been explored in-depth philosophically. I think

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[2] That is, while violent oppression usually also leads to psychological harms, it is not the case that psychological harms presume overt physical violence. Generally speaking, the sort of oppression I will be concentrating upon is what Jean Harvey refers to as "civilized" oppression (Harvey 1999, 2010), or the "psychological harms" addressed by Ann Cudd (2006, 55-81), or oppression in what George Yancy calls the "context of the quotidian" (Yancy 2008, 847). I will concentrate primarily on anti-black racism as paradigm cases; I will occasionally point to other instances of oppression such as sexism or heterosexism when applicable.

[3] Granted, this distinction is somewhat oversimplified for introductory purposes.

[4] Thus, it calls for a different mode of resistance than the traditional means of protest against the barefaced oppression found in slavery, for example. Revealing the connections and contrasts between these "faces" (Young 48-65) of oppression will set the stage for later chapters in which I assess the underlying mechanism in stereotypes, or faulty, implicit heuristic thinking, that perpetuate oppression, and later argue that subversive humor, that which is used by or on behalf of those marginalized and without power, can be used as a means to fight against systemic subjugation.

connecting these ideas with the existentialist and phenomenological concepts of spirit of

seriousness and ontological expansiveness will be fruitful in the discussion of the hidden sorts of

psychological oppression that writers such as Harvey, Young, McIntosh, Cudd, Yancy, Sullivan,

and others describe. Moreover, quick, efficient, heuristic/schematic[5] thinking, the sort common

with implicit biases and stereotypes, is also found in humor of all sorts. Thus, the investigation

into biases and stereotypes will serve multiple but related purposes: it will help to further explain

why psychological harms are often difficult to detect, but are widely experienced by those who

are underprivileged, as they can result from nonconscious habitual behaviors, and it will start to

provide insight into how humor works, setting the stage for an analysis of subversive humor

which reveals errors in our hidden social heuristics.

      In Chapter 3, I will defend a version of the Incongruity Theory of humor, setting the

groundwork for the final two chapters in which I focus on subversive humor in particular. Humor

can be especially useful by inspiring collaboration among humorists from the margins,[6] as it both

relies upon and at the same time challenges similar background expectations, often through

exposing and exploiting cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, those responsible for the psychological

harms discussed in Chapter 2 are likely to share many of the desires and expectations of those

who are marginalized, and are thus not as likely as overt oppressors, e.g., to respond negatively to

the humorist's recognition of incongruity between one's beliefs and actions, for instance.

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[5]I will often use "heuristic" and "schema" interchangeably, although there is technically a distinction: in general, a schema is used to organize/categorize perceptions, and can do so with limited information sometimes by filling in *false* data which nevertheless may appear plausible in the situation. A heuristic is used to make judgments about given perceptions. Schemas and heuristics are most often used in novel situations where one is presented with stimuli that require some sort of short-cut in order to make sense of the quickly processed information that needs to fit into a coherent pattern with what one already knows, or more accurately, *expects.* As it turns out, this is the case more often than not, as finite fallible humans almost *never* have complete and relevant knowledge even in the most contrived laboratory conditions, and thus our proclivity to mental short-cuts. For simplicity, I will take the various nuances among scripts, frames, the background, schemas, and heuristics to be minimal enough to substitute heuristics for all of them unless otherwise noted. The role of heuristics in humor will be made clear in Chapter 4.

[6] Henceforth, this phrase and others like it will include those humorists who act/perform on behalf of the marginalized even if they themselves are part of a privileged group.

In Chapter 4, I will argue that humor can act as a means to highlight the errors found in stereotypes or flawed social heuristics that contribute to psychological oppression, and can even subvert the often implicit mind-set that sustains an unjust status quo. Here I will continue with a theoretical analysis of humor and its relation to oppression, especially related to epistemic closure, hubris, and a central element of that unmerited pride, first-person exceptionalism biases.

In Chapter 5, I will address in general terms a few concerns about my view that subversive humor can be a means for consciousness-raising and attitude change. In response to such worries, I will show how subversive humor accomplishes most if not all of the following: it provides a means to detect committed stereotypical beliefs in active mental spaces, motivates appropriate emotions in the audience, collaboratively flouts conventions and engages the audience to find/create meaning in non-bona-fide, indirect language, and as a variety of thought experiment, it acts as a device of persuasion. In the final section of Chapter 5, I will borrow from Maria Lugones' work on playful "world-travelling" and W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of "double consciousness" to make the case that subversive humor can facilitate an openness and cooperative attitude among an otherwise closed, even adversarial audience. That is, such humor can foster the inclination and even desire to listen to others and, if only for brief moments, adopt their point of view.

CHAPTER 1: HUMOR AND THE HARMS OF OPPRESSION

First, in this chapter I will briefly consider the case of Frederick Douglass, who suffered under the overt system of subjugation in American slavery. This will stand as a contrast to the less visible forms of oppression, but it will also reveal important parallels between them. In this case, I am interested in the act of essentializing oneself and others, especially others who are deemed inferior by nature, and who are thus seen as rightfully in their low-status, out-group position by oppressors. That is, as I will explain more below, people are categorized by virtue of presumed inherent unchanging essences premade by nature of God. The main difference between essentializing in violent oppression is that the act and outcomes are explicit; with instances of covert oppression, as I will argue in part II of this chapter, the essentializing is still present, but implicit. I will make the case that the systematic psychological harms are real instances of oppression, and thus there is real moral culpability on the part of oppressors, even though such systematic oppression can be hard to see on the level of individual interaction.[7] So, in contrast to a purely individualist approach, discussed in part III, which is over-reliant on person-to-person interactions, this will lead to part IV and an analysis of socially constructed groups that are necessary to explain oppression. I will argue that the failure to see such harms inflicted on individuals due to their group membership is largely a result of the actions of those in power who construct norms/standards that benefit themselves politically and socially at the expense of others. But at the same time, these constructions create epistemic (and moral) blind spots for those with social and political power. I end this chapter with a brief discussion on the laughter of ridicule in what Jean Harvey calls "civilized" oppression, or psychological harms which exist without force or legal constraints. This will tie together the concepts and arguments previously outlined and lead into the next chapter which delves deeper into the essentializing role that implicit biases and stereotypes play in creating and sustaining psychological oppression.

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[7] I will show in Chapter 2 that privileged stereotypers are responsible for the psychological harms of implicit biases as well.

I.   Essentializing Self and Other in Overt Oppression

There is no controversy in the claim that slaves in the U.S. prior to 1865 were oppressed by the "unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant" (Douglass 1994, 286). Most of the material/physical methods of sustaining slavery are well-known (Douglass 1994; 2003; Carpio 2008; Watkins 1999; Yancy 2002): continual beatings, whippings, lynchings and constant threat of said acts in periods of "calm"; forced separation of families; ubiquitous legal proscriptions against learning to read and write or have the future open to one's own projects; denial of safe-haven even within the borders of "free states" (due to the *Dred Scott* decision and the Fugitive Slave Act); in short, it was a deliberate *de jure* system designed to dehumanize. In these situations, one group of people who happen to have been born with a certain body type[8] is *used* for the benefit of another group of people who, by accident of birth, happen to have a different body type; the members of the out-group are defined as Other and summed up as *essentially* inferior. There is little disagreement over the use of the term "oppression" in the cases of slavery or colonization; one group has all of the *unearned* power and privilege while the oppressed has none, or at least significantly less of either.

The physical form of those deemed inferior constitutes their visible essence. But this is not a simple passive perception of the objectively observable *sine qua non* that ostensibly constitutes the oppressed. Rather, a visual schema[9] is constructed by those with power to re-present others based upon a particular feature taken to be an indispensible quality, which is skin color in the case of slavery and colonization. By analogy, this practice is consciously carried out in a similar fashion to an Aristotelian teleological attempt to define a kind of animal based on

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[8] Later, the "One Drop Rule" would accompany the purely superficial categorization based on skin color (Mills 46-7). In both cases, however, contingent historical states of affairs led to the rather arbitrary racial categorization. A similar case can be made regarding systematic sexism that relies upon strict, unquestioned gender boundaries (De Beauvoir 1964, especially Parts IV and V; Frye 27-33).

[9] I will concentrate more on schemas and stereotypes in Chapter 2, but to put it briefly, schemas are loose theories we have about categories; they represent the prior knowledge or *expectations* one has leading into an experience and the manner in which one interprets it, usually in a putatively unambiguous manner. It is important to accentuate expectations here, as one can be taught to be prejudiced against others even prior to seeing them (Corlett 581).

essential features in a way that precludes the possibility of evolution or dynamism. That is, the animal is precisely and unambiguously *defined* as a natural kind of being *designed* for a specific purpose and not subject to change; there are no half-breeds in this attempt to "carve at the natural joints" of the biological world. This is teleological in that the entity is defined in terms of its final cause, or its purpose, which in this anti-Existentialist approach, presumes a static essence and function of each type of being whose essence precedes its existence, to reverse Sartre's famous dictum (see Yancy 2002, 297, 309). While such definitional techniques are problematic even for non-human animals, as the boundaries among various species, for instance, can be quite fuzzy,[10] it is even more unhelpful and insidious when applied to human beings, the most complex and dynamic creatures on the planet. Hence, many slave-holders and colonizers attempt to dissolve this problem by re-defining the ontological status of lesser beings through a visual schema that freezes them in place. The oppressors, those who have the power to control the categorizing language, resort to "zoological terms" (Fanon 1963, 7)[11] which construct the spaces (mental and physical) that simultaneously constrain the genuine options of the oppressed and absolve the oppressors in their *use* of the oppressed.

A brief encounter with the writings of Frederick Douglass will show how the slave-holding oppressors used brute force to maintain power and how they essentialized the slaves to justify their "Peculiar Institution."[12] It will also reveal the psychological harms against the oppressed that fester well beyond the tangible instances of outright violence against the slaves'

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[10] See (Van Deemter 20-30; Meynell 6-8; and Schneider 84-98 on psychological essentialism—"the idea that people act as if categories have essences even if they do not" p. 85).

[11] See also (Monahan 2011, 77-89) on the political motivations for purity of racial categories: "On the more individual level, the politics of purity demands an account of identity that is purged of ambiguity and indeterminacy—one that is purely internal" (88). Seeing that there is a lack of clarity regarding categorization of others slows our thinking down. As I will show below, the oppressor can avoid this uncomfortable feeling of doubt and even anxiety, by habituating oneself to unambiguous stereotypical thinking. It should be noted that in this dissertation I do not delineate between cultural and biological essentialism, as I agree with Mills (2005, 547) against Corlett (2005) that both constitute forms of essentialism contrived to prioritize the value of different groups within a hierarchy.

[12] It is interesting that this phrase caught on in the South; it reveals the dissonance between the actions and beliefs that sustained slavery, such as the universalizing and essentializing of the subjugated black bodies, and the awareness, at some level at least, that such a system was odd, particular, "*our* peculiar institution", thus not universal after all.

bodies. In his various autobiographies, Douglass offers an in-depth account of the horrors of

slavery in the United States in the 1800's. This is clearly an illustration of overt oppression by

force in which a person in the form of a slave is turned into a commodity that is literally bought

and sold. The enslaved person sees all options through a prism of bondage that precludes him

from viewing his future as open and subject to his own making. This point is made evident in

Douglass' description of his early encounter with the slave-breaker Covey:

> I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this
> discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul,
> and spirit. My *natural elasticity* was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to
> read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of
> slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute! (Douglass 1994,
> 58, my italics)[13]

The phrase "natural elasticity" might be understood in multiple ways. In one sense, Douglass

appears to lose his ability to snap back into physical shape after continual bodily assault. A large

part of the role of the breaker is to quite literally tame the bodies of the "unmanageable" people

who do not immediately fall in line with what is expected of them in their newly defined

ontological status as a slave. However, Covey relied far more on psychological tactics (Douglass

1994, 57, 66-7; see also Sullivan 2006, 25-7 quoting de Tocqueville), which of course utilized the

constant threat of looming violence, but which could not invariably depend on overwhelming

physical cruelty for fear of ruining the masters' "investments." So, he and other slave-drivers

used what Simone De Beauvoir refers to as the "mystifications of the serious," or psychological

ploys and myths that rely upon absolutes that cannot be questioned and against which rebellion

eventually comes to be seen as inconceivable. That is, they devised ways in which to convince the

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[13] Notice there is a transformation but the masters could not wholly dehumanize the slaves for fear of
limiting their output; so they were reduced to part human part animal—"breaking him in halfway" (Sartre
1961, L). Coupled with the acts and threats of violence are the weapons of psychological warfare, shame,
humiliation, and fear, which can act as self-degrading mechanisms within the oppressed themselves. See
(Sullivan 2006, 42), where she describes Cynthia Willett's notion of "racial hubris" which divides "the
African person into human and subhuman parts to produce maximal psychological pleasure for the white
slaveholder." Also, compare this with Marilyn Frye on the oppression of women: "What the exploiter needs
is that the will and intelligence of the victim be disengaged from the projects of resistance and escape but
that they not be simply broken or destroyed" (Frye 60).

slaves themselves that they are a certain sort of unchanging and inferior being, and, importantly, whatever it is that they are, that is what they *should* be.

I take Douglass' phrase "natural elasticity" to be explicable under certain existentialist notions.[14] That is, I think Douglass' sense of the loss of his physical, mental, and spiritual suppleness results from the cumulative effects of what Jean-Paul Sartre (1977, 796), Simone De Beauvoir (1976, 35-7), and Lewis Gordon (1999, 22-4; 2000, 122-5) will later call the "spirit of seriousness."[15] Under this attitude, the oppressor, and often the oppressed, fails to recognize the dynamic, flexible, and contingent characteristics of human persons that challenge the idea that we have unchanging natures, some presumed to be "superior" to others. The spirit of seriousness is a kind of "bad faith"[16] (Sartre 1977, 86-116; Gordon 1999) or "false consciousness" (Cudd 178-80) in which one is either purposely rationalizing regarding the supposed static nature which bounds the identity of those thought to be inferior in order to sustain the status quo, or one has become habituated to automatically categorize others into an inferior out-group through cultural presuppositions, biases, and stereotypes that more often than not rely upon demonstrably false beliefs. However, as I will argue in Chapter 2, even if one maintains pernicious stereotypes as a result of cultural influences, this does not necessarily mean there is no *commitment* at some level to such false beliefs by the individual.

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[14] The insightful connection between Frederick Douglass and Existentialism is made by Gordon (2000, 41-67; see also Yancy's [2002] "Beauvoirian Examination" of Frederick Douglass). However, there are comments by Douglass that might run counter to the view that he can be read as an existentialist, such as his many citations of scriptures alluding to Natural Law, Providence, and Manifest Destiny. Such references might reveal a spirit of seriousness; a concept I will explain below.

[15] See also (Monahan 2011, 45-7) for a precursor to Sartre's "spirit of seriousness" in Nietzsche's "spirit of gravity." Interestingly, I think Arthur Schopenhauer almost makes this point well prior to the existentialist stipulative definition of "serious", which I will analyze in Chapter 3. Henceforth, "serious" and any variant will imply the existential sense unless otherwise noted.

[16] On the existential account, and one I will in part argue for in Chapter 2, one is in bad faith when they fail to accept the fact that they are aware, at least at some level, of their own responsibility for the role they play in sustaining oppression (see Gordon 1999, 5, 29-44). See also (Gordon 2000, 85): "Our first observation is that racism is a form of dehumanization, and that dehumanization is a form of bad faith—for to deny the humanity of a human being requires lying to ourselves about something of which we are aware." I would qualify this last part with "*should* be aware."

According to Sartre, "The spirit of seriousness has two characteristics: it considers values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity, and it transfers the quality of 'desirable' from the ontological structure of things to their simple material constitution" (Sartre 1977, 796). These characteristics assume that human beings are simply static objects in the world wholly dependent upon certain and unchanging material conditions, and that any values or meaning are naturally laid down in such a way that individual persons are presumed to be bereft of responsibility for them. Furthermore, this notion of seriousness includes a desire for fixed essences of self and other, and importantly, this desire can be held nonconsciously by the serious.[17] This frees the powerful from having to think very deeply about, much less justify, their violence against others. But, as I will argue below, this mind-set ignores the contingent nature of values and norms created, *and continually amended*, by choices and interactions among human beings.

Frantz Fanon reveals the underlying spirit of seriousness in European imperialism, e.g., in which the colonized are constantly battered down by militaristic and police forces. But, as colonized, she is also essentialized through stereotypes which reify "absolute evil" in the bodily form of the "native" (Fanon 1963, 6; see also Sullivan 2004a, 11). In other words, the colonizers are *morally* obligated to control, violently if necessary, the "malevolent powers" of the colonized, and this becomes the norm in a contrived Manichean struggle. Violence is normalized through the faulty essentializing of the colonized bodies. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues that violence is inevitable in oppression even if that violence is institutionalized as he views it under colonialism. He sees violence as a mechanism in the very language of the oppressors and indeed in all forms of oppression (Fanon 1963, 4, 8, 27, 34, and 57 for the violence of capitalism). This

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[17] For consistency, I will follow Sullivan's (2006) use of "nonconscious" as a synonym of un-, pre-,-and sub-conscious, with the understanding that it can be ambiguous. By this term, I do not mean a mental state of which one is forever unaware, and I do mean to distinguish it from the psychoanalytic reification of "The Unconscious." In this way, the desire can be considered a "dispositional" state. A further extension of this attitude will be addressed in Chapters 2-5; the serious are also those who protect their cherished ideas and institutions by *sacrilizing* them. This can preclude them (and others) from laughing about, and thus, thinking critically about such protected spaces.

leads to the predictable violent response from the oppressed.[18] Jean-Paul Sartre makes similar claims (1976, 720, 731-4; 1961) regarding the inevitable exploitation of economic markets, but also concerning the violence of racism and the colonized people of Algeria, e.g., whose every action/re-action is constrained by the oppressive colonizer. Virtually every thought of the oppressed is affected by the belligerent colonizers in some way.

Other writers have been less adamant that oppression as such must be so clearly visible and/or violent. Iris Young captures the sort of oppression relevant to this dissertation: "In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a *well-intentioned* liberal society…oppression also refers to systematic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant" (Young 41, my emphasis). Likewise, Ann Cudd defines oppression *simpliciter* in terms of direct, external, and concrete forces which constrain one based upon group affiliation, *as well as* institutionally structured constraints through indirect psychological forces (Cudd 52). Of course, for both Fanon and Sartre, the mechanism of oppression need not always be visible, but the constant threat of violence bubbling to the surface is always on the minds of the oppressed. What distinguishes Young's and Cudd's description of the hidden forces of oppression from Fanon's and Sartre's, is that systematic psychological oppression does not necessarily depend upon an oppressor consciously and willfully being vicious. Again, it can be quite difficult to completely separate covert from overt oppression, as the psychological trauma that results from the long-lasting physical, legal, economic, and many other unconcealed tactics of oppressors, can lead to a perpetual cycle of mental oppression that can later become difficult to track. This benefits the oppressors who can maintain the status quo,

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[18] But as I will show in Chapter 2, Fanon is clearly concerned with the non-violent psychological harms created and sustained by insidious stereotypes as well, especially as documented in *Black Skin, White Masks.*

but now without the use of violence—the oppressed oppress themselves.[19] Furthermore, those with power by virtue of belonging to a particular group might simply be part of a system that deliberately oppresses; but without proper (or any) goading, these individuals will (choose to) remain ignorant of the role they play in harming others.

For De Beauvoir, expanding on Sartre's conception of the spirit of seriousness, oppression comes from those whom she refers to as serious people who attempt to find comfort in the firm, unchanging foundations and values that are seen to be pre-determined.[20] De Beauvoir considers one of the means a despot has to preclude the possibility of rebellion: "In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature. When a conservative wishes to show that the proletariat is not oppressed, he declares that the present distribution of wealth is a *natural* fact and that there is thus no means of rejecting it" (De Beauvoir 1976, 83; see also Douglass 2003, 92).[21] In a similar fashion, when a slave holder wishes to keep his "property" in line, the most efficient way is to make her believe she is a thing and that there is nothing that she can, nor more importantly, *ought* to do about it.[22]

The essentializing spirit of seriousness is not eliminated simply because the violence inherent in systematic slavery, e.g., has been legally proscribed. The attempt to control through definition, through language and law continues. Consider the example of the *Loving v. Virginia*

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[19] There is significant evidence that internalized stereotype-threat has long-term negative effects for those who have been habitually marginalized.

[20] Lewis Gordon adds: "The spirit of seriousness emerges when there is a collapse in the divide between values and the material world. In such instances, the material world becomes a cause of values and their absolute limitations…" (Gordon 2000, 69). See also (Yancy 2008, 845).

[21] It is interesting that prior to the economic philosophy of Keynes, it was assumed that a certain level of poverty among a given population was inevitable and in fact *natural*; hence, no government *should* meddle with the economic system, and, as a corollary of sorts, no poor person should feel systematically oppressed by a government anymore than she would feel exploited by the *oppressiveness* of earthquakes, hurricanes, or gravity.

[22] Here is De Beauvoir on this point: "The slave is submissive when one has succeeded in mystifying him in such a way that his situation does not seem to him to be imposed by men, but to be immediately given by nature, by the gods, by the powers against whom revolt has no meaning" (De Beauvoir 1976, 85; see also 1964 253-63).

1967 court decision on interracial marriage,[23] which reversed Virginia's statute designed to prevent marriages between persons solely on the basis of racial classification. It was found that neither the institution of marriage nor the individuals joined therein are subject to an eternally fixed designation; both the language and its referents evolve. Prior to this reversal, a grand jury in Virginia indicted the Lovings, a white man and a black woman, who had married in D.C., but decided to live in Virginia:

> On January 6, 1959, the Lovings pleaded guilty to the charge [miscegenation] and were sentenced to one year in jail; however, the trial judge suspended the sentence for a period of 25 years on the condition that the Lovings leave the State and not return to Virginia together for 25 years. He stated in an opinion that: 'Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.' (*Loving v. Virginia*)

This is a trial judge who consciously espouses the myths found by those serious men proposing, in this case, a *super*natural cause of one's condition and identity. Notice the similarities between this view of 1959 with the perspective proclaimed in 1856 by the "Reverend" Thornton Stringfellow in his *A Scriptural View of Slavery*: "I shall be able to make it appear that the institution of slavery has received…the sanction of the Almighty…that it was incorporated into the only National Constitution which ever emanated from God… [and that] its legality was recognized, and its relative duties regulated, by Jesus Christ in his kingdom" (Stringfellow 88).[24] For the faithful, slaves included, there is no more certain justification than that which comes directly from the Almighty or one of his presumed spokespersons. "We might call this a 'super-mystification'" (Kramer 2013) that exculpates the oppressors who are seen to be as powerless as the meek to tear asunder what God has wrought. After all, to paraphrase the Bible, there will always be the poor (and oppressed) among us.

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[23] http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=388&invol=1 Accessed 1/28/13.
[24] See Douglass' (1852, 28-9) description of this: "It is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, man-stealers and *thugs*."

The "super-mystifications" appeal to divinely fixed essences, and the "naturalizing" mystifications erroneously equate the contingent, *man*-made situation of the oppressed with natural disasters like earthquakes or hurricanes. In both cases the oppressor essentializes the bodies of others (Fanon 1967, 112, 125-7; Gordon 1999, especially Chapter 7; Young 127, 157, 169; Card 111), and while they might not (any longer) rely on brute force, they are both still explicit tools of oppression in which the attitudes of the oppressors are *congruous* with their behavior, verbal or otherwise. That is, there is a conscious intention on their part, albeit often heavily encrusted with fallacy and rationalizing, to maintain the status quo in which power and privilege remain in their hands to the detriment of the oppressed. With respect to the focus of this dissertation, we can see that the spirit of seriousness in its relationship to oppression emerges in three often interconnected and systematic ways: (1) brutal force of physical slavery, colonization, or rape[25] which is "justified" by specious arguments like those found in (2), that attempt to literally dehumanize others; (2) explicit psychological warfare like that used by slave-drivers, reverend Stringfellow, colonizers, and the trial judge above, who presume to define the character and identity of the oppressed in a manner consistent with the unambiguous beliefs of those oppressors; and (3) implicit psychological biases found among everyday social interactions that can be *incongruous* with the professed, conscious, liberal and tolerant attitudes and beliefs of those who nevertheless play a part in the oppression of others.[26] I will concentrate primarily upon issues concerning (3), as these constitute the sorts of oppression most in need of being recognized by oppressors and others.

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[25] See Card (99-104) on the institutionalization of rape.

[26] Just because one is aware that stereotypical thinking is politically incorrect, this does not mean that such beliefs are never found in socially/politically cognizant individuals. Indeed, this is largely the force of implicit biases; they are causally efficacious even though they might run counter to the consciously espoused beliefs of the individual in question. It is not clear whether or to what degree something like willful ignorance, "false consciousness", or "bad faith" plays with respect to 2 and 3; this will be a question raised again in subsequent chapters.

II.   Oppression "in the Context of the Quotidian"

The phrase in quotes above is from George Yancy's "Elevators, Social Spaces, and Racism: A Philosophical Analysis" (2008, 844). In this paper, Yancy argues that racism is not simply a matter of consciously held beliefs causally affecting one's purposeful, overt behavior. Rather, from his phenomenological approach, Yancy describes the "lived experience" of racism in the common spaces constructed in large part by the "white gaze", non-conscious bodily reactions, and everyday language, which can belie the consciously espoused claims of equality. Yancy borrows from Lewis Gordon and Shannon Sullivan in his description of the role that one's body plays in racist interactions in mundane circumstances. The term "racist" and "mundane" might seem incompatible when used in the same context, but it is part of Yancy's goal to bring to light, at first in descriptive experiential form and later offering a possible prescription in response, the often subtle forms of racism experienced by black people today. Indeed, racism has gone from the blatantly visible forms found in slavery and Jim Crow, to the subtle and often nonconscious *transactional*[27] habits of people within routine contexts. Focused attention to racism submerged within common experiences is needed especially with the *second* election of a black President of the United States. This is because there is now an environment that, to the powerful at least, appears to be "post-racial"[28] and thus devoid of "real" racism among the majority, and claims to the contrary constitute cynically "playing the race card."[29]

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[27] Sullivan employs this term to connote the "dynamic, co-constitutive relationship between the bio-physical organism and its environments" (2006, 77). That is, the individual or *atom*, is never completely shut off by rigid borders from other groups or the "environments [which] help constitute" that individual (2006, 176).

[28] For instance, see Adam Serwer's" piece in *Mother Jones* on the latest Supreme Court decision on key sections of the Voting Rights Act: http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2013/02/supreme-court-poised-declare-racism-over. Accessed 6/25/13.

[29] Somewhat incongruously, there is also the claim made by the same people in this *post-racial* society that President Obama has only been re-elected *because* he is black! See "Washington Post columnist and African-American pioneer George Will believes that President Obama is only leading in the polls because he is black": http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/419766/october-03-2012/george-will-s-political-post-racial-journalism (Accessed 2/3/13). See also (Wise 2010) and (Monahan 2011, 5), referencing the comments of the same George Will that the election of a black president has rendered race irrelevant. The inconsistency of Will's claims is glaring, especially when humorously re-presented by

According to Sullivan, invoking Fanon, the condition of the oppressed has been constructed by systematic "historic-racial schema that lurks behind the 'normal' bodily schema" (Sullivan 2004a, 14). That is, the cultural myths or mystifications created by whites form lasting stereotypes that constrain the bodily movements of the oppressed who live in a world in which racism is systematically *secreted*.[30] "Systematic" does not have to entail a conscious top-down central-planning tyranny of the totalitarian sort that political philosophers like Isaiah Berlin, Friedrich Hayek, or Robert Nozick, for instance, worry about. Rather, the norms that slowly arise and become fixed in the (un)consciousnesses of the masses are usually sufficient, even though there is no obvious oppressive pattern established. Indeed, the opposite pattern of egalitarianism is what we see on the surface, at least since the Civil Rights and Women's Movements. So, while there has been success in publicly *speaking* about the problems with using skin color or body type as a determinant for power *in the past*, this legal and discursive progress has occurred simultaneously with a systematically buried (Young 124) element of racism: the "constitution" (Gordon 2011, 20) of blacks by whites, through white people non-consciously being-whitely-in-the-world.[31] That phrase requires some unpacking.

Sullivan focuses on the connection between privilege, oppression, and habit. In an important way, to whites, their whiteness is not visible to themselves, because it does not need to be in this system which privileges them as the norm. But nonwhites cannot help but consider the role that their skin color might play in how they will be seen (or not seen) by others. In fact, this

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Stephen Colbert. See also (Duncombe 161, quoting the Onion) "'on the occasion of Rosa Parks's death, as her body lay in wait in the Capitol Rotunda and President Bush placed a wreath upon her casket, "Now We Can Finally Put Civil Rights Behind Us."'"

[30] This homonym, while ambiguous, is helpful as both meanings here are operative: the negative bodily schemas have *surreptitiously oozed* into the lived situations (not just the "spatiality of positions", as Sullivan puts it 2004a, 14, borrowing from Merleau-Ponty) of the oppressed.

[31] According to (Sullivan 2006, 160, borrowing from Marilyn Frye), being white refers to paleness of skin color while "being-whitely" refers to 'a deeply ingrained way of being in the world' that includes behaviors, habits, and dispositions." This is a contingent relationship so one's being white physically does not necessitate being-whitely.

lack of recognition of one's whiteness on the part of whites becomes the habitual[32] way of

"being-whitely", as Sullivan calls it, in contrast to just being white. This is in stark contrast to the

way that nonwhites (and women) must constantly judge themselves on a scale originally created

with black, female, old, etc., on the "degenerate" end of the spectrum, while white, male, affluent,

etc., properties typically representing the groups of those who devised the scales, are seen as the

standard against which all else is judged (Young 124-30). Anything deviating from these

historically constructed norms is viewed as different and thus in need of a qualifier.[33] This is the

habitual mindset, even if not fully conscious, of white liberals who seek greater integration of

schools, e.g.: "…using 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' as code words for non-white people

continues the racist practice of assuming that white people are the neutral, homogenous standard

against which all other, 'diverse,' peoples should be measured" (Sullivan 2006, 194).[34] These

cases involve the constraining-without-overt-coercion aspect of psychological harms.

      Yancy analyzes an instance in which he is alone in an elevator with a white woman who

"gives away" her genuine feelings about him through non-conscious bodily posture; a

communicative action that does more than convey her attitude, it also acts to constrain Yancy's

identity:

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[32] Here I follow Sullivan's conception of habit which will inform later portions of this dissertation:
"Understood pragmatically, habit is an organism's subconscious predisposition to transact with its physical,
social, political, and natural worlds in particular ways. Habit is equivalent to neither routine or 'bad habit,'
as the term is often used. Habits instead are that which constitute the self" (Sullivan 2006, 23; see also
Frye 37; and Yancy 2008, 860).

[33] Gordon and Yancy both make the point about the difficulty of simply living up to the norm or being seen
as normal which takes extraordinary effort. See especially (Yancy 2008, 857-8) and also (Schneider 87 on
"default" categorization), (Bartky 29) and (Frye 21): when we try to fit the norm when we are an out-group
member, or when we try to omit the out-group factor, we become apparently excessively odd and are
continually, if subtly, reminded of our strangeness. Compare this with the vast literature supporting the
causal efficacy of "stereotype threat" (Gendler 2011, 49-50, esp. nt. 42, and Chapter 2 below).

[34] In addition, there is the worry that the assistance offered by well-meaning whites can be seen as
condescending at best: "A benevolent racist, on the other hand, feels a genuine sympathy and a need to help
blacks, but such sympathy and need arise solely, albeit unconsciously, because of her belief in their
inferiority and their need to be helped. The intention of the benevolent racist is not to put down, slight or
show contempt for blacks, but she realizes that her benevolence does reinforce their inferiority. She
rationalizes that her "benevolence" toward blacks morally supersedes, cancels out, and absolves her of her
belief in their inferiority" (Ikuenobe 172).

> [To the white woman in the elevator with Yancy] There is only the visible, the concrete, the seen, all there, all at once: a single black *thing*, unindividuated, threatening, ominous, *Black*. The white woman thinks that she takes no part in this construction; she acts 'in the name of *the serious'* [my italics]. She apparently fails to see how her identity is shot through in terms of how she *constructs* [my italics] me. This failure is to be expected given how white privilege renders invisible, indeed, militates against the recognition of, various whitely ways of being-in-the-world. [Shannon] Sullivan notes that the 'habits of white privilege do not merely go unnoticed. They actively thwart the process of conscious reflection on them, which allows them to seem non-existent even as they continue to function.' (Yancy 2008, 861)

What gets buried, or buried deeper, is the role that whiteness plays in social interaction. This freedom from racial categorization on the part of whites might actually be sustained by a well-meaning drive toward a colorblind society[35] which has removed the significance of whiteness from the dominant mode of dialogue especially within the context of the quotidian. There is an enormous burden that whites need not consider in their everyday living—the fact that they are white. This is a privilege, along with being a heterosexual male e.g., that is both a cause of what Jean Harvey calls "civilized oppression" and a continual outcome of such oppression.[36] In many instances, those with privilege fail to recognize that they have a part in limiting the options of people who lack social and/or political power. Those who are overprivileged with power lack consciousness of this fact due to many reasons, some of which I will highlight below, but this failure to recognize, or willful ignorance, is a central feature of systematic, *civilized* oppression.

Jean Harvey distinguishes what she takes to be civilized oppression in contrast to violent, legal or economic oppression in a recent paper: "Civilized oppression is inherently more difficult to recognize, even by its victims. It is often subtle but pervasive ... Unlike violent oppression, there is often nothing conspicuous and it often involves acts of omission" (Harvey 2010, 14; see also 1999, 1-2). It cannot be legislated against, and perhaps should not be, as in many cases the oppression persists in large part due to the good-intentioned, non-conscious behavior of generally tolerant people. This makes the number of options for resistance and rectification quite limited,

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[35] I am not here inclined to join the debate over how much the move toward color-blindness actually fosters oppression by submerging its mechanisms beneath the surface or whether other causes for this are at fault. But see (Monahan 2011; Young 165; Wise 2010; Sullivan 2006, 60-1, 123-4,190-2; Mills 2007, 28).

[36] See (Sullivan 2006; and McIntosh 1988).

especially for cases described by Yancy. The very bodily movements of people belonging to privileged groups come to habitually express the subordination of others (Sullivan 2006, 3, 46, 53, 101-10, 188-9, especially 197). Moreover, it is worse when the oppressed internalize and start to believe in the negative stereotypes that confine them by distorting their self-identity; this is a self that can be confined but not ever completely isolated from the society into which it was born (thrown).

Yancy's elevator example is used to demonstrate the implicit biases that permeate a racist society; but it is made more complex when one includes within that culture the history of systematic biases against women which work toward sustaining their prefabricated *inferior* roles and in fostering the notion that they are (still) the property of (white) men.[37] The subordination of women, for example, is a pervasive element in many cultures, and "(if uncontested) appears to be natural—and because it is natural, unalterable" (Bartky 27). So, a girl is born into an identity for which particular roles have already been well established, indeed, irrevocably typeset to correspond to her essence. This is another instance of the spirit of seriousness, which in this case, "she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years" (De Beauvoir 1964, 268).[38] This seems to be the more pervasive and insidious form of oppression, as it leads to the *acceptable* or *normalized* conditions of the oppressed, and is seen as such by the oppressed, and as Harvey notes, this civilized oppression is harder to combat than violent oppression, for instance, due to the simple fact that it becomes the standard and is concealed in plain sight.

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[37]The victimization of blacks is compounded and interwoven with the victimization of women. In this case, the woman in the elevator is both oppressor and oppressed—she oppresses with her bodily comportment which expresses fear of the stereotyped "hyper-sexed" and "violent criminal"; but at the same time, these biases constructed primarily by white men adversely affect her, as Yancy notes: "There is panic, there is difficulty swallowing, and there is a slight trembling of her white torso, dry mouth, nausea. The point here is that deep-seated racist emotive responses may form part of the white *bodily* repertoire, which has become calcified through quotidian modes of bodily transaction in a racial and racist world" (Yancy 2008, 847). More on this in section IV below.

[38] More generally, Iris Young puts it this way: "one *finds oneself* as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been. For our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups which are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms" (Young 46, italics in original).

III.   Problems with an Individualist Approach to Oppression

Before delving deeper into the sort of oppression covered in this work, I want to consider two related questions that might arise at this point: (1) Are the cases of racism offered above, e.g., really "oppressive" systematically, or is oppression simply many *distinct* instances in which one *individual* (or government) unjustly imposes his will on another *individual* in a blatant and highly visible manner? (2) If the psychological forms of oppression persist in a way that just punishment and/or reparations are not legally possible, then we must be talking about something other than oppression as such. The term "oppression" (especially to those who are lucky to have power) has a very strong connotation that should only be used in describing some of the worst injustices of humanity. Yet, we are asked to unpack an "*invisible* knapsack of white [and heterosexual-male] privilege" (McIntosh 1988). Should we "just trust" those who claim there is really *pervasive* systematic oppression, right beneath our noses? Moreover, if Young and Harvey are correct that the forms of subtle psychological oppression cannot be ameliorated by any conceivable legal means, then the term "oppression" should not be applied. Since there is no single spectacle or historical event that can mark the oppression, as with slavery or in some cases with violent colonization, the harms seem non-existent.

The second question is one raised by Angelo Corlett (2005), and the first by Robert Nozick. To highlight the first concern mentioned above, I will follow a brief tangent into the socio-political disputes on the relation between individuals, groups, and *past* injustices. It is interesting to note that there is now a resurgence of the political views similar to those of Nozick regarding the wealthy or "successful" who are thought to be singly responsible for "having built that" (the rallying cry at the RNC Convention 2012). For Nozick, there "are only individual people, different individual people, with their own individual lives…there is no *social entity* with

a good that undergoes some sacrifice for its own good" (Nozick 32-3, my emphasis).[39] If this is the case, my initial conception of psychological oppression above cannot stand, at least not without significant revision, and Young's, Harvey's, Cudd's, Yancy's, and others' structural institutional approach fails as well. If there are only individuals, it does sound quite odd to attempt to alleviate the oppression experienced by a collective.[40]

Nozick famously argues for a minimalist form of government (Nozick 26) which persists primarily to protect against external threats, and should never be used to re-organize wealth among various "groups" or individuals in the society even in an effort to achieve parity among citizens. He does, however, allow for the exception of "those takings that fall under the principle of the rectification of injustices" (Nozick 168), but he seems to quickly gloss over the fact that the system has been so flawed from the outset that both the privileges of the wealthy obtained (intentionally or not) by systematic oppression, and the disadvantages of the oppressed still remain. The wealth of the powerful has been acquired through the labor of legions before them and surely upon the shoulders of giants of industry in the past, which more often than not has some historical connection to slave labor; that is, the forced unpaid labor of a particular *group* of people. According to Nozick, some inequality only seems unfair, but is really just un*fortunate* (Nozick 236). Note the operative word embedded, "fortune", as if the disadvantage is through no one's fault at all; hence, there should not (indeed cannot) be any politically just means of redistribution, since no one group is intentionally oppressing another group. But this reveals a spirit of seriousness in that it ignores the responsibility of those who have gained at the expense of others due to group affiliation; in addition, this attitude downplays or outright dismisses the

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[39] Sullivan (2006, 45-62) assesses a similar conclusion but from Freud's psychoanalytic theory which allows for the reality of social groups into which individuals may join, but denies the possibility that "the individual is originally constituted by its relations with the social (= extra-familial) world" (Sullivan 2006, 58).

[40] Granted, it would be a category mistake if I were arguing that groups as such suffer oppression as opposed to the individuals who comprise said groups—if this is Corlett's charge against Mills and others, it is a straw man. But I am not saying that; I am saying that individuals are in large part defined by their group memberships which often determine how they are treated, positively or negatively.

roles played by those in power in setting up and sustaining systematic cumulative advantages[41]

for themselves. It is a failure to recognize the historically contingent factors that have led to the

success of the wealthy and the concomitant "failures" of economic, political, and social "losers."

As I will argue below, this competitive individualism erroneously presumes an equal starting

point for all who choose to "play" in the game, and fosters a negative attitude toward those who

fail in the system.

It is true that civilized oppression cannot be addressed by legally proscribing the attitudes

and words of racists or sexists without causing great harms to our conception of freedom. This is

one reason why Angelo Corlett makes the following claims:

> Again, I am little concerned in this project with ideas of race or racism that cannot be at
> least plausibly prohibited and punished by law. If someone wants to refer to mere racist
> beliefs as being truly racist, so be it. But I think it does little good (though I suppose some
> good, on some occasions) to call something racist when the law cannot and should not
> effectively deal with it. I prefer to concern myself with the more egregious instances of
> racism, and ones the law can and should prohibit and punish. (Corlett 579)

So for instances in which an individual does not intentionally engage in discrimination by overt

act or omission, there is, Corlett thinks, no reason for the law to step in, and thus, no real racism

present.[42] Furthermore, and related to Nozick's individualism, Corlett argues against Charles

Mills' collectivist view of racism, "that it is institutional structures—not individuals—who are the

agents of racist aggression", which Corlett sees as one of the most dangerous doctrines in

academia. He continues, "It is time that we discard this piece of nonsense (limiting racism to

institutions) as far too many Anglos and Anglas in academia have sought to hide safely behind it.

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[41] For just one among a multitude of examples of cumulative advantages enjoyed by those with power, consider the access wealthy (predominantly white) parents have to their young children's teachers, the access predominantly white children have to advanced placement courses in high school, and the seemingly innocuous advantages whites have regarding acceptable classroom demeanor: (Sullivan 2006, 29-30) discusses the habits of classroom etiquette which are predominantly white middle-class based; and when blacks do not live up to it, they are "silenced and alienated from the class." This is an example of compounded or cumulative advantage beginning in grade school for white children, and a disadvantage for nonwhites. For others, see (Wise 2008; 2010; Brown 2009).

[42] He is even less amenable to viewing the claims by feminists, especially whites, who claim that women are systematically oppressed (Corlett 577-8). But he is contrasting such claims of oppression with the overt forms I discussed above, such as slavery and the American Indian holocaust (573, 581-2), both of which are undoubtedly cases of explicit oppression.

Individuals are not devoid of racism, while institutional structures exude it" (Corlett 580). I think Corlett is not entirely wrong here, as I will show in Chapter 2 on the individual's *moral* responsibility for stereotyping, but his dismissal of institutional oppression is problematic and borders on a straw man.

My general response to both Nozick and Corlett is to frame the issue in terms of an epistemic problem, but one that cannot be divorced from an ethical sphere. I will argue that privilege results from socially constructed but implicit norms that unfairly regulate inter/intra-group relations, and that, not without some irony, the systematically generated social privilege can actually place the oppressors in an epistemic disadvantage, at least with respect to matters of psychological oppression—something that does indeed exist, but is denied by the privileged who are disinclined to question the presumed fairness of the social system, and thus, such powerful people remain ignorant of the oppressive system they help to produce. But this ignorance does not constitute an excuse for such negligence. Once this case has been made, it will be easier to see in later chapters where blame and/or responsibility are attributable, if at all, to oppressor or oppressed.

IV.   Socially Constructed Ignorance

There is a socially conditioned epistemic blind spot surrounding systematic privilege that has led to the suppression of considerations regarding race and gender in social power relations. This ignorance at once hides the role that a community of others has played in the success of the privileged, and accentuates the lack of personal responsibility and ability in those underprivileged who have been marked as inferior and/or failures in society.[43] As I will argue in Chapter 2, there are a number of culturally infused stereotypes that perpetuate, often below the level of consciousness, the "fact" that the successful have merited their power just as those on the bottom deserve their low status. These biases lead to a cycle of ignorance that feeds upon itself: privilege

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[43] It is not coincidental that the former are primarily white, male, heterosexual, and the latter are not.

permits ignorance, and ignorance sustains privilege. But this ignorance is not simply due to faulty

epistemologies of a few individuals. While oppression "works through individual persons" (Cudd

22; Corlett 579), the errors, false beliefs, and nonconscious oppressive attitudes of the privileged

are socially conditioned. Consider again Yancy's elevator example: "While no one of us is

completely transparent to oneself, her blinkers, her blind spots, are specifically shaped through

the power of whiteness as the transcendental norm. Within the context of the elevator, her

ignorance is not simply a lacuna that results from her own epistemic complacency, but is part of a

larger systemic process whereby her ignorance is a dynamic social production" (Yancy 2008,

861-2). While she is an individual who is responsible for her thoughts and actions, her

psychological states cannot be wholly divorced from in-group/out-group interrelations.[44] The

cultural lenses through which we see (or fail to see) people of different groups, and the negative

or positive effects which result, cannot be explained solely in terms of individual bias, but require

a wider viewpoint which includes many socio-political factors that sustain the high status and

unmerited privilege of some at the expense of others.

Here are some of those factors which can lead to the intractability of distorted power

relationships by discouraging investigation, leading in effect to systematic negligence: "juridical,

economic, and other institutional arrangements" (Kruks 60), "the exercise of power as the effect

of often liberal and 'humane' practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production and

distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on" (Young 41), preconceptions that are

"entrenched, socially accepted, and often without malice, [which] tend not to be dislodged by

simply 'seeing' the people in question and seeing that the preconceptions are biased" (Harvey

1999, 48),[45] the "value-laden 'given[s]', [in which the oppressed is seen as] an object presumed

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[44] The good news here, I think, is that since the groups to which one belongs are largely (if not entirely) socially constructed, and oppression can result from attitudes and actions stemming from such contingent group membership, these systematic harms can also be de-constructed.
[45] See also (Kahneman 2011, 27 and especially 214) on the analogy between visual and cognitive illusions both of which are culturally embedded and extremely difficult to dislodge even after one recognizes that

untouched and unmediated by various contingent discursive practices, history, time and context"
(Yancy 2008, 845), the reification of women through the linguistic plane of platitude and cliché
(Scott 26) which fosters cultural as well as individual mental passivity, and the pervasiveness of
the European archetypes/stereotypes which display a strict and natural dichotomy between
good/bad white/black (Fanon 1967, 191). There is a cumulative effect of these mechanisms,
among others, that renders oppression less visible, if not invisible. But of course, not being able to
see a problem for what it is, or see it at all, does not make it go away; neither does it exonerate
those who benefit from the unjust system.

A purely individualistic account of socio-political success or failure ignores the
systematic unfairness built into the culture which continues to privilege those already possessing
power. Nozick seems to assume there are equal opportunities for all to satisfy the conditions of
transfer of money, for example, by doing "a certain job" (Nozick 236). He notes that the feelings
of envy result from those who have been less successful or unable to even find employment, not
because they think that those on the top do not deserve what they have, but because they *know*
that they do deserve it: "Shouldn't my self-esteem, feeling of worth, and so forth, depend *only*
upon facts about *me*?" (Nozick 240, my italics). Perhaps this is how we might want it to be, to the
extent that there are truly self-made individuals solely responsible for the wealth, success, and
even knowledge they have attained. Moreover, we would hope that my high self-esteem is not
only due to having an unfair advantage. Quoting Rogers Smith, Mills notes: "'For over 80% of
U.S. history, its laws declared most of the world's population to be ineligible for full American
citizenship solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender'" (Mills 1998, 132). In
other words, exclusion from opportunity (any, much less equal) has been the *norm* in America,
not the exception. With this in mind, Mills states that "Nozick's idealized Lockeanism ignores
(except for an endnote) the real-life history of illicit aboriginal expropriation and property in

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there is an error in perception or judgment. Significantly, the latter sort of illusion (error) is much harder to
overcome.

stolen African persons" (Mills 1998, 132). In a competitive model where the number of

participants has been limited from the start, those in the game *already* in possession of unmerited

advantage continue to gain at the expense of others. Even now with the constant unquestioned

mantra of freedom and equal opportunity in the U.S., we are led to believe that those who are

(still) on the bottom must have done something to deserve it, and they start to believe it too; what

other explanation can there be in the greatest and freest country in the world, but that the poor are

lazy, ignorant, and even naturally criminal, for example?

But it is not simply a matter of individual solitary success (or failure), contrary to the

ubiquitous messages in the U.S. praising the spirit of individualism: "The atomistic-individualist

ontology is necessarily displaced by a social ontology in which races [and other groups] are

significant sociopolitical actors" (Mills 1998, 134). That is, the contingently constructed groups

into which one is (accidentally) born play a far greater role in determining the success or failure

of that individual than do the "natural talents" or dogged perseverance of the individual. But why

is this so hard to see? One reason for this, according to Mills, is that whites easily forget

inconvenient facts of history that have contributed to their success and at the same time have

sustained (to this day) the hardships of nonwhites:

> The mystification of the past underwrites a mystification of the present. The erasure of
> the history of Jim Crow makes it possible to represent the playing field as historically
> level, so that current black poverty just proves blacks' unwillingness to work. As
> individual memory is assisted through a larger social memory, so individual amnesia is
> then assisted through a larger collective amnesia. (Mills 2007, 31)

In this way, a spirit of seriousness becomes manifest through cultural practices, habits, and

norms. The stereotypes of black laziness reinforce the ease with which history can be

whitewashed, thereby allowing the inconsistencies between the privileged constructed or

inherited mystifications and reality to go unnoticed. Mills explores this idea further with

examples that argue against both Nozick and Corlett; in the following case, Mills quotes from

Thomas Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates*

Inequality, in which white people in interviews will admit in one context the support from family

that they have received, and then "forget" it in the next: "'[X's] [white interviewee] memory seems accurate as she catalogues all sorts of parental assistance with matching dollar figures....However, as soon as the conversation turns to how she and her husband acquired assets like their home, cars, and savings account, her attitude changes dramatically.... The [Xs] describe themselves as self-made, conveniently forgetting that they had inherited much of what they own'" (Mills 2007, 31; see also Cudd 73).[46] With the intentional exclusion of blacks as a group from homeownership (the best way to accumulate wealth and pass it on to family members) during the 40's, 50's, and 60's (Mills 1998, 136), and the failures to adequately redress such wrongs still today, it becomes more obvious how unequal the system has been and currently is, and that an individualist approach to oppression, in which one person explicitly harms another individual, is insufficient.

But what about the viability of the term "oppression" as a descriptor for many of the instances connected to hidden privilege? As long as no laws have been broken, no force has been applied, and no explicit psychological torture has been observed, e.g., the assumption of the privileged is that there is no oppression; there is certainly not *systematic* oppression of groups of people. Recall that Corlett concentrates on the sorts of oppression which are visible and egregious. But the cases I have dealt with thus far, and more below, slip beneath the radar of the law, yet still constitute oppression. Granted, Corlett (79) is concentrating on reparations and what acts of oppression committed against individuals would qualify them for reparations by law, but his focus on individual acts of racism, e.g., and the violent visible aspects alone, ignores the significance of the hidden elements that remain long after the legal proscriptions are in place.[47]

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[46] Consider the help many receive from parents and even government, and the woeful blindness of some recipients: "I've been on food stamps and welfare…did anyone help me out? No." This is actor Craig T. Nelson attacking the welfare state entitlement mindset—truly a "moment of Zen". See http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-august-1-2013/pay-mas---fast-food---minimum-wage. Accessed 6/14/13. Other prominent figures like Mitt Romney and Donald Trump who both inherited handsomely from their fathers, could also stand as examples.

[47] By analogy, these overt and egregious sorts are the *symptoms* of the everydayness of oppression, but focusing solely on them is akin to taking cough medicine for cancer—the coughing causes unmistakable convulsions, but temporary salves for the surface manifestations which leave the obscured root causes

Furthermore, his insistence on treating explicit violent forms of oppression in which there is clear

malicious intent on the part of the individual racist, such as that found in white supremacism, as

more worthy of our concern than the subtleties of white privilege, seems to be based primarily on

the degree of spectacle each produce. But, as Sullivan notes "white privilege is just as, if not more

destructive than white supremacy, even if (or, perhaps, precisely because) it is not as

spectacular…. White privilege maintains itself largely by seeming normal, natural, and

unobjectionable. It functions best by remaining invisible, that is, unconscious" (Sullivan 2006,

55). If this is the case, and privilege fosters psychological oppression, then even those who

vocally object to racist and sexist practices can still play a role in sustaining systematic

oppression. The ignorance is socially diffused and made all the more obscure by the fact that

single instances of biased attitudes akin to those found in Yancy's elevator example, cannot

sufficiently explain the harms of psychological oppression without invoking a broader view.

Sullivan expounds on this idea referencing Fanon's example of trying to explain the

cause of a worker's varicose veins as a result "solely of the constitutional weakness of a person's

vein walls, rather than also of working conditions in which a person must stand on her feet for

hours a day" (Sullivan 2006, 59). She continues: "Locating the problem primarily in the

individual means that few efforts to eliminate it will be focused where they also should be: in the

social, political, and material world that helps constitute the individual" (Sullivan 2006, 59). In

other words, we can find an internal cause for one individual's lack of success, but failure to

account for the environmental factors that contribute to the individual's weakness will only ever

be an incomplete analysis.[48] Likewise, we can (and must) investigate the individual acts of

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untouched can actually exacerbate the problem; if there are no visible signs of illness this will make us less
inclined to search for a treatment.

[48] See also (Fanon 1967, 145) where he explains how a black can feel abnormal prior to any contact with
whites. He is not even a victim of an actual racist (singular) event and yet, the collective neuroses still
affects him. This is Sullivan's point (2006, 99), that oppression cannot be explained on individualist
accounts.

oppression, but we will get nowhere near a solution if we categorize such acts as nothing more than solitary criminal aggression in which one person unambiguously harms another.

Environmental factors can include socializing tendencies that subtly influence norm-adherence or system-justifying behavior. For example, Young argues that the "historical accidents" that equate whiteness and maleness with abstract reasoning, and objectivity, among other favorable attributes on the scale of normativity, continue to systematically infect the "mastering gaze" of the unmindful privileged who act as if their perspective is the universal point of view "from nowhere" (Young 127; Code 286). Due to remaining hidden within the quotidian, this attitude rarely gets challenged, but even when it does, appeals to rationalizations in the form of stereotyping the oppressed often results—"*they* are where they are in society because they are abnormal, lazy, criminals, ignorant etc." It is as though the oppressors have grasped the *nature* or essence of the oppressed in a glance, as if the dominant were elite(ist) *anthropologists without borders*. That is, not only must their professional assessment be the definitive one, but the nature of others (and self) is assumed to be fully accessible to them as if by right. This is expressed through the absolutizing body/verbal language, and comportment of the powerful. It is a phenomenon that Shannon Sullivan calls *ontological expansiveness*: "As ontologically expansive, white people often manifest a way of being in the world (often nonconscious) in which they presume the right to occupy any and all geographical, moral, psychological, linguistic, and other spaces. From the point of view of white ontological expansiveness, the existence of a linguistic space off-limits to white people is an 'unjust' violation of the 'natural' order of the world that must be rectified" (Sullivan 2004b, 302). Such overly-privileged access to the spaces others inhabit leads to lop-sided power relationships that can be sustained through covert psychological distortions. Moreover, it also creates epistemic blinders for the privileged as they feel no need to learn from the experiences of others in any other fashion than that of ethnologist, or more

accurately in some cases, an essentializing zoologist.[49] I think comedian Ellen Cleghorne efficiently captures the sense of ontological expansiveness with her insightful question: "why is it that 'When white women are naked, that's *pornography*,' but 'when black women are naked, that's *anthropology*?'" (Quoted in Gilbert 82, italics original).[50]

Consider just one example offered by Sullivan that exemplifies the attitude of ontological expansiveness: There is an all-white crowd in Harlem on a tour. The guide asks if they wanted to go into some black churches (without asking church members). In order to prime the tour group for something exciting to witness, the guide remarks, "'Easter Sunday in Harlem is quite a show.'" The group was "polite and well-intentioned" but this attitude was "precisely the problem: "'no one [and, one might add, no space] existed for them who could not be governed by their intentions'" (Sullivan 2006, 164 quoting Patricia Williams). In this case, the church is experienced as a wild zoo with exotic inhabitants that are less civilized than whites, and thus there is no need to ask their permission to "study" them. Of course, there need not be a conscious intention on the part of the tour group to objectify the members of the black church and assume an air of accessibility no matter where they happen to be. This is the power of unconscious habits of white privilege. According to Sullivan, no space is racially neutral, but to assume it is would be an instance of white privilege. Any discomfort whites might feel in spaces which are predominantly inhabited by nonwhites, feels unnatural and an unjust limitation on themselves.

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[49] Some are aware of this tendency: "'I learned early before prejudice could set in, that Negroes are humans too, and that when around them I do not fall into the role of ethnographer in a sense of studying them and putting them into their place'" (Fanon 1967, 199, quoting Georges Mounin). See also (Griffin 88) on white men picking up the "black" John Howard Griffin asking him questions about the Negro virility/sexual prowess in a way that rendered the man a mere object of study for an animal behaviorist. Beyond that superficial and prurient interest, whites feel at ease in a social world in which they need not exert any energy to deeply understand others. In Maria Lugones' sense, this "maximal way of being at ease [is] somewhat dangerous because it tends to produce people who have no inclination to travel across 'worlds' or have no experience of 'world' travelling" (2003, Chapter 4).

[50] In a rare near-recognition of privilege and ontological expansiveness, Bill O'Reilly recently commented to his guest, actor Lavar Burton, that he never feels concern about being approached by a police officer (even if the officer is black and happens to have a negative view toward O'Reilly), and that he did not understand Burton's and many other black men's apprehension of being stopped by the police. Note the reference from Chris Rock on "Driving while black" in the following: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5ezIMPS4UU, (relevant discussion begins at min. 3). Accessed 8/9/13.

To allow for the interweaving of nonwhites with whites breaks down the sharp boundaries that have been historically constructed—psychologically as much as geographically (Sullivan 2006, 148), but there are no such boundaries for traveling white people if and when they wish to travel. So, here is another instance in which asymmetrical power relations among social groups can be maintained without legal, economic, or violent coercion, and yet still cultivate psychological harms in which the oppressed view themselves as the oppressors (often nonconsciously) see them--uncivilized and inferior.

Harvey studies how such flawed relationships can lead to the continuation of oppression, again, within the context of socially constructed ignorance: "Being subject to distorted conceptions that find some public expression is the common lot of the oppressed. Often the conceptions are not the result of individual malice, but arise from long-standing and socially shared biases" (Harvey 1999, 46). These conceptual errors attributed to the "public self" of the oppressed are not easily corrected, and the victims themselves are often powerless to change them, a fact Harvey claims is not easy to see by those in privileged positions. She clarifies this point:

> Also, any misconceived public selves functioning in the minds and actions of those with high prestige are particularly unlikely to be corrected. The very fact that these conceptions are accepted by those with such social status protects the errors, since the privileged are less likely to be effectively challenged by the less powerful…and since it is understandable if the privileged do not self-correct the errors when those errors favor their higher status. The role of a person's prestige value, then, helps sustain and reinforce seriously distorted public selves. (Harvey 1999, 51)

Since the behaviors of the powerful often appear to go unnoticed by themselves, the claims by Young, Yancy, Sullivan, Harvey, and others are controversial for many, especially as the knapsack of privilege (and under-privilege) that needs unpacking is often admittedly *invisible* (McIntosh 1988). But invisibility in this context is not synonymous with perceptual occlusion rendering a given object wholly undetectable. That is, the white woman in the elevator with Yancy, and any imagined third-party privileged bystanders, for instance, have the *capacity* to see oppression in these contexts, but do not even though they might stand for equality and fairness.

So, the quotidian spaces are not the obvious KKK marches or David Duke rallies for political office. The speech and actions performed by these people are too obviously racist to constitute instances of civilized oppression, as there is little confusion as to the congruous intent corresponding to the offensive words and behavior. Perhaps a contrast can be made with Yancy's own example, quoted at length, in which from his perspective, the overt racist bodily posture of whites stands as an analogue to overt racist language and action:

> My body is confiscated within social spaces of meaning construction and social spaces of transversal interaction that are buttressed by a value laden episteme. It is a peculiar experience to have one's body confiscated without physically being placed in chains. Well-dressed, I enter an elevator where a white woman waits to reach her floor. She 'sees' my Black body, though not the same one I have seen reflected back to me from the mirror on any number of occasions. Buying into the myth that one's dress says something about the person, one might think that the markers of my dress (suit and tie) should ease her tension. What is it that makes the markers of my dress inoperative? She sees a Black male body 'supersaturated with meaning, as they [Black bodies] have been relentlessly subjected to [negative] characterization by newspapers, newscasters, popular film, television programming, public officials, policy pundits and other agents of representation.' Her body language signifies, 'Look, *the* Black!' On this score, though short of a performative locution, her body language functions as an insult. Over and above how my body is clothed, she 'sees' a criminal, she sees me as a threat. Independently of any threatening action on my part, my Black body, my existence in Black, poses a threat. It is not necessary that I first perform a threatening action. The question of *deeds* is irrelevant. I need not *do* anything. (Yancy 2008, 846)[51]

I think that a key difference here in contrast to overt racism is that there is no consonance between the visibly oppressive (to Yancy) bodily behavior of the woman and her internal world-view on nonwhites in general, which, if she were asked, might be tolerant and well-meaning. Additionally, if one were to ask another white person about this interaction, the racist body language might not have been noticed. At the very least, an egalitarian individual who would have no problems detecting the racism in the comments by David Duke, for instance, would likely aver that she does not "see" any oppression in the elevator scenario, much less the *alleged* systematic psychological harms. So, neither the woman nor a third-party observer, it seems, should be held morally culpable for her actions or non-actions.

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[51] I will return to this very fecund passage in Chapter 2 on stereotypes and attitudes, and Chapter 4 on subversive humor as a locutionary *and* illocutionary communicative act, borrowing from J.L. Austin. That is, such humor does more than just "play" with words, contra Morreall (2009, 34-5).

Yancy considers the possibility that he has misread the situation. This comes out when he discusses the question-and-answer portion of conferences (at predominantly white universities) after he has presented a version of his elevator example:

> A typical response from audience members is to offer scenarios that cast doubt upon what I take to be a racist act. It is as if they refuse to concede that there is the possibility that I could be correct. Even if I were correct only sometimes, it is important to explain such happenings. After one lecture, one person in the audience even suggested that perhaps the woman in the elevator was actually blind. While this is an interesting suggestion, the kind of abstract philosophical 'but what if' question that is attention-grabbing,[52] it might be said to function as a way that whites attempt to explain away what is far more implicative of their character, namely racism. (Yancy 2008, 851 nt. 24)

These might be examples of bad faith or at least rationalizations in the attempt to preclude the possibility that such systematic, somatically engrained racist habits are both real and prevalent even among those who adamantly profess a liberal-minded tolerance for *all* people. Another option, which is not mutually exclusive with the first, is that they are instances of ontological expansiveness that manifest out of a sense, often not fully conscious, that the privileged self simply *knows* more about the situations of the underprivileged than the underprivileged themselves. It is interconnected with (or the result of) the spirit of seriousness in which those with power naturally assume that *epistemic* privilege follows from their *social* privilege,[53] and even as the privileged perceive themselves as moral, they "must be able to construct representations of themselves and others to support a fantasyland of moral approbation" (Alcoff 49).

Again, there are some complexities with Yancy's example that he only briefly address; in particular, the historical construction of the essences and thus roles of women. Including deeper analysis here would not diminish Yancy's ultimate point about the culturally, somatically infused

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[52] See (Mills 1998, 33-40) on his exasperation with the "wearying parade" of traditional epistemological puzzles that have absorbed the mental spaces of philosophers and has excluded analyses of real life "socially generated illusions."

[53] There is irony here as the structures contrived by those with privilege in effect bar those same privileged from genuine understanding or comprehension of others they have ghettoized. In contrast, as I will argue in Chapters 3 and 5, the socially marginalized and underprivileged actually are epistemically privileged in many contexts (Gilbert; Yancy 2008, 850; Sullivan 2006; Lugones 1987; Mills 1998, 88; Alcoff 41-3). See also (Wise 2010, 65-87) on the Gallup polls showing a drastic difference between whites and blacks regarding the question of problems of race: black people have always been right in the past in describing racism, whites have always been wrong. Why would that be different in the current case? At the very least, whites should take seriously (non-existentially) the claims of minorities regarding oppression.

racism within our society.[54] Indeed, it would supplement it, as the often nonconscious bodily

anxieties experienced by white women within small enclosures shared with black men, comes

about not because of any *natural* innate fears, nor necessarily from individual hatred, but from the

history of black bodies having been "'relentlessly subjected to [negative] characterization by

newspapers, newscasters, popular film, television programming, public officials, policy pundits

and other agents of representation'" (Yancy 2008, 846, quoting Robert Gooding-Williams).

While this fact does not completely exonerate the white woman's racist gestures, it does offer

mitigating circumstances that are worth pursuing. It is true that such *explicit* notions of the role of

white women as chattel for husbands, and the idea that white women need to buy into the

mystifications against black men for the women to be safe, for instance, are rarely found today.[55]

But the implicit attitudes are still there, and in fact, closely associated with examples like Yancy's

elevator in which we can imagine the woman's fear of being raped by the culturally stereotyped

oversexed black male.[56]

It is not insignificant that the stereotypes against black people often overlap with those

against women, in particular related to hyper-emotionality and lack of intelligence. These biases

are operative even in the face of explicit counter-evidence to the cultural stereotypes. In fact, in

some cases in which a woman accuses men of stereotyping her, the response by her male friends

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[54] Yancy is aware of possible counter-readings of his example in which the woman fears being raped because perhaps she *was* raped in the past: "However, this does not make racism less of a problem. What this says is that situations have layers of complexity" (Yancy 2008, 853). But he only briefly considers the role that gender might have played in his example: "Of course, such racial representations of Black males helped to create and sustain the rationalization to 'protect' white women" (854-5). While Yancy is correct that oppressed people often have an epistemic privilege regarding matter of oppression, as noted at the outset of this chapter, there are degrees of oppression; women too are oppressed. For more on these complexities see (Alcoff 43-7).

[55] Though there are notable exceptions. At a recent wedding, I noted the traditional vows of the "man" (*do you promise to cherish and love…*) were not symmetrical with those of the "wife" (*do you promise to honor and obey…*). These are not only words; or rather, the words within an unjust system make a difference.

[56] Consider the following from Claudia Card: "Rape has historically been treated by men as a crime of theft against other men. That idea is not totally obsolete. Men still often regard the rape of a woman as an offense against her guardian—the theft of something (the woman's 'honor') that has a monetary value, a prestige value, or both" (Card 104-5). In this case, the woman's socialized fear cannot be divorced from the contingent historical constructions of the essences of both black men (dangerous, criminal, etc.) and white women (forever in need of protection provided by white men who "possess" them).

or spouse further perpetuates the stereotype even as these allies aim to help the woman. To expand on Sullivan's notion of ontological expansiveness, it can be seen as the immediate and well-meaning response by the husband that his wife has misread a situation in which she complained about being slighted at a party by the male host who made a joke at her expense, or that she has been consistently ignored at office meetings in which the ideas offered by the junior *male* employees continually take precedence over her own well-informed professional opinions. In an effort to "rectify" (Sullivan 2004b, 302) and console, the husband assures his wife, who in this instance takes on the stereotypical role of the child in relation to the mature adult male, that *she* has misinterpreted the situation. So, not only has the woman been publicly affronted by males in superordinate positions, she also is seen to have failed to understand a simple matter of human interaction due to being naïve and overly-sensitive to *perceived* insults.[57] The Women's Rights movement has come and gone, there are now more women in college than men, there are even female CEOs of large corporations, so surely, the husband in this scenario *reasons*, she could not really have explained the experience correctly. This unwillingness to even listen to others in a non-ontologically expansive manner, sustains the ignorance of the privileged and is one of the enablers of psychological oppression that must be addressed: "There are grounds, then, for claiming that the non-oppressed should try to understand what the oppression involves by listening to the victims, not, though, as a matter of intellectual curiosity, but with the empathy owed to those who suffer contempt and injustice" (Harvey 2010, 17).

Finally, recall how De Beauvoir and Young argue that oppressed people are thrown into situations they had no hand in making, for whom the rules apply asymmetrically to their disadvantage, and when they fail to meet these white, male, heterosexual standards, it is not assumed to be due to injustices in the system but a failing in the individual, the atom (Nozick)

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[57] For many more insightful if troubling commentaries and personal stories like this from female philosophers today, see "What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?" http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/. Accessed 1/20/13. Regarding the dearth of black philosophers and philosophy about black experience in the Western canon, which has led to some of the dubious responses by whites to Yancy's elevator example, see (Mills 1998, 5, 10-19, 66, 119-137).

who is weak, and responsible for her lack of social standing or even poverty.[58] If this is seen to be the case, then the felt oppression of the underprivileged is submerged even deeper, hidden away from those with privilege, and often the oppressed themselves, thereby permitting the powerful to express pride in their own "meritorious" accomplishments, and at the same time, even mock and blame the "losers" of society for their failures.[59] What is worse, those who are laughed at for their inability to live up to the expectations of the dominant can be subtly *coerced* to refrain from openly complaining about struggling in an unjust society: "The victims [of put-down humor] may have no way to object without socially 'causing a scene,' with all the predictable embarrassment that involves. Their objections disrupt the social scene precisely because they disrupt the submissiveness and compliant relationships so often unconsciously taken as owing to the more privileged" (Harvey 1999, 52). Since there is no outright violence, or even in some cases intended malice, and it is generally socially accepted, and the "oppressed" are laughing *at* themselves, then for all these reasons there is seen to be no harm with such laughter.

How can one fight back against such systematic, hidden oppression? Legal recourse will likely only lead to a lessening of rights for all and would hardly succeed anyway. As Young rightly notes, we cannot legislate against joking (Young 152) any more than we can successfully proscribe racist or sexist attitudes through the court system.[60] In this final section, I will interweave some of the themes discussed thus far; namely, the social construction of norms and the role they play in asymmetrical power relations among groups in everyday contexts, epistemic weakness of the privileged within these quotidian spaces, the spirit of seriousness, and ontological expansiveness, all within the context of joking in everyday scenarios. Here I will

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[58] Again, the spirit of seriousness is evident. See (Mills 1998, 86-95, especially 89-90) on the presumed "blamelessness" of the situation of the oppressed.

[59] See (Young 192-225) on the "Myth of Merit" and who defines, and thus controls, "success" in the social spheres of education, sport, employment, etc.

[60] Perhaps not surprisingly, there have been "Joke Courts" established by some totalitarian regimes, most notably in Nazi Germany, in which people were punished for naming "their dogs and horses 'Adolph'" (Morreall 1983, 102). This is revealing for a number of reasons: first, it shows that the phrase "It's just a joke" needs unpacking especially regarding political humor, and a second related point, those in power fear the weapon of the humorist-from-below.

begin to address Jean Harvey's concerns regarding the laugh of ridicule and the dangers of misusing humor as a means to sustain civilized oppression.

V.   Oppressive Laughter "in the Context of the Quotidian"

Consider the following jokes, which significantly, like most of their type, are anonymous and thus grant the teller a degree of immunity: "How can you tell if a blonde's been using the computer? There's White-Out on the screen!" and "A man and a woman were stranded in an elevator and they knew they were gonna die. The woman turns to the man and says, 'Make me feel like a woman before I die.' So he takes off his clothes and says, 'Fold them!'" (Ford et al. 162).

There are two central points of interest for this section of the dissertation. First, the laughter showers down from the perspective of the "winner's circle" (Harvey 1999, 7) as in most cases in which such a joke is presented, the joke-teller (who is often different than the joke-creator who also likely comes from a privileged position) is more powerful socially than the butt of the joke, and possibly the third-party audience as well.[61] Related to this first point, it is significant that this power differential is socially constructed, as argued for above.[62] Second, the laughter of the powerful often reveals a presumptuousness of privileged access on their part that they possess knowledge (about the oppressed) that the powerless do not have, indeed, cannot have due to presumed ignorance, naiveté, or what might be worse, simply the lack of a sense of humor.[63] These two points are interconnected; ontological expansiveness emerges in the

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[61] This is the case with office banter among colleagues in which a group of men might "playfully" mock the perceived ineptness of a female coworker. As the number of incidents like these accumulates, the qualifier "playful" no longer seems to apply. Like the term "serious", "play" is ambiguous. A musician *seriously* plays her instrument as an athlete *seriously* plays her sport and a comedian *seriously* plays with humor. None of these instances of "serious" is used in the existential sense. I will return to this discussion in Chapters 3-5.

[62] See (Frye 21, 29, 72; Bartky 29; Mills 1998; De Beauvoir 1976; Yancy 2008).

[63] In setting up a response to the theory of humor proffered by John Morreall (1983), Harvey notes the social importance attached to a good sense of humor, and that those without one "will pay a price for it. As the essayist Frank Moore Colby points out, people 'will confess to treason, murder, arson, false teeth or a wig. How many of them will own up to a lack of humor?'" (Harvey 1999, 3). See also (Bartky 31): "the nature of psychological oppression is such that the oppressor and the oppressed alike come to doubt that the

advantaged through the spirit of seriousness exuding a sense of epistemic and moral entitlement. Epistemically, the joke-creator/teller assumes some knowledge about an individual woman, in these cases standing in for all women in a way that fits the basic stereotypical and essentializing formulae for such jokes; *all* women are naturally less intelligent than men, they were *created* or *evolved* to work in the home, and they really do desire the roles into which societal norms have defined them and continue to constrain them.

The joke-teller also assumes a morally privileged stance in two seemingly inconsistent ways: (1) He cannot be condemned for any negative content in the joke as it is *simply* expressing the truth; this attitude relies upon the cliché that all jokes have an element of truth[64] to them, so it would be obtuse and immoral to censure a truth-teller. (2) On the other hand, if one protests that there is no veracity to the malicious claims in the jokes, he can, from a socially constructed cloak of immunity, hide behind the confession that he was not being serious (in the non-existential sense). Furthermore, he can now add insult to the butt of the joke who has either missed the point of the story and is thus lacking in intellectual wit, or if she understood it but complains that it was just not funny, she is seen to lack humorous wit. She (and importantly, *all women like her*) are '"poor sports' or 'have no sense of humor.' So they usually 'comply' with the joke" (Harvey 1999, 52; see also Bergmann 65, 75). It is interesting that one can "get away" with saying something quite offensive by following it with "It was just a joke", or "I'm just playing." Importantly, this is not an isolated incident in which just one person thinks he can get away with something; for the immunity to work there has to already be in place a wider cultural acceptance of his use of joking to demean (contra Oring 41-70). There is quite a lot to unpack in this evasive maneuver within an oppressive culture, as it will be an important part of the analysis in Chapter 2

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oppressed have the capacity to do the sorts of things that only persons can do, to be what persons in the fullest sense of the term, can be."

[64] Consider the following as a counter-example: "A man at the dinner table dipped his hands into the mayonnaise and then ran them thru his hair. When his neighbor looked astonished, the man apologized: "I'm so sorry. I thought it was spinach" (Hurley et al. 51, quoting Freud). No one, I suspect, would respond with, "That is *so* true!"

on stereotypes and Chapters 4 and 5 on subversive humor. In short, the powerful joke-teller wins

either way. This is the flip side of the condition of the oppressed who cannot win no matter what

"free" choice they make.[65]

 With the "concealed weapon" (Harvey 1999, Chapter 1) in laughter wielded by those in

positions of power in a way that would not be considered a case of violent or legally sanctioned

oppression, the oppression becomes all the more difficult to notice, and thus extremely hard to

combat. I think this kind of laughter illustrates quite well the cumulative kinds of harm involved

with psychological oppression. It is hidden in the open as laughter is inherently a social

expression in large measure meant to convey information to others,[66] and even when viciously

used by the powerful who are in these cases ensconced behind a veil of social protection, the

actual harms done are not clearly visible, and thus the oppressors can often elude condemnation.

There is no obvious legal remedy to a situation in which the asymmetrical relations between non-

peers leads to the "prudential" response of laughter at their own expense by the vulnerable.[67] But,

while no legal, group-based redistributive model, e.g., would succeed in response to these cases,

they cannot be analyzed individually in isolation from the social structures in which they are

enacted. That is, a Nozickean purely individualistic perspective on psychological oppression

lacks explanatory power, and Corlett's insistence on concern primarily for oppression that is

amenable to legal remedy allows for these psychological harms to continue unchecked.

 Questions on the ethics/virtues of laughter[68] should be addressed in a similar way to the

individual and group-based approach to oppression as such. A theory that looks only at instances

of humor between two individuals, or worse, the sense of humor of a solitary person, will

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[65] See (Harvey 1999, 13-14; Bergmann 63-4; Frye 3; Cudd 126; Sartre 1948, 141; Fanon 1967, 61, 132; 2000, 86-7; Sullivan 2006, 103).

[66] See (Provine 129-33; cf Morreall 2009, 101, 105).

[67] This is comparable to overt oppression in what Sonia Kruks describes as "complicity" on the part of women in abusive relationships whose rational "survival strategy" entails one is trapped into making only bad choices for herself. See (Kruks 60, 68; Cudd 77, 219-20; Frye 24).

[68] For a deeper analysis of this issue see (Cohen 1999; De Souza 1987; Buckley 2005; Morreall 2009; Bergmann 1986; Carroll 2000; Roberts 1988; Oring 41-70).

inevitably be deficient. This is in part Harvey's critique of John Morreall's theory of humor that lauds the individual for being able to use humor as a means to more objectively and steadfastly face the tribulations of the world. Specifically, Harvey is concerned with the following from Morreall: "When the person with a sense of humor laughs in the face of his own failure, he is showing that his perspective transcends the particular situation he's in, and that he does not have an egocentric, overly precious view of his own endeavors. This is not to say he lacks self-esteem—quite the contrary…having a sense of humor about oneself is psychologically healthy" (Morreall 1983, 106). Immediately one is struck by a logical and ethical implication here; those without a sense of humor are psychologically *un*healthy. Not to make the parallels too deep, but this "individual-based approach" to humor, as Harvey pejoratively labels it (1999, 4), is as overly simplistic as a purely Nozickean atomistic account of socio-political interaction. Recall that Nozick at times ignores the role of social groups, at others he denies their existence outright (Nozick 32-3). He assumes, as Harvey reads Morreall to as well, that one's self-esteem is sustained by oneself (Nozick 240), and those who fail to hold themselves in high-esteem have only themselves to blame. Harvey is accusing Morreall of reasoning about humor only from the secure enclave of the socially privileged, where it is assumed that there are only individuals who have made it on their own, and by extension, those who have failed have also done that on their own. Morreall then erroneously generalizes his findings to all, even if he has not intended to do this.[69] In this way, Morreall's perspective is overly individualistic as it ignores the significance of humor as a "social act" that cannot be detached from the asymmetrical power dynamics of in-group/out-group interaction.[70]

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[69] See (Heinrich et al. 2010). This error is quite common even among those formally trained in the science of data-collection about human subjects.

[70] An uncharitable interpretation of Morreall here might be to accuse him of ontological expansiveness: "Why aren't you oppressed laughing at this absurd situation into which you have been thrown?" I will return to Harvey's criticisms of Morreall in later chapters. There I will expand on Morreall's account, taking into consideration Harvey's quite legitimate concerns.

Mockery from those with power against those who have little or none due to the *accident* of belonging to a particular oppressed group[71] which has historically been constructed can be used as a subtle tool to perpetuate psychological harms. The kind of "ribbing" that opened this section attacks the individual, but in a way that removes her individuality. Elements such as our race, gender, or even religion when young, are not up to us, hence, even subtle, presumably witty jabs at one for such membership, especially if based upon pernicious stereotypes, can create a cumulative effect that does severe damage to one's psyche. When one feels trapped through constant reminders even in the guise of humor, that one belongs to an inferior group, that one deserves the treatment one is receiving, these factors can all lead to the loss of self-esteem which feeds the cycle of psychological oppression (Harvey 1999, 7; Bergmann 75-7).

The derisive laughter in such quotidian spaces is similar to the laughter that results from the proverbial banana peel systematically placed before the underprivileged in an effort to cause them to fall (see Bergmann 78). The fall elicits ridiculing laughter which adds to the injury as it presumes innocence on the part of the privileged who gracefully avoid these hazards (they themselves have constructed), and full accountability for those who have failed in the game. That is, on the Superiority Theory of humor at least, the oppressed are laughed *at* because they are deemed inferior.[72] But of course, to paraphrase Mary Astell, an early feminist writer, a man should not value himself for being wiser than a woman due to having a better education, than he should boast of his courage for beating a man whose hands are bound. This kind of laughter-from-above, or boasting about successes that could not possibly have been as independently achieved as the powerful assume, has to be distinguished from the humor of the marginalized.

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[71] One caveat here might be a case in which a male chooses to change gender; such a person can still be considered oppressed if *she* now suffers similar constraints as other women simply due to being women.
[72] According to the Superiority theory, all laughter has a butt or object of scorn. Many prominent figures in the history of philosophy have at least made tangential remarks in support of this view, such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, Henri Bergson, and some less prominent, such as F.H. Buckley, who presents a book-length defense of the Superiority Thesis. In contrast, I will defend a version of the Incongruity Theory in Chapter 3.

VI.   Conclusion

Sexist jokes, e.g., are not merely isolated instances of frivolous teasing; they can be repetitive salvoes that "Mold. Immobilize. Reduce." (Frye 2). They can be part of a compounding form of ridicule that constructs a "pattern of degradation" (Frye 15), and encourages the oppressed to laugh *with* the oppressors *at* themselves. It is the systemic and normalized nature of the harms that qualify these instances as civilized oppression. They can lead to distorted relationships between non-peers and a distorted sense of one's self-image as they perpetuate harmful stereotypes and attitudes about non-privileged groups (Cudd 180).

The hidden aspect of oppression can easily lead the socially advantaged to view the oppressed as an *accomplice* in her own subjugation, which compounds the problem by blaming those who suffer who are now further degraded by losing the right to be considered victimized: "They have just *freely* brought this on themselves", the privileged might aver. This overly narrow, atomistic understanding of freedom fails to account for the strong influence of systemic group pressures that should lead us to a wider view of freedom, choice/option, and complicity. That is, to borrow from Frye's analogy (4-5), we need something that will enable us to step back from the confining wires of the cage in order to *see that* there is a cage, and recognize if/when we are responsible for maintaining the constraining wires of that cage (see also Young quoting Simone Weil 39).

Finally, failure to recognize that there are different forms of oppression can lead to failures in prescribing appropriate modes of resistance, or worse, a failure to recognize resistance of any sort is warranted. An analogy might be made with rationalizations over gun control: the abhorrent and violent mass killings catch the public's attention due to their unavoidable salience, and when they happen, much wrangling and *some* effort is expended to ameliorate the situation, while almost no attention by comparison is devoted to the "everydayness" of gun violence in which many more people are killed, most, significantly, by suicide. To be sure, daily gun violence

is quite visible, but rarely sparks the attention of the public. Similarly, in the situation with the everydayness of psychological oppression, when it is recognized, there is a lack of clarity regarding the appropriate response to it: "Our society enacts the oppression of cultural imperialism [e.g.] to a large degree through feelings and reactions, and in that respect oppression is beyond the reach of law and policy to remedy" (Young 124). As I see it, this point leads directly into the concerns raised by Harvey regarding civilized oppression and to the need for a consideration of alternative forms of resistance (Harvey 2010).

Before I can consider a different mode of resistance, subversive humor in particular, I will investigate further the role of stereotypes in oppression. These stereotypes do not imply violent confinement, physical force, legal constraint, or even conscious contempt against the oppressed; but they are no less oppressive due to such "civility." Harvey notes that "Oppressive structures are built around generalized conceptions of the oppressed group's members, around negative images and demeaning beliefs about 'them.' The stereotypes form lenses through which the individuals are seen, or rather, remain unseen" (Harvey 2010, 20). Thus, no obvious violent, legal or redistributive model, e.g., seems appropriate in response to this sort of oppression. So, we need an account of what stereotypes are, as well as an analysis of the role that negative stereotypes in particular play in either creating or sustaining, or both, psychological harms of oppression.

CHAPTER 2: STEREOTYPES, SPIRIT OF SERIOUSNESS, AND ONTOLOGICAL
EXPANSIVENESS

I will first briefly examine stereotypes from a psychological and cognitive science perspective, noting the connection between stereotypes and schemas/heuristics. In part II, I will extend this analysis primarily through the philosophical account of stereotypes and stereotyping provided by Lawrence Blum. Here I will focus on the proliferation of implicit cultural stereotypes, offering a descriptive account contrasting them with individual and explicit stereotypes. These distinctions are important as the use of socially infused stereotypes sustains the sort of oppression I concentrated upon in Chapter 1, in opposition to a purely individualist and overt account of oppression.

In part III, I will extend the discussion from Chapter 1 on essentialism, examining the harmful role that stereotypes play in oppressive categorizing. These stereotypes can be especially destructive as they can be causally efficacious in social transactions without conscious awareness on the part of the oppressors or oppressed; thus, they are difficult to extirpate. Nevertheless, it will be argued that one has a level of commitment to the stereotypes; in particular, to stereotypes that justify a system that favors oneself at the expense of others. In this way, one *wants* the stereotypes to be true. In the final section I argue that one is morally responsible for such nonconscious stereotypes as I further tie together the reciprocal connections among stereotypes, spirit of seriousness, and ontological expansiveness with an account of automaticity, habit, and the inclination or commitment to cultural stereotypes.

I.   **"Stereotypes are a real time-saver."**

The heading for this section comes from a T-shirt sold by *The Onion,* a well-known satirical newspaper.[73] As I will discuss later in relation to humor, stereotypes are economical;

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[73] Although it is not well-known to everyone that it is satirical: see Barbara Demick's LA Times story "Kim Jong Un 'sexiest man,' Onion says; China's People's Daily buys it."
http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/27/world/la-fg-wn-peoples-daily-mistakes-the-onion-for-serious-

they are efficient in that they can be used to convey chunks of (presumably) relevant information quickly and with few words/images, and significantly here, usually without the need for much cognitive energy. Not surprisingly, the phrase also resembles the description that psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer gives to heuristics, which I will argue, can become stereotypes: "Heuristics are frugal—that is, they ignore part of the information" (Gigerenzer 20). This *ignorance* can actually be helpful especially when one needs to make immediate judgments in the face of an abundance of data. In such cases, it is beneficial that one forgets or ignores irrelevant information. Similarly, when there is limited information and one has to fill in the gaps in order to properly react, one needs shortcuts or "rules of thumb" (Gigerenzer 23) to quickly and successfully navigate through an uncertain environment. In the latter cases, visual schemas are typically utilized which allow for one to "jump to a conclusion" regarding the identity of a partially visible entity, for example, or more problematically, another person whose social group membership is ambiguous. In many cases these visual and/or cognitive shortcuts are intuitive,[74] that is, as I will use the term here, below the level of conscious awareness where the pace of represented and/or associated environmental stimuli far exceeds the capacity of the relatively slow and logical conscious brain. It could be argued that we could not survive were it not for the nonconscious heuristic mechanisms which carve up our surroundings into easily processed dichotomies, dangerous/safe, edible/inedible, friend/foe, etc: "stereotypes are necessary for human survival" (Baron 124).

Visually speaking, schemas offer "frames" (Minsky 1981)[75] of reference which efficiently categorize objects of perception; linguistically/conceptually speaking, heuristics provide "scripts" for ease of cognition and judgment. In either case, mental shortcuts are

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newspaper-20121127. Accessed 8/7/13. Facebook has recently added "Satire" on some of their newsfeeds that come from *The Onion* or *Daily Currant* for example, as it is not always clear that their stories are not *serious*. The concern of subversive humor backfiring will be considered in Chapter 5.

[74] See (Kahneman 2011, 46-9, and 236-7) on the conception of intuition as "recognition" as opposed to some mysterious sixth sense.

[75] "A frame is a way to represent a stereotyped situation, like being in a certain kind of room, or going to a certain kind of party. Attached to each frame are several kinds of information; some about how to use the frame, some about what one might expect to happen next, some about what to do if those expectations are not confirmed, and so forth" (Minsky 182). A similar use of the term can be found in linguistics (Lakoff 2000, 47- 62).

exploited in such a way that one can *usually* successfully navigate her surroundings. However, when such shortcuts fail, and there will be failures due to the speed at which they are processed and the constant and usually unsupervised use of such shortcuts, these flaws can proliferate and become a default mode of representation/judgment with respect to a given group of people. In other words, they can become stereotypes. Heuristics that become stereotypes might very well provide one with efficient means to succeed at getting by in an uncertain environment, but that nevertheless fail in some epistemic (and moral) regard. They might be "ecologically rational" (Gigerenzer 27; Baron 116, 121-6), yet epistemically and morally flawed. To put the matter somewhat crudely, all stereotypes *are* flawed schemas or heuristics: some are heuristics that have passed unnoticed into one's repertoire of beliefs and behavior,[76] others are flawed heuristics that bring to consciousness mental content that one willfully cultivates (Wegener et al. 43) under the erroneous assumption that they are true. Both, I will argue, are problematic.[77]

I follow psychologist David Schneider's (120) claim that stereotypes are a type of schema and/or heuristic (he only uses schema) and I subsume them under both of these related concepts because one can categorize another person based upon visual cues or a bodily schema as described by Fanon, Gordon, and Sullivan (see Chapter 1 above), or cognitive/conceptual patterns prior to any visual presentation. However, as is most often the case, one categorizes others through a combination the two, as one nonconsciously processes the visual data of the body of others and quickly renders a heuristic judgment about the individual based upon racial or gender schemas.[78] The literature on stereotypes as heuristics is also compelling: "'stereotypes can be viewed as judgmental heuristics that are relied upon by social perceivers whenever they lack the

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[76] See (Kahneman 2011, 24; Schwitzgebel 2010; Gendler 2008a, b; 2011).

[77] Regarding the first variety, it will be argued below that one has an interest in allowing some errors to pass unnoticed, and thereby perpetuate stereotypes nonconsciously. But this motivated epistemic negligence is also a type of moral negligence for which one is responsible. In Chapter 4, I will argue that while humor *simpliciter* acts as a mechanism for detecting heuristic errors in general, *subversive* humor specifically targets the heuristic errors that have become hardened into oppressive cultural stereotypes.

[78] Frye (1983, 32) and Bem (1981), for example, argue that gender schemas play an enormous role in sustaining cultural stereotypes: "sex typing results, in part, from the fact that the self-concept itself gets assimilated into the gender schema. As children learn the contents of the society's gender schema, they learn which attributes are to be linked with their own sex and, hence, with themselves" (Bem 355).

ability or the inclination to think more extensively about the unique personal qualities of outgroup members"' (Wegener et al. 43 quoting Bodenhausen et al). Note there is a big difference between "ability" and "inclination", as a lack of the former has little to no moral implications, whereas, a lack of the latter has plenty.

In a recent influential book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), psychologist Daniel Kahneman explores common errors in judgment using a model, or "useful fiction", to describe the interconnections between fast and slow thinking. The fast, automatic, intuitive, and emotional mechanism, he refers to metaphorically as "System 1", and the slow, logical, conscious mechanism he calls "System 2."[79] System 1 is always running and when not interrupted by System 2, it provides one with "cognitive ease" as if one were on autopilot where the following questions, for example, do *not* arise: "Is anything new going on? Is there a threat? Are things going well? Should my attention be redirected? Is more effort needed for this task?" (Kahneman 2011, 59). Not thinking hard is comfortable, and it can even be efficient and energy-preserving, hence the popular notion in social psychology that humans are "cognitive misers" (Cudd 69-70).[80] In contrast, Kahneman continues, "the experience of cognitive strain, whatever its source, tends to mobilize System 2, shifting people's approach to problems from a causal intuitive mode to a more engaged and analytic mode" which is more likely to reject the intuitive answer suggested by System 1 (Kahneman 2011, 65). Given the laziness of System 2 (Kahneman 2011, 35) however, many errors are not recognized and they can ossify into stereotypes.

Here, I am most concerned with the role that the heuristics in System 1 play in stereotype formation:[81]

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[79] He is careful to warn readers not to take these narrative aids too literally, as it is unclear exactly how enclosed these two "systems" are from each other and other modules of our brains. I will adopt his terminology when helpful—as a heuristic device! See also (Haidt 818-20) on the distinction between intuitive, automatic processing and the methodical, conscious reasoning processing.

[80] Borrowing a concept from Nietzsche, we might say that the uncensored System 1 can lead to "miserable ease"; or to amend it somewhat to fit heuristics, cognitive "*miser*-able ease."

[81] There are an astonishing number of cognitive biases related to heuristics, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I am concerned primarily with what Kahneman calls "availability" and "affect" heuristics, and a few others related to them: "The availability heuristic, like other heuristics of judgment, substitutes one

> *Stereotyping* is a bad word in our culture, but in my usage it is *neutral*. One of the basic characteristics of System 1 is that it represents categories as norms and prototypical exemplars. This is how we think of horses, refrigerators, and New York police officers; we would hold in memory a representation of one or more 'normal' members of each of these categories. When the categories are social, these representations are called stereotypes. Some stereotypes are perniciously wrong, and hostile stereotyping can have dreadful consequences, *but the psychological facts cannot be avoided: stereotypes both correct and false are how we think of categories.* (Kahneman 2011, 168-9, first italics in original)

Due to the relatively high degree of success of heuristic thinking, and many people's belief that that they just *know* certain things about people based upon social group membership, there is the assumption that stereotyping is merely a species of inductive generalization in which one reasons from particular cases to general. Moreover, even though they rely on limited information, it is assumed that many of these "inductive inferences" are in fact accurate, thus supporting a more ambivalent attitude toward stereotyping in general.

For example, Jussim et al. make the claim that "[i]n the absence of any other information, most people would probably expect any given day in Alaska to be colder than that day in New York, and they would expect a professional basketball player to be taller than most other people….But do stereotypes function this way? Yes. When individuating information is ambiguous or difficult to detect, people often rely on their stereotypes rather than individuating information" (Jussim et al. 13; Baron makes a similar case in which I am searching "for an object in regard to its sitability [*sic*] for my particular body dimensions" p. 119). This analogy, and many others like it, fosters a neutral perspective toward stereotyping. The stereotypes provide one with "the detection of *affordances*" that allow the stereotyper "to achieve goals" (Baron 116-17; see also Gigerenzer 2008). So, a stereotype on this view is successful if it allows for the stereotyper to achieve "greater adaptive payoff", and this is most likely when the focus is on

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question for another: you wish to estimate the size of a category or the frequency of an event, but you report an impression of the ease with which instances come to mind. Substitution of questions inevitably produces systematic errors….The affect heuristic simplifies our lives by creating a world that is much tidier than reality" (Kahneman 2011, 130, 138; see also Kahneman and Tversky 1982). In particular, the affect heuristic appeals to comforting emotions where we make decisions based upon what we like (or dislike) rather than through critical thinking.

negative properties of objects, states of affairs, or people. Invoking the mantra "perceiving is for doing," Baron avers that "negative stereotypes help us react to emergency situations…it is particularly important that attunements [the part of the stereotype that putatively "resonate[s] to or accommodate[s] to what is there"] to negative properties focus on affordances for overcoming or escaping from the dangerous entity" (Baron 124-5).[82] This attitude conflicts with that held by Blum and especially Bem (355-6) that stereotypes are not accurate, and yet there is a self-fulfilling quality to them.[83]

We tend to use the phrase "self-fulfilling" in the sense that something is rendered true that was not before; but if this is the manner used with certain stereotypes, must we claim that they are confirmed as accurate, and thus rational in some sense, when they "come true"? The answer is yes and no. Yes, if the analysis concerns only pragmatic considerations for the stereotyper; No, if we are interested in a fuller account of what is accurate or true, and in particular, what we can claim to *know* about other people based upon group membership. Jussim et al. point to this case: "For example, in the early part of this century, most unions barred African American workers from membership. Union members often claimed that African Americans were strikebreakers and could not be trusted. This severely limited African American's job opportunities. When faced with a strike, companies often offered jobs to all takers, and African Americans often jumped at the chance for work. Thus the union's beliefs about African Americans were confirmed" (Jussim et al. 14). This example is used by Jussim et al. to reveal the

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[82] Many of the examples used to make the case that stereotypes are sometimes accurate come from non-social stereotypes which are then (weakly) analogized to social settings. With the basketball case we are generalizing about humans but it is not at all clear that professional teams constitute helpful examples of stereotyped social groups. In fact, in both cases offered by Jussim et al., it is not clear that there are stereotypes at work at all; rather, we likely have fairly obvious logical inferences devoid of emotionally subjective content that is characteristic of cultural stereotypes: "Given that many damaging beliefs about stigmatized groups are inherently subjective, it is important to examine the motives underlying the use of these stereotypes to discriminate" (Uhlmann et al. 3; see also Blum 260). A clearer instance of stereotyping might be if one was confronted with a tall African American and then inferred he *must* be a basketball player. See (Schneider 94 and Kahneman 2011, 147-54) on Bayesian logic and base rate errors.

[83] "It is worth noting that the claim that stereotypes are inaccurate contradicts the claim that stereotypes create self-fulfilling prophesies. If stereotypes create self-fulfilling prophesies, then the stereotyped belief *becomes* true (even if it was false to begin with)" (Jussim et al. 15).

alleged inconsistency with the claims that stereotypes are both inaccurate and self-fulfilling prophesies. But what the example really shows is the circular, self-sealing[84] reasoning of racists: African Americans can't be trusted because they are strikebreakers. We know they are strikebreakers *because we are going to make them so.* The example (inadvertently) illustrates the perniciousness of the myths of the serious who construct stereotypes against the oppressed to keep them powerless by placing them into situations in which there are no good options, and the least horrible one, the one that is most "rational" and is thus most likely followed, creates the impression that the oppressed are at least complicit in their oppression by ostensibly confirming a widely held negative cultural stereotype--they cannot win.

In addition, the way they use this example reveals a bit of ontological expansiveness and a spirit of seriousness on the part of Jussim et al. It is too easy to state that the "union's beliefs about African Americans were confirmed" simply because in cases in which African Americans were offered a choice between no money and thus no food, and some money and thus some food, but with the stigma of being defined as "scabs", they chose the latter.[85] This essentializes the stereotyped, rationalizing (whitewashing) away the social and racial complexities involved. In a very superficial sense, and thus a biased sense, they are strikebreakers, and so they satisfy a literal one-dimensional definition of the term (maybe this is the "kernel"—see Blum 258-60). But they are *made into* strikebreakers by the very serious people who concoct the stereotype for their own

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[84] This is a term often used to refer to conspiracy theorists; it implies that one's particular hypothesis is in principle non-falsifiable (thus, hardly scientific), as even contradictory evidence stands as positive evidence for her view.

[85] Schneider does not escape a similar charge as that levied against Jussim et al. Consider his rather ambivalent perspective on the matter: "I can make the obese-people-are-lazy stereotype accurate by selectively paying attention to their behavior and treating them in ways that would make anyone act in a lazy manner…Our behavior and our minds make truth as much as they uncover it" (Schneider 565). This is the very problem with the stereotypes to begin with; they essentialize others erroneously in that they rely upon partial data, much of which is actively ignored, and when there appears to be an exception to the categorical rule, the environment is tampered with enough to make the stereotype fit the stereotyper's expectations and desires—this is manifestly *not* to make the stereotype accurate in the epistemological sense that one "knows" something essential about the object of the stereotype. To be fair, Schneider does argue on the same page that it is "meaningless" to claim that such stereotypes are true or false, but that these questions "ought to be left to suffer alone and in peace"—a fairly neutral-sounding stance. My central point here is that the psychologists' analysis of stereotype accuracy conceals the erroneous presumptions of knowledge on the part of the stereotypers, and thus a neutral approach is problematic.

material and psychological benefit. So, this example tells us little about the essence of African Americans,[86] but plenty about the motives of white male union members, and perhaps a bit about the ontologically expansive psychologists studying these stereotypes. The stereotypes are only *self-fulfillingly* accurate for the (white male) stereotypers; they do not accurately represent those who are stereotyped. But this is little better than white male solipsism (Sullivan 2006, 17, 163-4) in which the lived histories and mitigating social/racial/gender issues can be conveniently omitted in order to sustain a comfortable, coherent set of values and beliefs about one's culture.[87]

Thus, even if these perceived negative attributes are really there in others in some way, this does not render the stereotype accurate in the sense that it offers knowledge, as is it only accurate in a pragmatic sense *for the stereotyper*, and only in a manner that presents that person with a means to travel unencumbered by ambiguity, vagueness, and general uncertainty.[88] This account fits squarely within the ontologically expansive way of being; other people are seen as objects to be categorized in a way that best suits the needs of the categorizing *zoologists*. In this way, it is both epistemically and morally problematic to describe stereotyping as "rational", much less knowledge, insofar as the successful stereotypes afford "functional utility" or "pragmatic accuracy" (Baron 119, 120 nt. 2) only for the perceiver[89] and, importantly here, at the expense of the perceived. Moreover, in the cases where the stereotype *becomes* true, this is accurate only in

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[86] In the same way, stereotypes that slaves and women are ignorant, e.g., offer no insight into the *nature* of slaves or women, contrary to the beliefs of the stereotypers. For this conveniently ignores the contingent laws constructed by the powerful that proscribed the teaching of slaves (Douglass 1994, Chapter X; 1852, 17-18). The same case can be made concerning women (see the paraphrase of Mary Astell from Chapter 1). In each case, the stereotypers might have stumbled upon a superficially accurate rendering of others (if "ignorance" is related to lack of formal education in this case), but they have failed to see enough of the relevant extenuating circumstances to constitute knowing anything substantial about such people. What these examples do show, however, is that ignorance (in the form of stereotyping) can be beneficial *for the stereotyper*.

[87] To be clear, I am not accusing Jussim et al. of intentional racism or consciously endorsing the negative stereotypes of racists of the past. But I am claiming that by concentrating primarily upon an ahistorical account of stereotypes, they fail to present a compelling or complete rendering of what "accuracy" means in these contexts.

[88] Notice, being in such a way does not at all entail one possesses knowledge. More on this in Chapters 4-5.

[89] Thus, this leads to a theoretically weak relativist/subjectivist epistemology where truth is relative to white affluent males (Code 1991; Sullivan 2006, 17, 163-4), and it can lead to oppression in practice, where the lived social experiences of those without power who are continually stereotyped, are ignored.

the way one's beliefs that are coincidentally true are accurate, but fail to meet some necessary condition of justification (in some sense).[90] So, such an account of stereotyping is quite limited.

I deem the above-mentioned psychologists' neutral approach as an adoption of the spirit of seriousness in which stereotyping is viewed as inevitable and necessary to survival and even *accurate* at times, and for both of these reasons, assumed to be outside of the moral domain. The account of stereotypes that I will be concentrating upon in this dissertation is one first espoused by Walter Lippmann:

> [T]he existence of the stereotype in the culture shapes the stereotyper's perception of the group in question, so that the alleged characteristic (aggressiveness, dishonesty, emotionality) is 'seen' in the group and its members, whether it is actually present or not. 'For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.'[91] The falseness of stereotype is part of, and is a necessary condition of, what is objectionable about stereotypes in general. (Blum 256, quoting Lippman, and a bit of William James)

Put in terms of the discussion of systematic oppression in Chapter 1, stereotypes are socially constructed heuristics for immediate and *easy* reference about individuals based upon presumed essential features which pigeon-hole those individuals into a given category, usually to their detriment. So for instance, Blum tells us that "[w]hat we normally think of as stereotypes involve not just any generalization about or image of a group, but widely-held and widely-recognized images of socially salient groups--Jews as greedy, wealthy, scholarly; Blacks as violent, musical, lazy, athletic, unintelligent; women as emotional, nurturant, irrational…and so forth" (Blum 252). These are what he refers to as "cultural stereotypes" as opposed to an individual stereotype of

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[90] I am thinking of typical counter-examples to the notion that *true belief* is sufficient to constitute knowledge as introduced in Plato's *Theaetetus*, for example. As noted by Jussim et al., Kahneman, Schneider, and Baron, we tend to rely on stereotypes when the data is ambiguous and/or we *lack* most of the relevant information. So at the very least, the use of "accurate" related to stereotypes cannot be synonymous with "knowledge." How ontologically expansive to assert the accuracy of a claim when it is admittedly ambiguous, vague, and one is missing a majority of the relevant data. That is, when one has no *justified* belief.

[91] Charles Mills would agree with this description: "Concepts orient us to the world, and it is a rare individual who can resist the inherited orientation. Once established in the social mind-set, its influence is difficult to escape, since it is not a matter of seeing the phenomenon with the concept discretely attached, but rather of seeing things *through* the concept itself" (Mills 2007, 27).

others based solely upon some eccentric prejudice one might possess against a particular social group. Analyzing such biases will reveal how stereotypes can be essentializing mechanisms; in particular, how they can contribute to the forms of oppression discussed here.

But, at the risk of setting up a false dilemma, how much is stereotyping based upon one's capacity to consider others individually, especially within societies that cultivate ignorance (Chapter 1 section IV), and how much is it dependent upon one's *own* internal motivations that can override the automaticity[92] of System 1? I will spend more time on the latter point in section IV below, but here I need to say more about the former, with particular emphasis on what might be called implicit "social heuristics" and what Lawrence Blum refers to as "cultural stereotypes" (Blum 252). These are socially and systematically embedded mental shortcuts used to quickly and unambiguously categorize other people. This is quite different than the "stereotype" that bears are generally dangerous (Schneider 5-7).[93]

II.   Implicit (Unendorsed) Cultural Stereotyping

In an important sense, it is true that no experience is completely "naked" or "bare" as in order for us to make sense of the rapid influx of stimuli we need frames into which to categorize, otherwise, we are stuck in a meaningless sea of "buzzing, booming, confusion", and this applies all the more so regarding perceptual/conceptual representations of other people.[94] Since these

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[92] For recent and comprehensive overviews of work in automaticity and the unconscious, and motivation, see (Dijksterhuis 2010, and Bargh et al. 2010 respectively).

[93] It can be argued that there are stereotypes we do not want to get rid of such as the assumption or general rule of thumb that prisoners are more likely to be violent when out of prison than the general public, or bears are generally dangerous (Schneider 5-7, and Kahneman 2011, 168-9). In both cases my less-than-fully-conscious fight or flight mechanism might take over, but it is not obvious what moral flaw is thereby committed. It makes more sense to refer to these instances, at least the one about bears, as quick-and-dirty thinking or "heuristics", not the more negative connotation found with the term "stereotype"—although, cognizance of the ambivalent attitude in our culture toward the prison *industry* which churns out more violent people might make us reconsider. The way I will be using these interrelated concepts assumes that all stereotypes are flawed heuristics but not all heuristics are stereotypes. So, we might justifiably claim that there are some heuristics that are so useful and inevitable that we would not want to go without them (all bears are dangerous, certain colored plants are poisonous) even if we could; but this cannot be said of *any* stereotypes.

[94] Not only are the conscious perceptions "theory-laden" or oriented through culture, but so too are those that do not reach consciousness—these latter are the vast majority of our percepts (see Dijksterhuis 232-3).

heuristics often (usually) work below conscious awareness, stereotypes can form without the subject's awareness too. The supposed essential features of others that place them neatly into given categories are usually culturally established such that we become habituated at a very early age to make hasty judgments about others based upon these stereotypes.[95]

By way of contrast between cultural and individual stereotypes, I will offer a rather discomforting anecdote about my own failures in logic, but more importantly, as I will hint at here, my own commitments to a particular bias. This example of an individual stereotype will also be used to summarize much of Blum's work on implicit cultural stereotypes and what is wrong with them. In this section, I offer a descriptive account of implicit cultural stereotypes; what they are and how they come about. I will focus on the wrongness of such stereotypes in section III.

Growing up in Texas, our family (from the North) could not help noticing the astonishing number of pickup trucks on the road. Even more salient, to my dad especially, and subsequently for me too, was the unassailable *fact* that "they are all jackasses." Every time he would see a pickup on the road, he would note it, mutter "jackass" under his breath, and then comment about how the driver of this particular pickup is behaving just as he expects "people like them" to behave—namely, like jackasses.[96] This bias and remarkably similar behavior, was transmitted to me, though I did not come to this realization myself; it took a number of witty jabs at my incongruous behavior from my wife for me to recognize my situation.

To my mind, there is no culturally established or well-known stereotype against people who drive pickups. This is a "purely personal [or familial], idiosyncratic stereotype of a group"

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[95] According to psychologist David Funder, "a *stereotype* is a preexisting representation of a type of person. The connotation, almost uniformly, is that this representation has an overly powerful effect on human judgment" (Funder 142). I take the idea that the stereotypes "preexist" to mean that they are (usually) socially inculcated and not formulated by individuals, *and then* diffused into culture. Young children, for instance, who are thrown into an *always already* racist and sexist society, are not consciously choosing to see women and black people as somehow outliers, different, below the standard. Much like clichés, stereotypes are usually anonymous, thus pinning responsibility on an individual for their genesis is not plausible (see Scott 26).

[96] This catchall pejorative simply means that one drives erratically, dangerously, and as if he (always a he) owns the road, for example. To borrow from Sullivan, pickup drivers express "vehicular expansiveness."

(Blum 253). But one of the parallels with cultural stereotypes, I think, is the ease with which it is transmitted, in this case from father to son, as I did not become fully aware that I had such a biased view even after I found myself acting on such stereotypes. I hope that if I were aware that I held such views, I would have curbed the enthusiasm with which I raged at the various pickup drivers on the road. But the nonconscious mode of transmission of these stereotypes made it much less likely that I would amend my behavior that arose from the implicit biases. As discussed in Chapter 1, and will be elaborated upon here on stereotypes, this blindness is greatly exacerbated when there are many others like you, perhaps almost everyone with whom you engage, who help perpetuate the erroneous belief, e.g., that all people who drive pickups are fundamentally and irredeemably flawed in some manner.[97] Happily, this is not the case with my *individual* bias, and I am now coming to terms with the flaws in my inductive reasoning. Not only do I now intellectually understand that the samples from which I have drawn my (hasty) generalizations are both miniscule and biased in terms of sound statistical analyses, but I have so few allies with which to buttress my for-whatever-reason-cherished-beliefs about pickup drivers, that remaining committed to such beliefs becomes embarrassing and bizarre.[98] I now check myself when I feel road-rage bubbling to the surface upon eyeing a pickup in my vicinity.

So I have progressed. But what is significant here is the fact that the stereotypes are *still* causally efficacious even now that I can step back from them and recognize both the epistemic error and the moral failing of negatively characterizing all people who drive a certain vehicle. I do not want to think/feel the way I (apparently) do about such people, and I certainly do not want others to know this about my character. If I were asked at the time whether I held such a bias, I

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[97] "We know that people can maintain an unshakable faith in any proposition, however absurd, when they are sustained by a community of like-minded believers" (Kahneman 2011, 217, on the self-proclaimed "expertise" of the financial community). The stereotypes are even more recalcitrant when they benefit the stereotyper somehow.

[98] Of course there are reasons why I might continue to hold such false, or at least, unjustified beliefs, but they are not epistemically sound ones. Rather, they are psychological rather than logical, and they are "generally too imprecise, contested, or emotive to readily lend [themselves] to straightforward empirical investigation" (Blum 260; see also Schneider 565).

suspect I would deny it. Yet, even with this level of awareness, and a desire to avoid prejudicial

thinking generally, I find that at times it is as if the stereotype is activated in spite of myself.[99]

Here is one astoundingly embarrassing account. I am driving on a southern Californian highway

(the stereotypes cross borders as easily as generations) in the left lane, and I notice a pickup

behind us.[100] Anticipating some "jackassery" on the part of the driver behind me, I began to grip

the steering wheel tighter and continually look into the rear-view mirror with an expression of

building contempt on my face. After some time, I realized that this particular driver is not too

close, not cutting me off, not shining his headlights into my rearview mirror; he is not meeting

my expectations. To put it into terms relevant here, he has not fit easily into any of my habituated

heuristics which have ossified into stereotypes regarding people with his characteristics; the

affective frames that were most accessible, and coherent with my self-sealing web of beliefs[101]

about this group of people, were confronted with contradicting evidence. If I simply possessed an

erroneous belief about such people based upon poor reasoning, such as a failure to understand

sample size, representativeness, and counter-examples, e.g., then I would likely have taken this

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[99] "The naturalist Stephen Jay Gould described his own struggle with the Linda problem [an example revealing the incompatibility of heuristics with logic; in this case, we are given a description of "Linda" and then asked whether she is likely a bank teller or a feminist bank teller, among other options. The vast majority of respondents pick "feminist bank teller" over "bank teller" ignoring the rather obvious rules of probability]. He knew the correct answer, of course, and yet, he wrote, 'a little homunculus in my head continues to jump up and down, shouting at me—'but she can't just be a bank teller; read the description.' The little homunculus is of course Gould's System 1 speaking to him in insistent tones" (Kahneman 2011, 159).

[100] Lynne, my wife, had subsequently described my behavior during this incident, much to my mortification.

[101] There is little agreement as to what to label these cognitive states. Gendler (2008a,b) argues that at least in some cases the "associative, automatic, arational, affect-laden, action-generating" states are better explained by classifying them as "aliefs", as opposed to beliefs. This rendering has a great deal of plausibility in my case and with cultural stereotypes as well: "Beliefs change in response to changes in evidence; aliefs change in response to changes in habit. If new evidence won't cause you to change your behavior in response to an apparent stimulus, then your reaction is due to alief rather than belief. (Of course, there are strategies for changing aliefs as well--but these run through sub-rational mechanisms)" (Gendler 2008a, 566). There is much in this quotation that will prove fruitful in my arguments for the efficacy of subversive humor in response to implicit stereotypes involved in oppression. However, in a compelling counter to Gendler, Eric Schwitzgebel prefers the phrase "in-between-beliefs" for those instances in which one's nonconscious thought and action appear inconsistent with one's avowed beliefs. He is concerned that Gendler's account artificially cordons off the rational, conscious, intentional parts of our mental spaces from the irrational, emotional, nonconscious parts, insofar as speaking of "parts" is helpful.

case as a refutation for my categorical assumption that "all pickup drivers are jackasses." In other words, I would have found my generalization to be mistaken or not justified in any appropriate way, and, assuming I was not committed to such beliefs for some reason, I would have amended my conclusion.[102] This is not what I did.

Instead, after what seemed like an inappropriately long time for a jackass to *not* act like a jackass, I am told I began gently tapping the brakes a few times. I did this again without conscious awareness, and eventually, the pickup driver got fed up, flashed his brights, passed us, flipped us off (my wife receiving the brunt of this offence), then cut us off. At this point, I apparently smiled, turned to my wife, and in a clear case of confirmation bias, I exclaimed, "See, they're *all* jackasses!"[103] This is not the expected behavior of someone who has just realized a simple error in his reasoning.[104] This exemplifies (in an individualist as opposed to cultural context) the level of commitment, and thus some degree of culpability, one might have regarding tenacious stereotypes. Furthermore, given my expectations I am primed to see what I take to be typical behavior by pickup drivers, but in a very real sense, I am blind to actual bad behavior by

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[102] Another option, one I have taken in other equally embarrassing situations, is to simply note that this *one* instance is an "exception to the rule." My stereotype still holds with respect to just about every other pickup driver, so my comfortable and self-sealing world-view remains coherent, or coherent enough (see Blum 259). For some examples of this consider the following: On January 6, 2010, Dick Gregory, Civil Rights activist and comedian was invited to speak at the Chicago Humanities Festival on "Race, Comedy and Justice." He was introduced, rather ironically, as "*African American* comedian." A similar instance occurred with Joanne Gilbert who was introduced as "female comic" (Gilbert 34). This seems innocuous at first blush but it is still potentially damaging and it has parallels with clear instances of oppression in the past: One may become a cabinet minister, but will always be a "Jewish" cabinet minister (Sartre 1948, 80). This is the very common reaction by the privileged to the perceived exception to the rule regarding an African American or a woman who succeeds in arenas traditionally reserved for white males—most arenas. We do not ever hear someone like George Carlin introduced as "*Caucasian male* comedian…." The successful white male is to be expected as the adjectives "white" and "male" are the norm (Gordon 2000, 81, 88-90).

[103] "To use Piaget's terminology, expectancies foster assimilation of discrepant input to the existing frame; the operative idea is that expectancies look toward confirmation as opposed to fidelity to the world" (Baron 122). Stereotypes are not used to track the truth, but confirm one's already set opinions (see Gendler 2011, 40). Put in slogan form, *stereotypes are made not found.*

[104] Here is Blum on this point: "This evidence-resistance is only a tendency on the part of the stereotyper. Sometimes a stereotyper is able to 'take in' evidence against a stereotype that he holds, in a way that causes him to question or even abandon the stereotype. But this scenario obtains much less frequently than it does of a mere false belief held in a non-stereotypic, non-rigid, manner" (Blum 261 nt. 15). He adds: "There is an important difference, then, between stereotyping a group and merely making a false generalization about it" (Blum 261; see also Gendler 2008a, 566 nt. 26 on "evidence-recalcitrant *be*liefs").

people who drive small cars that do not fit my particular stereotype.[105] To pile on the

embarrassment, I was (apparently) cutoff in pickup-truck-fashion by a tiny Geo Metro, after

which Lynne (my wife) wondered why I was not set into a rage. I confessed that I had not even

seen the car, much less the infraction, though neither was so small that it was impossible to see.

Again, this is an individual stereotype held by someone who knows (or should know) better, who

is *not* having such bias reinforced by the culture at large, and who is *not* benefitted by holding

such stereotypes other than deriving comfort from having a coherent world-view, and yet, it is

clear that the obstinate stereotype continue to effect behavior, most of which is nonconscious. The

matter is far more disconcerting with implicit cultural stereotypes (those which are more

damaging to the oppressed and a boon to the privileged than my individual stereotype against

pick-up drivers, e.g.), as they are harder to bring to the surface, and when they are, there is much

resistance against describing them in a moral sense as stereotypes. Or if they are admittedly

stereotypes, they are described in amoral terms as either being necessary, accurate, or both.

　According to Blum, cultural "stereotypes can also be 'held' at a cognitive level below

that of belief. Someone might hold an image or a view of Blacks as prone to violence without

ever having formulated that link to herself and affirmed it." Quoting Diana T. Meyers, he

continues: 'Culturally entrenched figurations [stereotypes] are passed on without obliging anyone

to formulate, accept, or reject repugnant negative propositions about any group's standing or self-

congratulatory positive propositions about one's own'" (Blum 266). This idea is not new. Studies

of implicit biases have been replicated thousands of times in hundreds of scenarios testing

anything from racial biases to gender biases to prejudice against people who are shorter than

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[105] Analogously, white males tend to be primed to see the role they have played in their own success, and
blind to the positive impact others have had for them (see Mills 2007, 31). Similarly, they are primed to see
the individual's role in failures and blind to any systematic causal factors—this, of course, is when they are
failures of "others." See also (Gordon 2000, 61) with his description of the "Carefully crafted discipline of
unseeing" that has nothing to do with optometric failures.

average.[106] But the phrase "below that of belief" is potentially problematic as, like claims about

the innate tendency and "inevitability" of stereotyping discussed above, moral condemnation

against such nonconscious stereotyping seems out of place. Recall Yancy's example of racism he

experienced in the elevator and the denials from whites at philosophy conferences that such

occasions constitute racism. We might say this was an instance in which the woman clutching her

purse and holding her breath manifested a "form of cognitive investment that [was a] less than

endorsed belief yet more substantial than the automatic and unendorsed responses involved in

culturally programmed associations" (Blum 269; see also Gendler 2011, 43).[107] Seen in this light,

Yancy's elevator example (2008, 846 and Chapter 1, p. 18 above), and many others like it, can be

described in the context of implicit stereotyping. These are the heuristic errors that are not

corrected by the conscious System 2 because there is little motivation for the privileged

individual ensconced in a society that benefits her to become aware of such beliefs and behavior,

much less to correct them.[108] These are cultural biases accessed by individuals that might not be

consciously endorsed as being true by those same individuals, yet they are automatically triggered

given the relevant environmental stimuli—the heuristic/stereotype "black males are dangerous

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[106] The list of research on this matter is too extensive to note here, but see (Banaji and Heiphetz 2010; Schneider 59-60; Gendler 2008a, 577-8; 2008b, 656-63; Kelly and Roeddert 2008; and Vedantam 2005) for overviews.

[107] The philosophy of mind and cognitive scientific details here can get confusing: "Less than endorsed belief" does not necessarily entail that it is not a belief, contra (Gendler 2008a, 565-6; cf. Schwitzgebel's dispositional account of in-between beliefs pgs. 536-9 and Sommers' "doxastic dissonance" 270-2). But Blum does note earlier they *can* be "below the level of belief", perhaps on par with Kahneman's heuristics or what Dijksterhuis calls "preconscious processing" (232-3). However, with implicit bias priming experiments, it seems at some level there is propositional content (a feature of beliefs) that gets represented, albeit automatically and below the level of consciousness (Banaji and Heiphetz 361-66). So, it might be more apt to call them nonconscious beliefs, which, like other nonconscious mental representations, can affect behavior in ways that are dissonant with one's consciously endorsed beliefs. Gendler appears to be open to the view that aliefs do represent in much the same way as beliefs (2008a, 557; 2008b, 643), rendering her alief/belief distinction less clear than one might wish. Depending on the context and the triggering stimuli, one belief might come into focus over another inconsistent belief. They are not recognized by the stereotyper as inconsistent because they are not both consciously available for comparison to the same degree at the same time in her short term memory. Given the contemporary negative view of *negative* stereotyping in general, and the motivation to be *seen as* unbiased, it is likely that the culturally inappropriate beliefs will less often achieve "cerebral celebrity" or "fame in the brain", as Daniel Dennett puts it (Hurley et al. 115, 119), and make it into consciousness (see also Wegener et al. 42). But this does not render those states ineffective.

[108] Keeping in mind the complexities of gendered dynamics in the example (see Chapter 1, 34-8).

criminals" is immediately associated with the presence of a black male. This is why many whites

will nonconsciously act in ways that belie their consciously held notion that all persons should be

treated equally and that there is no morally relevant difference between a white and black male,

for example.

The unmistakable body language, as perceived by the oppressed, reveals the belief or

attitude from whites that black males are dangerous; this is evidenced by the locking of car doors,

clutching of purses, or what can lead to greater danger, the profiling of black males even if they

are wearing a suit and tie.[109] The white woman sharing the enclosed space with Yancy is not

(fully) aware of her bodily postures which connote a fear reaction and the desire "to escap[e]

from the dangerous entity" (Baron 124-5). Gendler (2008a 574; 2011, 43; see also Ikuenobe 172)

refers to this in the literature as "aversive racism" in contrast to "dominant racism" as exemplified

in slavery and colonialism. The aversive racism that can be seen by the oppressed, but is less

visible to the oppressors, is one of the types that I have been referring to as civilized oppression

that maintains an unjust system without conscious malicious intent.[110] When a society is

structured by race and gender and the related heuristics have been constantly and ubiquitously

habituated in racist and sexist ways, it is not surprising that the resulting cultural stereotypes will

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[109] The recent decision in the Florida case exonerating George Zimmerman of all charges in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an African American 17 year-old, has caused much outrage as it appeared Zimmerman was clearly tracking Martin as a suspicious-looking person wearing a hoodie (it was raining) in a neighborhood (predominantly white) in which he did not belong (see Sullivan 2006, 143-66 on the "racialization of space"). In this case, as in many like it, the victim (unarmed teenager, Martin) *becomes* an aggressor to the instigator of the situation (Zimmerman who was armed). The stereotype of dangerous-black-male is rendered *accurate* by the profiling surveillance (contrary to the warnings of the 911 operator Zimmerman called) of Zimmerman. The President of the United States has recently spoken a few words about the case, noting that he, prior to being a Senator, had experienced many of the same scenarios as Yancy and even those experienced by Martin, such as racial profiling based upon cultural stereotypes. Whites can afford to assume there is no bias against them in most social interactions, as there is little to no history of such behaviors even when a horrible crime is perpetrated by "one of them" as with the "Unabamber" or the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, or indeed, any white male serial killer or mass shooter. There is no worry of me feeling I might be mistaken for one of those people, that I might be targeted and "profiled" because I might match that description.
[110] "Even among those who are explicitly and sincerely committed to anti-racism, the legacy of having lived in a society structured by hierarchical and hostile racial divisions retains its imprint. So, for example, White participants primed with images of Black faces tend to be faster to identify an ambiguous image as a gun, and more likely to misidentify a (non-gun) tool as a gun" (Gendler 2011, 44).

be hard to dissolve even when the public discussion has moved to more egalitarian language. Even when there is public outcry against such stereotypes, or perhaps because of the outcry, the stereotypes go underground, so to speak, but do not thereby become ineffectual.

The descriptive account in this section sets the stage for the last two sections where I present a moral analysis of implicit cultural stereotyping. Next, I will illustrate how such consciously unendorsed stereotyping causes harm. In the final section, I will address responsibility and/or blameworthiness for these stereotypes.

III. The Harms of Implicit, Cultural, Essentializing Stereotypes

I am concerned most with the cultural stereotypes engaged in racial and gender categorizations that sustain psychological oppression. So, I need to analyze the existence and persistence of the *social* categories in which membership is defined by individuals possessing putative essences. This calls for an epistemological and moral account that is largely dependent upon social interaction and in-group and out-group mentality. It is not simply a matter of how such stereotypes are psychologically formed by individuals, but how they are formed by culture, *used* and amended, if at all, in social interaction.[111]

According to Schneider, "[e]ssentialism promotes drawing inferences from single exemplars of biological kinds to other instances….it is likely that people are born with essence-attuned 'antennae,' although language is also an important cause of essentialist thinking in children….Childhood essentialism need not grow into an adult form, although it may well do so" (Schneider 86). When essences allow for categories to be viewed as causes, the social world can

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[111] The nature of social groups and related cultural stereotypes cannot simply be explained by a kind of naïve realism in which one adopts a "what you see is what you get." Or as Kahneman (2011, 85-8) refers to it, "What you see is all there is" kind of thinking which seeks coherence over quality and quantity of evidence, as witnessed in the self-fulfilling prophesy example above. Since the social construction, maintenance, and at times unintentional nonconscious internalization of stereotypes are complex, an epistemological interpretation of stereotypes should be equally complex, or at least be able to account for the complexities involved. This is not the case with any of the psychologists who take a neutral approach to stereotyping, concentrating almost entirely upon the psychology and supposed survival needs of the individual stereotyper. Failure to get the epistemology correct here, can also lead to moral failures (see Blum 262).

be more easily and coherently comprehended through available stereotypes. For instance,

assuming some entity possesses an essence, we can then readily explain its behavior in causal

terms related to how it is categorized.[112] We determine "abnormal" behaviors based upon the

causal nature of essences such that if an entity seems to be acting *less normally*, we might

question the category to which we thought it belonged; we begin to doubt what its proper essence

is. In the context of human social groups, these doubts are often (unjustifiably) allayed by the

mystifications of the serious who define what normally counts as human, for example, and

reassign perceived "anomalous" instances to a different category, or employ mystifying tactics to

shoehorn the recalcitrant into the category they think the person belongs.[113]

Schneider claims that it is the default category from which we compare others, and in

this, his findings fit well with philosophical analyses of stereotypes and psychological oppression:

"In Western society we think of people as men until told otherwise (so we mark women but not

men, as when we say a person is a 'female doctor' but rarely a 'male doctor'); whites are a default

category for people…and a female is assumed to be straight unless we are explicitly told that she

is lesbian" (Schneider 87; see also Gordon 2000, 81; Lakoff 162). White heterosexual men do not

require much explanation for anything they do as they are the measuring stick of normalcy

against which all other human actions are judged and stereotyped. When asked what the

difference is between women and men, gay and straight, black and white, in each case one

focuses on the features of the less dominant category, and adeptly ticks off the ways in which

they are peculiar. This focus on those without power as different and "marked as inferior" (Young

60; Lakoff 2000, 42-6), is something both liberal-minded egalitarians *and* those in the less

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[112] "Fish swim because they are fish; by this we seem to mean, as a kind of *shorthand*, that some sort of fish essence … creates the proper body configuration, muscular arrangement, and propensity to move these muscles in particular ways" (Schneider 86 my italics).

[113] We saw this with the ontological redefining in slavery in Chapter 1, section I, Frye on sexism, and Fanon on Colonialism. Especially significant is what Fanon calls "psychic alienation" resulting from stereotypes which can lead to the "estrangement or separating of a person from some of the essential attributes of personhood" (Bartky 31). Examples of making the stereotype fit by shoehorning were offered with the "Pick-up drivers as jackasses" and "African Americans as strikebreakers" cases.

dominant category do as well. Thus, it seems no one is really immune to the malicious effects of stereotypes. But this is not a concession to Kahneman's view, for example, that we should adopt a neutral stance regarding stereotyping. Essentializing stereotypes privilege the powerful within the complex web of multifarious human interactions that we call "culture", much of which is contingently dependent upon historical "hegemonic ideological patterns" or schemas which "are often structured as to convey misinformation" (Mills 1998, 34) and sustain the status quo, asymmetrically affecting those with power against those without.

With these stereotypes, the very aspect that makes the oppressed appear as different is the same feature that makes any single one stand for all in that particular (out)group, and the "recognition" of this becomes habituated and, as briefly covered in Chapter 1, absorbed in the discourse and bodily movements of the privileged. The stereotyping presumes "…there is no distinction between him and the social role [constructed through stereotypical myths by the serious] which makes the individual an essential representative of the entire group….Its members are literally without insides or hidden spaces for interrogation" (Gordon 2000, 88-9; 2005, 373; see also Blum 272-4). Such an attitude, here revealing a spirit of seriousness, allows for those with power to quickly size-up others, often inaccurately, without having to use much mental energy that would normally be needed to be able to see past the façade that has been erected by an oppressive system, and lived out by the oppressed in a way that has made them feel they deserve their situation (Cudd 180).

When stereotypes against a group of people accumulate and become part of the national historical discourse,[114] for example, they become subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) tools that constrain the powerless, indeed, even leading to the oppressed to oppress themselves. Consider the well-researched phenomena of "stereotype threat." Tamar Gendler (2011, 49-50; see also Schneider 136-9) offers an extensive overview, the highlights of which I will briefly consider here: "'stereotype threat disrupts performance via 3 distinct, yet interrelated, mechanisms: (a) a

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[114] See (Mills 2007, 31; Cudd 73; and Sullivan 2006, 129-42).

physiological stress response that directly impairs prefrontal processing, (b) a tendency to actively monitor performance, and (c) efforts to suppress negative thoughts and emotions in the service of self-regulation. These mechanisms combine to consume executive resources needed to perform well on cognitive and social tasks. The active monitoring mechanism disrupts performance on sensorimotor tasks directly'" (Gendler 2011, 49-50 nt. 42 quoting Schmader et al). As far as those who are oppressed, succumbing to stereotype threat makes succeeding at being "normal" or achieving even the minimum social standards of ordinariness set by the powerful, very difficult. This can lead to failure in these cognitive domains, especially test-taking, which our society disproportionately values (Young Chapter 5; Ziv 1983, 72), which can then lead to further weakening of self-esteem and prestige (Harvey 1999, 51), and "thus do cultural myths become self-fulfilling prophecies" (Bem 355-6).

From the perspective of the oppressed, the belief that one is responsible for the powerlessness of one's situation not only adds fuel for the continuation of the oppression by effectively obliterating any lasting thoughts of fighting against those responsible for it (spirit of seriousness), but sends the victims into a deepening spiral of greater defenselessness (Cudd 11, 160; Fanon 1963, 171). Again, this seems to be the more widespread and sinister form of oppression, as it leads to standardized conditions of the oppressed, such that even the oppressed themselves *live out* the socially constructed stereotypes that constrain them (Frye 67). That is, the economic, educational, employment, etc., failures of the oppressed are seen to be a result of individual shortcomings such as laziness, being overly emotional, ignorant, violent, etc., all of which are expressed and transmitted in tidy stereotypes—but since these failings are causally connected to *essential* features of the individuals by virtue of those people belonging to a particular social group, the stereotypes are assumed to be accurate and thus when used by the powerful, they are deemed morally neutral. Indeed, they truthfully represent the social world—

"That's just the way it is."[115] The possibility that there are systemic problems does not need to arise; we have an explanation for why "certain people" are where they are in (or out of) society. This mindset helps sustain the status quo and always benefits the privileged.

Social psychology and philosophy can find common ground regarding what is problematic about stereotyping, and here we can see what distinguishes the perniciousness of stereotypes from mere erroneous generalizations. In particular, stereotypes are usually inaccurate, and when they are accurate, this is merely coincidental and not a result of valid or cogent reasoning; they rely upon negative presumptions about a person based solely on group membership; even when they are "positive", they still inculcate lazy thinking and can imply some other negative attributes (assuming that all Asians are smart and good at math could lead one to assume they are boring, e.g., see Blum 274 and Cohen 80[116]); and the two points most relevant to my work here, stereotypes are rigid, thus rarely amenable to emendation, and they fail to encourage thinking about individuals *as* individuals (Schneider 17-22), or to borrow from Lewis Gordon, they foster "epistemic closure" (Gordon 2000, 88)[117] with respect to the particularity of others. These last two points correlate with the discussion on essentialism and oppression in Chapter 1 above. Epistemic closure in the context of perpetuating culturally infused stereotypes, offers a sense of cognitive, affective, and even moral ease for the stereotyper and at the same time harms those who are stereotyped, as it both creates hostile environments and then feeds upon that oppressive construction, allowing for the negative stereotypes to fester and multiply.

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[115] The spirit of seriousness is found in racism where "[i]t is both an epistemic closure, in that it understands itself as already possessing all of the relevant answers, and a normative closure, in that it sees the value and meaning of racial categories, and the individuals that occupy them, as fixed and given (essential)" (Monahan 2011, 150).

[116] See also political pundit Bill O'Reilly's presumed compliment toward Asian Americans, which at the same time serves as an explicit negative stereotype against liberals: "Asian people are not liberal, you know, by nature…they're usually more industrious and hardworking." http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdLHGnDMBjs. Accessed 7/8/13. His glib attitude in summing up others with a sense of zoological accuracy is a clear instance of ontological expansiveness. Furthermore, it is ironic when O'Reilly removes the individuality of Asian Americans (and liberals) with stereotypes, while he continually espouses the virtues of individualism and *personal* responsibility.

[117] I will have much more on this later, but see also (Blum 264, nt. 18; Morreall 2009, 112-115; Basu 388; Monahan 1995, 57-60).

At the outset of this chapter I noted that stereotypes are kinds of heuristic errors. This is true, but if there is any moral accountability for stereotyping, it is insufficient to claim that stereotypes are mere flaws in one's automatic (uncontrolled) System 1, especially when some (Jussim et al; Baron; Kahneman 2011, 168-9; see also Uhlmann et al, 2-4 for a list of others) claim that stereotypes are *not* always inaccurate. If my stereotypes against pickup drivers were simply heuristic errors driven by cognitive ease and availability of non-statistical data, such as the *feeling* of representativeness (Kahneman 2011, 149-155), e.g., then there is a great likelihood that I would have readjusted my world-view to fit the new data. I would have been startled to see something that conflicted with my habitual mode of representation. Perhaps I was a bit surprised, briefly, and that is why I acted in a way to "correct" the error in perception that conflicted with my conception, to borrow from Schopenhauer (2008, 93).[118] I attempted to change the world rather than my world-view; a common phenomenon with the "self-fulfilling" nature of stereotyping. While such reactions might be deemed "rational" from an ecological point of view, I have shown in this section that these essentializing stereotypes are harmful.

From a "neutral" point of view, stereotyping people, like objects or animals, promotes cognitive efficiency where one relies upon availability[119] and affect heuristics. Though these heuristics and subsequent actions are not always fully conscious and might even be "automatic" in a sense, I will argue that one is still responsible for them, if not blameworthy. This is due to the degree of motivation and commitment to them, especially when the stereotype sustains the status quo which supports the stereotyper, and more generally, one's commitment to a way of being that allows certain harmful stereotypes to flourish.

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[118] In anticipation of later chapters on humor, notice I did not find this incongruity amusing; rather, I found it somewhat threatening to my cherished stereotyped view of part of the social world.

[119] Devine (1989, 6) uses "accessible": "An additional consequence of this developmental sequence is that stereotypes have a longer history of activation and are therefore likely to be more accessible than are personal beliefs. To the extent that an individual rejects the stereotype, he or she experiences a fundamental conflict between the already established stereotype and the more recently established personal beliefs." So, even the stereotypes we come to realize we have but wish we did not, are often very difficult to dislodge.

IV.   Responsibility and Blameworthiness for Implicit, Unendorsed, Cultural Stereotyping

The categorizations involved in implicit stereotyping might seem unavoidable "[b]ecause this is a real-time process, and because race is a salient category in many interpersonal interactions, race-associated schemata tend to be activated automatically" (Gendler 2011, 47-8). So, the stereotypes *can* be seen as the inevitable outcome of brains that have evolved (or have been designed) to be cognitive misers, generally getting things correct, but, with some "anomalously" drawn oppressive conclusions.[120] In this sense, oppressive stereotyping is unconscious and "accidental"[121] rather than irrational or immoral—a problem if one views psychological oppression perpetuated by stereotypes as unethical. Furthermore, they can manifest behavior that can be described as "unwanted belief-discordant" mental states (Gendler 2008a, 572). A non-social example of this might be the recognition at one level of awareness (perhaps visceral) that there is danger in standing over a sheer drop, but at the same time the intellectual cognizance that the sense of fear is unwarranted—you are standing on "The Grand Canyon Skywalk" which you know is extremely sturdy and safe (Gendler 2008b, 634). More to the point here are analogous cases, Gendler claims, involving implicit stereotypes of others:

> Ultimately, encountering or thinking about a member of a well-learned category activates what I have called, in other work, an alief:[122] an innate or habitual propensity to respond to an apparent stimulus, often with an automatized representational-affective-behavioral triad …. Such aliefs are triggered whether or not they accord with our explicit beliefs—indeed, even when they run explicitly counter to them. And because they operate at a level that is relatively (though not completely) impenetrable by controlled rational

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[120]A cultural parallel is the blatantly wrong conclusion about the history of the United States. Consider political pundit Sean Hannity, who epitomizes the spirit of seriousness with his espousal of the "American Exceptionalism-Manifest Destiny" heuristic: "America is the single greatest and best country God has given man in the history of the planet" http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/174546/june-19-2008/sean-hannity-loves-america. Accessed 3/8/13. In other words, the moral failings are but accidental outliers that should not stand as a lasting blemish on our collective history.

[121] For a recent example of this idea put to music, and for a superb parody of the same see *The Colbert Report*: http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/425563/april-17-2013/-accidental-racist--song. Accessed 8/7/13.

[122] See (Gendler 2008a,b).

processes, their regulation is best achieved by strategies that exploit capacities *other than rational argument and persuasion.* (Gendler 2011, 41 my italics)[123]

One of the concerns raised in Chapter 1 above can now be reformulated here in the context of implicit biases and faulty heuristics: on what grounds can one be held morally culpable for *nonconsciously* holding onto *culturally* infused stereotypes, many of which might have been inculcated into an individual's psyche seemingly against one's will?

Many of our cognitive errors remain beneath conscious attention, as Kahneman notes.[124] When there are few signs that something is amiss due to the ubiquitous influence of culture which normalizes such flaws, then the automatic processes remain "beyond our control", as one might put it, such that we should not be held responsible, much less blameworthy, for the errors. When framed in this light, it seems Corlett's concerns about what really constitutes racism, oppression, and moral responsibility is viable.[125] So, I will make the case that even in a racist and sexist culture, the individual still has the responsibility to self-monitor his beliefs and behavior.

We see what we expect/want to see, but given enough counter-evidence to our built up heuristics, and sufficient motivation, we can actually train ourselves to see differently (Cudd 74; Kahneman 2011, 173-4; and Chapters 3 and 4 below). This takes effort and a desire to change, and as most of us have the desire to accurately represent reality, to know, we will usually amend our heuristic errors when we are conscious of them. But when the desire to be a fair person

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[123] The italicized claim will be integral in later chapters on subversive humor as a means to "regulate" oppressive mental states and actions.

[124] "Biases cannot always be avoided, because System 2 may have no clue to the error. Even when cues to likely errors are available, errors can be prevented only by the enhanced monitoring and effortful activity of System 2" (Kahneman 2011, 28; see also Schwitzgebel 532). There is the threat of seriousness here—the cluelessness is not unavoidable, as it is easy to miss something if one *chooses* at some level to not effortfully monitor one's self.

[125] "To the extent that one engages in this or that kind or degree of racist behavior (ethnic prejudice and ethnic discrimination), one is a racist. And since the proper locus of control for racism is not some ethereal social structure, but rather the individual cognizer, then we are each individually responsible (insofar as we are liable for anything) for the *self-monitoring of our beliefs and behaviors* so as to not remain racists or commit yet another racist act, inaction, or attempted action" (Corlett 579, my italics). I think Corlett is correct that individuals must be held morally responsible for racist actions (and inactions), but as noted above and in Chapter 1, ignoring the role that systemic but implicit cultural stereotypes play in oppression will leave the disease of oppression in place even while (if) we have quarantined the overt malignancies in the form of violence against nonwhites and women.

committed to the truth, e.g., butts up against systemic pressures to maintain a status quo that

favors you, questioning *or even becoming aware of* such cultural stereotypes could lead to

undermining that privileged status. So, since we are committed to stereotypes even in the face of

counter-evidence, they are not arrived at through logical statistical reasoning, and since they

"tend to benefit (materially and psychologically) dominant populations and disfavor dominated

ones" (Cudd 70), it would be an adoption of the spirit of seriousness to take a disinterested amoral

view towards them in general. Cultural stereotypes are more than unavoidable logical errors or

false beliefs perpetuated by individuals in a society. To say otherwise is to appeal to the cliché

that to be human is to err; but this places us in the company of those who argue that there will

always be the poor among us, and that the harms of psychological oppression are inevitable based

upon our human nature; "stereotypes are necessary for human survival" (Baron 124), so what can

we do about them? "Why bother" (Gordon 2000, 72).[126]

    Here my analysis of stereotypes in oppression will more directly combine the cognitive

and social scientific data with the existentialist and phenomenological concepts of spirit of

seriousness and ontological expansiveness.[127] With respect to questions about how to group

others, easy answers pop into mind from System 1 that *feel* good enough such that extra

conscious effort from System 2 is deemed unwanted and unwarranted. If cognitive dissonance is

uncomfortable, the cognitive ease of unambiguously categorizing others can be comfortable if not

pleasant to the stereotyper (Kahneman 2011, 65-7). But this unburdened way of being can lead

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[126] When it is assumed that an enormously powerful government is incapable of doing anything, what in the world can an individual do? This is seen with the court ruling in *McCleskey v. Kemp* (1987) which accepted the statistical analysis that a defendant is at least twice as likely to receive the death penalty if the victim is white, but ruled against McCleskey arguing that it was *not* discriminatory, as ruling otherwise would lead to undermining the entire (admittedly racist) system. See (Gordon 1999, 75-6).

[127] While existentialists like Sartre, De Beauvoir, and Gordon, e.g., might accuse the psychologists mentioned in this dissertation with being serious mystifiers, I think an argument can be made (but not here) that they (Sartre and Gordon more so than De Beauvoir) over-emphasize the responsibility of the individual in bad faith (Sartre 1977, Part I Chapter 2; 1948, 99, 103; De Beauvoir 1977; Gordon 1999, 5, 29-44; see also Cudd 67-8). I think this limits the role that cultural impacts have on stereotyping and psychological oppression. For a critique of Gordon in particular on this point, see (Ikuenobe 169). I think a middle ground between the psychologists and existentialists can be found.

one to become less *inclined* to engage the effortful System 2.[128] But, in addition to the rewarding feelings of cognitive consonance, there is also a motivation on the part of the privileged to remain ignorant of certain socio-political realities that might otherwise undermine their sense of ease and entitled empowerment. As briefly noted above, the difference between "ability" and "inclination" is morally significant with cultural stereotypes; indeed, this is largely Sullivan's point with her description of the habitual way of "being-whitely." This sort of habit is not a mere reflex reaction over which we have no control, but a cultivated way of being.[129]

When habitual biases are exposed enough to stand out from the quotidian, the privileged have an impressive ability to deceive themselves[130] or habitually rationalize in order to sustain the coherence of a world-view that favors them; this coherence may rely on stereotypes that are neither conscious nor accurate. Not only can the stereotypes become habituated but so too can our responses to them (see Ikuenobe 171). The stereotypes can be automatically triggered by some

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[128] See (Chapter 1 above) and (Lugones 90-3). But Kahneman, at least briefly, is open to a non-neutral stance on stereotyping in general, though he does not explicitly connect the following with problems of stereotyping: "Those who avoid the sin of intellectual sloth could be called 'engaged.' They are more alert, more intellectually active, less willing to be satisfied with superficially attractive answers, more skeptical about their intuitions. The psychologist Keith Stanovich would call them more rational" (Kahneman 2011, 46). A parallel might be found with Gordon's *epistemic closure*. How is it that the marginalized possess epistemic privilege *vis a vis* the socially privileged regarding oppression? They have been forced to think about the issues in ways the white male privileged have not needed to (see Yancy 2008, 848-9); the latter can rely upon their System 1 without strain as the culture to which they belong consistently fails to provide viable alternative views to their biased social norms. The hegemonic discourse fosters "intellectual sloth", but this can even infect (be secreted into) those who are most adversely affected by the stereotypes. In some ways even the oppressed might come to find it easier to live up to (down to) the cultural stereotype as the best means to just get by, making them *accomplices* in their own subjugation--this is civilized oppression (see Jenkins 183; Watkins 34, 126; and Gordon 2005, 375-6). See especially (Harvey 1999, 13-4 and Kruks 60, 66) on the view that "compliance [is often] a rational survival strategy for many women." Notice, under-privileged people living out a stereotype is different than the powerful implicitly perpetuating said stereotype; given the epistemic vantage point of the oppressed, there is often recognition of this difference (but not always; see Bargh et al., 291). I will return to this important point later with a discussion of W.E.B. Dubois' concept of "double consciousness" and Lugones' "ontological confusion" (Lugones 9) in relation to incongruity, humor, and oppression.

[129] Borrowing from Sullivan (2006, 69), I am a "co-author" of this manner of being, as I am "supported" by a society which privileges people like me and helps me to remain ignorant of such habits.

[130] "For now, we need only observe that lying to ourselves must be a case of bad faith since we must, in effect, deny having control over that which we have control. With such an effort we attempt to give up our choice in our condition. We attempt to evade the human confrontation with choice" (Gordon 1999, 9). In contrast, Alcoff claims that "...*on balance*, members of oppressed groups have fewer reasons to fool themselves about this being the best of all possible worlds, and have strong motivations to gain a clear-eyed assessment of their society" (Alcoff 44).

state of affairs in one's environment; but without the proclivity or commitment to recognize them as stereotypes and then at least attempt to override them, they become further ingrained and part of one's habitual representation of the social world--they become part of the way such persons are constituted. This is so even for those who would overtly deny endorsing the content of stereotypes.[131] According to Cudd, "stereotyping cannot be seen as an unbiased information-processing phenomenon, but one that is *creatively manipulated* by persons to serve their interest in a coherent rationalization of the social roles and the social groups that perform them" (Cudd 71-2, my italics). The constant use of these stereotypes eventually becomes habitual and virtually second-nature, but this is not to ignore the fact that one can be motivated by a particular attitude toward data which fits the way one *wants* to see reality.[132]

I have used Sullivan's notion of habit above (Chapter 1, nt. 32; see also Yancy 2008, 864-5), and it is integral in the discussion here. Habitual ways of being in the world do not

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[131] This is the case whether we refer to the overt belief-discordant behavior above as an alief, an in-between belief, or dissonant belief (for more descriptive phrases with the same/similar referents, see Schwitzgebel 545). Having said that, Gendler's use of "racist aliefs", according to Schwitzgebel, opens the door for privileged people to shrug off responsibility for racist tendencies: "if what we believe is what we avow, and what we believe is also this central topic in philosophy of mind, epistemology, and philosophy of action, then I worry that we are invited to a *noxiously comfortable view of ourselves*: Once we have our judgments right, we have our beliefs right, and thus we have right that aspect of our minds about which the philosophical community cares. It is thus easier than it should be to regard ourselves as free of racist, sexist, elitist, and other objectionable attitudes" (Schwitzgebel 547, my italics). My sympathies with this quotation will be evident in Chapters 3-5, but here, if his critiques hold, one can see in the italicized phrase parallels with a spirit of seriousness and an ontologically expansive way of being. Extending his arguments below, I will claim that Gendler's aliefs are in fact assented to at some level in ways not applicable to her other non-social examples, such as the Skywalk and Movie-goer cases. There are culturally infused motivations, instilled and sustained through ubiquitous stereotypes, for privileged (and underprivileged) to accept as true the view that out-group members are inferior in the relevant ways in order to justify a system which privileges the powerful.
[132] (Uhlmann et al.) offer types of commitments to stereotyping other than the presumption of accuracy, such as "threatened egotism", "system justification" or the rationalization of inequality (p. 4-8). See also (Haidt 821) on the "just world" hypothesis that is sustained by "motivated reasoning." To borrow from Gordon (1999, 147), the stereotypes are driven by "a certain attitude toward the evidence. Evidence is presented for the fulfillment of desire." There is an important distinction to be made between a desire one wishes to satisfy, usually by trying to make the world fit one's wants, such as the *desire* for the belief that "all pickup drivers are jackasses" be true, versus a belief one intellectually thinks is true based on evidence that corresponds to reality, and is consistent with one's other well-established beliefs. See John Searle's (1983, 14-15, 173) "world-to-mind direction of fit" vs. "mind-to-world direction of fit" examples; the former represents the mode of desires, the latter beliefs. However, belief and desire get easily intertwined, especially in the examples discussed here, for I do not think such mental states are cleanly cordoned off from each other.

necessitate occurrent conscious beliefs in order for one to be properly considered "being-a-certain-way", such as Sullivan's example of "being-whitely." Recall that this refers to an entrenched form of comportment or style of being that results from a multiplicity of associations, some that are conscious and voluntary and others that are nonconscious, automatic, and not completely controllable;[133] within the tradition of virtue ethics, this might be simply called one's "character", or at least, such ways of being contribute to one's character for better or worse.[134] So, I can be fittingly described as being-whitely as I unself-reflectively (and habitually) claim to be fully responsible for *all* my successes; that I have worked hard and deserve all that I have, and thereby imply that I am not privileged at the expense of others. When interrogated further about these beliefs, I habitually rationalize away any inconsistencies, making any counter-evidence fit my favored opinions.

As I argued in Chapter 1, the spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness allow for an unjustified sense of ease with which the privileged think and act in the world. The clarity of thought unencumbered by ambiguity, vagueness, or uncertainty (that is, reality), constitutes a sense of tensionless comfort where it is unwarranted. The cultural frames enable one to have social heuristics available for ease of categorization, ecologically speaking, in which System 2 is rarely activated other than to find ways to alleviate any unwanted dissonance—but even when the conscious system is not engaged, one is still responsible for the effects of the unmonitored System 1. The complex interaction among spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and stereotypes can be glimpsed with Sullivan's discussion of unconscious habits of white privilege: "Especially in the case of a white person who consciously opposes her racial privilege, it is psychologically and emotionally difficult for her to recognize when and how she is a beneficiary

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[133] Pamela Hieronymi refers to this as "one's take on the world" based on one's "commitment-constituted attitudes" (358) for which we are responsible even if it is not conscious or occurrently voluntary.

[134] By analogy with oppression, in which singular isolated violent incidents, for instance, are insufficient to constitute systemic oppression, one-off actions (good or bad) are also insufficient to constitute one's character; they must be "temporally stable and regularly manifested in behavior across a wide array of objectively different types of situations" (Snow 1). They must be habitual.

of it [or a cause of the limitations of others]. That difficulty tends to make it easy for her to see her privilege as normal and even to view those who do not have it as abnormal or deficient. Viewing others in that way helps protect her self-image as good, hard-working, and fair: she is not the beneficiary of anything that she did not earn or deserve" (Sullivan 2006, 52).[135]

These stereotypes which mark others as abnormal contribute to both spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness, which in turn feed back into the perpetuation of easy essentializing, stereotypical thinking. Here is another example from Sullivan in which habit is formed and cultivated through nonconscious interactions/transactions within social environments:

> I associate its smell [cumin, a spice often used in Mexican and Tex-Mex food] with the (perceived) body odor of Mexicans. Even though I now consciously know that the association is racist, and I sincerely do not want to make it, I am not able to smell cumin without it occurring. It is as if behind or alongside my conscious knowledge, a much stronger olfactory un(conscious) knowledge exists, undermining my attempts to smell cumin as just plain cumin (if there is such a thing)....Mexicans are greasy and smelly, while I am clean and odor free: this is what my nose assures me. (Sullivan 2006, 68)

It is as if she cannot help herself, or control her inner homunculus (Kahneman 2011, 159); she is unable to completely filter out the habitual connection made automatically by her heuristically-driven System 1. These same nonconscious habits can obstruct one's drive (at one level) for changing behavior as the habits self-perpetuate.[136] However, even though a response to stimuli might be nonconscious, automatic, and even unendorsed (if brought to consciousness), she is still responsible for it.

One's privilege already makes it difficult for one to recognize the ontologically expansive way of being; this ignorance is co-constituted by culture and the individual who implicitly desires to maintain the status quo that privileges him. This difficulty of seeing involves an element of

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[135] See also (Harvey 1999, 48-51; Wise 2008, 64; Mills 2007, 31; Monahan 2011, 155-6).

[136] The psychosomatic infusing of nonconscious racial habits can also be seen in the "distasteful hiss of my grandmother's voice as she pronounced the word 'Mexican.' She and many others must be considered a coauthor of all I write or say regarding Mexican people, life, food, and so on…" (Sullivan 2006, 69). "Coauthor" still implies agency in the morally relevant sense. We might not be blameworthy for the culturally infused stereotypes that get triggered in us automatically, but insofar as we do nothing about them when so triggered, I think we are blameworthy; we help continue to write the stereotype—but fail to *right* it (cf. Blum 269 on Patricia Devine's distinction between moral responsibility for personal beliefs "but not for the automatic stereotypic associations triggered in us as a result of growing up in particular social context").

willful ignorance; Gordon might refer to this as a "[c]arefully crafted discipline of unseeing"

(Gordon 2000, 61).[137] There is no disconnect between eye and brain such that one is physically

incapable of seeing; rather, one must, at some level, *work* at not seeing what is uncomfortable or

what creates unwanted tension in one's otherwise coherent system of self-serving beliefs. This

effort gets easier when one is collectively engaged with like-minded and like-behaving in-group

members who access the same cultural stereotypes,[138] but this effortlessness does not make the

stereotypes morally acceptable or true beyond a superficial sense; indeed, I have referred to this

as "*miser*-able ease," as it exploits and eventually trains the heuristic mechanisms that allow for

the feeling of cognitive ease, only admitting errors when they can be described as the inevitable

outcome of an uncensored, automatic time- and energy-saving device. It is a lack of concern for

the truth and social fairness that is in large part caused by a desire to present the world in a

favorable light for the privileged individual, and those like him, in which he is seen as the sole

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[137] Gordon is referring to the slave breaker Covey's (see Chapter 1 section I above) self-deception or bad faith in his dehumanization of Frederick Douglass: "Whatever Covey may have said, he *knew* that Douglass was a human being, and Douglass *knew* that Covey knew it" (p. 61). This example differs from the case at hand in that Covey explicitly endorses racist beliefs, but tries to justify/rationalize them by seeing Douglass as not fully human—or, *not seeing* him as fully human. There are many parallels here, but I think Gordon views racism, at least, as relying on more explicitly held and endorsed beliefs than those described in implicit stereotypes. See (Yancy 2008, 852, 856, 859-60) for a similar view on seeing, but one that emphasizes the cultural influences more: "her coming to 'see' me as she does is actually a cultural achievement, a racist socio-historical schematization, indeed, an act of epistemic violence" (859-60).

[138] See (Gendler 2008a, 577 nt. 53). Interestingly, the *feeling* of ease does not necessarily mean that one is actually using less cognitive energy. Just as it takes more mental prowess to sustain a *comfortable* lie than what you think is true, one who is motivated enough to conceal one's "belief-discordant aliefs (for example, by expending executive control in cases of interracial interaction to suppress your aliefs, thereby temporarily depleting your cognitive resources)" (Gendler 2008a, 578), appears willing and *able* to make that cognitive sacrifice—the feeling of ease in social interactions overrides (or justifies) the cognitive costs. However, I am not sure the costs are as great as Gendler claims (see also Gendler 2011), especially with cases of automatic associations that have become habituated. If such automaticity constantly required the kinds of cognitive energy Gendler presumes, it is unlikely that professional athletes or grandmaster chess champions, e.g. (see Kahneman 2011, 241-2), would be able to perform as efficiently and expertly (or *automatically*) as they do. So, we might say that the comfortable feeling from *eventually* succeeding in believing in ones' own lies, for instance, is a sufficient motivator to either sustain the necessary cognitive costs, or, what is more efficient, to habituate oneself to *ignore* the uncomfortable associations and see what one desires (and thus expects) to see. In this way, incongruities can be conveniently ignored or quickly forgotten, thereby saving extra cognitive resources. We can train our heuristics to avoid cognitive overload, and in this way, we are deserving of either praise or blame depending on how the habitual heuristics get incorporated in our long-term goal-directed behavior. Furthermore, once so habituated, executive control, certainly conscious control, is no longer required to sustain the feeling of actual cognitive ease even though we are in error.

author of his successes in a just system. Representing the social world in this way leads implicitly to the belief that others are inferior due to their low standing in that same society (if so many of "them" failed because of an unjust system, what does that mean for all of my "successes"?), creative rationalizing in the form of putatively accurate stereotyping results in order to sustain the myth of atomistic merit.[139] Likewise, certain tactics are recruited to hide or dissolve the hindering dissonance when (if) the conflicting beliefs and/or attitudes are each brought to consciousness long enough to be compared with one another.[140]

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[139] There is a motivation to accept the truth of cultural stereotypes even in the face of more counter-examples than supporting ones. This can be compared to the wishful thinking of those who get their fortunes read by palm-readers who ignore or quickly forget the multitude of the "psychic's" errors. The difference is in the latter case they are harming themselves; in the former, others are harmed. For a similar argument, see (Schneider 143).

[140] This is why I think there is a difference between Gendler's example of the "avowed anti-racist" who reveals "differential startle responses when Caucasian and African faces are flashed before her eyes" (2008a, 553), and her (2008b, 634) "Skywalk" alief/belief example, among others. The rationalizing tactics and motivations are significantly different. It is true that both can involve associative, automatic, affective content that leads to action in a way that can remain below conscious awareness, and remain unendorsed at a *superficial* level. But with implicit racism, it is not clear to me that what she refers to as aliefs are *a*rational: "Though aliefs may be useful or detrimental, laudable or contemptible, they are neither rational nor irrational" (Gendler 2008a, 557). I think this, in part, is what worries Schwitzgebel (545); I can claim I am not responsible for my arational aliefs, even if "contemptible", because they are not determined by any of my intentionally forged, rational goals. This can lead to the "*noxiously comfortable view of ourselves*" (see also Holroyd 290 on the need for "humility" in our long-term goals of being non-prejudiced). But "racist aliefs" are motivated by, or are the indirect result of, self-serving reasons; thus, in either case, the person is responsible. I would argue that Gendler's aliefs are rational, but in the "ecological" sense discussed above with stereotypes (see also Gigerenzer 25, 27 on the ecological rationality of heuristics). If I habitually act in a manner that benefits me, that appears to work toward satisfying one of my long-term goals, such as living comfortably, or rather, *complacently*, this would be rational behavior. But the willful neglect of the logical and practical consequences for others resulting from this habitual-complacency-driven goal can lead to ontological expansiveness where I implicitly and habitually overvalue my selfish goals at the expense of my laudable ones—and at the expense of other people. Thus, the habitual actions which serve one of my goals leads to adversely affecting others in ways of which I *should* be cognizant: "On this score, benefiting from acting whitely-in-the-world can have negative implications for non-whites, even if whites are unaware of the consequences of their actions. I feel compelled to exclaim: But, he or she *ought* to have been aware! And where he or she *ought* to have been aware, he or she *can* indeed be aware" (Yancy 2008, 865; see also Harvey 2010, 15; and Monahan 2011, 150). This is more a case of rationalizing than irrationality. Consider an analogy with a consciously professed animal lover who argues that sentient creatures should not be unnecessarily harmed, but regularly, and habitually, eats meat. In this case, what she endorses consciously (animal rights) is a proposition (or series of them) which logically and morally leads to another proposition (unnecessarily slaughtering animals is wrong) which she does not (deeply) endorse. If this were merely a result of a logical error, the inconsistency could be pointed out, and she would likely be open to amending one or both of the dissonant beliefs. But since her commitment to the savory flavor and gustatory ease of meat-eating, as evidenced by her habitual carnivorous diet, supersedes her commitment to animal rights, she is motivated to remain cognitively/epistemically closed to her heuristic errors—cruelty=bad, meat=good, but meat=cruelty, to put it a bit over-simply to fit the principle of transitivity. This is quite common; few Americans, for instance, spend much cognitive energy agonizing

But in order for this habitual comportment to be maintained in the way that long-standing stereotypes are there must be many and varied instances in which one behaves in the habitual goal-dependent manner described.[141] Furthermore, to be held responsible even for one's nonconscious mental states, one must have at least some control over the automatic reactions, even if that control is not directly and occurrently engaged. I will close this chapter making the case that we do have sufficient control regarding implicit and automatic stereotyping, borrowing from Sullivan's (2006) phenomenological perspective and Nancy Snow's Aristotelian account of habitual virtuous actions.

There is agreement among many of the authors quoted here on the moral importance of aligning one's habits with one's consciously endorsed beliefs (see Gendler 2008a, 576-8; 2008b, 662; Sullivan 2006, 90; Schwitzgebel 547-8; Sommers 272; Schneider 568; and Blum 270). At the risk of thinking wishfully, I assume most people today hold generally egalitarian views about other people even those in out-groups. If asked, they would aver that they at least want to be open and good people even to the point of making it one of their long-term goals. A single beneficent act does not make a good person; likewise, a single automatic, nonconscious stereotypical act does not make one a horrible person. Just as professional athletes[142] and musicians, e.g., become

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over the source of their meals. In other words, at one level, she *does* endorse unnecessarily harming animals, or is at least ambivalent to their unnecessary suffering, as doing so helps sustain the long-term goal of pleasing her palate. So, even if her reactions within meat-eating environments or animal-rights environments are automatically and habitually triggered below the level of consciousness, they are still rationally endorsed enough to constitute responsibility for them, and she is *blameworthy* if she continues to fulfill her personal desires at the expense of other sentient beings (of course, the matter is more complex if she *must* eat meat on doctor's orders—there are no such medical parallels with oppressive stereotypes).

[141] I follow (Snow 34-8, 44, 57-9; Dijksterhuis 234; Holroyd 283-5; and Bargh et al. 288-305) on the understanding of nonconscious, automatic goal pursuit. "Aristotle is right: In order to live well, we must work to bring our habits in accord with our reflective beliefs" (Gendler 2008b, 662).

[142] Lionel Messi, likely the greatest footballer ("soccer player" for ontologically expansive Americans) alive today, is certainly deserving of praise for his abilities. Granting the fact that he could not do the things he does without his teammates, and that much (most during matches) of his actions are automatic and below the level of consciousness, it would still be perverse to claim he is only responsible for his individual actions in the moment if he has consciously executed them. He has habituated himself to perform efficiently through the automatic association of ideas, images and the positioning of his own players and the opponents, etc.—he has trained his heuristics in the arena of football. Even though the associations are nonconscious and automatically triggered based upon environmental stimuli, he is still responsible (enough) for our admiration. But if he were asked, he would likely claim he *meant* to do many of the actions performed—they were properly intentional and goal-directed (quite literally) even if nonconscious

experts through thousands of hours of practice to the point that their actions become automatic and habitual, a morally good person, it can be argued, must also habitually act in ways consistent with her consciously professed goals of being a good person.[143]

Snow (46-7) uses an example of driving the same route *routinely* on "auto-pilot" to argue for the possibility of responsibility for nonconscious automatic habitual behaviors. Such cases meet the basic criteria of automatic, nonconscious, habits which are yet open to "intervention control" and thus responsibility on the part of the driver: "The habitual acts are performed on 'automatic pilot,' yet, should unfamiliar prompts become apparent, the agent would ["should" if we are discussing the cases above] be alerted to the fact that her actions were no longer satisfying her rationally held beliefs and desires, and would intervene, in accordance with conscious reflection, to redirect the action sequence" (Snow 46). This is different than "blindsight", e.g., in which parts of the brain are damaged and one is quite literally seeing nonconsciously as the visual stimuli are affecting one's behavior but without drawing on conscious representations. For example, I am not "blind" to the Geo Metro that cuts me off, as I do not smash into its rear, and I could become conscious *that* I am seeing it in a way blindsight patients cannot. Likewise, the way I am conscious of pickups is largely colored by my implicit expectations which are primed by schemas and heuristics which have become stereotypes for which I should be held liable, even though I might only be a coauthor of them and they might not always be consciously entertained. But what of automatic, nonconscious, *unendorsed* behavior of the sort described in section III?

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much of the time, and effective without the need for direct executive control. If he begins to act in ways contrary to his professed intentions and desires, he has the *ability,* and his coach might add, the responsibility, to intervene in an action and take direct, conscious control to redirect his behavior.

[143] With systemic oppression, the individual stereotypical acts might not make the individual stereotyper a habitual stereotyper, but to reiterate, oppression is not fully explicable on purely individualist terms. An oppressed person on the receiving end of your first (and only, for the sake of the example) stereotypical act, likely has experienced hundreds of other constraining situations prior; yours is one more that, on its own, might ultimately be as harmless as one person emitting harmful carbon dioxide--oppression (and global warming) are not caused by solitary individual acts, but the more individuals become aware of their implicit biases, the greater likelihood they can be avoided and thereby contribute to the decline of oppression.

I might not be blameworthy for inadvertently knocking over glassware in a store, but I am still responsible. If, however, I make no adjustments to my bodily comportment going forward, knowing full-well I am prone to break such things insofar as I continue to habitually carry myself in the same manner, I am then responsible *and* blameworthy even if my behavior is automatic and incongruous with the explicit representations of myself—I do not want to be viewed as clumsy or unconcerned for the property of others, in fact I might *believe* that I am quite proprioceptively adroit as well as considerate. But if my behavior continually belies that conscious belief and desire, and others inform me of this discrepancy, then at the least I must admit I am failing to act in accord with that intentional goal. Of course, it could be argued that the consequences of bodily negligence at a department store are far more unambiguous than the harms of implicit stereotyping—again, this is one of the reasons such biases are so troubling.[144] Regarding cultural stereotypes, I would say I am responsible for how I act based upon them, but I am not (yet) blameworthy for possessing them. Young addresses this in part with her distinction between blaming and holding responsible the perpetrators of oppression; this is important when "unconscious behavior and practices reproduce oppression" (Young 124). I might not directly intend to act or *be* in a way that proves detrimental to others, but I do intend to be in a way that is comfortable cognitively, emotionally, socially, etc., and this can effectively be satisfied by implicitly supporting an unjust system that favors me over others, especially if it is a competitive system. It is as if there were two (to simplify) long-term goals that butt up against each other when automatic behavior and associations are triggered by particular states of affairs; one is the drive for the kinds of ease noted above,[145] and another might be "the goal of equity in social exchanges and the commitment to truth" (Snow 44).

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[144] "[T]he more implicit our beliefs and attitudes, the harder they are to control, especially when people deny that they have them" (Schneider 566).

[145] For those with privilege, this goal is often to find justification for the system that favors themselves (see Uhlmann et al. 8). Such motivations, as I have been arguing, can be automatic and driven by "unconscious motives" that are "activated by the situation of having personal power….[T]he unconscious system justification motive is posited to produce outcomes that are negative at the level of the individual

If one is morally responsible for *virtuous* behavior that it is habitual and automatic,[146] we should also argue that one is responsible for vicious beliefs and behavior that in effect makes the stereotyper a participant in the oppression of others through the use of negative yet implicit stereotypes. At the very least, we can accuse the professed egalitarian of failing to live up to her consciously held beliefs and desires about herself and others, possibly even questioning the level to which she is really committed to them.[147] If one truly and deeply held the goal of being virtuous, for example, behavior that runs counter to this desire should be recognized and corrected. If the disconnect is not recognized, as with cases of implicit negative stereotyping, then there is at least a level of epistemic negligence, which is motivated by many of the factors mentioned above, and thus there is also a level of moral neglect for which one should be held accountable.[148] When this neglect becomes habitual and no effort is recruited to amend one's behavior, then responsibility (the forward-looking aspect) is followed by blame (backward-

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person…the locus of control over behavior and judgment is not the conscious self as much as it is the currently active goal" (Bargh et al. 291). Just as troubling, and especially relevant to section III above, are cases where if one's moral commitments are met, even if only once, they are subsequently turned off: "Thus, after the egalitarian goal was fulfilled, it shut off, leaving 'host' individuals vulnerable to behaving in a manner contrary to their [professed] egalitarian values" (Bargh et al. 304).

[146] Snow puts the matter this way: "If someone has an enduring virtue-relevant goal, such as being a just person, one's consistent goal pursuit could give rise to many different kinds of just actions as are appropriate for objectively different circumstances. If one repeatedly encounters circumstances that call for a just response, just actions could eventually be triggered by situational cues outside one's conscious awareness. One's just actions could become habitual—the kinds of habitual actions that, over time, build up dispositions to just behavior" (Snow 44-5; see also 57-9).

[147] See (Schwitzgebel 536, 540-1, 544) and (Snow 95-6) for an example of the vice of lacking social intelligence. One explanation for this sort of ignorance is that one is motivated to *not* develop social skills; that is, one is self-satisfied and uninterested in being genuinely concerned for other people. This is morally blameworthy. To borrow from my own case, my two-year-old son Milo, upon dropping one of his toys exclaimed, in the "appropriate" context, "Goddammit!" My wife does not say this, but apparently I do (or did) habitually upon the merest inconvenience. This non-conscious, automatic, and unendorsed behavior is something for which I am responsible and morally blameworthy to the extent that I do not make an effort to change it.

[148] "Our habits, associations, and automatic responses *are,* to a substantial extent, responsive to evidence" (Schwitzgebel 539). See also (Holroyd 280; and Bargh et al., 302-3) "Overriding Chronic, Automatic Processes" for an overview of studies on this, and (Snow 34-8) for her overview of Devine's and Monteith's studies on "self-regulatory control." Even a brief recognition that one's harmful actions/beliefs conflict with one's egalitarian goals is often sufficient to get one to "think twice the next time a stereotypic response is possible" (Snow 35). I will have more on this in Chapters 4-5.

looking); you are at fault for past moral failings.[149] We continually hear from nonwhites (including the President) and women[150] that stereotyping still occurs quite often, so simple *arational/amoral* ignorance of them and the harms that follow is not what is at play.[151] Cultural implicit stereotypes contribute to the privileged way of being, which in turn contributes to the blithe indifference toward the actual life experiences of others typical of a spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness, which circle back to the ease of perpetuating harmful stereotypes. But stereotypes are incompatible with a commitment to the truth, as they are never accurate in any deep way, and the spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness, while satisfying the goal of ease, are inharmonious with the goal of "equity in social exchanges", as argued in Chapter 1 above.

Finally, it cannot be the case that oppression results simply from logical errors in our heuristic mechanisms, which after all, are inevitably subject to bugs. Were that so, all we would need is a sufficient educational program that reveals the errors in racism and sexism, e.g., and with enough people sufficiently well-informed, oppression would disappear. But the commitment (implicit or explicit) to a given world-view that privileges oneself in many ways can often defy logic and counter-evidence. So, in many cases something more is needed than cold logical argument in the form of "white" papers or even mass protests that explicitly and *one-dimensionally* delineate the systemic errors that lead to oppression. I will argue that one such means is subversive humor; but before diving into that argument, I need to articulate the general

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[149] See (Holroyd 274, 280-2, and especially 290) for more on this point: "individuals may be blameworthy for failing to take responsibility for implicit biases once they are aware that they are likely to be influenced by them…[but] Increasingly, experimental findings have supported the claim that variations in the manifestation of implicit biases are the result of variations in personal attitudes, rather than in general knowledge of social perceptions."

[150] Again, see "What is it like to be a woman in philosophy?" http://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com/. Accessed 1/20/13.

[151] Furthermore, shouldn't the burden now shift to the privileged whites to overcome their racism? (See Yancy 2008, 860). See also Sullivan on this point: "In the context of white privilege, my emphasis on the productivity of unconscious habit suggests not just the possibility of taking, but also the need to take, responsibility for racism. It demands that a person ask of herself: what kind of racial and/or racist world am I helping to produce….If people cannot be held wholly responsible for their unconscious habits, they can be held accountable for their attempts (or lack thereof) to transform them" (Sullivan 2006, 90).

view of humor that I support. In the next chapter, I will argue for a version of the Incongruity

Theory of humor as it relates to issues discussed here.

CHAPTER 3: INCONGRUITY, SERIOUSNESS, AND PLAYFULNESS IN HUMOR

A brief summary of what has been presented and the relation to what is to come will be helpful at this middle point of the dissertation. In the previous two chapters I offered an account of some of the underlying mechanisms that sustain psychological oppression. I argued that the spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and stereotyping all play a central role in the perpetuation of civilized oppression, which in turn provides fertile ground for the continuation of those negative covert attitudes. These often hidden operators are beneficial for the privileged and detrimental to those without privilege, a point that is often lost on those on the privileged end of the spectrum in large part due to willful ignorance. I argued that stereotypes are erroneous heuristics, all of which are problematic even if they are positive, "accurate" in some way, culturally inculcated, implicit, automatic, and consciously unendorsed. Connected with the spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness, these stereotypes are employed to maintain a status quo that favors those with power. At the very least, the implicit biases that manifest as *conscious* belief-discordant behaviors point to a moral failure of long-term goals set by the professed egalitarian.

Throughout, I have made occasional reference to the role that humor can play in consciousness-raising and even in attacking the sort of oppression described here. In this chapter, I will defend a version of the Incongruity Theory of humor, setting the groundwork for the final two chapters in which I focus on subversive humor in particular. Humor can be especially useful in forming collaborative efforts among humorists from the margins,[152] as it both relies upon and at the same time challenges similar background expectations, often through exposing and exploiting cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, those responsible for the psychological harms discussed in Chapter 2 are likely to share many of the desires and expectations of those who are

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[152] Henceforth, this phrase and others like it will include those humorists who act/perform on behalf of the marginalized even if they themselves are part of a privileged group.

marginalized, and are thus not as likely as overt oppressors, e.g., to respond negatively to the humorist's recognition of incongruity between one's beliefs and actions.

The first section will offer an analysis of the important concept of incongruity as it relates to humor studies. Here I will open with Arthur Schopenhauer's concise section in *The World as Will and Representation Vol. One* on "A Theory of Humor" and selections from his supplemental work "On the Theory of the Ludicrous" from volume two. In the second section, I will expand on Schopenhauer's conception of incongruity, appealing to the contemporary work of John Morreall, who is one of the most prolific writers on the philosophy of humor today. I will reveal some of the connections between Schopenhauer's notion of "seriousness" with that of the existentialists discussed in Chapter 1.

In section III, I will consider the relationship between playfulness and incongruity, noting the role that enjoyment of incongruity plays in creative, non-dogmatic thinking. In section IV, I will critique Morreall's arguments in part from the perspective of Jean Harvey's work on civilized oppression, extending the discussion from the end of Chapter 1. Here I will analyze the complex relationship between the ambiguous terms "seriousness" and "playfulness" or "play mode" as Morreall refers to the latter. In the final section, I will contend that Morreall's conception of humor, with which I generally agree, fails to adequately address what I call subversive humor. He is cognizant of the benefits of a humorous attitude and of the work of rebellious groups who use humor, but his insistence that the play mode of humor precludes emotional attachment and practical concern, renders his philosophical analysis of humor far less comprehensive than his (2009) title suggests. I will make the case, contra Morreall, that some humor in play mode is non-existentially, non-gravely serious, and intends to do more than simply "delight" audiences; the subversive humorist, in particular, is attempting to disclose and transmit information in such a way as to create change in both attitudes and practical social interactions.

I.   Incongruity and Humor

If humor is to be explained generally as involving some element of *incongruity*, this term needs to be made as precise as possible. Unfortunately, there are many incongruity theories of humor with different interpretations of this central concept.[153] Given the virtually unlimited number of objects, states of affairs, linguistic turns of phrase, etc., that we find humorous due to some incongruity, it is not surprising that a single theory of incongruity has not become dominant. Arthur Schopenhauer, though he is not the first to note the connection, is a good place to start with a discussion on incongruity and humor. I think his ideas on the subject have been extremely influential on contemporary incongruity approaches such as John Morreall's and recent developments within cognitive science and cognitive linguistics on humor. In addition, his notion of "seriousness," which he contrasts with humor, is consonant with the existentialist conception of the spirit of seriousness discussed throughout this work.

In humor studies, the following quotation is well known: "*Laughter*[154] always arises from nothing other than a suddenly perceived lack of congruence between a concept and the real objects that are in some respect or other thought through it, and it is itself just the expression of this lack of congruence" (Schopenhauer 2008, 93). Schopenhauer is extending a broader

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[153] There is not space here to rehearse the history of the Incongruity Theory of humor, much less alternative approaches. For an overview of this history see (Morreall 1983, 1-59; 1987, 1-186; Hurley et al. 37-56; Buckley 3-48), and for a defense of an incongruity theory against competing views such as Superiority and Relief/Release theories, see (Morreall 1983, 38-59; 1987, 128-138; 2009, 1-26; Oring 1-12; Hurley et al. 93-143; Marmysz 123-54). Other terms often used as synonyms to define/explain incongruity have been ludicrousness, ridiculousness, the unexpected, contradiction, paradox, absurdity, something inappropriate or inconsistent, a lack of harmony, having parts that do not fit together, etc. Of course, not all of these concepts are interchangeable with each other. For more on this, see (Morreall 2009, 10-15; Oring 13-40; and section III below).

[154] While it might not be presumed by Schopenhauer in the section "A Theory of Humor", from which this passage is extracted, I will take laughter, or the disposition to it, to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the experience of humor; we laugh at many situations that are not humorous, such as being under the influence of nitrous oxide (laughing gas), being tickled, infants playing peek-a-boo or being tossed (and then caught) in the air, when embarrassed, etc. However, it could be argued that laughter is not necessary for humor either: one can recognize and even enjoy some state of affairs, and yet not laugh, such as a comedian who is over-tired, but has just thought up an excellent joke routine. While an interesting topic, it is tangential to this dissertation. For more see (Morreall 2009, 60-4; Provine 2000; Hurley et al. 23).

discussion on the role of reason and in particular, the disadvantages of one being over-reliant

upon *a priori* reasoning in opposition to experience.[155] In this sense, what is *congruous* would be

a percept that a perceiver expects to see or that which fits within his already established

preconceptual framework through which one interprets the world. Although it might seem

obvious, it bears stating that "what a person finds incongruous depends on what he finds

congruous, and that the latter is based upon the conceptual patterns which have been built up in

his experience" (Morreall 1983, 62). When inconsistencies are brought to consciousness, or in

Schopenhauer's sense, when we are surprised to find "two or more real objects [that] are thought

through *one* concept" (2008, 93), the elements for humor are in place. He adds the following

perspicuous point regarding the single concept "whose identity is carried over to them [the *real*

objects of perception], but where they are otherwise so entirely different that we are struck by the

fact that the concept fits them in only a one-sided respect. But it is just as often a matter of a

single real object whose lack of congruence with a concept, under which it is in one respect

rightly subsumed, is suddenly made palpable" (Schopenhauer 2008, 93).[156] To clarify,

Schopenhauer is arguing that *if* there is laughter then there must be the sorts of incongruity he

discusses. It is not clear that he is saying the converse that *if* there is incongruity there must be

laughter; this untenable view would imply that all incongruities are funny. But even with the

more favorable interpretation, the former one in which laughter is seen as a broader category than

humor, he does not explain what it is about the incongruity that leads to laughter.

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[155] I will address this point more below in section II with an analysis of his notion of "seriousness." But I think it needs to be noted that his distinction between reason and experience, or conception and perception, is too dichotomous. Given what we have learned from the recent advancements in cognitive science and neuroscience, and the philosophy of mind, it is unhelpful to cordon off *a priori* the "modules" of the brain, whether we are discussing what parts correlate with speech, seeing, hearing, conscious and nonconscious, alief/belief (Schwitzgebel), emotional/rational (Schwitzgebel; Damasio referenced in Hurley et al. 66-9), or emotion/intellect (Marmysz 144).

[156] This explanation is remarkably similar to recent studies of humor in cognitive science (Hurley et al. 2011; Minsky 1984; Fauconnier), cognitive linguistics (Raskin 1979; 1992; Ritchie 2005), in which frames or scripts are discovered to come into conflict with each other, but in the end a relevant form of resolution is possible due to (the necessity of) reinterpreting the early claims (set-up) with the later claim(s) (punch line). In Elliot Oring's formulation, there is both an "appropriate" and "spurious" rendering of the incongruity (1-12).

He does not offer many examples in this section, assuming the matter is "so simple and comprehensible that it has no need of it" (93), but he does (curmudgeonly) in *Volume II*, where he is willing "to come to the assistance of the mental inertness of those who prefer always to remain in a passive condition" (Schopenhauer 1887, 271-2). In the interest of space, and contemporary readers for whom many of Schopenhauer's examples might not elicit an adequate background context with which to find the humor,[157] I will only cite one of his briefer jokes: "The soldiers in the guard-room who allowed a prisoner who was brought in to join their game of cards, then quarreled with him for cheating, and turned him out."[158] And here is Schopenhauer's analysis: "They let themselves be led by the general conception, 'Bad companions are turned out,' and forget that he is also a prisoner, *i.e.,* one who they ought to hold fast" (Schopenhauer 1887, 277-8).[159] This is one of the examples of ludicrousness, according to Schopenhauer, in which a foolish action results from one erroneously subsuming realities under general conceptions. It is a variety of the fallacy of Accident in which a general rule is followed and mitigating/accidental circumstances are ignored, as the theory, imperative, or general maxim takes precedence (when it should not) over concrete perception, or what Schopenhauer implies throughout, *reality*.[160]

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[157] One of the reasons some of the jokes offered by Schopenhauer might not "hit" today's audience has to do with the simple fact that different eras have different cultural background conceptual frameworks; these preconceptions can be translated, but this often requires an amount of intellectual effort that stifles the enjoyment of the incongruity between percept and concept (in Schopenhauer's terms). Another reason might be that the *backgrounded* incongruities of the past have become so common to us today that they no longer facilitate surprising cognitive shifts: men dressed as women is no longer as funny as it once was. Thus, such normative roles might have to be subverted in a more creative way today. In fact, *black* men dressed as women in TV and film has a rather negative connotation to it (see http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=uAPAdYiJ6oI for Dave Chappelle's concern with this motif in his 2006 interview with Oprah Winfrey).

[158] To be fair to the essence of the joke, Schopenhauer does not do it any service with his somewhat awkward presentation.

[159] In the next chapter I will focus more deeply on examples like this which rely upon heuristics ("general conceptions") which we are surprised to find in error.

[160] Another interpretation is that the competing conceptions or general rules "hold prisoners", "throw out cheaters" are juxtaposed but the latter rule over-rules the former. This is not *necessarily* inconsistent with Schopenhauer's own analysis, which views laughter as the expression of pleasure at a perceived incongruity (see Lewis 37-8). See also (Koestler 36) on the analysis of the "conflicting rules" in this "chestnut."

Laughter just is our recognition that an interpretation of reality is incongruous with a perception of it.

Without a further account of what makes one incongruity humorous and another not, and why laughter at all in response to incongruity,[161] Schopenhauer's theory can only provide a starting point for our investigation. That is, his conceptual/perceptual incongruity tells us very little about *why* such mirth results from the recognition of the unexpected as he presents it. Without getting bogged down in the details of this debate among incongruity theorists of humor, it will suffice to say that Schopenhauer provides a general account of the content of what we find funny, but not the function or reason why we receive the pleasure that we do through humorous laughter.[162] It is true that if I find something to be incongruous, then I am experiencing part of the world that does not fit the way I expected it to be. For instance, Morreall rightly notes that "[t]he core meaning of 'incongruity' in standard incongruity theories is that some thing or event we perceive or think about violates our normal mental patterns and normal expectations" (Morreall 2009, 11). As noted in Chapter 2, humans are prone to think in patterns and utilize mental shortcuts in order to successfully navigate our surroundings in such a way that conscious attention to details in those patterns is rarely needed. But what is it about the perception of an incongruity that invokes laughter? It cannot merely be an unexpected break in a pattern, or a violation of some rule or conceptual model. Finding the severed head of your favorite race-horse in your bed is clearly incongruous, but hardly elicits mirth.[163] So there must be something that allows us to distinguish between amusing incongruities and incongruities *as such* that might include "the

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[161] But why laughter? Why not projectile vomiting? (Hurley et al. 48), or "weeping—which is an equally 'purposeless' activity?"(Koestler 51).

[162] See (Jones 2006 and Hurley et al. 257-286) on the need for an analysis of both the content and function of amusement.

[163] It is important to consider all the "players" involved in a potentially humorous situation. According to Harvey "Intentional humor can involve three sets of players: the initiator, the 'audience' [she does not view *any* audience who laugh to be genuine bystanders, "To laugh at the joke is to be involved"], and the subject of the humor" (1999, 4). I would add a fourth, the creator of the humor, as with formulaic jokes in particular, this usually anonymous person(s) is often not the same as the joke teller (see Morreall 2009, 88, on the important distinction between joke teller and the wit—the spontaneous performer of humor). With this added complexity, it becomes very difficult to determine the intentions and interpretations of all the players involved in a humorous situation.

grotesque, the macabre, the horrible, the bizarre, and the fantastic" (Morreall 2009, 13, 73-5; see also Carroll 2000).[164]

Morreall argues that the difference is that humorous incongruities are accompanied by "playfulness and the tendency to laugh" (Morreall 2009, 73). The non-humorous incongruities "lack the playfulness of amusement, in that they are emotionally engaged responses" (73). In other words, when we laugh at something found humorous we undergo a psychological and conceptual shift: "This change may be primarily cognitive [but can be affective as well, but is less humorous as a result], as the incongruity theory shows—from a serious state of perceiving and thinking about things that fit into our conceptual patterns, to a nonserious state of being amused by some incongruity" (Morreall 1983, 38). The shift must be sudden and pleasant, in order to distinguish humorous incongruity from that which slowly dawns on us, precluding the necessary break in our expectations, and that which is surprising, but produces negative emotional affect, such as the imminent threat from the Mafia which is delivered in the form of a decapitated horse, for example. Here is a general overview of Morreall's position:

> 1. We experience a *cognitive shift*—a rapid change in our perceptions or thoughts.
> 2. We are in a *play mode* rather than a serious mode, disengaged from conceptual and practical concerns.
> 3. Instead of responding to the cognitive shift with shock, confusion, puzzlement, fear, anger, or other negative emotions, we *enjoy* it.
> 4. Our pleasure at the cognitive shift is expressed in *laughter*, which signals to others that they can relax and play too. (Morreall 2009, 50, italics original)[165]

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[164] I will expand on the details in Chapter 4, where I borrow from the philosophy of language and cognitive linguistic notion of oppositional scripts, indirect speech acts, and conversational implicature. But even reducing the level of analysis of incongruity to oscillation between/among oppositional or divergent scripts will beg similar questions: what makes one set of oppositional scripts humorous and another not? (See Hurley et al. 117-120 on the covert element of surprise that is not found in conventional implicature).

[165] I agree with each of these points with some caveats. With (2) and his conception of "disengaged", and related to that in (3), his implication that humor is not an emotion, but a blocker of emotion, both lead to unwanted conclusions. I will return to this overview below with a discussion on the ambiguity of seriousness and playfulness, and in Chapter 4 with a brief critique of Morreall's unfortunate dichotomy between critical reasoning and emotion. Less troubling, I also have concerns with his claim that humor is the "playful enjoyment of a cognitive shift that *naturally leads to laughter*" (Morreall 2009, 72, my italics). I might qualify this with the "disposition" to laugh, or "tendency" as Morreall later uses (73) as one can find something humorous without actually *falling prey* to the convulsive paroxysms of laughter. But there is neither space nor need here to make that argument.

This is an extension and improvement upon Schopenhauer's approach.[166] Although Schopenhauer does eventually offer some particular examples, he fails to reveal what it is about the incongruity in operation that leads to mirth beyond noting the recognition that our reason is not infallible.[167] Morreall's additional feature of play mode related to free, creative thought, and his extended analysis of the sudden conceptual shift with the recognition of incongruity, provide more detail about the content of incongruity in addition to placing humorous incongruities within a distinct context from non-humorous dissonance.

Morreall argues that the feeling of mirth arises from a sudden conceptual[168] shift caused by the recognition of a non-threatening incongruity. If one has enough time, or the change is too small, the suddenness will not be experienced, and thus it will be too easy for the individual to "assimilate" and "adjust smoothly to what is happening, and there is no 'jolt'….We speak of a joke's 'hitting' us, and the conclusion of a joke as its 'punch line'" (Morreall 1983, 49). Many of these details are interconnected. For instance, understanding the role that brevity plays in wit cannot be divorced from the suddenness criterion, and the suddenness criterion is of course closely tied to the violation of expectations criterion which is the cause of the cognitive shift. In this context, "sudden" can refer to both the speed at which one makes a cognitive shift and/or the

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[166] It is also a clarification of (Morreall 1983), as in the later work he does not require that the shift is made between a serious mode to the play mode. If this were the case, stand-up comedians would have to work much harder than they already do just to return their audience to a state of practical concern (which is essential to seriousness for Morreall, as I will discuss below) in order to then facilitate a shift into enjoyable disengagement.

[167] According to Schopenhauer, humorous laughter results from the "victory of knowledge of perception over thought [which] affords us pleasure…It must therefore be diverting to us to see this strict, untiring, troublesome governess, the reason, for once convicted of insufficiency" (Schopenhauer 1887, 279-80). This is very different from a Kantian approach in which consistency and acting in accord with universal laws of reason are imperative (see Marmysz 126-8). This is actually a very important insight by Schopenhauer, unfortunately he does not develop it any further, leaving us wondering what could possibly be enjoyable about discovering defects in our rationality (see Lewis 44-5). I will have more on this in Chapter 4.

[168] Morreall also uses "psychological" shift as a broader category which might include emotional content in addition to cognitive (1983, 42; 57-9). Significantly, it is not clear that Morreall escapes a similar charge lodged against Schopenhauer: should (can) emotions and cognitions be so cleanly separated? For the sake of argument, and clarity and consistency, I will use "conceptual" shift when examining Morreall's theory of humor.

degree of the dissonance between our experience and our expectations.[169] Related to this are the

"compression" devices adopted by humorists which allow them to employ few words or ideas

parsimoniously, such that key words or phrases *automatically trigger* chunks of cultural

information (scripts) with which the audience is encouraged to make associations; the wit, in

logical terms, happily misplaces (shares) the burden of proof, and the audience, provided they are

sufficiently placed in play mode, happily accepts the *collaborative work*.[170] The scripts involved

are more likely to produce humor if they are opposed to each other in some way, rather than

simply ambiguous, which by itself is insufficient for humor.[171]

What distinguishes humorous and thus pleasant, sudden conceptual shifts from

unpleasant sudden conceptual shifts? If the broader psychological shift (which must have a

conceptual component for humor) in response to an incongruity evokes an attitude that is

practically engaged, there will be no pleasure, and thus no humor, or very little of either. The

practical concern is usually, though not necessarily, expressed through emotions. He offers

examples of negative emotions such as "fear, pity, indignation, disgust, etc." and neutral ones like

"puzzlement, wonder, curiosity, or problem-solving" (1983, 52-3; see also 1987a), as attitudes

that will not provide pleasure sufficient for humor. The reason for this, Morreall argues, is that

such emotional states gear one toward "urgent practical needs" (1983, 53; 1987b), or as he puts it

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[169] Compare this with someone trying to tickle you *slowly*, "telegraphing" each *jouissant* joust, really amounting to little more than an anemic massage, or a methodical dissection of a joke prior to or during the performance: "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind" (E.B. White quoted in Harris and Rabinovich xi). See also (Morreall 1983, 48-9) and (Boskin 1997, 31-4) on the distinction between long drawn out humorous stories, and the succinctness of one-liners, both of which, however, rely on similar constraints with respect to timing.

[170] Morreall merely glosses over this important element of humor, I think, so I will return to the idea of collaboration and compression devices below in Chapter 4.

[171] Here are Morreall's examples, which I leave to the reader to determine the level of funniness: "'My Lord, I regret to inform you of my wife's death. Can you possibly send me a substitute for the weekend?' And 'I saw the bank from the bridge'" (Morreall 1983, 71). See (Oring 7) for a similar analysis, but one which includes a clash between *appropriate* and *spurious* incongruities playfully juxtaposed. The more hidden the spuriousness (heuristic error) in a joke, the greater the resulting humor when it is discovered.

later, "[e]motions[172] involve cognitive and practical engagement with what is going on around us. We are serious, focused on dangers and opportunities, and prepared to act to further our interests. What is happening matters to us. The mental framework is REAL/HERE/NOW/ME/PRACTICAL" (Morreall 2009, 32). It is true that I might giggle a bit upon solving a logical puzzle or riddle, but in many cases like these I am, according to Morreall, not clearly in play mode, and I am more concerned with what Paul McGhee calls "'reality assimilation'" (Morreall 1983, 53; 1987a, 192-5). More significant for Morreall is the element of security and the attitude or mental state one must be in to experience humor that does not call for any adjustments to one's environment or self.[173] This is the *non-threatening* requirement for an incongruity to be pleasing. This attitude is most often found in what he calls the play mode which he opposes to a serious mode. I will now look at both Schopenhauer's and Morreall's conception of seriousness before returning to the idea of playfulness.

II.   Incongruity and Seriousness

In both his "A Theory of Humor" and "On the Theory of the Ludicrous," Schopenhauer critiques abstract ideas of *a priori* theorizing.[174] Consider the following rather harsh treatment of the systematizing pedant (Kant?), which could also be a description of the spirit of seriousness:

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[172] Both negative and positive emotions place us in this "serious" mode; thus, Morreall argues (1987b) that humorous amusement is not an emotion.

[173] Recall from Chapter 2 the way that Kahneman describes the state of mind of one *comfortably* ensconced in System 1(Kahneman 2011, 59). To be clear, Morreall appears to be speaking of *immediate* existential threats to one's well-being (2009, 145); when the surprising incongruity does not call for "immediate attention" humor is a good response. But we can easily imagine a much wider view of "threat" to include the abstract awareness of one's inevitable death, for example. In this way, "gallows humor" and, more to the point, the humor of the concentration camp (Frankl 63), while distancing one from the horrors surrounding them (in the camp) or the fact of one's mortality, do not imply a lack of concern, but are not thereby lacking in humor (more on this in section V below).

[174] For more on this see also (Schopenhauer 1887, 277-9; and 244-269 on his contrast between concrete and abstract knowledge which precedes his account on the ludicrous). See also (Monahan 1995, esp. 58-9) for a similar approach to Nietzsche on laughter. Interestingly, there is also a parallel between Schopenhauer's open distaste of presuming that our conceptual systems are anything more than tools to work on reality, and branches within Buddhism: "According to Zen, we must constantly challenge our conceptual systems and 'break up' our concepts, to prevent ourselves from thinking that they give us an objective grasp of things" (Morreall 2009, 135). This might also be a Nietzschean response to the spirit of gravity.

> Here then the incongruence between concepts and reality is soon shown, soon shown how the former never descend to the level of the individual, and how their generality and rigid determinateness can never exactly fit the subtle nuances and manifold modifications of actual reality.[175] With his general maxims, the pedant thus almost always comes up short in life, shows himself to be dull-witted, insipid, of no use: in art, for which concepts are unfruitful, he produces lifeless, stiff, mannered afterbirths. Even in an ethical respect, the intention to act rightly or nobly cannot be everywhere realized in accordance with abstract maxims,[176] because in many cases the infinitely subtly nuanced character of the circumstances necessitates that the right choice issue immediately from one's character, while the application of merely abstract maxims yields, for one thing, mistaken results on account of only halfway fitting the circumstances, and is for another thing impracticable by virtue of being foreign to the individual character of the agent, which never allows of renunciation entirely; from this, inconsistencies then result.[177] (Schopenhauer 2008, 94)

There is more than a touch of inflexibility in Schopenhauer's own tone in this passage; [178]

however, I wish to concentrate on his notion of seriousness in connection with incongruity

detection and humor, and the sense of seriousness at work in this dissertation. A motif here,

described in existentialist terms, is the contrast between the static abstractions of universalizing

systems of thought (or social institutions) which are bound by necessary laws, and the dynamic,

plural, contingencies of lived experience. For Schopenhauer, we are *foolish* if we think our

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[175] This could very easily be a description of stereotypes offered in Chapter 2 above.

[176] See (Marmysz 119-120; 155-71) on "nihilistic incongruity", or the drive to continue fighting even with the deep uncertainty of success (whatever that term might imply) in a world "of the here-and-now [that] looks bad" when juxtaposed with our rational ideal standards.

[177] See (Roberts 1988) on the virtues of humor, in particular, in fostering recognition of the incongruities between one's moral abstractions (like Kant's Categorical Imperative of treating all rational beings as ends in themselves) and one's concrete actions (like Kant's deplorable comments about nonwhites and women).

[178] It might be that Schopenhauer, following Kant *very briefly*, accepts the idea that the experience of humor is aesthetic, and as such, it momentarily disengages us, or better, *abstracts* us from that which we experience, allowing us space (mental, physical, emotional) to theorize, in "play" mode. But, if we take this too far, we might be missing Schopenhauer's point in his more general critique of Rationalist theorizing, as Eric Baker hypothesizes: "If the tone of Schopenhauer's rhetoric seems unbecomingly harsh and thus out of line with the composure appropriate to the dignified, impartial medium of theoretical discourse or 'cool reason,' it is because he sees this abuse of the notion of disinterested, contemplative theory as the chief source of the problem he is naming here. The fact that his own 'theory' is revealed in the end to be motivated by his very personal feelings about the *Jetztzeit* (now-time) of his own cultural moment goes to the same point: theory is not the timeless medium of truth, but an interested intervention, rooted precisely in the kind of thing that theory otherwise tends to regard as beneath its dignity: *the singular, contingent, contextual, cultural moment*" (Baker 23, my italics). Seen in this way, a connection is made with the discussions from Chapters 1 and 2 above: Schopenhauer can offer a "theory" of humor without being accused of hypocrisy, so long as we understand that his intentions are not the same as the dogmatic and *serious* pedants who presume to possess universal, necessary, unchanging, ahistorical, *a priori* Truths; truly a utopian "view from nowhere."

conceptual schemas can so easily and perfectly map onto reality, as if there were no incongruity.[179]

In *Volume II*, which extends the analysis on his theory on humor, Schopenhauer provides another connection between the spirit of seriousness and a humorous attitude: "The opposite of laughing and joking is *seriousness.* Accordingly, it consists in the consciousness of the perfect agreement and congruity of the conception, or thought, with what is perceived, or the reality. *The serious man is convinced that he thinks the things as they are, and that they are as he thinks them*" (Schopenhauer 1887, 280, my italics).[180] Notice this conception of seriousness is quite different than the common connotation of the term which has as synonyms such words as *grave, solemn, somber, severe, sober, stern,* etc., to describe the person's mental state.[181] These all might be peripherally related to Schopenhauer's conception of serious, but they are not the prominent sense with which he is working. Compare Sartre's, De Beauvoir's, and Gordon's approach to the spirit of seriousness in which the salient feature is the absolutist, dogmatic, and otherworldliness and/or unquestionable nature of the values and meanings held by serious people. To be sure, one who holds fast to a world view takes it *seriously* in the sense that it is important to him, another common connotation of the term, but one who *tenaciously* (Peirce 188-9) sticks to a set of beliefs regardless of any counter-evidence (see Chapter 2 sections II and III), is serious in a different way

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[179] These schemas need not be as formal as Kantian or Hegelian philosophical systems; without equivocating on "system", they can be cultural schemas (stereotypes) which act as lenses through which members of society make sense of their social world (see Chapter 2 and Mills 2007, 27). In this way, an individual might nonconsciously see others through what Marmysz refers to as "ready-made systems of thought" (4), which grant that individual an unjustified sense of competency in resolving incongruity. It is unjustified in the same sense in which one who presumes stereotype-accuracy does so from the perspective of "system justification" (Uhlmann et al. 4-8; Bargh et al. 304). As I will argue below, there is comfort or ease within this serious mindset that seeks certain necessary conclusions which fit a closed theory: "But such slavish applications of theory are not truly creative since they work solely within a system of prefabricated method. Creativity [and humor], on the other hand, involves something unexpected and novel" (Marmysz 149).

[180] Though he seems to go astray when he notes that "the more a man is *capable* of entire seriousness, the more heartily he can laugh" (Schopenhauer 281, my italics). Having the capacity for seriousness is not necessarily to adopt a spirit of seriousness; certainly not in the existential sense, as Puritans can be entirely serious without hearty laughter.

[181] These could also reference states of affairs in the sense that a situation is deemed serious because it is important; it is *a really big deal.*

than the familiar senses connote. The spirit of seriousness is an attitude that self-perpetuates mental inflexibility especially related to values and meanings connected to power and comfort. The cognitive ease that comes with (presumed) certainty can act in a reciprocal fashion by further entrenching one in seriousness. Graveness, soberness, etc., might accompany this sense of seriousness, but one can peel those common notions away from a serious man, and still be left with the opposite of humor.

Here I will borrow from Morreall's taxonomy of the tragic vision of life as analogous to the sense of seriousness invoked by Schopenhauer and later existentialists. I will concentrate only upon the most closely related features and those associated with incongruity, as he offers many varied distinctions between the comic and tragic world-views.[182] The over-arching difference has to do with mental rigidity in seriousness as opposed to mental flexibility in humor. The first contrast he offers is between simple and complex conceptual schemes: "Tragic heroes approach life with relatively simple concepts that they want to apply neatly to every experience. In facing and working through a problem, the tragic hero tends to classify things and situations into opposites such as good and bad, honorable and dishonorable, using straightforward criteria" (Morreall 1999, 22). This myopia and simplistic division of reality lead to greater harms due to choosing between only two self-imposed (terrible) options, failing to consider at least a third viable solution.[183] Furthermore, related to the content of Chapter 2 above, we see the motivation for comfort, ease, and purity of thought about oneself, the world, and especially other people, that can foster the habituation of essentializing stereotypes.

Secondly, serious people have a low tolerance for disorder that is revealed in their "need for closure" (Morreall 1999, 23) even when the conclusion that they latch onto is not obviously

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[182] When not quoting, I will use the existentialist sense of "serious" or "seriousness" in place of "tragic vision" and "humor" or "humorous" in place of "comic vision" (which I will address in section III below) with the understanding that Morreall is primarily offering a dichotomy between specific dramatic art forms.

[183] Consider President Bush's bold and unifying (for Americans at the time) language after 9/11: "You are either with us or against us…." Even one who is minimally open-minded will see the *dangerous* false dilemma in this (see Willett 18-29 on hubris and Chapter 4 below).

the best one; this fits with the prior description of seriousness seeking simplicity while ignoring the multiplicity of reality.[184] Moreover, this attitude also parallels the presumptions of serious people who are inclined toward what Lewis Gordon calls "epistemic closure" in the context of making judgments about groups of people: "In the act of epistemic closure, one ends a process of inquiry. In effect, it is the judgment 'say no more'…In contrast, epistemological openness is the judgment 'there is always more to be known'" (Gordon 2000, 88).[185]

Third, serious people prefer the familiar, the traditional, customary, and the status quo: "Unanticipated and unfamiliar events are threatening. Tragedy has a low tolerance for cognitive dissonance—for something that does not fit what we already know or believe" (Morreall 1999, 23). Fourth, and related to the prior three points, the attitude of seriousness shuns ambiguity and vagueness in the drive for simplicity, dividing reality into neat and tidy essential categories: "Tragedy goes for *the* truth about each thing and situation, and for the absolute truth rather than the relative truth" (Morreall 1999, 24). In this way, the serious person also respects authority and traditional roles and rules (social/political/moral) to a fault, failing to recognize that "unique situations may require unique responses" (Morreall 1999, 36-7). Furthermore, characters that might possess both elements of good and evil, but in varying and complex ways, are rarely found in tragedies; likewise, in the real world, serious people prefer to carve up reality into unambiguous groupings, especially people.[186] Fifth, "[m]ost thinking in tragedy is what psychologists call convergent thinking—trying to find the single correct answer to a problem, as in mathematical computation. In this mode, there is no room for making unusual connections

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[184] The abstract theories in contemporary cosmology which seek a Grand Unified Theory (GUT) or Theory of Everything (TOE) might be tragic approaches to a reality that is pluralistic and not amenable to universals.

[185] See also (Morreall 2009, 112-115; Basu 388; Monahan 1995, 57-60; Hurley et al. 107-8; Davenport 169). According to Morreall (1987a, 197-9) on surprise, one with a humorous attitude is more amenable to open-ended questions and has less need for resolution, or at least humorists need not seek resolutions in the same way as the serious people do who desire closure within the always already existing structures hierarchically designed. This can be connected to the discussion from Chapters 1 and 2 on racism, e.g., which offers stasis and clarity. But the world is characterized by ambiguity, dynamism, and instability; so racism is a kind of closure.

[186] Consider George W. Bush's phrase "Axis of Evil" in contrast to over-worn descriptors of the U.S., like: "America is the single greatest and best country God has given man in the history of the planet."

between ideas" (Morreall 1999, 25; see also Marmysz 161). The "rigid determinateness" Schopenhauer sees in the pedant's theoretical, universal, abstract thinking can also be found in the serious person's clinging to the "accuracy" of certain stereotypes which sustain a comfortable narrative for that person.

Sixth, the serious person is not very likely to question authority, tradition, or "the categories and patterns of thought that they inherit" (Morreall 1999, 25); in other words, they often fail to think critically. The serious person is prone to emotional engagement which often precludes creativity and critical thinking: "In emotional states, we tend to act in automatic, habitual, less intelligent ways; and the stronger the emotion, the less rational our actions [which fosters mental rigidity]….That rigidity makes the characters less adapted to their situations; and to the extent that we imitate them in our own lives, it makes us less adapted to handling our problems" (Morreall 1999, 25-6). That is, the serious person is less rational in her response to life's issues; quoting Horace Walpole, "the world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel" (Morreall 1999, 27).[187] Seventh, seriousness cultivates stubbornness in decision-making and especially changing one's mind. We see the connection here with convergent, unambiguous thinking which seeks closure regardless of the negative consequences of a simplistic, but readily available, conclusion. This is the frame of mind of those who argue for the *necessity* of sticking out a war (instigated by *contingent* historical developments) due to the horrible loss of life and treasure that has thus far been sustained. This reasoning is a variety of the slippery slope and false dilemma fallacies. It is also a striving for consistency at all costs, the sort Emerson calls the "hobgoblin of simple minds", and as Morreall notes, "Tragic heroes…see their stubbornness as single-mindedness, commitment, whole-heartedness, devotion to duty, resoluteness of purpose, or some other virtue" (1999, 28).[188]

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[187] Later I will amend that to "a comedy to those who think *and* feel", "tragedy to those who *only* feel".
[188] For example, here is Stephen Colbert's (hobgoblinish) consistency in belief: "I believe the same thing Wednesday that I believed on Monday, no matter what happened on Tuesday." This mentality is also well-described by Bergson with his claim that laughter has as its target "mechanical inelasticity" (120, 124-6),

Eighth, serious people are driven by idealism as opposed to pragmatism, for example. Seriousness is an attitude that favors "clean abstracta like Truth, Justice, and Duty to the messy concreta—people, things, and situations….[seriousness] "craves an ideal, perfect world" (Morreall 1999, 28; see also Marmysz 156),[189] and this is often the cause of inconsistency, as Schopenhauer notes, "the application of merely abstract maxims yields, for one thing, mistaken results on account of only halfway fitting the circumstances" (Schopenhauer 2008, 94). Ninth, the serious person is *serious* rather than playful. I will analyze this distinction much more below, but Morreall's conception of serious here is *not* the existentialist connotation, as is revealed in the following description: "For us to be serious is to be solemn and given to sustained, narrowly focused thought. It is also for us to be earnest, that is, sincere, in what we say and do. We say only what we believe, and act only according to our real intentions" (Morreall 1999, 31).[190] Tenth, seriousness is compatible with the interrelated structures of militarism, social, and sexual hierarchy; that is, it espouses authoritarianism, elitism, and sexism. This is so even for those who

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and it is why the more cautious and borderline comedian, Bertrand Russell, will not die or kill for a belief—he might be wrong.

[189] See also (Morreall 1999, 77): With God there are no true moral dilemmas—it is all in the hands of an all-powerful being, so there is a reason for everything that happens. There is comfort in this bad faith.

[190] This description does not entail that the serious person is incapable of laughter, or even humor. As I argued in Chapter 2, the serious stereotyper uses essentializing constructs to sustain a status quo that favors him. Such a person is quite capable of creating jokes, but they are rarely used *playfully.* That is, they are the jokes of Archie Bunker who arrives at his conclusions "with such confidence in their validity" based upon "unchallengeable premises" (Alcoff 48), that his feeling of certainty constrains his inclination to think divergently or creatively, much less to consider alternative perspectives about the social world—such laughter arises out of an "absolute commitment" (Davenport 173) in which the central aim is to ridicule those without power or privilege. This is the laughter of the complacent individual who is committed to a social hierarchy that "just happens" to offer him privileges not available to others. It could be argued that his brand of "humor" is still subversive in that it presumes to find the faults in the *bleeding-heart liberal* social agenda and thereby seeks to undermine it, but this would only show that "subversive" can be ambiguous too. As I will argue in the next chapter, humor *simpliciter* is a heuristic error detection device; *subversive* humor is too, but it focuses on the heuristic errors that have ossified into pernicious stereotypes; recall, all stereotypes are heuristic errors, but not all heuristic errors are stereotypes. The use of stereotypes in the jokes created and performed by serious people is motivated by the goal of system justification; this is not the case with the subversive humorist. The serious person wishes the stereotypes were true; the subversive attempts to reveal that they are not. In an upside-down world in which the playful acceptance of ambiguity, dynamism, and incongruity, etc., was the norm, in addition to a genuine concern for equality, those who would seek to *subvert* such "power" structures would not be subversive or playful in the senses I am using here. Moreover, in such a possible world, opinions opposed to the ambiguity-tolerant norms would likely be viewed by the non-dogmatic as just another element in the dynamic, open system, and would be given a fair hearing.

lack social standing but have been mystified by serious oppressors into accepting their low status as a matter of natural or supernatural necessity (see Chapter 1).

Finally, the distinction between serious people and humorous people is not that only the latter are able to perceive incongruities and the former are *essentially* incapable by nature; such a view would itself be a variety of the spirit of seriousness. Instead, the difference has to do with *how* each experience and respond to life's incongruities: "folly, disappointment, vice, mistakes, danger, and suffering" (Morreall 1999, 39), to name a few. This extends Schopenhauer's view of seriousness to include the deified or natural *T*ruths neither of which can be questioned, and which are used to uphold the power-structures which privilege those on top at the expense of those below.

The mental inelasticity (with the many facets described above) combined with power and a society that privileges those who already have power creates and perpetuates the sort of seriousness which I wish to contrast with humor; in particular, subversive humor. This sort of humor has as *one* of its goals the subversion of an unjust status quo. For such a disruption to be successful, different possible perspectives on reality need to be made available, and this requires, on the part of the humorist and audience, an ability *and* inclination to cognitive shifting. In order to do this (non-existentially) serious work through humor, one must be capable of *playing* and encouraging others to adopt a similarly playful mode of discourse/interaction. One effective way to do this is to create and/or highlight incongruities in such a way that others will want to play with the seemingly incoherent thoughts, and possibly discover (or help make) a hidden meaning within the ludicrous. But before making this case, we need to consider how people in play mode respond to incongruity.

III.   Incongruity and Playfulness

First of all, what can be pleasurable about incongruity? As noted above, most of the conceptions of incongruity involve some element of confusion (if brief), tension, doubt, disagreement, or some kind of discord, all of which can be, as Kant argues, quite displeasing to

the understanding. After all, a few interpretations of incongruity presumed by philosophers in the past are contradiction (Kierkegaard), irrationality (Kant), and absurdity (Santayana). These views (excepting Kierkegaard's perhaps) are decidedly against seeing incongruity as beneficial or enjoyable. Thus, a consideration of the mental states of the audience in addition to the content of the humor is required, as Morreall claims, "[t]here is nothing objectively incongruous or comic about the universe or the human condition, then, and so amusement is possible only for those who are ignorant and confused" (Morreall 2009, 15). Ignorance and confusion sound unpleasant and indeed people in either mental state have often been the butt of humorists, especially from the perspective of the Superiority Theory of humor.[191] But such mental states can lead to enjoyment or even be enjoyable in themselves for one who is in play mode; that is, within the framework of a playful attitude, these otherwise negative mental states can be co-opted (Hurley et al. 264) to aid in philosophical investigation specifically, but awareness and interest in the world generally.[192] On the other hand, for those who desire to immediately alleviate the discomfort felt in the realization of a tension between one's beliefs and perceptions, or expectations and reality, there are fewer openings to live an examined life (Morreall 1999, 10), and one is in a sense trapped in seriousness.

For Morreall, play mode is an attitude or way of seeing the world, but it is not the default mode (2009, 52; Boyd 6-8; Lewis 45); it is something that one has to cultivate and hone much like an appreciation of aesthetics in general, or the taste for beer. This is exemplified in what he calls the "comic vision of life." Within this attitude "[w]e can be playful in several senses, each

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[191] See (Chapter 1, nt. 72).

[192] As I will argue in the following chapters, a positive account of ignorance and confusion can be found not only in humor studies, but in a philosophical attitude generally. To anticipate, this approach can be seen in the goading of the "non-violent gadfly" Socrates (see King 2; also Sánchez 105-7 and Minsky 180 nt. 5 on the benefits of knowing you are confused). See especially (Lear 290-4): "The point of Socratic irony is not simply to destroy pretenses but to inject a certain form of not knowing into polis life… it shows the difficulty of becoming human…the difficulty of getting the hang of a certain kind of playful, disrupting existence that is as affirming as it is negating….Socratic ignorance is thus an embrace of human open-endedness."

opposed to a sense of 'serious.'[193] First we can be not-grave, not engaged in deep, narrowly

focused thought. Secondly, we can be not-sincere in what we say and do. As a joke, we can

engage in non-bona fide communication and activity[194]…When we are serious, we are usually in

a practical frame of mind in which we want to achieve some goal. We are working toward

something, and *anything playful would be a distraction*" (Morreall 1999, 33, my italics).[195]

Morreall also includes a third interesting connection, one which I will develop further below,

between the manner in which we "play" rather than "work" music, e.g., noting that life in general,

as seen through a comic vision, is something better played rather than worked in serious mode.

This is so even though he claims "[m]ost humor … has always been about problems" (Morreall

2009, 53).[196]

The most important distinction between seriousness and playfulness in the context of

incongruity is that the latter fosters openness to difference and complexities in others (Morreall

2009, 116-17) and divergent thinking in which a multiplicity of possible meanings is available, as

opposed to convergent thinking which follows a single path and evades or ignores incongruity

(Morreall 1999, 32).[197] That is, a playful attitude inclines one toward using, for one's benefit and

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[193] See also (Jones 129; Sorenson 171; and Davenport 170) for similar accounts of "seriousness."

[194] See (Raskin 1992). This element, among others in the quotation above, needs to be explored further as on the face of it, it seems to preclude the efficacy of subversive humor. That is, if play mode is necessary for humor, and this mode disengages us from matters of practical concern and sincerity, how can subversive humorists be taken *seriously*?

[195] To his credit, in contrast to his earlier descriptions of seriousness, here he includes a number of qualifiers making his distinction between play and seriousness less strict. However, the final claim rings false to me, in particular due to its categorical tone. Surely, as I will show, some kinds of "distractions" or diversions can be helpful in achieving a goal; indeed, some goals remain elusive *because of* one's serious, obsessive, logical, *practical* and conscious effort devoted to it (see Kahneman 236-7). It is not clear yet, but a deeper conceptual analysis of "seriousness" and "playfulness" will provide a broader and more apt sense of "practical" in the context of subversive humor and oppression.

[196] In the following I will discuss how and why incongruities are viewed as amusing while in play mode, but with the understanding that the relationship between incongruities and playfulness is reciprocal. That is, play mode can be induced in an audience by the witty creations/juxtapositions of incongruities, and one in play mode is more likely than not to seek out and enjoy incongruities. In the interest of space, I am only going to cover Morreall's conception of play mode in general terms, summarizing the contrasts with the descriptions above on the tragic vision of life which I connected, for the most part, with the existentialist notion of seriousness. I will return to the benefits of playfulness in humor in the next two chapters, but here I will concentrate upon the relation between playfulness and incongruity.

[197] Here is Avner Ziv quoting J.P. Guilford on the definition of "divergent" thinking: "'the unique feature of divergent production is that a variety of responses is produced. The product is not completely determined

possibly others', the feelings of doubt and confusion e.g., which are inevitable in an uncertain, surprising, and often baffling world. When in play mode, one is more open to the complexities of reality, not only cognizant of disorder, the unfamiliar, ambiguity, incongruity, but predisposed to *enjoy* the mental tension that results from these dissonances, as these disruptions of expectations are helpful in opening avenues for creative thinking. By "creative" here, I simply mean one's thought is free from the constraints imposed by others. Within play mode, one is more likely to recognize incongruities in one's own presuppositions and others' that have been culturally infused. Often, this recognition can lead to humor.

The range of amusing incongruities is quite broad, but some of those most related to the freedom of thought regarding norms, customs, and the social, intellectual, and ethical expectations include playing with points of view, categories, logical rules, linguistic rules, and the pragmatic rules of conversation, for example. Many of these overlap or are subsumed within each other, but each include the development of novelty-seeking, which, as noted above, is uncomfortable for the dogmatic serious person who seeks comfort in the familiar, or that which is congruous with his preconceptual background.[198]

Creative thinking cultivated by playfulness could include free playtime during school recess, e.g., in which children engage in imaginative play rather than "organized" sport in which the rules and goals have been preset by others (often *humorless* overly-competitive adults).[199] In this way, a spirit of playfulness is opposed to the existentialist spirit of seriousness in addition to

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by the given information'" (Ziv 1983, 69). Some of the features to look for in divergent-thinking responses to questions are "fluency, number of relevant responses produced; flexibility, number of different approaches; originality, statistically infrequent and appropriate ideas" (Ziv 1983, 71).

[198] Borrowing from Adler, Dixon et al. note that "[h]appiness and humor are also thought to be indicative of an individual's degree of dogmatism. Dogmatic individuals limit their possibilities for happiness by allowing themselves fewer options. A person with a 'dogmatized guiding fiction' [akin to Schopenhauer's negative appraisal of abstract maxims of the Rationalists] lacks flexibility and openmindedness, which are prerequisites for the consideration of alternatives" (422).

[199] Lugones' conception of play fits the sort I envision for the subversive humorist. In contrasting her sense of play from the *agonistic* and competitive sense espoused by Johan Huizinga and Hans-Georg Gadamer, she adeptly, and succinctly, deflates the former's view: "Huizinga, in his classic book on play, interprets Western civilization as play. That is an interesting thing for Third World people to think about" (Lugones 94).

Morreall's conception of seriousness. For instance, De Beauvoir considers the playfulness of a child *thrown* into a world of ready-made values: "That does not mean the child himself is serious. On the contrary, he is allowed to play, to expend his existence freely. In this child's circle he feels that he can passionately pursue and joyfully attain goals which he has set up for himself… [and yet] he feels himself happily irresponsible" (De Beauvoir 1976, 35).[200] Following the adage that "childhood would be an ideal state if only it happened later in life", we might desire a mixture between creative playfulness with responsibility in "good faith."

A related point is that creative play also promotes mental freedom, as the French philosopher Penjon claims, laughter is "freedom from the strict laws of rational thinking and freedom to play with new ideas" (quoted in Ziv 1983, 69). Of course, many of these "laws" are the sorts Schopenhauer bemoans that are constructed by *a priori* theorists.[201] So, again we see the relevance of Schopenhauer's views on humor, in this case, both as a censor of our over-privileged expectations, and as an alternative to the overbearing constraints of reason: "Humor gives temporary legitimation to thinking in impractical and illogical ways, releasing the 'adventurous ideas' that are fundamental to creativity" (Ziv 1983, 69; Basu 388, and Marmysz 148-9 say virtually the same thing). Under the umbrella concept "incongruity" we can see some of the benefits of a humorous attitude: "'Humor is by far the most significant behavior of the human brain….Humor…shows how perceptions set up in one way can suddenly be reconfigured in another way. This is the essence of creativity'" (Morreall 2009, 112, quoting Edward de Bono). It

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[200] For an interesting distinction between *creative* play and *serious* play, see (Wenner 24). See also (Gordon 2007, 167-8) on Dewey's combination of playfulness and seriousness, and (Gordon 2000, 76) on sadistic sexual play, in which "one has, in principle, taken the position that one's role isn't absolute, isn't, in existential parlance, 'serious'…Sadistic sexual play is not bad faith, because in such an instance the erotic charge emerges for the sake of *playing,* which requires recognizing that one *chooses* the rules of the game" (see also Lugones 95-6).

[201] Although he only implies this tacitly, such presumed necessary and universal imperatives, whether they are ethical, political, natural, logical, or even conversational, are really contingent structures that have a historical development. That is, they have been cobbled together over time in bits and pieces by various people for various purposes. The cognitive shifting between these general rules and the particular violations of them is pleasurable in large part due to the feelings of freedom of thought unconstrained by strict "untiring reason" but also, somewhat paradoxically, due to the discoveries that are often made, even if trivial at times, when "matrices of thought previously believed to be incompatible" are fused together (see Koestler 45 and Minsky 181).

is easy to see, from an evolutionary point of view, why creativity might be something worth

cultivating, and one of the most effective ways to continually sustain an interest in doing that

which is in our interests is to offer rewards; in this case, the reward is pleasure, the feeling of

mirth. This feeling, like that experienced in play generally, is desirable in itself. That is, while it

makes sense to ask a child, e.g., why he wishes to play with a particular toy, it would be odd to

ask that same child why he wished to play *simpliciter*.[202] But humor, like play, is also

instrumentally valuable: "The main ingredients of humor, surprise and incongruity, together with

the idea that 'this is not for real,'[203] should encourage some departure from the constraints of

conventional thinking" (Ziv 1983, 70). Later he expounds on this line of thought: "Humor is a

way of looking at things and phenomena 'as if'…. Humor, like play, is an invitation to fantasy…"

(Ziv 1983, 72).[204]

    There is a reciprocal relationship between incongruities that encourage playfulness, and a

playful attitude that places one in the appropriate cognitive distance to first recognize, then

understand, then enjoy the incongruity. In other words, they build upon each other, and *no* one,

not even the most serious of the existentially serious, is wholly incapable of recognizing and

enjoying humor.[205] What is significant about Ziv's study on incongruity and divergent thinking, is

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[202] In my experience, blank stares or a facial expression accompanied by a vocalization that means something like "that's silly" are the responses (this is so even *sans* "*simpliciter*"). What my son Milo, in these cases is *saying*, is of course that play is intrinsically valuable; even a two and a half year-old knows that (see Morreall 1983, 89-100; Gopnik 70-4).

[203] This phrase, along with Morreall's "fictionalizing" and/or "aestheticizing" potential problems to render them humorous as perceived through play mode, needs a deeper analysis which I will offer shortly.

[204] One of the contemporary theories of humor involves an evolutionary account of play, in which it is hypothesized that mature humor has evolved from the play-fighting tendency in primates and other animals (see Provine; Boyd) and has developed into the playful intellectual exchanges we see from the physical comedy of The Three Stooges, to Woody Allen's existentialist wit, to everyday joking in conversation. See also (Kramer 2012) on the relation between humor and "as if" fantasy.

[205] To presume the serious are incapable of humor is itself an adoption of a spirit of seriousness. At times Davenport falls into this attitude even as he, correctly I think, describes seriousness: "Indeed, it must be emphasized that individuals can be truly serious, in the ordinary [non-existential] sense, only to the degree that they do *not* hold their beliefs and values to be absolute" (Davenport 174-5). But he also writes this: "Humor, I am suggesting, requires a detachment from seriousness. The serious man--the man with undeviating confidence that his values are absolute is *no more able to laugh at himself* than the serious God….Such divine laughter is frightening because we expect God to be serious. We also expect that advocates of absolute values will not find themselves humorous, and we are rarely disappointed" (Davenport 170, my italics). I would replace "able" with "inclined" (see Chapter 2). An omniscient being *is*

that the students were immediately primed to be in play mode (Ziv calls it "fun mood") by the suggestion ("humor cue") to give humorous answers to questions on an exam. This prompt also unshackles the students from the typical convergent-thinking mind-set culturally linked to test-taking, and encourages them to be playfully creative, which feeds back into the feelings of mirth (see Ziv 1983, 74-5). This successful indirect approach to get students interested in learning through encouraging them to be *properly* disinterested in play mode, can inform our strategies for consciousness-raising about and subversion of implicit biases within civilized oppression.

So, not only can incongruity be pleasurable in play mode, akin to an aesthetic experience where "incongruity is enjoyed for its own sake" (Morreall 1983, 93; 1987a, 197), the amusement we experience in detecting incongruities habituates us to be on the lookout for more of them in a variety of contexts; this is in effect intellectual training not only in preparation for confronting an uncertain world, but, as I will argue below and in the next chapter, for better comprehension (or comprehension at all) of verbal communication in the complex realm of social interaction. This provides the wit with a unique opportunity to open the minds of otherwise serious people by triggering their play mode. In doing so, both the wit and the audience can enjoy incongruity and possibly see a socio-political situation, e.g., from a new, more truly egalitarian perspective.[206] But before this case can be made, more needs to be said about the efficacy of playfulness and seriousness in humor. Next I will briefly address two related points of contention in Morreall's theory of humor; the first will be a continuation of Harvey's concern with Morreall's overly individualistic account of humor, and the second will focus on Morreall's conception of "seriousness" as emotional and intellectual practical concern.

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incapable of laughter due to the impossibility of being surprised; the serious person only thinks/acts as if he is omniscient on certain matters.

[206] "In looking for incongruity in society, we look for discrepancies between what people should do, what they say they do, and what they actually do. From the days of the ancient Greeks, comedy has focused on self-deception, pretense, and hypocrisy" (Morreall 2009, 113).

IV.   The Ambiguities of Seriousness and Playfulness

Jean Harvey's book *Civilized Oppression* was written in 1999. In the first chapter, she

critiques Morreall's theory of humor that he presented in 1983. Morreall has continued to write

extensively on humor and I think he has refined his theory in ways that indirectly address (I do

not see any indication that Morreall has read Harvey's text) some of the problems raised by

Harvey (see Chapter 1, section V above). For instance, in his latest book (2009), he devotes an

entire chapter to "The Negative Ethics of Humor." In it, he does provide a defense against the

sorts of claims made by Harvey, even though his theory still focuses primarily on the individual

rather than a group-based social approach. For example, he reflects on the harmful effects humor

can have with respect to shirking one's responsibilities; we might be so disinterested that we

"laugh off" a problem or criticism that demands our concern (Morreall 2009, 102). More to one

of Harvey's direct concerns (1999, 14), and from his earlier work, Morreall does caution against

the misuse of humor which "may even be used to exert an unfair kind of pressure on someone to

do something he doesn't want to do: he wants to say no, but the request is laden with such

'friendly' humor that he'll seem like a 'poor sport' if he doesn't comply" (Morreall 1983, 117).

But this analysis of humor remains within the "the winner's circle" (Harvey 1999, 7), almost

Machiavellian in its advice narrowly tailored to the socially privileged as to when laughing is

acceptable and when it is not.

There are exceptions such as a brief discussion on why most lawyers and doctors *do*

laugh at jokes made at their expense (they are powerful and respected groups in contrast to

historically oppressed groups), and his deliberations on the "solidarity" created through humor

among concentration camp prisoners (Morreall 2009, 109-110; 119-24). Most of the examples

used in the later text can be distinguished from those in (1983, 106) where he claims that one's

disinclination to laugh at one's own failures implies one is lacking real self-esteem.[207] Morreall

does show concern about oppressive jokes and analyzes what might be wrong with them (2009,

105-9);[208] in addition he considers why black people, women, and homosexuals, e.g., do not

laugh at jokes that harm them (see also Bergmann 76). Furthermore, he offers an ethical principle

related to the use (and misuse) of humor given the cognitive and practical disengagement

involved: "Do not promote a lack of concern for something about which people should be

concerned" (Morreall 2009, 110; see also Sánchez 105-121). While this sounds like a

commendable maxim to follow, it has the unintended consequence of both exonerating

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[207] Harvey rightly notes, "no other person is mentioned in reference to 'failure' here" (1999, 4). Morreall does spend some time on the interrelated issues of power, stereotypes, and jokes, which can stand as a response to Harvey (1999, 5-6). For example, he ends his analysis on the negative effects of certain forms of humor with the following that fits well with the arguments I have made in Chapters 1 and 2: "The stereotypes perpetuated by jokes are more objectionable, then, when they are about people who lack social status and power, and when those stereotypes are part of the social system that marginalizes them and 'keeps them in their place.' Here we can rightly criticize what Joseph Boskin calls 'the complicity of humor'" (Morreall 2009, 110; note this agrees with Harvey (1999, 4-5) on the lack of "genuine bystanders"). He offers more examples that I think could quite readily be used as evidence that he takes Harvey's sorts of concerns seriously (they are important). In particular, I think he has in this latest book, expanded beyond a primarily individualist approach on humor that starts analyzing the sense of humor in people who (always) already possess power, and then generalizing to everyone (Harvey 1999, 3-4). But he has not adequately addressed the concern that his theory gives the impression that one who does not respond to her "failures" with a sense of humor has a further flaw in character. I think the reason for this is because of Morreall's over-reliance on the distinction between his senses of "serious" and "play." I think Lugones has it right when she claims that the "lack of playfulness is not symptomatic of lack of ease but of lack of health. And I am not healthy being in the 'worlds' that construct me unplayful" (93).

[208] Michael Philips asks the following question: "'is truth a defense against the charge of racism? What if members of that group really have or statistically tend to have an unflattering characteristic a joke attributes to them? Surely we are allowed to notice this and communicate this information to one another'" (quoted in Morreall 2009, 105). Morreall responds to this question, and the well-known example used by Ronald de Souza (239), by reminding readers that "sexist and racist jokes, like jokes in general, are known to be fictional by tellers and audience alike. We often introduce jokes with play signals such as, 'Have you heard the one about…' and we use the present instead of the past tense to indicate that what we are saying is not a report of a real event" (Morreall 2009, 105), and we use such obvious hyperbole that no one would take them as assertions. But on the very next page, Morreall states the following: "What usually makes these jokes harmful is that they present characters with exaggerated degrees of undesirable traits who represent groups that *some people believe* actually have those traits" (Morreall 2009, 106, my italics), and that it is the "stretching of negative stereotypes" that produces the fun (107). So they are fictional to the joke-teller, but not necessarily to an audience—this contradicts his statement on the previous page regarding "play signals." So, joke-tellers have no intention to convey information; if they did, they would not have packaged the "propositions" in the form of aesthetic vehicles which are (only?) meant to delight. In most racist jokes, and other form-jokes about the foolishness of one ethnic group or another, "[t]he stupidity of the character … is not a piece of information being communicated, but a fantastic idea being presented for playful enjoyment" (Morreall 2009, 106; cf. LaFollette and Shanks 334 and Oring Chapter 4 on "The Humor of Hate").

oppressors and undermining the efficacy of subversive humorists. This is due to the level of emotional and cognitive disengagement in his sense of play mode.

The main reason I think Harvey's general criticisms still stand, a reason Harvey does not raise directly, is due to Morreall's insistence that one of the advantages of humor lies in *total* cognitive and emotional disengagement (Morreall 1983, 121-26). When taken as far as he does this at the very least turns into the vice of apathy. He is aware of this argument, but not all of what it entails. In his analysis of play mode, he notes that one is practically disengaged from reality, emotionally, conceptually, and cognitively (2009, 101-2). This distance can cultivate a number of intellectual and moral virtues. But when the disengagement is the sort advocated by Morreall, there is a doubly negative consequence: since purveyors of oppressive jokes have no intention of doing harm, as they are "just playing" with no designs to actually convey genuine or "bona-fide" information, they are guilty of little more than revealing an "indifference to the truth" (Morreall 2009, 106);[209] and at the same time it further degrades the power of the oppressed who *do* choose to engage their situation with a humorous attitude--they too are "just playing" as they are not taking (and thus *they* need not be *taken*) seriously (in Morreall's sense) the content of their own jokes. For Morreall, both oppressor and oppressed *jokers* are acting "as if" their situations were not real and thus are of no practical or moral concern. So, Morreall at once absolves (for the most part) oppressors who use ridicule, and undermines (by trivializing) marginalized peoples' use of subversive humor as mere frivolity, intending *only* to stimulate glee: "the creator of humor

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[209] This *is* indeed a moral failing, as I have argued in Chapter 2, section V. And Morreall is correct to argue that "nothing as cognitively sophisticated as belief is required for such jokes to do harm. Mere repeated thinking of groups in negative stereotypes is enough to prompt us to treat real individuals [not the fictional caricatures found in jokes] not according to their actual merits and shortcomings, and so justly, but as automatically inferior because they belong to those groups" (Morreall 2009, 108). Here he is arguing against Ronald de Souza and Merrie Bergmann who claim that one must consciously endorse the negative content (premises) of oppressive jokes if they find them amusing. LaFollette and Shanks (337) concur with de Souza and Bergmann. As I argued in Chapter 2, implicit biases and negative stereotypes can operate beneath the level of conscious belief and even be automatic, but still be morally objectionable. But the fact that one is unconcerned with the truth is inconsistent with other values, such as seeking egalitarianism, e.g. (see Chapter 2, section IV), thus, the moral failing is greater than Morreall allows (for more on the moral concerns with indifference to accurate beliefs about and relations with others, see (Lugones 82-5).

puts ideas into our heads not to communicate information, but for the delight those ideas will

bring" (Morreall 2009, 102).[210]

Ironically, this non-serious attitude in Morreall's sense, when applied to oppressor or

oppressed in humor, can actually be seen as an adoption of seriousness in the existentialist sense.

Rather than standing as a confrontation to a legitimate problem, the laughter from the oppressed

acts merely as an exercise of fictionalizing and/or aestheticizing[211] what would otherwise be

viewed as a crippling state of affairs. Seen in this light, the humor acts not as a subversive tactic,

but rather as a further mechanism of self-constraint, for the laughers are not really interested in

changing anything, but merely experiencing the temporary relief that comes from tension-

releasing laughter;[212] they are revealing that they are content, even *at ease* with the way things are

even though the play mode enables them to recognize the disparity between that reality and how

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[210] One possible escape for Morreall might be to argue that racist and sexist jokes are not really instances of humor when they are motivated by racist and sexist beliefs; in fact he hints at this response but does not develop it. In such cases, there is little or no playfulness, as the goal is simply to maintain the status quo rather than to playfully reconfigure it. I am sympathetic to this view regarding oppressive jokes, but this approach would need to include an analysis at the other end of the spectrum—subversive humor. Morreall could argue that due to the asymmetrical power relations between oppressors' use of jokes (see Oring Chapter 4) and their intention to sustain the status quo, and the oppressed persons' use of humor to subvert the status quo, the latter qualifies as humor but the former does not.

[211] When unsettling cognitive shifts occur, there are ways in which we can train ourselves to take a playful attitude toward them, and one of the most effective, according to Morreall, appears to be our ability to "fictionalize" the potential problem: "When we tell a joke, draw a cartoon, or produce a film about a fictional situation, we allow our audience the luxury of dropping the concerns they ordinarily have about comparable situations" (Morreall 2009, 53). Again, we would want to know for how long such concerns would be dropped and what this would mean. If it is providing a temporary "safe space" so to speak, where one is separated enough (but not completely) from the content of the situation so that she can perceive the relevant incongruity and both comprehend and enjoy it, this is beneficial for a number of reasons, some of which are mentioned above, and more will follow. Even if it is merely an analogical exercise to help make better sense of a real-world scenario in which temporal, emotional, and intellectual distance of any sort are not possible, this too can benefit the marginalized. The benefits are lost, however, to the extent that one remains content to stay within the fabricated comforts of fiction and pure aesthetics; one has resigned oneself (in bad faith) to the habitual ease of residing in "worlds" bereft of "flesh and blood people" (Lugones 87). See also (Sánchez 117-20).

[212] I think Morreall is correct in part related to the distance play mode can provide in many situations from philosophical investigations, one's own successes and failures, dealing with tense high-stakes matters in hospitals, and even overt oppression under genocidal regimes, to name just a few. But in none of these cases are the states of affairs such that we are left with no alternatives; that is, the humor is not obviously a last resort in response to inevitability, like death, e.g. Consider the case of a "condemned man who, upon approaching the gallows, says, 'Well, this is a good beginning to the week!'" (Marmysz 141). This is existentially subversive, but not politically; hence, "gallows humor" is quite different than subversive humor, but it is not clear that Morreall allows for this distinction.

things *should* be (see Morreall 1999, 4-6).[213] This is not an espousal of Stoicism per se, in which

one seeks the wisdom to distinguish between that which can be controlled and that which is

beyond anyone's power. Morreall has many valuable things to say about laughter in the face of

the latter, where I think a connection can be made between his "comic pragmatism" (1999, 29)

and an existentialist brand of humor (Marmysz 155-166; Davenport; Monahan 1995). But to

confuse the latter with the former is both a form of bad faith and spirit of seriousness: since

nothing can be done about systematic oppression any more than we can elude death, "Why

bother?" Why not just laugh?[214] But I do not think this is what occurs when subversive humor, at

least, is invoked.

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[213] "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be" (Hazlitt 65). Let us rephrase this: Only *humans* laugh because they are *capable* of discovering this dissonance. When one is deep in the bowels of seriousness and comfortably ontologically expansive, habitual commitments to sustain the status quo prevail. Consider Lugones' comments on playfulness and "world-travelling" and the ambiguities of identities in relation to socially constructed centers and margins: "Though I would think that any account of identity that could not be true to this experience of outsiders to the mainstream would be faulty even if ontologically unproblematic [unambiguous essences easily defined]. Its ease would constrain, erase, or deem aberrant experience that has within it significant insights into non-imperialistic understanding between people" (Lugones 89). I will have more on this in the following chapter on playful collaborative argumentation as a means to open the eyes of the privileged.

[214] This is the attitude toward humor that Gordon rightly criticizes: "Humor stands in these communities as complex competitors of proverbs, but instead of wisdom, they offer distance" (Gordon 2000, 34). I think Morreall's criticism of Camus' "metaphysical rebellion" and his scornful attitude toward the absurdity of existence, for instance, is correct. A comic vision, of the sort expressed by Nietzsche, e.g., rather than tragic vision in response to such *inevitable* absurdity makes more sense: "the lesson they offer is that facing a world without epistemological or ethical foundations, our highest and most authentic response is not pointless rebellion, but laughter" (Morreall 2009, 132; see also Monahan 1995, 58-61; Marmysz 155-71; Davenport 169-173). But the sorts of absurdity in oppression that subversive humorists rebel against are *not* inevitable; rebellion is not pointless in these cases, nor is rebellious laughter, as it is not God or Nature or some other Law of Necessity against which the marginalized are railing, but the contingent structures designed for the benefit of some humans at the expense of others. To borrow from Daniel Dennett on issues of free will, these oppressive systems are "evitable." We can view both gallows humor and humor against oppression as subversive, but it is the former which seeks only to subvert (stoically redirect) one's own psychological attitude, while the latter intends to succeed in psychological, emotional, and cognitive distance *and* (or *through* such distancing) subvert the contingent conventions within a system that is hierarchically constructed by and for those with privilege. For Morreall, we respond with practically engaged negative emotions to an incongruity we wish to change (Morreall 1987a, 190-2; 1989, 6), and with puzzlement when confronted with an incongruity that elicits a desire to change our attitude toward it (Morreall 1987a, 192-5; 1989, 7). But with humorous disengagement, he claims, we neither attempt to amend the world or our perception/conception of it (Morreall 1987a, 195-204; 1989, 9). Contra Morreall, I argue that subversive humor is not a flippant attempt to render an inexorable event psychologically, emotionally, or intellectually insignificant, but a practical means of responding to that part of the world and mind which is *subvertible*. Marmysz, I think gets it half right when he notes that we can use humor to "reorient ourselves toward" otherwise painful experiences "in such a manner that we gain a feeling of

As I see it, there are three distinct meanings of "seriousness" in opposition to "playfulness" relevant to this discussion: (1) the existential sense described in Chapter 1 and Schopenhauer's description above; (2) Morreall's solemn or *grave* sense in which one has immediate practical concerns revealed in the literal use of *bona-fide* language and emotional engagement with one's environment, sometimes even leading to fight or flight types of responses; and (3) the practical concern for that which is *important* to an individual; I take something *seriously* because it matters to me. This kind of *mattering* does not entail a hyper-emotional attachment to some state of affairs such that one is in a sense trapped in her reptilian brain, for example, where only fight or flight type responses are available. But it is also not a mental state wholly devoid of emotion, as such a mental state would not (could not) elicit any interest, much less concern, for the individual.[215] It is this third sense of serious that Morreall at times hints at when comparing a humorous attitude to a philosophical attitude (2009, chapter 7), and his example of "playing" rather than "working" music (1999, 33). It is this sense of seriousness that is distinct from both the existentialist connotation and Morreall's seriousness-as-graveness that I will show is combined with playfulness in subversive humor.

Even with Morreall's encouragement to *play life* as one plays music, rather than to work it, he still equates play with a purely aesthetic experience in which one is engaged "simply for the pleasure of the activity itself" (Morreall 1999, 33). There are many examples of this play mode in musicians, athletes, actors, and *play*wrights. In this sense, grave, sober, solemn, etc., are antonyms of play, but, when we look at professional (or even *amateur*, in the sense of "loving" what one does) musicians, athletes, etc., we are not contradicting ourselves if we note such people

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control and mastery over them" (145). But he, like Morreall, sees this attitude as a mere "means toward the end of providing us with merriment" (Marmysz 146).

[215] "If it was about something that didn't matter, the brain wouldn't bother dealing with it at all" (Hurley et al. 184 nt. 6). The brain is dealing with humorous situations because there is a motivation to do so which comes from the underlying "epistemic" emotions.

take their *play seriously.*[216] We can add to this list philosophers and comedians. A philosopher,

e.g., who engages in thought experiment (play of ideas) is serious in the sense of having sufficient

concern about something to take the time to think about it deeply. At the same time, she is not

overly-emotionally[217] engaged with the subject of study such that she cannot think critically about

it; she is not stuck in the mode of convergent thinking in which unusual solutions are ignored and

incongruities are only viewed as "disturbances in the practical order of things" (Morreall 1983,

122). So, the philosopher can be serious without being in a spirit of seriousness and without being

grave, grim, stern, and certainly not solemn or sober—a quick look at the history of philosophical

thought experiments with evil demons, brains in vats, what it would be like to be bats,

teletransporters, and famous violinists surreptitiously attached to one's back, will quickly

disabuse us from using the epithet "sober" for philosophers.[218] Likewise, a comedian, subversive

wit in particular, does intend to arouse enjoyable laughter, but at the same time she intends to

invoke such mirth about important and thus *serious* matters. Very much like the philosopher, she

engages her audience with amusing counter-factuals, possible worlds, and often socio-political

role-reversals which convey serious information playfully. I will offer examples of each of these.

They reveal that playful humor does not just offer a sugar-coating to an otherwise tasteless (or

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[216] Bertrand Russell makes a similar point: "People often make the mistake of thinking that 'humorous' and 'serious' are antonyms. They are wrong. 'Humorous' and 'solemn' are antonyms. I am never more serious than when I am being humorous" (Quoted in Hurley et al. 250; see also Bergson 82-3). It is also apt to say that children take their play seriously, and so should adults. That is, we should take our own play seriously, and the unstructured, free play of children seriously. One of the many negative effects of No Child Left Behind is a truncated (or completely removed) recess period, which is overshadowed by more time in the traditional classroom setting where young children remain seated, inactive, continually drilled on test-based content which focuses on narrow, uncreative, convergent thinking. For more on this see (Wenner 2009; Morreall 1983, 95-100); and (Gordon 2007, 172) on her critique of the current system of rules and regulations for teacher performance driven by testing which assumes a single absolute universal standard: "Their aim is to break down the conditions of speech, which is, by definition, open ended, and of laughter, which spontaneously disrupts the settled by playfully emphasizing incongruities." Education should not be reduced to mere *training*.

[217] Notice this does not entail a completely unemotional state. More on this in Chapter 4.

[218] While Morreall includes an 8-point comparison between comedians and philosophers, including the mutual interest in counterfactuals and thought experiments often used to question authority and presuppositions generally, through the raising awareness about an incongruity or logical fallacy (2009, 128-9), he maintains that both require the practitioner to be aloof and nonserious. It is better to say they are both serious endeavors that are best engaged within play mode.

distasteful) medicine, but creative, critical open-mindedness that is more suited to making sense of an ambiguous, contingent, dynamic, and often ironic reality.

It is surprising that Morreall maintains this hard line between his notions of "serious" and "play" given his analysis of humor and freedom and his specific mention (2009, 70) of the subversive feminist group, *The Guerilla Girls*, and in Soviet Russia, *Krokidil* (1983, 102), who clearly use humor as a means to convey rebellious information *and* effect socio-political change. But he later undercuts the force of their humor: "When we want to evoke anger or outrage about some problem, we don't present it in a humorous way, precisely because of the practical disengagement of humor. *Satire is not a weapon of revolutionaries*" (Morreall 2009, 101, my italics).[219] Many political spoofs are just jests employed solely for the gratification they might bring to an audience. But this is not the case for subversive humor, including the wittiness of many of the very individuals and groups Morreall cites.

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[219] Gregor Benton, who has investigated the use of humor in the Soviet Union, puts it this way: "But the political joke will change nothing. It is the relentless enemy of greed, injustice, cruelty and oppression—but it could never do without them. It is not a form of active resistance…" (Quoted in Sorensen 168-9). In contrasting amusement with negative emotions, Morreall claims that since "we enjoy the incongruity in amusement, our only motivation might be to prolong and perhaps communicate the enjoyable experience; we do not have the practical concern to improve the incongruous situation, nor the theoretical concern to improve our understanding of it" (1987a, 196). I agree with Morreall regarding the desire to communicate the mirth and thus prolong (spread) that feeling to others, but without prolonging the activities themselves (government mistreatment of citizens, e.g.). I suppose it might be true that politically subversive humor would not be necessary if there were no incongruities to find amusing—if everyone were truly equal, and greed, injustice, cruelty, and oppression were somehow eradicated. However, this does not entail that humor cannot be beneficial in creating socio-political change. This would be akin to claiming that compassion is causally inert against suffering since the former could "never do without" the latter.

V.   Serious Play[220] in Subversive Humor

In this final section of the chapter, I will argue that even though almost all instances of

humor, especially subversive humor, rely on indirect modes of communication, and they usually

invoke some level of playful absurdity on one or more levels of interpretation, they can still be

considered a means of conveying important/serious information. In the following chapter, I will

expand on this idea as it is used in both everyday conversations and subversive humor against

oppression.

Consider the following from Morreall: "Suppose we are talking about how General

Motors [GM] has recently closed several factories in order to cut costs, and you say, 'Next they'll

shut down *all* their plants, to really save some money'" (2009, 35). Morreall claims the humorous

retort does not qualify as a locutionary act in J. L. Austin's (1962, 99-107) sense, e.g., other than

being a meaningful string of words, because it is not meant to actually convey information, ask a

question, or give a command.[221] Furthermore, Morreall claims it is not an illocutionary act either.

In such acts, one is intending to *do* something with the words uttered, in particular, to get others

to act in some way. So, when one performs an illocutionary act, this can be a means to bring

about a change of some state of affairs, or what amounts to a perlocutionary act. He gives the

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[220] "Playful Seriousness" might work as well, especially with subversive humor in which a serious matter is playfully presented. For instance, metaphysical musings on the nature of one's identity within the ambiguous interstices of the social world(s) can easily qualify as serious work. But, following Lugones, a playful attitude can allow for mental freedom without abandoning the *subject* of study: "The playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying we are *open to self-construction*. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, *there are no rules that are to us sacred*....While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular 'world'. We *are there creatively*. We are not passive" (Lugones 95-6).

[221] Additionally, it violates most of H.P. Grice's rules of conversational logic, in particular his Cooperative Principle. Here are some of the maxims which I mesh together: "Do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence; avoid obscurity of expression; avoid ambiguity; be brief [and he adds somewhat amusingly, or at least ironically] (avoid unnecessary prolixity); be orderly" (Grice 45-6; see also Morreall 1983, 79-82). I will return to this issue in Chapter 4, as I am not convinced that violating or "flaunting" these rules of conversation leads to a lack of cooperation at all; in fact, I will argue that in humor, especially conversational humor, playfulness fosters greater cooperation than might exist without it, even when such playfulness can be used to expose heuristic errors in others' thinking.

example of a child asking to borrow dad's car, and the father responds with the implicit command "'the gas tank is almost empty'" (Morreall 2009, 34). Here the illocutionary speech act is performed *in* the straightforward locutionary act which appears to be describing a state of affairs. But in this context, this mundane statement is understood (or better be) by the child to mean something like "If you want to borrow the car YOU will have to fill it up with gas, perhaps out of YOUR own money."[222] According to Morreall, joking and amusement, non-bona-fide or insincere uses of language, cannot be explained through Austin's framework. This is not surprising, as mentioned multiple times above, playful humor conflicts with any practical concern, including the successful transmission of information. This is because, while in play mode, "[a]ll that counts is whether your words amuse me, and it doesn't much matter how that is done" (Morreall 2009, 36). I think this misses the point of humor even in the everyday example Morreall chooses to make his case about humor and speech acts; but it especially fails to make sense of what occurs with subversive humor.

To return to his GM example, I might not be directly informing you about a fact regarding GM, but I am *in*directly telling you something about the way GM affects my moral sensibilities, and others like me, and *should* affect yours.[223] I do not intend that you believe the literal content of the faux-assertion,[224] but I do convey something I think is true, at least on one reading of the joke—GM engages in immoral practices, or GM does not value (or care at all) for its employees. In order to enjoy the remark, one must be able to recognize the incongruity

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[222] It is an economical and conventional means of getting something done with words. This is an example of what Austin (70-1, 96, 129), and Searle (1975) later, refer to as an "indirect speech act." The typical example is the following: "Could you pass the salt?" The speaker means what he says, but something more. The direct, locutionary act is the *polite* question. Sometimes, in an attempt to amuse, respondents will simply reply with "yes", pretending they understood the utterance *only* as a question, and not the further illocutionary act of intending to get one to pass the salt. If the illocutionary force succeeds, and the salt is passed, that constitutes the perlocutionary act; something was done with words.

[223] At least this is a very plausible interpretation of the exchange; from the perspective of subversives we can understand this dialog as meaning more than simply "I intend to make you laugh." But at the same time, we can still find it (at least mildly) humorous.

[224] And you will understand this is in play mode, and I will be aware that you are in play mode by your laugh rather than blank stare and/or questioning me about the "logic" of a company trying to save money by halting the production of the very thing that makes them money.

involved, and yet come to realize that what appeared nonsensical, non-illocutionary, and impractical on the superficial level, in fact does make sense when reinterpreted, in this case, from a (mildly) rebellious perspective: "Leaders of giant corporations that are too big to fail (or jail) can get away with anything; this is not as it should be." The adept use of hyperbole to create a pleasing incongruity is doing more than merely delighting.

The economy of language and the commonly shared background frameworks or scripts, enables us to exploit them in a way to get our audience to know what we intend even when we are not stating it clearly and directly. In Morreall's example where my son wants to borrow the car, I state (locutionary act) that the car is almost out of gas. But I am giving more than just a description of the way the world is; I am in a way prescribing to my son that the car *should* be filled up *by him*. There is a similar underlying linguistic and psychological structure with the GM example, but with the notable difference in its attempt at humor. I will have more on this in the following chapter, in particular what makes one humorous and the other not,[225] but I wish to emphasize here that even in both of these rather ordinary cases, more is being said than what is literally presented, and the implicit information in both can be interpreted as important—even *serious* in the sense that what one is saying (in not saying it) matters.

The subversive wit recognizes the difference between the way the world is and the way it should be, and is *not content*, contra Morreall, with "everything [being] acceptable just as it is" (Morreall 1989, 9; see also 1987a, 195). In the section on intellectual and moral virtues fostered by humor, Morreall notes that since "all moral codes want us to transcend our 'here/now/me' perspective, they encourage us to avoid anger, fear, and other self-focused emotions" (2009, 116). It is significant that he omits "real" and "practical" from this list, which he had included earlier in the text (2009, 32). I think he has it right in the latter section, as neither morality nor humor is fully disengaged from reality and practical concern, and this is especially so with subversive

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[225] One obvious point that can be made here is that the GM situation involves playfulness and an oppositional incongruity where the car-borrowing does not.

humor. Indeed, Morreall offers many insightful examples that make this point,[226] against so much of his earlier insistence that if something is truly humorous it cannot be burdened with practical concern, because, to the extent that it is, the experiences invoked are less aesthetic, less enjoyable, less focused only on the incongruity, and more concerned with somber issues that must be solved in an absolute, single-tracked approach (1983, 92-100; 1987b, 216; 2009, 116).[227] This is the counter-attitude to playfulness, not the seriousness that accompanies important, real, practical issues like oppression. The subversive humorist is not laughing stoically against an unjust reality that is inexorable no matter what one does; again, this is the spirit of seriousness. Rather, she is laughing at incongruities between reality and the way she thinks it should be.[228]

Often, the incongruities are subtle, as they have been smoothed over by cultural stereotypes which have primed us toward certain expectations. This is largely due to cultural norms and maxims that have become so entrenched and unquestionable that they have morphed into heuristics which rarely rise to the level of conscious attention. Some examples dealt with in the first two chapters center around the idea that the U.S. is an exceptional meritocracy, where oppression is an anomaly of the past, and any success or failure is due solely to individual

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[226] Many in fact which fit Cudd's view on the efficacy of satire in raising consciousness (201). Morreall writes almost the same thing which is inconsistent with his criterion of humor being non-practical and disengaged: "Jokes about Hitler…gave those he was oppressing some feeling of freedom and kept alive a morally praiseworthy *resistance* to his regime. On a smaller scale, we might use humor to embarrass a person who is acting out of bigotry, in order to wake him up to what he is doing, and to *give support to the people he is mistreating*" (Morreall 1983, 112, my italics). The last claim also sounds similar to (Harvey 2010, 15; 1999, 70-1, esp. 77): "protest in the face of mistreatment signals the victim's refusal to comply with such manipulations of their intellectual and moral judgment. They know they have a right to fairer treatment and their protests convey that they have not been intimidated or browbeaten into thinking otherwise."

[227] Davenport (171) and Marmysz follow Morreall on this: "Seriousness is committed, earnest and somber. The humorous attitude … moderates our seriousness, reminding us that in the grand scheme of things, nothing is really that important" (Marmysz161). The subversive humorist, at least, is also committed and earnest, just indirectly, and this is especially the case when humor is used as a tool to undercut an unjust system rather than frivolously flail against fate. But I think Marmysz has half of the story correct enough to incorporate an analysis of all sorts of humor *including* subversive humor. This is evident in the following: "However, a humorous attitude is not the same as an attitude lacking in seriousness. It is, rather, an ability to see things within the context of multiple perspectives" (Marmysz 162). But he does not disambiguate the term "serious."

[228] There is not a single manifestation of this incongruence; it could be behavior, beliefs of the privileged, etc. Recall, these incongruities are more readily perceived by those who suffer under oppression due to being socio-politically underprivileged, the marginalized possess an epistemic privilege in this sphere of knowledge.

perseverance or lack thereof. But the practical reality, in broad terms, is that there is an incongruity between the values extolled consciously, explicitly, and *mind-numbingly* of the system in the U.S. and the actual lived experiences of most of its citizens throughout its history. Subversive humor can both expose these incongruities and create change.

Finally, I will address some of the examples Morreall uses to defend the claim that humor fosters open-mindedness, multiple perspectives, and makes us "not only more tolerant of people's differences, but more gracious" (Morreall 2009, 116-7). Here is the first:

> Consider how Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater became a member of the Phoenix Country Club in the 1960's. Because his father was Jewish, the club initially rejected his application. Instead of getting angry or filing a lawsuit, Goldwater called the club president to ask a question. 'Since I'm only *half*-Jewish, can I join if I just play nine holes?' The man laughed heartily and immediately let him in. Goldwater's humor has gently opened his eyes to the absurdity of the club's anti-Semitism and had given him an easy way to *change* its policy. (Morreall 2009, 117, my italics)

Morreall does not tell us whether the policy was changed *only* for Goldwater or for all—a significant point. However, even if this worked only in the individual case, it does illustrate how one can be in play mode, use incongruity ("the absurdity of anti-Semitism") humorously in order to elicit play mode in the listener, and invoke a change, even if minor, in an oppressive system. The question for Morreall here is whether this instance is no longer funny *because* it has as an additional goal, the practical intent to alter a part of social reality that Goldwater wishes were not the case. If the quip is still amusing, and it is as effective as Morreall contends, then this stands as an example of subversive humor in which a playful attitude is used to not only highlight, but amend a serious/important and practical situation.[229] This stands as an attack of the spirit of seriousness, in this case, explicitly mandated by the bigoted country club—that is, Goldwater is

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[229] It is an error to assume *a priori* that one cannot question certitude without assuming a position of indubitability, and thus, existential, solemn seriousness. Morreall is not alone in his claim that humor dissipates as practical engagement intrudes: "The best humorists-Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Bob Hope, and Mort Sahl--share this mixture of detachment and desire, eagerness to believe, and irreverence concerning the possibility of certainty. And when they become serious about their convictions--as Twain did about colonialism and Hope about Vietnam--they cease to be humorous" (Davenport 171). He does not provide examples of their attempts at satire that fail to be humorous.

using humor to address a contingent state of affairs constructed by the mystifications of the serious.[230]

In another case, Morreall contends "[l]ives have been saved by humor." "A few years before coming President, Lincoln was challenged to a duel. He agreed, provided that he could specify the weapons and the distance at which they would stand. The other gentleman agreed. Lincoln said, 'Cow shit at five paces.' And that was the end of the argument" (Morreall 2009, 118). Little needs to be said about the seriousness involved with a situation in which death is highly probable; Lincoln was apparently inept at both swords and firearms. Happily for him, he did have a sense of humor; a fact duly noted and adopted by his potential dueler.

The third example comes from his section entitled "Humor during the Holocaust." In fact, there are many examples I could pick out from this section which illustrate the point I wish to make regarding the efficacy of subversive humor in which the wit *is* in play mode, *and* is taking a matter seriously in the sense that he wishes his situation were not as it is, and is acting through humor to change it. Jewish prisoners in ghettos or camps, for example, recognize the incongruities in the absurdity of the Nazi regime and through humor are benefitted in three ways, according to Morreall: "humor focused attention on what was wrong and sparked resistance to it. Second was its cohesive function: it created solidarity in those laughing together at their oppressors. And third was its coping function: it helped the oppressed get through their suffering without going insane" (Morreall 2009, 118; see also Sorensen 175-8 for a similar account). There is both cognitive and emotional distance here, but it is not the sort envisioned by Morreall, for if it

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[230] While the situations are clearly different in scope, there are parallels between this sort of exchange and the satire of someone like Jonathan Swift: "And that, of course, was Swift's intention. He used humor not to entertain, but to change the reader's political views. The ability of humor to change (or attempt to change) our beliefs deserves explanation" (LaFollette and Shanks 330). I agree. Although I would qualify the statement with "he used humor not [just] to entertain…." Marmysz offers a good starting point for the arguments I wish to make: "Comedy, jokes, and humor are potentially subversive tools that, in their power to make the dangers of the world look small, also have the power to overthrow and destroy the serious spirit of reverence that tradition and authority have bestowed upon our leaders and social institutions" (Marmysz 162). There is a fine line, however, between making a potential tragedy appear less important than it might be, and trivializing genuine suffering.

were, such humor would have been a boon only in his second and third ways, which is not nothing, of course. The first benefit of humor requires some kind of practical engagement, likely one that is both emotional and cognitive, as I will argue for in the following chapter.

I will end with an example provided by Morreall which illustrates at least these three benefits of humor, in this case used against overt oppression:

> 'Goebbels was touring German schools. At one, he asked the students to call out patriotic slogans. "Heil Hitler," shouted one child. "Very good," said Goebbels. "Deutschland über alles," another called out. "Excellent. How about a stronger slogan?" A hand shot up, and Goebbels nodded. "Our people shall live forever," the little boy said. "Wonderful," exclaimed Goebbels. "What is your name, young man?" "Israel Goldberg." (quoted in Morreall 2009, 124)

This example, and others, disconfirms Morreall's claims regarding the degree of disengagement in humor as such: "We are in a *play mode* rather than a serious mode, disengaged from conceptual and practical concerns" (Morreall 2009, 50; see also 1983, 88-90; 1987b, 217-18; 1999, 16). But here we can see the ambiguity of "playfulness" and "seriousness." Who is wholly disengaged in this example? Is it the Jewish boy who creates the humor? Is he so unemotional in this case that he is only concerned with creating an aesthetic experience? Is he so emotionally involved that he cannot succeed in such a creation? I would argue that he, like other subversive humorists from Frederick Douglass to Richard Pryor, to Chris Rock and Dave Chappelle, are in play mode when they make humorous socio-political commentary—but they are also (non-existentially) serious in much the same way a musician *seriously* plays her instrument, as an athlete *seriously* plays her sport, as a philosopher *seriously* plays with thought (experiments), and as a comedian *seriously* plays with humor.

The world is, according to Rationalists at least, fully rational, and they even have a principle that undergirds this assumption, as Morreall references: "the Principle of Sufficient Reason…Everything, in short, is theoretically explainable" (Morreall 2009, 14). So, when experience stands in opposition to this theoretical assumption we should be, as many apparently are, confused, upset, or even disheartened that the world does not fit our theory. There is a long

history, in philosophy and other disciplines, of either ignoring the empirical data that apparently

falsifies our theory, or conceiving *ad hoc* reasons to force the putatively contradictory evidence

into our *a priori* abstractions in order to maintain coherence at the expense of correspondence to

the world. The negative connotation in "rationalize" applies here. By assuming a framework in

which *everything* fits perfectly we habituate ourselves toward a spirit of seriousness. That is, we

incline ourselves to an unquestioning attitude, one that presumes a hermetic seal between our

(pre)conceptions and perceptions. Morreall notes that an omniscient being would not (*could* not)

have a sense of humor as there would be nothing unexpected; no violations of patterns or

conceptual frameworks (2009, 14-15; 1999, 46). By analogy (and it can only be that), the person

habituated in a spirit of seriousness is epistemically closed not due to actual omniscience, but a

presumption of certainty within a particular domain that does not admit of surprise. Put

differently, one has fostered a disposition to ignore any *unwanted* incongruities or smooth over

them.[231]

So with injustice, e.g., the subversive wit is not just puzzled by incongruity such that she

attempts to only amend her attitude and perspective toward it as if she were merely confronted

with a riddle; nor is she solely constrained within a negative attitude such that her thoughts are

convergent, single-tracked, irrational, existentially and *Morreall*-serious. Rather, with subversive

humor, there is the third element, humorous amusement, which allows for the subversive wit to

transcend (without denying or fictionalizing) the emotional seriousness through entering play

mode, linger with the intellectually puzzling incongruity, and find the matter important/serious

enough to do something creative about it. This creative response requires practical engagement,

but indirectly, through divergent thought which opens new avenues for the humorist and her

audience to consider.

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[231] Here the opposition between humor and a spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and stereotyping can be made more forcefully, though a full account of subversive humor against these will have to wait until Chapter 5.

In the next chapter, I will delve into the details of how subversive humor can be used to disrupt the comfortable, miser-able ease of the powerful, from explicit subversive performances which rely on spectacle to some degree or other, to the subtle undermining of logical, normative, linguistic, and conversational rules in the context of the quotidian.

CHAPTER 4: HUMOR, HUBRIS, AND HEURISTIC ERROR DETECTION

In the previous chapter, I distinguished between a serious attitude and a playful attitude when one is confronted with incongruity. I noted that the serious or closed mode is the default approach to navigating our surroundings, but that the creative, divergent-thinking, and open play mode can be employed to confront serious matters—those that are important and in need of attention. The subversive humorist, in particular, is attempting to disclose and transmit information in such a way as to create change in both attitudes and practical social interactions through bringing to light flaws in our thinking and acting. In this chapter I will argue that humor can act as a means to highlight the errors found in stereotypes or flawed social heuristics that contribute to psychological oppression, and can even subvert the often implicit mind-set that sustains an unjust status quo. I will continue with a theoretical analysis of humor and its relation to oppression and offer concrete cases for study in the final chapter.

In the first section, I will briefly return to the concept of epistemic openness in contrast to epistemic closure in relation to the spirit of seriousness and oppression. The serious person presumes a level of certainty without argument which fosters a complacent attitude toward oneself and others, this in turn, both makes use of stereotypes and perpetuates them by tacitly accepting the false content—or at least revealing a desire, at some level, that the stereotype be true/accurate. I will show that subversive humor "cracks open"[232] this type of certainty and hubris at play in oppression. In the next section, I will make explicit the connection between stereotypes and heuristics and their interplay with humor in general, borrowing heavily from the work of Hurley et al. This will provide a basis for subsequent arguments in section III in which I make the case for collaboration in error detection, potentially even among oppressors and subversives. This will be an explanation primarily at the level of cognitive science, cognitive linguistics, and

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[232] Thanks to Nancy Snow for this phrase.

philosophy of mind.[233] Section III will be broken up into four subsections where I focus on the

key elements that are specific to subversive humor.

I.   If philosophy is to serve a positive purpose it is to dissipate certainty

The paraphrase above is from Bertrand Russell's *Philosophy for Laymen.* The crux of his

claim is this: "[Philosophy] must not teach mere skepticism, for, while the dogmatist is harmful,

the skeptic is useless. Dogmatism and skepticism are both, in a sense, absolute philosophies; one

is certain of knowing, the other of not knowing" (Russell 1946, np). In the previous chapter, I

made note of some of the parallels between humorous and philosophical attitudes, in particular,

that both are amenable to creative/divergent and open thinking. Of course, not all philosophy is

immune to dogmatism, as Schopenhauer revealed, or useless skepticism (Russell 1946) and not

all joking encourages, or is elicited by, epistemic openness.[234] Associated with openness in

philosophy and humor is another correspondence, one not covered explicitly in Chapter 3: the

positive purpose of humor, subversive humor in particular, is also to dissipate certainty, but

specifically, the *feeling* of indubitability that both results from and is a further perpetuation of, a

spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness which perpetuates ignorance about the

complexities of social reality.[235] But, as argued in Chapter 2, these are not mere logical errors or

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[233] In the final chapter I will expand on this notion through an existential-phenomenological account of intersubjective "world-traveling" through humor.

[234] The oppressive jokes on the racist website "White Aryan Resistance" (WAR) or even the cumulative use of sexist jokes akin to those which opened section V in Chapter 1, are usually not used in order to reveal a hidden error in our thinking or engage an audience in collaborative and divergent thinking. The difference is that the jokes of the serious rely on and sustain cultural stereotypes, and at least with the cases like WAR, they are not implicit—the racists on that web page believe they have clear and distinct ideas regarding the essential characteristics of non-Aryans, and they make no attempt to conceal their messages through the playful or indirect method of humor. They are in effect shouting to the world the cognitive, emotive, and ethical flaws in their world views. To borrow from Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*: The feeling of *certainty* is when one is mistaken at the top of one's voice.

[235] Like the complex interrelation among privilege, the spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and stereotyping, cultivated ignorance and the feeling of certitude are reciprocally related. The quickest path to a *feeling* of being certain is cultivated ignorance, where doubt and confusion, ambiguity and plurality/fluidity are pruned away. This highlights a central motif: "What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know; it's what we know for sure that just ain't so" (Mark Twain quoted in Hurley et al. 109). Complacency, self-satisfaction, disinclination to self-monitoring, all lead to closed mode, or rather, to sustaining the default serious mode which can spill over into a spirit of seriousness if not checked.

epistemic flaws resulting from a lack of relevant information. They are epistemic lacunae that are caused by willful ignorance that immunizes them from the discomforts of doubt.[236] On a cognitive level, this complacency is maintained by training the non-conscious System 1, driven by a commitment to a status quo that favors the privileged at the expense of the oppressed; considerations that one lives in anything but a just social system are closed off by "heuristic prunings" (Hurley et al. 107). These prunings are controlled by two forces: friction and closure. With respect to the former, certain beliefs are not activated simply due to a lack of time or energy. The latter, which will be central to my arguments below, shuts off specific associations; a cognitive scientific account of "epistemic closure" discussed in previous chapters: "Something about the content in some avenue actively *closes off* further exploration: 'Nothing down these alleys! Save your time and energy!' This kind of heuristic search terminator is necessarily risky and crude, *not* involving further analysis of the path" (Hurley et al. 107).[237]

To return to a concept from Lewis Gordon, the humorist (and philosopher) seeks and embraces "epistemological openness", in contrast to the serious person, who stifles inquiry and discourse through unwarranted assumptions of certainty. The latter leads to a rigidity of thought and what Gordon calls *epistemic closure* (Gordon 2000, 88). Gordon's existential sense of closure

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[236] Major and Townsend refer to the socially constructed attitudes and beliefs about one's culture and one's place in it as "status ideologies": "They are an important component of individual's worldviews, operating implicitly and explicitly to guide perceptions, expectations, and interpretations of the social world…[and most significant here] status ideologies reduce epistemic uncertainty" (250). They add: "The idea that people are motivated to maintain consistency in their beliefs about themselves and their social world also plays a central role in a variety of other psychological theories….These theories assume that people strive to maintain consistency in their beliefs and behaviors so as to increase a sense of predictability and control. Inconsistencies disrupt a person's predictive ability and create feelings of uncertainty, thereby lessening a sense of control" (Major and Townsend 253).

[237] Here is another point at which cognitive science and existential phenomenology can collaborate in an analysis of cultural stereotypes in oppression. According to Dennett, phenomenology can provide interesting first-person subjective accounts of particular experiences, but will "forever wallow in the mysteries and circularities of pure phenomenology" (Hurley et al. 128). Whereas, a purely neuroscientific approach, e.g., fails to address the qualitative experiences of individuals. So, it is better to assert that more than one layer of analysis (cognitive science, introspective phenomenology, and social sciences e.g.) is needed to explain humor (and oppression)—the underlying mechanisms of the lived experience, the subjective phenomenology, and the role of social interaction. See Cudd p. 29 on the layers of analysis of oppression. But Hurley et al. are aware of the need for multilayered analysis of humor at least: "Comedians are in the position of people who know quite a lot about how to drive race cars, how hard they can be pushed under which conditions, but haven't any clear idea of what is under the hood" (Hurley et al. 130).

is not mutually exclusive with a cognitive and social scientific account of the rigidity of thought found in stereotyping. For Gordon, closure is a phenomenon that seals off additional thought about others by relying upon limited information provided only by recognition of particular social group membership. Given the multiplicity of a person's social identity, accurate inferences about one's "full biography" (Gordon 2000, 88) cannot possibly be derived from observing just one side of that person. While the epistemically playful person leaves avenues of the other's identity open for further questioning, the closed, serious person is content with *knowing* the other person sufficiently by a particular social role alone.[238] Since there is no more to be known about these other simple people (the self is always more complex, unique, individual, etc.), all sorts of cultural stereotypes *become* true and enable the stereotyper to remain closed and comfortable, ignorant of his own ignorance.[239] So, heuristic prunings sever or block channels of knowledge about one's culture, one's self and role in that culture, and one's relation to others who are oppressed in that culture. This conceit is contagious and often masquerades as "confidence", "ambition," or "national pride", and especially with nationalism, it largely remains implicit as it spreads via normalized social interactions within the "…single greatest and best country God has given man on the face of the planet" (see Chapter 2, section IV above).[240] This attitude, and offshoots from it, is what I call "hubris."[241]

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[238] See also Sánchez (39, 61) on Portilla's sense of 'snob' (*apretado*), and Alain de Botton's 2009 *Ted Talk* on a philosophical understanding of "success." Here he uses the term "snob" in the sense I use "hubris" in the context of existential seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and epistemic closure: "A snob is anybody who takes a small part of you, and uses that to come to a complete vision of who you are" http://www.ted.com/talks/alain_de_botton_a_kinder_gentler_philosophy_of_success.html. Accessed 1/26/14.

[239] "Our comforting conviction that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance" (Kahneman 2011, 201).

[240] This is an unquestioned mantra that many humorists undermine (cf. Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Dave Chappelle, Bill Hicks, Chris Rock, Roseanne Barr, Ellen Cleghorne, Ellen DeGeneris, Margaret Cho, and Louis CK to name a few). There is an enormous gap, as these comedians show, between our idealized/mythical expectations and reality: "Most know, despite their indifference to the past, that opportunity is often thwarted by the reality of scarcity; that the individual can be subverted by the power of the organization; and that reliance on technological prowess has led to personal and environment disaster…. 'When we think of America, and of her huge success, we never realize how many failures have gone, and still go to build up that success. It is not till you live in America, and go a little under the surface,

Hubris, as I understand it here, is a sense of unmerited pride analogous to the unquestioned attitude one finds in Garrison Keillor's fictional "Lake Wobegon", "'where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above average'" (Quoted in Boskin 1997, 26). In the case of the U.S. in general, the *Wobegon* effect fosters the illusion of merited superiority of those in power that is diffused among the populace, and with especial fervency among the powerful who have been born into their positions of privilege.[242] The connection I am making is between the well-studied "first-person exceptionalism, [which] is among the most wide-spread and pervasive of our tendencies towards bias" (Gendler 2010, 129; 2007, 81), with the more systemic "first-*country* exceptionalism." With respect to negative cultural stereotypes, these two biases interlink and feed off of each other: I am proud to be a successful American in a country where all are free to realize any goal, *if they work hard and keep out of trouble*; and if you have not achieved the American Dream,[243] by the question-begging definition, you have not worked hard enough, or you are not smart enough, or you exhibit a lack of proper reverence for the rules of the system. To put these in terms of hubris-

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that you begin to see how terrible and brutal is the mass of failure that nourishes the roots of the gigantic tree of dollars'" (Boskin 1997, 16-17, quoting D.H. Lawrence).

[241] I follow Cynthia Willett's usage of "hubris" as an excess of pride or outright arrogance possessed by those who are *proud* of their place in a hierarchical society. In *Irony in the Age of Empire*, her primary target is the U.S. government especially leading up to and during the 2003 war in Iraq—Orwellianly christened *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. "Today in the context of both domestic and international politics, we might think of hubris as an act of arrogance, or a crime of humiliation, and understand its perverse pleasure as what those who are morally righteous sometimes seek" (Willett 39). It is important to note in relation to Chapter 2, Willett's conception of hubris does not entail a conscious intention to harm others; indeed, the moral ends of the sole superpower, e.g., might even be laudable (Willett 29). Along with the whitewashing of history there is the ubiquitous messages of American exceptionalism in all possible arenas, which spreads a spirit of seriousness among the populace hungry for self-adulation and nationalism: "The romance of America as the moral center of a new world order blinds us to the ambiguity of the moral status of any unbalanced power in a unipolar world" (Willett 27; see also Gordon 2000, 31). It is not unrelated that the tragic virtues of honor, glory, status, and conceptions of manhood (Willett 12) or manliness intertwine with hubris.

[242] It is not a trivial play on words to read Keillor's created town's name as "woe-be-gone" which fits with the desire for ease and complacency in which there are no worries or self-doubts, as they are actively ignored.

[243] For more clichés, slogans, mantras, or other cultural dogmas extolling the ideals (and rule-following necessary to attain them) of the U.S., see (Boskin 1997, 20-25; and Major and Townsend 250-1; Young Chapter 7).

driven cultural stereotypes: those who have failed only have themselves to blame, for they are *lazy, ignorant, and/or* (*violent*) *criminals*.

The serious person possesses an attitude such that the social norms are ahistorical and *a priori*, lacking in the imaginative inclination (not ability) to see, much less create, alternative points of view in contrast to the dominant one, whether this is about the culture or the individuals who comprise it.[244] Ambiguity, vagueness, and in general, uncertainty, are causes for discomfort for the serious person (Major and Townsend 250, 253-9).[245] Rather than admitting ignorance, and accepting at least some aspects of others as being complex and partly "anonymous" (Gordon 2000, 88-91), for example, the ontologically expansive person presumes to have access to the hidden spaces of others; indeed, for such people there are no "hidden spaces for interrogation" (Gordon 2000, 89). The general rule, maxim, principle, or theory, only admits of exceptions insofar as they *make* the rule.

When there is a conflict between a presumed rule or heuristic and a perceived reality, discomfort or at least tension can arise. How one responds to such tension depends upon the degree to which one is inclined to be open or closed. The epistemic closure of the serious person fosters arrogance, which, even when met with some traditional forms of resistance, retreats into a cocoon of willful ignorance in which the "problem"[246] is always with someone else. The only *real* side (cf. Watkins 40) of others is what white (males) perceive it to be. This solipsistic attitude not

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[244] To put it more eloquently, quoting James Baldwin: "'there is simply no possibility of a real change in the Negro's situation without the most radical and far-reaching changes in American political and social structure. And it is clear that white Americans are not simply unwilling to effect these changes; they are, in the main, so *slothful* have they become, unable even to envision them'" (quoted in Spelman, 119; see Chapter 3 above on Kahneman's different but related use of "sloth"). See also (Lugones 43-4) on the "disrespectful, lazy, arrogant indifference to other cultures…. that devalues other cultures through stereotyping them or through nonreflective, self-satisfied acceptance of such stereotypes." It is not obvious how such political and social structural changes can be fomented. If the structures change, but without the concomitant change in cultural stereotypes and thus in peoples' attitudes, then a de facto status quo remains; this was the crux of Chapter 2 above.

[245] This can mean reality can be unpleasant for them unless they sustain comfortable ignorance. See (Gordon 1999, 72): "Human reality is founded on contradiction, irony, ambiguity, and paradox."

[246] Cf. (Gordon 2000, Chapter 4) on Du Bois' "The Negro Problem."

only dismisses the perspective of oppressed people, but denies *that* there is another perspective, as permitting an alternate view would imply some flaw in the essentializing stereotypes.[247]

This often unconscious but harmful attitude and action can lead to the sort of oppression documented by Harvey in which we do not recognize our own habitual and "common-place failings" which constitute "the mechanisms of subordination [that] are at their most subtle" (Harvey 2010, 23-4). However, even though the privileged are still committed to the stereotypes on some level, they can be opened up to their own errors and even to the experiences of the oppressed. Subversive humor can be effective at combating a one-dimensional view of others, offering an open-ended, and thus, more accurate, fuller description of them. This does not entail a complete grasp of others, quite the contrary; such an approach offers the appropriate distance to see from more than a single perspective and does not require that one individual stand in for all who belong to the same social group. But even such shifting will be limited, as it should be.[248] In fact, logical argument and traditional political protest, e.g., are important elements of resistance against oppression, but they have not proven effective against the sorts of de facto harms dealt with here that result from implicit biases (Harvey 2010; see also Gendler 2008a, 566, and Haidt

[247] There is a strong parallel here with Frye's conception of male oppressors' attempts to "Mold. Immobilize. Reduce" women (Frye 2): "The arrogant perceiver's expectation creates in the space about him a sort of vacuum mold into which the other is sucked and held. But the other is not sucked in to his structure always, nor always without resistance. In the absence of his manipulation, the other is not organized primarily with reference to his interests. To the extent that she is not shaped to his will, does not fit the conformation he imposes, there is *friction, anomaly or incoherence* in his world. To the extent that he notices this incongruity, he can experience it in no other way than as something wrong with her" (Frye 69, my italics). The *friction* Frye speaks of here is different than the heuristic pruning force Hurley et al. discuss (107); it is closer to the force of *closure*. The man, in this case, is "selfishly looking for excuses" (Hurley et al. 108) to not have to reconsider his constructed (even if co-authored) world-view in which women have essential, unambiguous, immutable natures/roles. This leads the man to presume a flaw in the woman who is not fitting the mold, rather than an error in his own abstract(ing) notions. So, in order to confirm his hypothesis/bias, to shoehorn the world to fit his mind, he, like the racist union members (or drivers biased against pick-ups) discussed in Chapter 2, alters his perception of part of the world (and sometimes the world itself—again, the pick-up bias), smoothing out any actual tension or friction that causes discomfort.

[248] Extending the virtues of epistemic openness, Gordon notes: "Combined, one receives 'good' data, 'solid' data, 'rigorously acquired' data, but never *complete* data. It is by staying attuned to the incompleteness of all data with regard to human beings that one makes the approach humanistic. It is a method that reveals that when it comes to human beings there will always be more to learn, and hence, more to research" (Gordon 2000, 93). See also (Lear 283-4) on the inherent irony of human experience that "does not lend itself to straightforward data collection or measurement. There is no statistically reliable way to answer the ironic question, '"Among the millions who pray on Sunday, does anyone pray?"'

2001). A more effective consciousness-raising technique is needed for this sort of oppression. In the next section I will outline an account of humor as error-detection mechanism.

II.   Detection of Heuristic Error Through Humor

Recall that heuristics are used to make judgments about given perceptions where one is presented with stimuli that require some sort of short-cut in order to make sense of the quickly processed information that needs to fit into a coherent pattern with what one already knows, or more accurately, *expects*; this is an important connecting point with humor. As noted in Chapter 3, humor relies, in most cases, on what might be called compression tools. These are mechanisms that allow audiences[249] to gain ready access to bundles of background information quickly and efficiently: "The *compression* tool takes advantage of widely shared general knowledge" (Hurley et al. 163). Furthermore, the available data often comes packaged in frames or scripts which are elicited by clever use of hints within the set-up of the joke, but they are done so specifically with the intention to deceive, fool, or misdirect, our rule-driven, heuristic expectations. In many cases, these tricks are invoked in order to shed light on an already well-known state of affairs in such a way that one must reevaluate a given set of presuppositions. Here, humor relies upon background information that is triggered by the subtle invocation of heuristics, or the clever embedding of heuristics within the setup of a potentially humorous situation. Importantly, as I will detail in section III below, humorists not only rely upon heuristics, but also flawed heuristics that are stereotypes: "A stereotype functions as a data-compression device that instantly references a huge library of exaggerated or oversimplified information. Just mentioning the stereotyped class is a

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[249] I have been using the term "audience" throughout this dissertation, but a point of clarity is needed here regarding audiences of subversive humor in particular. I am not really sure what to call the observers of subversive humor. Jean Harvey in her book "Civilized Oppression" makes note of the difficulties involved with humor, especially racist and sexist jokes—the listeners who laugh at such jokes are more than the neutral-sounding term "audience" implies. This is because the term has the connotation of passivity—we are simply absorbing what another has to say, we are hardly participating in anything harmful. But Harvey points out that there rarely are completely disinterested third-party bystanders when it comes to humor. I take this concern seriously, as a similar view is needed when we look at subversive humor specifically. We are more than merely passive recipients of a logical argument in which all of the details are spelled out for us or spectators of purely aesthetic experience in which we remain in a fictionalized realm that has been created by someone else.

blatant invitation to the audience to create a mental space[250] that is bound to have contaminating

errors in it—as almost everyone already knows…" (Hurley et al. 163).[251]

Some heuristic errors are ultimately harmless, but others can be detrimental to the

individual, or with cases of heuristics that ossify into stereotypes, harmful to others. So, we need

some mechanism that can check for flaws within the nonconscious heuristic system. One

candidate, according Hurley et al. in their attempts to reverse engineer the mind, is humor. Since

heuristic errors are likely to occur as a result of speed and lack of conscious self-monitoring, and

as Kahneman avers, our conscious System 2 is inherently lazy (2011, 35), we need something that

can do the dirty work of "debugging for the underlying mechanisms of control within an

environment" (Hurley et al. xi), to invoke the language of computer programming. Consider their

cognitive scientific view on humor and heuristics:

> Our brains are engaged full time in real-time (risky) heuristic search, generating
> presumptions about what will be experienced next in every domain. This time-pressured,
> unsupervised generation process has necessarily lenient standards and introduces
> content—not all of which can be properly checked for truth—into our mental spaces. If
> left unexamined, the inevitable errors[252] in these vestibules of consciousness would
> ultimately continue on to contaminate our world knowledge store. So there has to be a
> policy of double-checking these candidate beliefs and surmisings, and the discovery and
> resolution of these at breakneck speed is maintained by a powerful reward system—the
> feeling of humor; mirth—that must support this activity in competition with all the other
> things you could be thinking about. (Hurley et al. 12-13)

This passage connects with much of what I argued in Chapter 3 regarding the receptive approach

toward incongruity while in play mode; that is, while having a humorous attitude. This account

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[250] See (Fauconnier 1985, especially 16-30; Hurley et al, 12-13, 95-104, 117-22, 144-50, 171-5, 23-7).
Mental spaces are logically constructed 'spaces' (not physical modules in the brain) in which thought
experiments and abstract planning for hypothetical situations are born and bred. These enable us to better
handle our environments without needing to rely solely upon the less than ideal trial and error approach.
More on such spaces below.
[251] While Hurley et al. do note the "deservedly negative reputation" (163) of stereotypes, they are less
concerned here with the socio-political implications of stereotypes and oppression, and so they appear to
take an ambivalent view toward stereotyping in general, explaining only their functional role in humor.
Because of this, they seem to erroneously lump non-social heuristics with cultural stereotypes.
[252] The fact that there are *inevitable* heuristic errors does not lead to the existentially serious conclusion that
there is nothing that can be done to ameliorate their impact. Furthermore, such inevitability does not entail
the necessity of cultural stereotyping. Again, all stereotypes are heuristic errors, but not all heuristics, or
even heuristic errors, are (cultural) stereotypes. See the "pizza" joke from Noel Carroll below for a
heuristic error that is not a stereotype in the sense used in this dissertation.

buttresses, from a ground level, so to speak, the argument that the recognition of incongruity, dissonance, or even errors in one's own (certainly others') mental spaces can be enjoyable and rewarding. This is a point Schopenhauer seems to have understood as well: humorous laughter results from the "victory of knowledge of perception over thought [which] affords us pleasure… It must therefore be diverting to us to see this strict, untiring, troublesome governess, the reason, for once convicted of insufficiency" (Schopenhauer 1887, 279-80). Although I think his assessment is largely correct, we might replace "for once" with "very often." Connecting the philosophy of Schopenhauer with the empirical findings in current cognitive science, we can argue that humor results from a novel view of some aspect of the world in which suddenly and unexpectedly an erroneous presupposition or pre-conception is detected.

To simplify, consider the following little gem: "A man orders a whole pizza pie for himself and is asked whether he would like it cut into eight or four slices. He responds, 'Four, I am on a diet.'"[253] This represents an error in a heuristic (or heuristic*s*, there are usually many operative at any moment) that we are initially committed to and that is *usually* good enough, even if not optimal—*fewer slices equals fewer calories; diets require fewer calories,* etc.—but we find here that it fails, and we are rewarded with feelings of mirth by recognizing said error. So, mirth is "the motivation for a mind to search out subtle oversights made in reasoning that could infect the integrity of our knowledge" (Hurley et al. 67).[254] While many of the errors might be subtle,

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[253] This is a paraphrase of a joke told by Noel Carroll on the Podcast *Philosophy Bites* "On Humour" 4/9/11. To borrow from Marvin Minsky, some frames or scripts can be general enough to spawn subscripts or subframes that are automatically triggered upon the triggering of the more general rule or heuristic. This point will be more significant in the discussion below on subversive humor which highlights flaws in our general heuristics such as "American Exceptionalism" and which can at the same time expose particular instances of the disparity between our professed ideals, often in the form of unquestioned tropes or rules of thumb, but without considerations for exceptions. This might not immediately dawn on us until we get to the punch line and then have to decide, usually very quickly, how to interpret what at first seems nonsensical. When interpreted, or reinterpreted as an instance of humor, we recognize another perspective is possible than one found in the default, literal, serious mode.

[254] Minsky puts it this way: "since we have no systematic way to avoid all the inconsistencies of commonsense logic, each person must find his own way by building a private collection of "cognitive censors" to suppress the kinds of mistakes he has discovered in the past" (178). Much of the work by Hurley et al. builds on Minsky's approach to humor; however they (and I) part ways with Minsky's overly-Freudian analysis in Minsky's *Jokes and their Relation to the Cognitive Unconscious.* For this dissertation,

the means of bringing them to consciousness need not be. In fact, many instances of humor are meant to be jarring as they abruptly refocus our attention to otherwise hidden flaws. But in most cases, they do so by relying on covert means which make use of surprise. If the error is "telegraphed" and the audience is provided with all the relevant data up front, the feeling of mirth is not experienced. Instead, one experiences something akin to being told, in a bona-fide communicative, straightforward speech act (see Chapter 3, section I), that something is or is not the case. But in humor, the error must be clandestinely situated within the associated frames so that the audience can discover it *themselves* in order to experience the reward.

Specifically, the pizza bit can be explained by appeal to frames, scripts, or heuristics, and more fundamentally, according to Hurley et al. borrowing from Gilles Fauconnier (1985), mental spaces: "A metal space is a region of working memory where activated concepts and percepts are semantically connected into a holistic situational comprehension model…mental spaces are *constructed* during comprehension tasks as well as during abstract and creative thought" (Hurley et al. 97). When we hear the first few words in the joke above, we immediately "get into" a restaurant script, and likely related subscripts such as "pizzerias", "dieting", etc., in which a bundle of associated expectations are primed, most of which, at this point, are merely dispositional, only to become consciously available or active depending upon the environmental stimuli, and the individual's drive for coherence. The background frames allow for us to limit the number of options before us, which might otherwise be infinite, thereby leading to paralysis, and the conservative (in the sense of being slow to accept novel claims as true) mental shortcuts, or heuristics, usually aid in associating and situating the relevant, and appropriate frame in a complex scenario—usually.

So in humor the mental spaces are the quickly generated "containers" for holding expected scripts or frames and they are constructed to handle novel data which oppose in some

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"censor" need only imply a means of finding mental bugs rather than the psychoanalytic conception of censors as sublimating mechanisms which work toward *concealing* forbidden thoughts (see Minsky 175).

way the heuristics currently active in short-term memory. According to Hurley et al., "Simple

temporal juxtaposition—getting both beliefs active at the same time—is the necessary first step in

the creation of conflict between two or more beliefs in active memory—they can be contradictory

and side by side in long term for a long time—dormant" (Hurley et al. 113). Recall from Chapter

2 the way that Kahneman describes the state of mind of one *comfortably* ensconced in System 1

(Kahneman 2011, 59 and Chapter 2 above on surprise). According to incongruity theories of

humor, the punch line is designed to "jolt us." That is, the conclusion either contradicts or

opposes, at least partially, the script or schema that preceded it. In Kahneman's terms, humor

summons the conscious System 2 in order to find *some kind* of resolution to the perceived

incongruity between/among conflicting, previously nonconscious, beliefs that have been

juxtaposed in one's short-term or working memory.[255]

Which frame we associate in any given context and thus, what we expect to be the case

and what we expect to not be the case,[256] is determined by frugal mechanisms or "heuristic

prunings" introduced above. The two forces at play here, friction and closure, differ in that the

latter is malleable, allowing one to have greater control over what heuristic path to follow. This is

quite different than the inevitability of cognitive miserliness and options petering-out due to time

constraints. Furthermore, "[c]losure, in contrast, is teachable, adjustable by experience. We can

think of it as a thrifty triage system, helping not-quite-blindly to allocate resources, by 'selfishly

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[255] Here is an example from Morreall: "We hear a knock at the door and we approach it thinking someone
is going to be on the other side wanting to speak to us. In our heads the script is Answering the Door. If we
open it to find two Girl Scouts selling cookies, our second mental state follows the first smoothly;
everything is normal. We are still Answering the Door. But if we open the door to discover our dog
whapping her tail against it, we undergo a cognitive shift. We interpret the sound from the person's
knocking to a dog's tail wagging, and drop our expectation that we will be speaking with someone….Those
are not opposite scripts, but they are different enough to jolt us. If we enjoy that jolt, that's amusement"
(Morreall 2009, 52).

[256] Most of the expectations regard rules, whether conversational/linguistic/semantic (Grice; Lakoff and
Johnson; Raskin), heuristic/logical (Minsky; Hurley et al), or socio-political-moral (Lugones; Rorty; Lear;
Sánchez; Willett). These rules are rarely consciously followed, to borrow from linguistics: "One gestalt
may presuppose the presence of another, which may, in turn, presuppose the presence of others, and so on.
The result will typically be an incredibly rich background structure necessary for a full understanding of
any given situation. Most of this background structure will never be noticed, since it is presupposed in so
many of our daily activities and experiences" (Lakoff and Johnson 176-7).

looking for excuses' to terminate its own activation any time its local hunch is that the current task is unlikely to engage its talents productively and so it should conserve its resources for a better occasion to shine" (Hurley et al. 108).[257] But when two or more ideas populate the conscious mental spaces in our short-term memory, the content generated by heuristic rule-following can be compared, including the heuristic rules themselves, and can be consciously and willfully analyzed. In order for this content to remain active in short-term memory long enough to reveal an incongruity, a task which takes up a lot of cognitive energy, there must be some reward; in this case, it is humor—the feeling of mirth.

The feelings of mirth arise as payoff for the mental energy required to juxtapose potentially conflicting ideas in our minds, allowing for us to discover an error in our committed beliefs: "Humor happens when an *assumption* is *epistemically committed* to in a mental space and then discovered to have been a *mistake*" (Hurley et al. 121). Most of the examples used by Hurley et al. regarding committed erroneous beliefs are rather innocuous.[258] However, the cognitive groundwork they provide allows us to extend their notion of error detection to humor as a mechanism capable of revealing pernicious stereotypical beliefs to which one is committed. The feelings of mirth arise as a reward for finding an error in heuristic thinking that if left unchecked, would lead to the sort of negative stereotyping and oppression outlined in the previous chapters.

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[257] Put another way more relevant to the discussion at the end of Chapter 2 above, we can train our heuristics even if they are automatic and nonconscious. "For the most part, the incessant generation of mental spaces in the course of our daily lives appears to us to be effortless and automatic and, involuntary. 'We' delegate this task to the unconscious triage mechanism that carries on without further supervision, admonition, or notice by 'us'" (Hurley et al. 118). Of course, these automatic heuristic searches are controllable by us. Appeals to Cartesian dualism in which the self is presumed to be isolated from the mechanical, nonconscious body will not suffice to exculpate one whose heuristic inertia has "protected" one through ignorance.

[258] For example, when considering what Tom and Bill were playing catch with at a beach, you will likely appeal to the default frame of *ball*. But, "if it turns out that Tom and Bill were playing catch with a live fish, this is bound to interrupt your *complacency* since you were at least committed, in your mental space, to the default (but generic) *ball*" (Hurley et al. 104, first italics mine). A similar situation is found with subversive humor, but the interruption of complacency is far more consequential.

The need for such consciousness-raising in mundane contexts is important,[259] but successful detection is even more vital when the errors are harmful stereotypes. The sense of certainty in many cases is quite rigid and thus one often seeks to ignore potential weaknesses in one's system of beliefs or more generally in one's commitments. It is this unburdened complacency that the subversive humorist attacks; or better, *exposes* for correction. In the next section, I will argue that not only is subversive humor a weapon against oppression, but it can also engage others cooperatively even when committed beliefs are exposed as defective.

III.   Collaborative Heuristic Error Detection Through Subversive Humor

i.   An overview of the potential of subversive humor

Subversive humor can be successful in three important ways. In this chapter, I focus primarily on the first, although they are interlocking points: (1) Humor can be used in revealing hidden errors in our stereotypical thinking rewarding us with the feelings of mirth when flaws and incongruities in our (and others') presuppositions are discovered. Such rewards can facilitate the desire to repeat the process of fault-finding by developing a humorous attitude in ourselves and others, possibly including oppressors. While still confrontational, the successful humorist is not defensive, overly self-deprecating, or aggressively offensive, but penetrating in the way sardonic wit often is. It reveals what is already so ordinary--systematic racism, e.g., and renders it both extraordinary[260] and absurd, all the while beguiling an otherwise adversarial (or antipathetic)

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[259] "A committed belief in working memory is likely to become a committed belief in long-term memory, and a committed belief in long-term memory is a disposition to construct future active beliefs and use those contents in acts of reasoning. Allowing this ballooning process to continue unchecked when one of our committed beliefs just ain't so can generate a cascade of false beliefs resulting in a substantially faulty world representation" (Hurley et al. 111).

[260] There is a useful analogy between humor and poetry, namely between humor and metaphor, a central contrivance in a poet's *arsenal*. The wit is revealing something extra-ordinary about something most people deem ordinary, to borrow from Shelley on the role of poetry (see also Dennett 2013, 74). To answer concerns that this comparison is hyperbolic, consider that it is not coincidental that poetry (from *poeisis*--to create or make through *playing* with words outside of rules of conversation) and humor have some overlapping means to their ends, as both often trade in hidden meaning, economy of language, ambiguity, metaphor, irony, etc. The focus here is on two areas of overlap: (1) both poetry (primarily through the use of metaphor) and humor through creative juxtaposition and efficient use of words where much is left

audience.[261] This attitude fosters epistemic openness to multiple perspectives, often one of the first steps in the recognition that others lacking in power might be oppressed, which can thereby expose and possibly deconstruct the spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness. (2) Humor can act as a psychological defense mechanism that places the oppressed in the appropriate cognitive and emotional distance from her oppressive situation as she avoids being so removed in hyper-rational abstraction that she has no visceral connection to her situation, but she is not completely submerged in it either, such that she is incapable of penetrating thought, or lacking a capacity to see the incongruity, and thus remains unable to do anything about it.

Subversive humor is a creative outlet that is far more than mere frivolous fancy, as it can reveal to the oppressed that their situation is not impervious to change. In addition, the *humorist-from-below* is in a real sense forced to be creative and see from more than a single myopic perspective. The humorist is open and interested in multiple views for humor often lies in the vague and ambiguous boundaries or "borderlands" (Gilbert 4) of society. Given that the marginalized are ostracized to the subordinate spheres, or at least to the boundaries where they are forced to inhabit the fluctuating and confusing middle ground between the dominant and the subordinate, it is not surprising that such oppressed people often make use of humor to help them navigate through the ambiguity and constantly shifting margins in relation to the "center(s)."

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unsaid, intend/convey more than what is literally, explicitly, one-dimensionally stated and (2), both can reveal otherwise hidden assumptions that have enormous influence on how we think. Furthermore, both can reveal something of interest and importance about the mundane that most people in serious mode tend to ignore. Here is an example with humor: "'Only in America do sick people have to walk to the back of the drugstore to get their prescriptions while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front'" (Hurley et al. 164). This example does not assume *universal* understanding; that is, the background relies upon specifically North American culture. While humor may be universal, there are very few if any universally humorous jokes. But, humor has the effect of encouraging audiences to *want* to understand. Nobody wants to miss out on getting a joke. This is one difference between humor and poetry: at least in our current culture, one is more likely unperturbed when one fails to "get" a poem; this is not so with humor. Furthermore, I do not take playfulness as a necessary condition for poetry in the way I do for humor. Though there is not space in this dissertation, there is a similar distinction to be made between humor and irony, where only the former requires the element of playfulness (cf. Rorty 1983, esp. 12-13, 60 on poetry and metaphor; Sánchez 201, and Lear 281-3 on Socratic irony especially in the *Euthyphro*; and Geertsema 2004 on irony as a consciousness-raising tool against overt oppression in South Africa).

[261] This sentence was adopted from (Kramer 2013, 643) discussing humor as a response to *overt* oppression.

This underprivileged social position in fact offers the oppressed an epistemic privilege lacking in those with power and social privilege.[262] (3) Humor is quickly transmitted and potentially far-reaching, related to (1), capable of opening the eyes of putatively disinterested third-party bystanders (or "audience") which at the very least counts as a minor protest against an unjust situation; this realization by such an audience can be the first step toward enlisting their support in ways logical argument, violent protest, or traditional political activism, to name a few, rarely do. In the following subsections, I will go through each of the key elements found in humor generally that are central to subversive humor.

ii.   Detection of committed stereotypical beliefs in active mental spaces

The subversive wit primes the audience with specific culturally relevant frames by encouraging the juxtaposition of one's set(s) of beliefs. That is, she relies upon general preconceptions that her audience will likely possess, such as chunks of information that can be readily accessed through cultural triggers (memes). These scripts allow for quick associations of ideas by strategically placing a key word or phrase in opposition/contrast to the audience's expectations. These triggers are automatic (at least initially) in some instances due to the well-known cultural ideals and stereotypes in question.[263] So, she brings together simultaneously[264]

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[262] In this way, the common and well-researched phenomenon of humor as defense mechanism and psychological boon in times of hardship (Provine 2000; Frankl 1984; Morreall 1983; Boskin and Dorinson 87-8; Lipman 1991) is extended with the epistemic benefits a humorous attitude provides. That is, a further and hitherto unconnected benefit of a humorous attitude for the individual's sense of humanity and freedom is the epistemic privilege possessed by the marginalized.

[263] See Chapter 2 and (Gendler 2011, 47-8) on the saliency of racial categories. Also, consider the following joke which relies upon the construction of mental spaces into which the cultural stereotypes will be called to mind *so that* they can be undermined: "Two mathematicians were having dinner in a restaurant, arguing about the average mathematical knowledge of the American public. One mathematician claimed that this average was woefully inadequate; the other maintained that it was surprisingly high. 'I'll tell you what,' said the cynic, 'ask that waitress a simple math question. If she gets it right, I'll pick up dinner. If not, you do.' He then excused himself to visit the men's room, and the other called the waitress over. 'When my friend comes back,' he told her, 'I'm going to ask you a question, and I want you to respond 'one third x cubed.' There's twenty bucks in it for you.' She agreed. The cynic returned from the bathroom and called the waitress over. 'The food was wonderful, thank you.' The other mathematician said, 'incidentally, do you know what the integral of x squared is?' The waitress looked pensive; almost pained. She looked around the room, at her feet, made gurgling noises, and finally said, 'Um, one third x cubed?' So the cynic paid the check. The waitress wheeled around, walked a few paces away, looked back at the two men, and

into consciousness the idealized egalitarian heuristics and the stereotypical heuristics, such as

Sean Hannity's "America is the single greatest and best country God has ever given man on the

face of the planet", and a concrete instance that opposes the formerly unquestioned ideal, the fact

that 80% of this nation's history has been one of explicit exclusion.[265] As I will show with

examples in the final chapter, this fosters multi‑dimensional thinking. In particular, the subversive

humorist primes the listener's higher‑order thinking and modeling of the social world. She assists

with intersubjectively constructing multiple mental spaces in her audience that will be needed for

the comprehension and enjoyment of the humor-act and essential to the potential for fixing errors.

Once conflicting beliefs are made salient, the individual can either suppress one and favor

the other, engage in crafty rationalization or *bad faith* in order to maintain them both in an

attempt to evade the discomfort of cognitive dissonance, or, the move one would hope for

assuming there is the genuine desire for egalitarianism and truth‑seeking, the person amends or

omits the stereotypical belief that runs counter to her commitment to truth and equality.[266]

Humor is not the only means to construct mental spaces in which erroneous content can

be exposed sufficiently to fix bugs, but the more conventional means have not proven fruitful

muttered under her breath, '...plus a constant'" (Quoted in Hurley et al. 174-5). "The beauty of the punch line lies in the fact that, contrary to our stereotype as well as that of the mathematicians, the waitress knows more than we ever imagined; it is she who has been concealing her knowledge, for she knows a more precise answer than either mathematician had in mind….The pleasure is heightened, of course, by our recognition that the mathematicians are none the wiser; *we* know, and they don't, that they have hugely underestimated her, thanks to their stereotypes. This is a knockout feminist joke, exploiting our stereotypes while exposing them" (Hurley et al. 175).

[264] This is insofar as one can entertain consciously contradictory thoughts. Even if this is not the case, as (Schwitzgebel 544-5) surmises, in humor one is still oscillating, with extreme rapidity, between/among committed beliefs and beliefs that run counter to the commitments. The key point here is the higher-order thinking involved with subversive humor: "Our store of world knowledge is only intermittently accompanied by metaknowledge about these contents. The result is that its weaknesses are essentially 'invisible' *until they are teased to the surface during the construction of a mental space.* What works 99 percent of the time may fail on occasion, with disastrous results—unless it is brought to the surface in a fictional setting, or in a real-world setting that happens to be a forgiving environment" (Hurley et al. 120). What Hurley et al. fail to mention here is that the humor itself can create the very "forgiving environment" in which to foster openness to one's own errors.

[265] Upon the briefest reflection, one can see that with the term "man", Hannity is not referring to Native Americans, African Americans, and certainly not women--really, he must only mean white, heterosexual, affluent, males.

[266] Another possibility is that one belief "overrides" but does not "replace" the untoward belief. See (Gendler 2008a, 569, nt. 32). One would have to continually work to habituate such overriding until it becomes an established automatic reaction to stimuli that would otherwise trigger the stereotype.

especially regarding covert oppression.[267] This is true in large part because what is deemed conventional, normal, appropriate, has been defined by those in power for those in power. This fact has not changed in our current consciously professed egalitarian society that still subtly and systematically permeates arrogance and complacency among the privileged. So, a less conventional and more imaginative approach is needed, but one that does not rely upon traditional rule-following, one-dimensional thinking, nor one that attacks the status quo merely to delight. Subversive humor employs aesthetics and logic, playfulness and seriousness, emotion and reason; but the sort of emotions invoked matter. I will turn to this point next.

iii. Motivating appropriate emotions

Recall from Chapter 3, sections I and II, the argument made by Morreall that humor is not an emotion because it is either stifled by negative emotions, or it stifles these negative emotions, and, more to the point here, humor entails a lack of genuine concern with tracking the truth or changing the world and our perspectives of it; a key element to emotion. I will not rehearse that argument here, but I will make the case that Morreall's account, which is in line with the majority view in the history of philosophy, erroneously divides the intellect from the emotions.[268] I think it is accurate to claim that humor can undercut and/or offer an appropriate distance from the negative emotions experienced by those who are depressed, sick, or buried in existential angst in the midst of a seemingly absurd cosmos. It is also the case that the feeling of humor can be blocked or dissipated due to negatively valenced emotions like fear or anger. But neither of these points precludes humor from being an emotion. The playful attitude that is

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[267] While overt oppression might call for direct means to counter it, this is not the case with covert. Recall from the end of Chapter 2: "…. Such [racist] aliefs are triggered whether or not they accord with our explicit beliefs—indeed, even when they run explicitly counter to them. And because they operate at a level that is relatively (though not completely) impenetrable by controlled rational processes, their regulation is best achieved by strategies that exploit capacities *other than rational argument and persuasion* (Gendler 2011, 41 my italics).

[268] Within the history of "Western" thought philosophers have (negatively) associated body, emotion, irrationality with women, and mind, reason, rationality with (white) men: "As a consequence of these divisions, emotion and intellect, since they are qualitatively different endowments, come to be thought of as in perpetual conflict, unable to mix or cooperate with one another" (Marmysz 144). (See also Monahan 2011, 160; Code 2011; Rooney 2010, 224-8; Lugones 107-118).

evoked and perpetuated by humor fosters "open-ended thinking [and it] use[s] emotions like curiosity, boredom, doubt, confusion, insight, *mirth*, and the like" (Hurley et al. 81, italics added). That is, these emotions *motivate* us to think (and rethink) about some complexity of reality and help us to make sense of it.[269]

Morreall claims that emotions in general, but those particularly possessed by tragic figures similar to those people in a spirit of seriousness, "lock heroes into self-concern and into their own perspectives, just as they do to us in real life. With emotional states, we tend to act in automatic, habitual, less intelligent ways;[270] and the stronger the emotion the less intelligent our actions" (Morreall 1999, 25).[271] But if neurologist-philosopher Antonio Damasio is correct, among many other contemporary theorists who regard emotional intelligence as essential to intelligence *simpliciter*,[272] then we should infer from Morreall only that some emotions or some high level of an emotion can counter-act/balance other emotions. Humor is an emotion that

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[269] "Motivation" and "emotion" are both derived from *movere*—to move: "Emotions as motivators provide a kind of rationality. They direct our behaviors, and they had better direct them in a reasonable manner, or evolution will punish them with extinction" (Hurley et al. 74). Put in starker terms: "Humor is one part of the emotional mechanism that encourages the process that keeps data integrity in our knowledge representation. This process ensures that we reduce the likelihood of making faulty inferences and fatal mistakes. Without a trait like this, a cognitive agent as complex as we are would be practically guaranteed a quick death" (Hurley et al. 289).

[270] Refer to the end of Chapter 2 above for a response to the claim that automatic and habitual behaviors are necessarily less rational.

[271] This would be true if he had qualified the statement with "some negative emotions", rather than tacitly assuming all emotions gear one toward non-rational, non-critical behaviors. Furthermore, even anger, a negative emotion in Morreall's perspective, is really only a vice when it connotes rage, which is the normalized tendency when used to describe the "dangerous" black male, or the overly emotional woman (see Lugones 107-118 for a positive rendering of justifiable anger (not rage) when expressed by women who are responding to oppression). So, it is not at all clear that emotions as such are irrational or completely cut off from reason. An example could be borrowed from Antonio Damasio's *Elliot's Problem*, in which a patient is incapable of making real-world choices due to an absence of the relevant "emotional reactivity and feeling" (Damasio 51; see also Gendler 2006, 190-1). Elliot lacked emotional intelligence, something that cannot be separated from intelligence as such, contra Morreall. This is also something Schopenhauer picked up on early: "Given the elevated press of life with its call for quick decisions, bold action, prompt and firm engagement, there is indeed need for reason, but when it wins the upper hand and hinders and confuses intuitive, immediate discovery and simultaneous adoption of the right course of action, purely in terms of understanding, and generates indecisiveness, it easily ruins everything" (Schopenhauer 2008, 91-2). We need not follow his hyperbole at the end of his comment, but there are elements here that provide the grounding for much of the current research into heuristics and the need for quick, efficient short-cuts in thought. It is significant that this passage immediately precedes the section on his theory of humor.

[272] See (Elder 1996; Rooney 2010; and Minsky 1984 and Hurley et al. 73-92 on the need for emotionality in artificial intelligence).

motivates us to continue to seek the pleasing rewards of mirth. Moreover, when the feeling of mirth is experienced in subversive humor, the audience enters play mode, if it is not already deeply in it, and is more open to challenges to their fundamental beliefs; they are in a position to enjoy and even seek out further, the temporary feelings (emotions) often invoked by humorists—confusion, doubt, curiosity,[273] and of course, mirth.

The feeling of confusion or doubt can be uncomfortable, even anxiety-inducing at times (see Hurley et al. 79-80; Frankl 127; and Peirce 98-100 on the "stimulus/irritation of doubt"). Referencing the shock that Alice in *Through the Looking Glass* experiences through the abrupt shifts in expectations, linguist Robin Lakoff notes that

> the ability to recognize the frames in which we find ourselves is comforting, and to be forced to shift them abruptly, disconcerting. To discover that you do not share a frame with someone is equally distressing. Reframing is traumatic, and we resent being forced to do it. We also don't like changes in the rules governing our behavior within preidentified frames. (Lakoff 2000, 48)

This is another level of explanation for Kahneman's *cognitive ease* for creatures of habit. Subversive humor, like all humor, relies upon cognitive shifting and reframing of all sorts of rules, but instead of resenting, distressing, or feeling traumatized by the frame-shifting, we enjoy it so much that we even pay people to help facilitate such oscillations, and this can be the case even when the shifting entails a re-evaluation of our own cherished (and preidentified) rules and heuristics. Furthermore, as I will argue for in the next subsections, we are not *forced* to make the frame shifts, but rather we are encouraged to participate in the mirth-making. With humor we savor the tension created, perhaps similar to the discomfort felt in allowing oneself to (briefly) go hungry, knowing there is a big meal as payoff soon. By analogy, the punch line, even when it counters my expectations, is worth the brief confusion and discomfort to get to it.[274] As Hurley et

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[273] "The epistemic hunger of curiosity—a burning desire to find reason and order—prompts us to fervently advance upon situations that require explanatory exertion (often to exhaustion) that ultimately leads to that religiously adored moment of insight" (Hurley et al. 79).

[274] This analogy works well when one is already within play mode. A different but related account will be needed to explain the openness of interlocutors in spontaneous humor (see Morreall 2009, 83-90), either in

al claim, "without a sense of confusion, we claim, you would not know what contradiction is—it is *only* the inclusion in your biology (and thus in your phenomenology) of this exceptionally strange pain that allows you to notice contradictions" (84-5). But again, the "pain" is temporary, and when in play mode it can be seen as a necessary emotional component to comprehend and enjoy a piece of humor. This is so even when the humor is not found in jokes with the common set-up and punch line form, but in conversational humor typical of many standup comedians who point out or create incongruities above the level of semantic scripts, or in addition to them, as is often the case with subversive humorists' jokes or stories.[275]

There is a strong tradition in philosophy starting at least with Socrates, the "non-violent gadfly" (King 2001; Sánchez 171; Lear 290-4), in which confusion or *aporia* can be viewed as a necessary stage in the progress toward truth, or at least the progression to the state of knowing that you cannot be as certain as you thought you were.[276] Socrates' *elenchus* can be described as a method designed to bring about confusion in his interlocutors; this feeling of doubt and recognition that what one just moments ago thought was certain is now something about which one is truly ignorant, can be a fruitful *starting* place for philosophical investigation. With respect to humor, in particular observational humor that elicits both a "funny huh" and "funny ha-ha"[277] response, the audience is placed in a similar situation. When the humor involves purposeful ambiguity, or exaggeration and seeming absurdity, some kind of resolution, or better, some meaning salvaged from apparent ludicrousness, is needed in order for it to be enjoyed (contra Morreall 1987a, 199). This will require an appropriate distancing from the content of study in

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[275] conversation or the more unexpected cases of "guerrilla" tactics used by groups such as *The Guerilla Girls* or *Krokadil.*

[275] "When jokes are consciously used to convey a message, they are concerned with more abstract categories of relationship, not with the surface features of the joke text" (Oring 96).

[276] In the context of protest against oppression, Gene Sharp in "The Politics of Non-Violent Action" advocates for indirect means to bring hidden injustices to the surface: "With the launching of nonviolent action, basic, often latent, conflicts between the respective groups are brought to the surface and activated. Through ensuing 'creative conflict and tension' it becomes possible to produce change to resolve the underlying conflict" (Sharp 523). In all of his nearly 800 pages on non-violent protest, Sharp devotes less than a few paragraphs explicitly related to political (subversive) humor.

[277] See Morreall (1987a, 188–207) on the differences between "Funny Ha-Ha" and "Funny Strange." Also Hurley et al. (27–34) on "Funny-ha-ha" and "Funny-huh."

order for it to be comprehended and experienced as amusing, in much the same way philosophers must be sufficiently disinterested (not *un*interested) in the subject under scrutiny in order to step back from it and view the matter from a wider perspective. This is especially the case when adopting a different view on a state of affairs entails seeing from a perspective that might be contrary to one's own. This can encourage one to look again at something one felt was certain just prior to the Socratic questioning or the humorous anthropological musing.

The distance that is evoked by the humorist comes about as she places the audience in a playful mode where surprise is relished and leads to enjoyment rather than anxiety. This "emotion of 'playfulness' is what encourages us to spend the energy on the games that constitute play" (Hurley et al. 80, nt. 20). But these "games" include serious tasks such as checking for flaws in our heuristics whether they concern rules of language, society, or morality. These playful emotions allow for incongruity to stand out in ways it would not if we were too deeply ensconced in the details of one frame or too distant from that frame such that no meaningful connections can be made between/among patterns of thought. That is, "We are able to shift perspectives when there is appropriate cognitive and emotional distance from the incongruity. We have to avoid being too close or too invested in the humorous event, while not being completely disengaged from it either, so as not to risk a hyper-rational abstraction that leaves us with no visceral connection to the scene before us" (Kramer 2012, 299). LaFollette and Shanks (332-3) make similar claims, but seem to ignore the worry of being *too distant* emotionally to recognize incongruous patterns of beliefs between which one "flickers" or "oscillates", with one possible exception: "Similarly, if the subject matter of the humor is not particularly relevant to us, we may find it hard to motivate the flickering between different groups of beliefs about the persons, things or events in question. Imagine telling Dan Quayle jokes to an audience 100 years from now when the Bush administration has been completely forgotten by all except a few dedicated historians" (335). Thankfully for many comedians today, Quayle is still viable prey.

Humor can facilitate a willingness to remain uncomfortable at least long enough to follow the thoughts of the wit and possibly reveal our cognitive incongruities. Without noticing that there are contradictions between our ideals and the actual way of the world, no amount of conscious, willful, egalitarian beliefs and desires will provide a resolution. The feelings of mirth in subversive humor play the role of priming the appropriate emotions helpful in motivating an audience to discover a hidden inconsistency and, if one genuinely holds the ideals to egalitarianism and truth-seeking, doing something about it. It offers an indirect unconventional means of raising consciousness about systematic *conventional* oppression and can succeed where traditional approaches have not. The following subsection shows how subversive humor can undermine normalized frames of thinking, and do so in a collaborative fashion.

iv. Collaboratively flouting conventions

Direct, bona‑fide communicative acts have traditionally been used by protestors against oppression. In these cases, the intent and meaning of the language is unambiguous, practically engaged, and serious. In other words, one strictly adheres to the typical rules of language, logic, and even the society that oppresses.[278] Subversive humor violates these rules but without falling into frivolity and without the loss of meaningful communication in the effort to achieve a goal. By way of comparison with speech that is similar to humor, yet without rule-flouting, recall the example of an illocutionary act of asking if one "is *able* to pass the salt?" (Chapter 3). This speech act through the question is intending to get something accomplished even though any competent language-user would admit that it is not really asking a literal question. Given the common occurrence of such a method, it is not surprising to anyone until one replies with something like "Yes I can", but then refrains from actually passing the salt. So technically, there

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[278] There are exceptions such as the non-violent approaches adopted by Dr. King and his precursor Gandhi: "The aim of nonviolent action with this motivation is thus not simply to free the subordinate group, but also to free the opponent who is thought to be imprisoned by his own system and policies… [But often we need more than argument to make this point, thus] Conversion is more likely to involve the opponent's emotions, beliefs, attitudes and moral system" (Sharp 707).

is little playfulness, and little need for it, when we immediately detect the implicature[279] involved

with so many indirect speech acts. Like "dead metaphors",[280] they have become part of the way

we conventionally communicate, and there are even rules by which we can succeed in our

interpretation of these now common uses of indirect speech. But humor is distinct from indirect

speech acts that have become unexceptional means of getting things done with words. The

subversive humorist is playfully and surprisingly[281] violating the rules,[282] but, for the sake of

consciousness-raising, it is assumed that the audience will still be able to find and/or make

meaning out of the wit's purposeful and playful employment of incongruity, absurdity, or

hyperbolic analogy. Without at least this level of collaboration between humorist and audience,

not only will they likely not comprehend the content, but they will fail to enjoy the humor.

Viktor Raskin, who offers a seminal account of a semantic scripts theory of humor,[283]

notes that "humor is a very cooperative MC [mode of communication], and it is used for

productive and efficient discourse when both sides, the speaker and the hearer(s), operate in the

same mode" (1992, 87). In subversive humor, this "same mode" is the playful attitude. This is not

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[279] This term is adopted by H.P. Grice to refer to conversational senses inferred in a dialog in which one omits or even says the contrary of what one means. He offers a stipulative definition of this term to distinguish it from logical implication.

[280] See (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 33; and Rorty 18, 77). While less direct than straightforward, literal, bona-fide language, phrases such as "head-on collision", "hands-on training", and most of the examples offered in (Lakoff and Johnson), do technically flout Gricean maxims, they are not thereby non-cooperative, as they "do not really interfere with the speaker's and hearer's mutual commitment to the truth of the utterances" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 33).

[281] "You can also feel a surge of conscious attention whenever you are surprised. System 2 is activated when an event is detected that violates the model of the world that System 1 maintains" (Kahneman 2011, 24). See (Hurley et al. 117-120) on the covert element of surprise that is not found in conventional implicature.

[282] This need not entail there are no restrictions whatsoever with humor. An obvious example of violating a humor cooperative principle can be found in Michael Richards' (Kramer from *Seinfeld*) rant, shouting the word "nigger" over 14 times in roughly two minutes against two black audience members he felt were being too loud during his performance. Interestingly, as he breaks the rules of humor, namely, leaving the realm of playfulness and openness, he shifts into bona-fide communication mode—there is little question as to what he wishes to convey, and in this way, due to his closed mode, he falls into a spirit of seriousness.

[283] On this linguistic theory of humor "[a] text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions (a-b) are satisfied: a. the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts. b. the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite in a special predefined sense" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 50). I do not think the scripts must be wholly oppositional; in this I follow Oring's (2003, Chapter 1) very similar approach to humor which depends upon an "appropriate incongruity." See also the new book by McGraw and Warner (2014) in which humor is hypothesized to result from a "benign violation."

always going to be the case *going into* a verbal engagement, but once the audience recognizes the play mode of the speaker this can both encourage them to get into play mode themselves, and thus openness, pulling them into a collaborative mission of fault-finding; a task that would otherwise be time-consuming and dull. In addition, without the playfulness and openness, the task would more likely be put off or completely derailed, especially if it involves an investigation into one's own potentially flawed beliefs. But with humor, the audience will be encouraged, through the rewarding aspects of laughter, to suspend or bracket the default serious mode and concomitant closed emotions, and in doing so, will more likely be able to enjoyably collaborate with the rule-breaking interlocutor.

This might at first appear counter-intuitive, especially as it is a common view of humor that it *violates* Grice's rules for proper communication, namely, his "Cooperative Principle" (CP) (see Chapter 3 and Morreall 2009, 2-3, 34-5 for an overview). That is, when one is following the non‑conscious and unwritten (until Grice) rules of conversational logic, one avoids ambiguity, says only what one believes to be true, states only that for which one has evidence, is orderly, communicates as simply as possible, etc. Violation of these maxims, it is assumed, limits cooperation among conversants. This is true in some situations, in particular, those in which the shared background is an argumentative milieu of the sort found in philosophy conferences, for instance; but even here it is not obvious that there is explicit or implicit striving for genuine collaboration.[284]

Furthermore, a point connected with the contingencies of language as seen from play mode, the power structures within a status quo are not necessary and inviolable. The norms

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[284] Instead, one is constrained by expectations to present a clear, concise "defense" of one's "position" and others in the audience are expected to directly and unequivocally "attack" the presenter's logical "redoubt", forcing her to publicly "retreat" after having lost a verbal "skirmish", leaving only one person "victorious" in this zero-sum game. It is significant that in these putatively open, direct, literal, unemotional, objectively logical interactions, a cooperative attitude is often thwarted by the unquestioned background assumptions encapsulated in the "Argument is War" metaphor; a metaphor maintained by those with privilege and power: "…whether in national politics or in everyday interaction, people in power get to impose their metaphors" (Lakoff and Johnson 157; see also 159-60; Haidt 823, 825-6; and Rooney 2010). But this need not be a necessary conclusion (or premise). One of the goals of the subversive humorist is to gain control and some modicum of power through the use of subversive language.

within the hierarchy, indeed the hierarchy itself, are recognized for what they are: contingent, historically constructed, and thus open to being de/re-constructed.[285] Analyzing the work of Grice on implicature and how humor appears to violate his maxims for cooperation, Raskin and Attardo (1994) allow that some rules can be contravened between humorist and audience and still allow for cooperation at a different level. For example, "When flouting a maxim, the speaker/hearer dyad can 'recoup' the violation by honoring another maxim…the hearer can reconstruct an intended meaning on the basis of the assumption that the speaker is committed to communicating some meaning…" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 32). For my purposes, the vague "some meaning" will involve the socio-political-ethical content espoused by the subversive humorist, some examples of which are found in Chapter 3 section V.

One of the important questions Raskin and Attardo (1994, 34-5) raise is how can such common examples of linguistic exchange in humor succeed in being understood at all? One reason they offer is that humorous interaction is "ruled by a cooperative principle of its own which is just as stringent as the bona-fide communication cooperative principle" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 35).[286] The new mode one is encouraged to adopt is a result of the successful humorist, but Raskin and Attardo stop short of claiming that it can allow for the audience to play with words and meaning in order to understand, enjoy, and possibly be persuaded of, meaningful and purposeful content in the humorous act. In other words, they do not take the play mode as far as I do.[287] But they do note, correctly I think, that the non-bona-fide communication mode in

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[285] In this way, play mode yields a perspective on incongruities that is both instrumentally and intrinsically valuable: "In humour, we can experience the breaking of norms without the usual penalties that go along with such an infringement. *Finding funny* [the pleasurable mental state of amusement], 'not only creates the sense of freedom, but also assures us that we may temporarily escape from the uniformities and mechanisms of life.' As a consequence of this, 'the humorous process, like play, is its own end and justification.' When we laugh, just as when we play, we 'pretend' that these norms do not hold" (Jones 134, quoting L.W. Kline).

[286] I should note that they are concentrating on jokes, and not the less formalized conversational humor or even stand-up routines which in many cases should be viewed as conversations (see Morreall 2009, 127-9). Furthermore, I do not agree that the *rules* of humor are as stringent as those found in direct speech acts. I will address why I think this below.

[287] In most cases of humor that interest me, the wit succeeds insofar as she not only includes her listeners in the discussion, but she encourages them to *actively* and playfully engage with her material and her

humor is the "default non-bona-fide communication mode, or the one which is closest to bona-fide communication" (36, 38). That is, we are more likely to interpret a seemingly non-cooperative expression as humor than we are to assume it is a case of lying, play-acting, or simple nonsense: "In accordance with this new cooperative principle, hearers do not expect speakers to tell the truth or to convey any relevant information. Rather, they perceive the intention of the speaker as an attempt to make them laugh" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 37).[288] While I have addressed the reasons why I think they are wrong with respect to "truth" and "relevant information" in humor, they do provide a case that audiences recognize the intentions (at some level) of the humorist, and this makes an otherwise completely absurd statement, for instance, meaningful, or not completely meaningless. Raskin's and Attardo's neo-Gricean cooperative principle for humor lends support to my account of subversive humor as a serious effort to genuinely and collaboratively engage others in order to change attitudes. But recall from Chapter 3 above, if the attempt to make one laugh is assumed to be the only goal of all humorists, then Raskin and Attardo undermine the genuine efforts of subversive wits.

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intentions, even though these might be clothed in indirect speech acts, metaphor, irony, ambiguity, exaggeration, and omission. Even those in the default serious mode, or even those within the spirit of seriousness, are susceptible to having their play mode "turned on" so that the humor can be enjoyed. So there is a reciprocal relationship between playfulness and humor. To put it broadly, one is more inclined toward recognizing humor and enjoying it while in play mode, and one is more likely to have her play mode engaged through exposure to humor. Outside of comedic performances, there are still many cues, bodily, linguistically, contextually, that one is about to offer a joke, for example, and these cues, not unlike the behavior of children and non-human animals engaged in *play* fighting, signal to the other to employ one's play mode. Such gestures allow for cooperation at a subversive level--a level in which different rules are at play. This is not to say there are no rules, but whatever they are, they are fluid, non-rigid, and open as (Lugones 96) puts it. With non-human animals, there are visual cues that one is in play mode which can (usually) indicate to the other (mock enemy) that one intends only to play-fight, or what young humans might call make-believe that they are fighting (Hurley et al., 261-3). In doing so, they allow each other more leeway in being aggressive without the worry of actual aggression leading to harm, and this permits a safe environment to collaboratively practice something that is in the non-fictional world very dangerous.

[288] They caution against appealing to "possible worlds" analogies, as that is a technical term that has little bearing on the truth-value of claims within joke-worlds. As I will show below and further in Chapter 5, this restriction unnecessarily cuts off an enlightening comparison between philosophical thought experiments and the "real" world, and subversive humor play-worlds in relation to serious moral claims. By claiming that the "humor cooperative principle has nothing to do with truth" because it "presupposes and embodies a 'local logic', i.e., a distorted, playful logic, that does not hold outside of the world of the joke" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 37, 52), they fall in line with the positions offered by Morreall, Marmysz, Davenport, and others, discussed in Chapter 3.

v.   Finding meaning collaboratively

The humorist is *trying* to create cognitive dissonance (or permit the mental spaces in which the audience can do so themselves), and flout the rules of conversation, logic, and society by relying upon a collaborative effort with the audience in which they must actively take part in the humor in a manner not found in direct communication, much less argument. That is, the more my presuppositions are made explicit, clearly defended, and rendered *consonant* with my premises, usually the better my argument will be. With humor, presuppositions are invoked, but often purposely hidden beneath some salient script(s) with which the wit intends to contrast in the end with a conclusion (punch line) that opposes, contradicts, or is different enough from the initial salient idea. This encourages the audience to reinterpret the entire presentation if they want any degree of resolution to the incongruity. But, since the default mode for interpreting apparent absurdity found in jokes or narrative hyperbole, the sort often employed by professional comedians,[289] is to view it as humor, and we are driven by our attraction to the feelings of mirth, we are especially inclined to be more open and playfully assess the various possible meanings of the wit's language.

In cognitive linguistic terms regarding jokes, "The punch line triggers the switch from one script to the other by *making* the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning" (Attardo and Raskin 1991, 308, my italics). On one hand, it does make sense to suppose that one listening to a joke is *forced* to oscillate or backtrack from the unexpected punch line and quickly reinterpret the content of the setup. But this is not necessarily the case. For example, when we read the following, "Masochist says: 'Hit me.' Sadist says: 'No.'" there is a moment when we are not sure what has just happened; it is very brief unless the operative terms are unknown to you, in which case the moment might last longer, or there might not be any resolution. But, given our tendency to both understand the words we hear

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[289]Audiences in comedy clubs are already primed to be in play mode and thus expect to have their expectations fiddled with, and thus are more inclined to divergent or creative thinking at the outset.

or read and, in particular with humor, our desire to gain the reward of pleasure for having

discovered an erroneous presupposition, part of the work of understanding falls on the audience

in a manner not found in most modes of communication.[290] It is here that the humorist and her

listeners collaborate; indeed, they have to, to some degree if they want to "get" the joke, which is

of course a necessary condition for enjoying it.[291] Whether with jokes or a comedian's story, if

they want the reward that constitutes a fix for their addiction to mirth,[292] they must follow the

humorist to the end, to the conclusion or the punch line, in which expectations are shattered, or at

least bent considerably, errors are exposed, and they like it.[293] We are only *forced* to interpret a

joke as a joke, and thus re-cognize the meanings and relations of the terms involved as

incongruous, insofar as we can *only* interpret ambiguous language as humorous or in one way.

But this is not so. The wit does not enforce a single meaning on her text or performance, and

rarely specifies up front her intended meaning, for to do so would limit the need for oscillation or

frame shifting in her audience, and remove the participation component in which the audience

discovers their own errors. Instead, she leaves spaces open for interpretation and hopefully

reinterpretation, a "burden" that at least in part falls upon the audience—and we are usually

happy to take it on.[294]

Consider the following joke that has a conclusion that is not sufficiently "over-specified"

such that the audience is *forced* to adopt only one possible resolution: "(2) Women are always

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[290] "The speaker exploits the listener's drive for rational comprehension much like the ruthless logic of a computer virus exploits the programmed behavior of an operating system." (Veale 421). See also (Hurley et al. 133-6, 117-120).

[291] An additional sense of "collaboration" in these cases is the benefit the comedian receives from the immediate response or assessment from the audience. If the comedian is good, she will be responsive to the audience, tweak her material accordingly, and either amend or omit certain material. This is a never-ending process (see McGraw and Warner 40).

[292] For more on this evolutionary account comparing our addiction to mirth to that of sweets, sex, drugs, and music, see (Hurley et al. 1, 26, 62, 81-2, 253, 290, 294).

[293] As noted above, we even pay for it at times. Since it is a *mirth addiction,* we really should refer to comedy clubs across the nation as "Mirth Labs."

[294] There is one sense in which we might be compelled by the wit to her desired interpretation, and that is that since we are addicted to mirth, we have little choice but to interpret an apparent bit of nonsense or exaggeration as humor. I think Morreall makes more sense: "in order to bring about a shift in humor, the person creating the humor must engage the interest of those he wants to amuse, and thus have *some* control over their train of thought…" (Morreall 1983, 82-3, my italics).

using me to advance their careers. Damned anthropologists!" (Veale 422).[295] Our initial

interpretation prior to the punch line is likely invoked by scripts related to male chauvinism. We

can admit with Raskin and Attardo that this should be interpreted as humor, but this does not

require only one interpretation. The audience is not being controlled or driven to a single view,

but, the structure of the opposing scripts nudges one toward a humorous interpretation in which

some sense is salvaged within the unconventional, yet meaningful presentation. So, rather than

the humorist forcing the audience to converge onto only one possible thought,

> [w]hat seems more likely is that as listeners, we instinctively choose the alternate [non-male chauvinistic] interpretation because to do so creates a humorous effect. In this view, the punch line is not a crisis of interpretation that forces a retreat, but an opportunity that allows a willing listener to collaboratively engage with the speaker in the creation of humor. To see why the speaker would create this opportunity and why the listener would eagerly grasp it, we need to look at the social logic behind the joke. As social beings we are conditioned to find self-deprecation much more appealing than arrogance, so there is an elegant symmetry to a narrative arc that begins with feigned pride and ends in humiliating honesty. In jokes such as (2) this arc is established collaboratively, and no force or necessity need be hypothesized. It is the attractiveness of the *structure we are allowed to construct*, rather than the logical deficiency of the one we are forced to reject, that decides our interpretation. (Veale 422-3, my italics)

There might still be *a* resolution offered, but it will not likely be the one presumed by the

audience early on. In this way, when we recognize that the speaker is in play mode, our play

mode is triggered, to put it coarsely (see Provine 149 on the "laugh-detector"), and we now take

on the role of "co-author" of the meaning involved in the humor. In doing so, rather than being

told explicitly and directly that we possess a flawed heuristic, for instance, we play a role in

discovering such flaws by co-constructing the relevant mental spaces in which incongruous

beliefs can be compared.[296]

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[295] To clarify, "The set-up in (2) suggests two facts that nicely serve to flatter the speaker: firstly, he appears to occupy a position of some power in his little world; secondly, he clearly does not want for sexual attention. The punch line, however, pitilessly shatters these illusions; the speaker is not a powerful sexual magnet after all, but a subject of study for female anthropologists who wish to profit academically from his implied primitiveness" (Veale 422).

[296] It will be helpful to view this "co-authoring" as the inverse of that found in Sullivan's notion of ontological expansiveness (see above nt. 129).

It is true that some examples of humor can seem so wild that it is obvious that there was no intention upon the author of it to make any connection to reality. As Raskin and Attardo assert, in these cases the humorist and audience cooperate insofar as there is a mutual understanding that the meaning within the joke-frame is *only* intended to bring laughter, and should not be interpreted to seep outside the imaginary borders constructed in the humor frame. But by denying that the joking or play-worlds created by humorists *never* have any connection to truth in the 'real world', as "truth is irrelevant to joke-telling" (Raskin and Attardo 1994, 65), Raskin and Attardo, among others mentioned in Chapter 3, ignore a large subset of humor, namely from subversive humorists, whose aim is to meaningfully connect a funny fictionalization with a serious reality. But we should not be misled by the term "fiction"; the meaning and intentions in our playfully constructed scenarios can bleed into reality in such a way that listeners can be persuaded to see things from a fresh perspective, and possibly be convinced of the view espoused in the imaginative thought experiments of the subversive humorist.

vi.   Subversive humor as imaginative thought experiment

I made brief mention of Morreall's comparisons between comedians and philosophers in Chapter 3. I would like to expand (and improve) on that account here. The following is a very brief summary of Morreall's (2009, 126-9) comparisons between philosophy and humor, particularly of comedians: (1) ideally both are forms of conversation that rely upon interaction between/among interlocutors. (2) Both are often concerned with everyday banalities that the majority of the populace usually ignores, until they see the oddities for what they are by being confronted with a philosophical thought experiment or an amusing bit that might spread quickly online. (3) "In philosophizing about something or joking about it, we view it from a higher perspective than our normal one [and here is where we do not completely agree]…they are practically detached from those experiences" (Morreall 2009, 127). (4) Both encourage that we look at the world and our place in it from novel perspectives. (5) Both humorists and philosophers

are critical thinkers; that is, open to analyzing common assumptions, including their own.[297]

Finally, and most relevant to this subsection, "comedians and philosophers often think in

counterfactuals, mentally manipulating possibilities as easily as most people think about realities.

Thought experiments have been standard in comedy and philosophy since ancient Athens"

(Morreall 2009, 128).

Philosophical thought experiments are conducted in the mind where pre-existing mental

spaces are employed or new ones constructed through the creative priming techniques of the

experimenter. This is most often accomplished by way of narrative analogy, especially in moral

philosophy, as comparisons to unquestionably moral (or immoral) cases are made to highlight the

wrongs (or justice) of a case in question. Sometimes these tactics call on elaborate philosophical

tools that employ imagery (Rooney on Plato's Allegory of the Cave), metaphor (Lakoff and

Johnson), and logically possible fantasy (Gendler 1998, 2004, 2006, 2007; Dennett 2013).[298] I

take many cases of subversive humor to be philosophical thought experiments that are offered as

a means of framing (or re-framing) an issue so as to reveal hidden assumptions, collaboratively

invoke shared commitments, moral or otherwise, and attempt to change the subtly biased attitudes

of the audience. In this way, thought experiments and subversive, humorous play with words,

concepts, and situations, are deeply connected.[299] Extending the ideas argued for in Chapter 3, I

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[297] Morreall makes the following astute observation: "A standard procedure in both comedy and philosophy is to bring up a widely accepted idea and ask three C questions: Is it *clear*—what exactly are those who believe this saying? Is it *coherent*—do its parts fit with each other and with other ideas of the people who hold it" and is it *credible*—do we have good reasons to accept it? Comedy and philosophy thrive on 'No' answers to these questions—on confusion, fallacies, and other incongruities in the way people think, speak, and write" (Morreall 2009, 128).

[298] In fact, Dennett's new book "Intuition Pumps and other Tools for Thinking" is wholly devoted to the taxonomy of "imagination-extenders and focus-holders."

[299] It is not coincidental that in German, "thought experiment", *Gedankenexperiment*, popularized by the philosopher of science Ernst Mach, is sometimes used interchangeably with *Gedankenspiel*—which is roughly an "intellectual game", a "game of make-believe", "toying with ideas", or "thought play." I will argue in Chapter 5 following (Koziski 1984), the comedian is a kind of cultural anthropologist given to concocting interesting and playful scenarios in order to make a point, and, as with scientific thought experiments, the goal is not merely to delight: Schrödinger's dead (or alive) cat in a state of superposition was not created solely to amuse dog-lovers.

claim that instances of subversive humor are a species of thought experiment, or "devices of persuasion" (2007, 80-6).[300]

Gendler promotes a mental model account of thought experiment through which we can learn something new about the world even though there might not be any novel empirical data adduced with such experiments.[301] In her words, "to perform a thought experiment is to reason about an imaginary scenario with the aim of confirming or disconfirming some hypothesis or theory" (Gendler 2004, 1154).[302] With a touch of tweaking, this understanding of thought experiment can be extended to help explain the potential persuasiveness of subversive humor. We can use thought experiments to gain a better conceptualization of some aspect of reality, usually by highlighting something that now seems obvious due to the clarity or compelling nature of the thought experiment, or by reframing an account of the world that was thought to be unquestionable, but is now justifiably held under a microscope, in some cases leaving us bewildered as to how we missed a given point or connection prior to the illuminative thought experiment. Some of the more familiar examples Gendler cites are those that are most imaginative and creative, but that are not intended to remain solely fictionalized or aestheticized, to use Morreall's language regarding humor (2009, 53).

Gendler considers Philippa Foot's famous "Runaway Trolley", John Rawls' "Veil of Ignorance", Judith Jarvis Thomson's "Famous Violinist", among others (Gendler 2007, 76-7, 83,

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[300] Sometimes they are simply used to clarify a point or bring to consciousness something that might otherwise remain hidden right beneath our noses: "Just as scientists often use thought experiments—readily comprehended, simplified fictions—to help resolve their theoretical difficulties, we have all come to appreciate that fiction is as good as true narrative in drawing out the conflicts in our everyday understanding" (Hurley et al. 113). But Dennett cautions us not to become overly committed to the allure of thought experiment, especially those that become wholly fictionalized. He offers a general rule of thumb: "the utility of a thought experiment is inversely proportional to the size of its departures from reality" (Dennett 2013, 183). I think this coheres with Lugones' conception of playfulness that remains within the world of "flesh and blood people" (Lugones 87).

[301] There is not space here to give an account of the current debate regarding the nature and efficacy of thought experiments, but see (Gendler 1998; and Gooding 1998) for overviews.

[302] In an earlier paper devoted specifically to scientific thought experiments, Gendler notes that "Reasoning about particular entities within the context of an imaginary scenario can lead to rationally justified conclusions that—given the same initial information—would not be rationally justifiable on the basis of a straightforward argument… [the thought experiment is] a reconfiguration of internal conceptual space" (Gendler 1998, 397; 420).

85-6). But the most significant case she discusses comes not strictly from philosophy, although the focus is an ethical matter. She gives the example of a thought experiment in which the central character finally "gets" the "punch line" (Gendler 2007, 82) but by way of an indirect, imaginative analogy; it is the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba.[303] It is a narrative in which King David is *encouraged* to recognize his own ideal principles, apply them to a fictional case presented to him in such a way that it brings to salience the fact that he is violating his own imperatives, and this facilitates an attitude change in David. Gendler uses this as an example of how to overcome the tenacity of the first-person exceptionalism bias—a common facet of hubris discussed in section I above:

> By framing the story so that David is not in a position to exhibit first-person bias with respect to what turns out to be his own actions, Nathan has *enabled David to acknowledge a moral commitment that he holds in principle, but has failed to apply in this particular case*. There is no ambiguity here about which commitment, on reflection, David endorses: The story he has been told is fully effective; it *reshapes his cognitive frame, and brings him to view his own previous actions in its light*. Despite being relatively schematic,[304] the story is a vivid one, engaging the reader's imagination as she hears about David's and Nathan's actions, and David's imagination as he hears of the behavior of the imaginary rich man who slays the poor man's sheep. Within the domain of philosophy, broadly construed, there is a tradition that emphasizes the capacity of the literary form to appropriately represent moral complexity, contrasting this with the tradition of austere philosophical theorizing. (Gendler 2007, 82, my italics)

While there is nothing really funny in this story, there are similar effects found with subversive humor especially regarding the italicized points.

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[303] This is the tale of King David of Israel who takes advantage of a woman and has her husband sent to the front lines of battle where he is killed. The assumption of the reader is that it is an unethical act on David's part, and we, like David, are swept up in the analogue fictional story in which the unjust actions of the central figure lead the audience to believe beyond a reasonable doubt his culpability. The "punch line", as Gendler refers to it, is when it clicks for David that the imaginative scenario mirrors his own, and he cannot avoid the conclusion that he is guilty. Quoting Martha Nussbaum, "'there may be some views of the world and how one should live in it…that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose… but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to *particulars*'" (Gendler 2007, 82, my italics). Cf. Morreall's distinctions between a tragic and comedic view of the world—the humorist is interested in the particular, concrete, dynamic, complex, and ambiguous (see Chapter 3, section II above). Contemporary moral psychologists like Jonathan Haidt have engaged in numerous empirical studies that support Nussbaum's (and Gendler's) point that persuasion through direct, logical, argument is rarely successful especially when many of the cognitive biases discussed in Chapter 2 are operative.

[304] It is an added benefit of subversive humor that it surprisingly and engagingly flouts formerly unquestioned rules, heuristics, and schemata.

The humorist indirectly encourages audiences to recognize an error in their mental space(s) in much the same way that thought experiments do. The central connection here is the reshaping of cognitive frames and the openness to being persuaded through imaginative creations. The compelling nature of the analogue story in the Biblical account parallels some of the examples I will provide in the final chapter, even if there might be profane aspects to some of them. In these cases, subtle stereotypes, which incline one to act in a manner inconsistent with one's own consciously professed ideals, are exposed. As discussed in Chapter 2 above, these mental shortcuts are rarely consciously scrutinized, and when it comes to stereotyping that sustains oppression, some form of self-monitoring is needed. Happily, and to our enjoyment, there are humorists who are quite adept at encouraging just this sort of self-reflection: "It is amusing to realize that a comedian can be seen to be a sort of informal—but expert—scientist, leading the way, helping us expose and resolve heretofore unnoticed glitches in our common knowledge" (Hurley et al. 112-13).[305] But why can the subversive humorist succeed in this endeavor where other conventional means fail? I will answer this question in the final chapter.

IV. Conclusion

We generally do not wish to be seen as having inconsistent beliefs within our cognitive web, much less beliefs at odds with our consciously professed egalitarianism. We also do not

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[305]The connections between humor as error-detection device and thought experiment as persuasion device are compelling. Recall the lengthy quotation from Hurley et al. 12-13 in section II above, and my account of subversive humor as a consciousness-raising tool, and compare that with the following from Gendler on thought experiment: "by presenting content in a suitably concrete or abstract way, thought experiments recruit representational schemas that were otherwise inactive, thereby evoking responses that may run counter to those evoked by alternative presentations of relevantly similar content.…exactly because they recruit heretofore uninvolved processing mechanisms, thought experiments can be expected to produce responses to the target material that remain in disequilibrium with responses to the same material under alternative presentations, so that a true sense of cognitive equilibrium will, in many cases, prove elusive.…when thought experiments succeed as devices of persuasion, it is because the evoked response becomes dominant, so that the subject comes (either reflectively or unreflectively) to represent relevant non-thought experimental content in light of the thought experimental conclusion (Gendler 2007, 69). By "disequilibrium" Gendler means that one's reactions to the fictional story are not compatible to their reactions to the same conclusions, but presented in a different, in this case, more direct and conventional manner. This is one point at which the subversive humorist can succeed in playfully revealing incongruities between one's consciously professed egalitarian beliefs and one's automatic biased language and action.

enjoy it when we are abruptly forced to shift our frames of reference which directly and explicitly highlight flaws in our thinking/acting or the preidentified rules governing our behavior and social roles (Lakoff 2000, 48). Because of this, an indirect route toward consciousness‑raising can be more effective than traditional means of protest that may succeed in changing laws or economic realities, but fail to change minds. Indeed, the surprise and enjoyment elicited by humor provide a good means for slipping past the "heuristic prunings" (Hurley et al. 107) or social censors that normally, in the default serious mode, sustain the sense of ease and cognitive coherence through stereotypes. This can be so even when the subversive wit is confronting what Lugones calls "aggressive ignorance" or Mills' "collective amnesia", or Gordon's "willful non-seeing" and "epistemic closure." In other words, the subversive wit attempts to joggle her audience out of the *miserable ease* of cognitive (and emotional) complacency; she is indirectly engaging our System 2 in an effort to bring to salience content we might otherwise not (wish to) consider.[306] Moreover, since most of us do consciously espouse freedom, equity, and a drive for truth-seeking, the subversive wit, like the philosopher employing thought experiments, can transport the audience from their openly expressed moral commitments, staging the discussion with those commitments held in conscious short-term memory, and juxtapose them with the implicit, hubristic stereotypes that would have otherwise remained dormant, yet causally efficacious on behavior.

With humor we can actually delight in the surprise and temporary tension experienced when contradictions are exposed, at least long enough for us to consider the possibility that we harbor inconsistent beliefs, and briefly revel in an otherwise anxiety-inducing recognition. We participate[307] in our own bias-finding activity because we *want* to, even if the goal is not initially

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[306] "When all goes smoothly, which is most of the time, System 2 adopts the suggestions of System 1 with little or no modification. You generally believe your impressions and act on your desires, and that is fine— usually" (Kahneman 2011, 24).

[307] Similarly, "thought experiments rely on a certain sort of *constructive participation* on the part of the reader, and…the justificatory force of the thought experiment actually comes from the fact that it calls upon the reader to perform what I will call an *experiment-in-thought*" (Gendler 1998, 413-14). By this she means the audience participates, or collaborates (in my usage) with the thought experimenter in counter-factual conceptualizations that nevertheless can result in real-world changes in belief and attitude: "And by bringing the reader to perform experiments in thought, thought experiments can lead us to reject shaky (and

or even consciously, to repair or stave off flawed heuristics that become stereotypes. This reward
in discovering errors does not come about unless we involve ourselves in the understanding of the
humor.

In the final chapter I will offer a number of concrete examples of subversive humor that
parallel in many ways Gendler's account of thought experiments as devices of persuasion. This
will be an analysis at a higher level, so to speak, than the cognitive science, psychology, linguistic
and philosophy of mind approach taken in this chapter. In the next chapter, I will return to an
existential-phenomenological account to consider how subversive humor encourages audiences,
especially those who contribute to civilized oppression, to playfully travel across worlds
(Lugones) and "tarry along" (Yancy) with the perspectives of the marginalized.

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ultimately false) theoretical commitments in light of newly systematized but previously inarticulable [*sic*]
knowledge about the way the world is" (Gendler 1998, 415). Importantly, she claims straightforward
argument fails to adequately articulate the theoretical commitments in the manner (playful) thought
experiments can.

CHAPTER 5: THE ART OF SUBVERSIVE HUMOR

In the first section of this final chapter I outline a few possible issues related to my argument that subversive humor can successfully raise consciousness about oppression and even change minds. The rest of the chapter will stand as a general response to the issues raised in the first section. In section II, I will offer a few test cases of subversive humor by or on behalf of oppressed groups. These are in response to the sorts of hidden harms discussed in this dissertation, especially related to white male privilege, stereotypes, ontological expansiveness, and a spirit of seriousness. In the interest of space and the reader's patience, I will offer deep analysis only of the first example, in this case from comedian Louis CK, as it stands as a paradigmatic case of subversive humor even though it comes from a person with privilege. His example allows for a broad examination of the underlying mechanisms involved in subversive humor discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The other central examples will also be evaluated within the context of the arguments from the previous two chapters on humor, but with brevity and the assumption that the analyses from the first example apply to them as well. But they will each stand as unique examples in which specific elements of oppression are highlighted. For example, while the Louis CK bit offers consciousness-raising about white privilege in general, Richard Pryor's connects the spirit of seriousness and its effects in slavery to a similar attitude that is still present at our Bicentennial, Chris Rock's points out subtle linguistic stereotyping, and Dave Chappelle's, which I reserve for the final section on world-traveling, addresses ontological expansiveness of whites in contrast to the ontological confinement experienced by black men. In addition, his example illustrates the epistemic privilege of oppressed people with respect to matters of injustice. In the final section, I will present an argument that subversive humor facilitates culture-sharing and world-traveling by inculcating a variety of what W.E.B. Du Bois calls "double consciousness."

I.   Potential Problems

There are surely numerous rebuttals to my case, but I am only going to focus on what I view as the strongest. I present them as two central counters, but they each have multiple sub-arguments associated with them. (1) Since humor, by my own account, relies upon ambiguity, and the audience plays a large role in understanding the humor, there is a chance that some will misinterpret the point, or get it, but only focus on the aesthetic or pleasurable aspects of it. For example, it is easy to imagine that someone listening to one of Richard Pryor's entire performances might enjoy it all but fail to register his subversive point. This could lead some of them to either repeat it out of context with a different purpose, namely, with less egalitarian and more stereotypical goals, or, more innocently, simply repeat the bit without noticing that others have interpreted it as system-sustaining humor rather than subversive, either way, causing the subversive's weapon to backfire.[308] If no seriousness is detected in the humor, it could be seen only as frivolous fluff with no intention to propose anything as being true, and even if truthfulness were recognized as a goal, one could argue that the jester has only jokes without justification—a punch line is hardly a conclusion.

A related problem is (2) target audiences who are not already intentionally in play mode attending a paid-for performance, e.g., might fail to get that the subversive protest is meant to be

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[308] The latter point is one of the reasons Dave Chappelle left his own show and extremely lucrative contract—he did not like the way some white people were laughing at his subversive humor. It is possible that the laughter he heard was genuine but was not the sort that constitutes world-traveling in a non-ontologically expansive manner. That is, the laugher follows his humor, maybe he understands what Chappelle is attempting, enjoys the playful incongruity, but is not affected in any meaningful way even with the brief collaboration. A concern here is that such individuals then attempt to repeat the humorous bit and even with the best of intentions, but end up manifesting a form of condescending racism (see Ikuenobe 172). For example, Chris Rock's performance on issues of race within the African American community was repeated (though quite poorly) by Steve Carrell's character in the sitcom "The Office" at a racial sensitivity training seminar; Carrell's performance was neither sensitive nor all that playful, and significantly, lacked the timing and context of the original, contrary to the insistence of Carrell's character. Thanks to Michael Monahan for this example. The worry of world-traveling in an ontologically expansive manner will be covered in section III below.

humorous.[309] That is, one might simply not find the piece funny and in fact might take offence to it, thereby precluding the onset of a playful attitude, and decrease the chances for open-mindedness. In many cases of subversive humor, not only are contentious issues raised, but aggressive, abusive language is employed, as found in the examples below. Stephanie Koziski raises both of these concerns (1) and (2) at once: "It is also possible that the performance may have stimulated a good time with no particularly important thought processes or the participant may have been made uncomfortable by the comic's beliefs and responded by tuning out part of the message or even by falling asleep" (Koziski 71; see also Duncombe 131 for similar concerns). She does not relate empirical data of the somniferous qualities of comedic performances, but her concern overall is legitimate.

The larger point raised by each of these worries is that the subversive humorist can fail to foster what Maria Lugones refers to as "world-traveling." That is, the subversive wit in particular, does not create border-crossing opportunities in which the privileged can see from the perspectives of the marginalized, but instead, she further tribalizes the ingroup/outgroup dynamics, hardening rather than softening the boundaries historically and contingently constructed. Put another way, the humorist might facilitate world-traveling among the powerful, but fail to get them to "check" their privileged, ontologically expansive, baggage.

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[309] I would like to thank Michelle Rotert, Brian Wagner, Robert D'Alonzo, and Will Ashford for the many discussions regarding some of these worries, among others.

II.   It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of a thing he was never reasoned into[310]

Although Swift's claim is hyperbolic and assumes too strict of a dichotomy between

reason and emotions regarding persuasion,[311] it does mirror comments made by many

contemporary philosophers regarding the problems with implicit biases, cultural stereotypes, and

systematic hidden oppression (see Young; Sullivan 2006, 9-10; Gordon; Cudd; Gendler 2011, 41;

Yancy; and especially Harvey1999, 48; 2010, 17-8). I will argue that subversive humor is a

helpful method in protest against such oppression, and I will present a few examples that reveal

why.[312] These cases will be assessed using the conception of subversive humor from Chapters 3

and 4. That is, I will demonstrate how they highlight social incongruities that have been either

ignored or discounted as insignificant, and how they show, at least implicitly, what is wrong with

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[310] This claim attributed to Jonathan Swift is a bit strong; perhaps it is useless to rely *only* upon reason. After Frantz Fanon was continually confronted with the mystifications of European white stereotypes, he notes in *Black Skin, White Masks* "I was up against something unreasoned….I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason, there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason….I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason. It was up to the white man to be more irrational than I. Out of the necessities of my struggle I had chosen the method of regression…." (1967, 118, 123). One of the purposes of this chapter is to show that a "method of regression" or "irrational" "unreason" in response to *civilized* oppression is not necessary. This is not at all to dismiss Fanon's particular situation, which of course includes both overt and covert elements of oppression (see Chapter 1, section I above). That is, I am not arguing that he is wrong to end up weeping (1967, 140), nor that he is mistaken about the impossibility of laughter in the face of compounding and nauseating stereotypes (1967, 112). Rather, I am following his existential-phenomenological stance in the face of unreasoned (poorly reasoned?) racism and attempting to give a *descriptive* account of how subversive humor can be a successful means of indirect protest against the covert elements that perpetuate oppression. To borrow from Sorensen, "humor [can be] a logical way of dealing with this absurdity in everyday life" (Sorensen 175). Recall from the end of Chapter 2, even though the cultural stereotypes, many of which Fanon suffered through, are automatically triggered, non-conscious, and counter to one's consciously held beliefs, this does not entail the implicit biases are completely without reason(s)—namely, the goals of comfort, coherence, complacency, and especially sustaining privilege. These are all causally efficacious "reasons", but to the extent that they remain nonconscious, their possessors cannot amend them when they are flawed, and we are confronted with a similar situation faced by Fanon—no amount of direct argument seems sufficient to crack open the complacency of the privileged in a spirit of seriousness.

[311] I believe he is referring to the fact that humans are more prone to persuasion through emotional appeals than reason, and when reason was not initially part of the persuasive equation, reason (alone) will not suffice to undo the erroneous belief. This has been studied extensively in social psychology. See (Haidt 819) for an overview: "Because moral positions always have an affective component to them, it is hypothesized that reasoned persuasion works not by providing logically compelling arguments but by triggering new affectively valenced intuitions in the listener.

[312] I will offer examples from standup performances primarily because they are so popular and publicly available for evaluation. It is important to note that these performances are not always translatable as standard jokes in which there is a clear set up and then punchline. However, the analysis of jokes from the previous two chapters can still be applied to these comedic presentations.

them. I will focus on the way humor can pleasantly jar one out of the default serious mode in which assumptions, conventions, and rules are rarely questioned, and encourage one to see her social world in a different light. I will return to Gendler's discussion on thought experiment to help make my case that these instances of subversive humor engage the audience collaboratively, reveal hidden/ignored heuristic errors, and, as devices of persuasion, they seek changes in attitude and belief. As an addendum to Swift, the inducements of such humorists appeal to emotion and reason, aesthetics and logic, playfulness and seriousness, System 1 and System 2.

i. Louis CK on White Privilege

The first example comes from Louis CK (CK),[313] a comedian who identifies as a privileged male, yet uses humor to expose and undermine such inherited and unmerited advantages. I will analyze his performance in greater detail than the others as the content speaks directly to much of what I have been concerned with in this dissertation. I will concentrate upon his account of issues surrounding race and privilege which, though not obvious centerpieces, can be found in almost all of his performances and TV series. These are complex areas that are not obvious fodder for humor, and it is clear that his comedic repertoire is broad enough that he is not including these topics for lack of funnier bits—these issues matter to him.

About 40 minutes into his standup routine in *Chewed Up* (2008), CK exposes what should be an obvious truth about white male privilege. He does so spiritedly and with force at times that might otherwise be abrasive and antagonistic were it not for the playful attitude he effects and infuses into his audience:

> I'm healthy, I'm relatively young, I'm white—which, thank God for that shit boy. That is a huge leg up, are you kidding me? Here's how great it is to be white. I could get in a time machine and go to any time, and it would be fucking awesome when I get there. That is exclusively a white privilege. Black people can't fuck with time machines![314] A

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[313] His last name is Szekely, but due to audiences' and club owners' difficulty with pronouncing it, he truncated his stage name to the phonetically similar "CK." Although he was born in Mexico, he has enjoyed the privileges of whiteness and maleness.

[314] I think it is interesting that he appeals to time machines in this example—a very common element in philosophical thought experiments.

black guy in a time machine is like, 'Hey, if it's before 1980, no thank you, I don't wanna go.' But I can go to *any* time. *The year 2*. I don't even know what was happening then; but I know when I get there, 'Welcome. We have a table right here for you.' Oh, thank you." (Louis CK, 2008)[315]

He continues the point now with force, but still clearly in play mode and within the rules of humor cooperation, which I will briefly address below:

It's lovely here in the year 2. I can go to any time in the past. I don't want to go to the future and find out what happens to white people, because we're gonna pay hard for this shit. You got to know that. We're not gonna just fall from number one to two. They're gonna hold us down and fuck us in the ass forever, and we totally deserve it.[316] But for now, wheee! Now, if you're white and you don't admit that it's great, you're an asshole! It *is* great. And I'm a man. How many advantages could one person have? I'm a white man. You can't even hurt my feelings. What could you really call a white man that really digs deep? 'Hey cracker.' 'Ugh. Ruin'd my day. Shouldn't have called me a cracker. Bringing me back to owning land and people. What a drag.'" (Louis CK, 2008)

What about this performance makes it an instance of subversive humor? To answer this, I will show how it accomplishes most if not all of the following: it provides a means to detect committed stereotypical beliefs in active mental spaces, motivates appropriate emotions in the audience, collaboratively flouts conventions and engages the audience to find/create meaning in non-bona-fide, indirect language, and as a variety of thought experiment, it acts as a device of persuasion.

1. Detection of committed stereotypical beliefs

In this case, the heuristic error exposed is the general attitude of "being-whitely-in-the-world" (see Chapter 1, section IV; Chapter 2; and Sullivan 2004b, 302; 2006, 148, 164; Yancy 2008). This routinized comportment implies more than bad habits; rather it is a concatenation of dispositions, beliefs, and expectations that weave together to affect one's behavior, often

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[315]As with all of the examples I use for illustrations, it is far more informative, and enjoyable, to watch the performances rather than read the transcripts, where many of the play-mode-inducing cues are lost. Happily, CK has allowed most of his performances to be posted in their entirety on YouTube. For this particular bit, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkJOcpapKGI. Accessed 11/10/13.

[316] There is a worry here with CK's use of offensive language that is similar to Chris Rock's use of the term "retarded" that will be discussed below.

nonconsciously.[317] In order for whites to behave whitely and not detect any problems with this

way of being, subtle stereotypes that sustain the status quo are needed. Being whitely requires

willful ignorance and contingent construction in the way that being white, which refers to

physical traits e.g., does not. I think it is this distinction that CK is pointing to implicitly with his

time machine thought experiment and stark criticism of whites who deny that they possess

unmerited privileges. With respect to civilized oppression, this is the incongruous state of affairs

in which one who professes the goal of truth-seeking and egalitarianism at the same time harbors

status quo-sustaining stereotypes and/or comports oneself in a manner contrary to those

consciously expressed ideals. CK highlights a point that is almost pedestrian for critical race

theorists and feminist philosophers, but that has not gotten much traction in the public sphere—

the reality of white male privilege and the benefits it bestows upon those who have it.[318] He

succeeds in relaying serious content efficiently, playfully, and to an audience that likely has been

culturally ensconced in "willful ignorance" regarding a whitewashed past and the negative effects

that remain in the present.[319] He is pointing to a dimension of white ontological expansiveness,

which is in this case chronological, as well as geographical. Just as there is no space that is

wholly off limits to whites, there is also no time in which whites are not received with open arms

as the favored group—an unmerited privilege.

He constructs or employs within his audience the mental spaces in which their

presuppositions about race and privilege are brought to the fore and *allowed* to comingle with

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[317] A review of the interrelatedness among spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and cultural stereotypes discussed in chapters 1 and 2 will help explain why this bit can be said to expose a flawed heuristic, and why "being-whitely" can be analyzed under this category.

[318] For an example of the general public's ignorance of the concept, see the recent article from the first-year student at Princeton, Tal Fortgang, bemoaning the repeated calls for him to "check his privilege" (see http://theprincetontory.com/main/checking-my-privilege-character-as-the-basis-of-privilege/. (Accessed 4/4/14). A quick perusal of the piece reveals that he has a limited and epistemically closed perspective on white male privilege, as do many of those in the media and blogs who applaud his efforts.

[319] It is likely that they are by default epistemically closed to such issues as well even though they are paying customers at a Louis CK concert. His audiences are famously representative of the U.S. population spanning political affiliations, race, and gender (see the official Louis CK cite https://www.louisck.net/), so he is not preaching to any choir, to invoke a cliché. But, even if the crowd was predominantly liberal and professedly egalitarian, as argued in Chapter 2, this does not ensure that they are epistemically open about privilege and stereotypes.

their ideals of equality. This fertile ground for recognition of internal inconsistency might be tense and uncomfortable, even within play mode. But that necessary and brief unease is worth the audience's time and effort to follow CK to his "conclusion", which, as is typical of most humor, need not be explicitly stated. Of course, here we can interpret the point he intends to convey and perhaps *convince* others that it is true, is that "slavery and Jim Crow were real, white male privilege is real, and these are not unconnected."

One of the things CK does is dispel the popular myth that "reverse racism" can be just as pernicious as anti-black racism, or that "reverse racism" even has a referent.[320] The history behind the slur "cracker" is not one in which the hurlers of it possessed power; indeed, it was the opposite, and still is. The origin of the epithet is somewhat murky, but CK is correct to note that it calls to mind a *long* period of time in which white males "cracked" their whips in an overt display of power over slaves. The punchline "'Shouldn't have called me a cracker. Bringing me back to owning land and people'", is unexpected because we generally do not anticipate anything positive (in this case for white males, the objects of the slur—having the capacity/ability/qualifications/merited advantage to possess property), but in the context of his preceding negative comments about such privilege, he sets the stage for us to juxtapose these oppositional scripts; "cracker" is a pejorative that expresses (exposes) the privileges its bearers possess. In other words, he makes the positive and negative valences of term compete with each other, as he seems to be saying (simultaneously) that the slur is ineffectual against its intended targets because all it succeeds in doing is fortifying privileged people's *superior* standing, and so

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[320] The phrase is confusing as at first blush it sounds like "the opposite of racism", which, of course, is not the intended connotation. We all have the tendency to stereotype, but the stereotypes and slurs against white heterosexual men are not analogous to the stereotypes against non-whites and women. As Robin Lakoff notes, "There isn't an 'official' Caucasian stereotype, because Caucasians, the group with clout, have created the stereotypes for the other groups" (2000, 52). We do have the *Washington Redskins*, e.g., but nothing like the "Kansas City Caucasians", or the "Washington Whiteys." But even in those cases, the appellation lacks force because it lacks the violent history found in the stereotypical images with Native American mascots, the term "nigger", or any of the many slurs against women. For an excellent witty thought experiment exposing the absurdities of the phrase "reverse racism", see comedian Aamer Rahman's *Fear of a Brown Planet* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw_mRaIHb-M. Accessed 10/13/14. Thanks to Jennifer Marra for this example, which also includes a time machine!

instead of doing any harm, it buffets their self-esteem, in much the same way lawyers and doctors

in the U.S. often relish jokes at the expense of their own professions.[321] On the other hand, again

due to his "set-up" in which he calls unacknowledged privileged people "assholes", he seems to

be saying that the slur *is* effective because, as is the case for most of his audience--because it is so

for most of the populace at large--they do not want to be accused of having unmerited privileges,

to say nothing of being compared to violent slave holders. I will have more on this point with the

discussion of the collaboration needed with the audience for meaning.

   Importantly he does not assume, as many do today, that the vestiges of that past have

long since dissipated. He makes this clear with his exaggerated claim that "you're an asshole" if

you disagree with him about such privileges. I think he means this sincerely, though of course not

literally equating one with the nether parts of the anatomy, but in the sense that he views someone

who possesses all the benefits of white male privilege and refuses to admit it as lacking in

virtuous character, to put it mildly. It is a rare occasion that one can expose the unmerited

privilege of a large group of people, call them "assholes", and get those same people to laugh

with him. How does he succeed in this?[322]

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[321] See (Morreall 2009, 109-110) on jokes and stereotypes against lawyers: "Do people act condescendingly to lawyers, insult them, or deny them jobs because of that stereotype? Hardly. Lawyers are a powerful and respected group in our society, and the stereotype of the tough-minded, unsentimental lawyer enhances rather than threatens their power and position. In fact, lawyers even put that stereotype to work in TV commercials and Yellow Pages advertising for law firms."

[322] To anticipate a possible objection, it might be the case that many in the audience are inclined to laugh not because they have discovered an error in their own web of beliefs, but, still protected by their ontological expansiveness and spirit of seriousness which fosters first-person exceptionalism biases and rationalizations to sustain complacency, they simply are laughing *with* CK *at* the objects of his humor— that is, *other people.*

2. Playing with our Mirth Addiction[323]

When CK yells to his audience that "if you don't think it's great being white you are an asshole", it is potentially offensive, but within the playful-mode he has placed his audience, there is more likely a desire to "tarry along" (Yancy 2008; 2012, 44, 52) with his mirthful rant about a serious matter. He is being playful and facilitates a similar playful attitude in the audience allowing them to listen to something that might otherwise be overly confrontational. He is encouraging the audience to frame-shift, rather abruptly, and with convention-defying language that unsettles them from their comfort zones. Recall Lakoff's claim (2000, 48) that such shifting is generally unpleasant, but the manner in which he presents this content, it is clear that he is being playful, and this recognition among the audience enables them to shift their habituated frames and expectations in order to briefly, at least, share his perspective.[324] Significantly, CK's point of view is very likely not the one initially shared by the audience, if we accept the mountains of data from IATs, social psychological studies on cultural stereotypes, implicit biases, first-person exceptionalism, and white privilege. But CK's indirect approach places the audience, or better, *participants*, in a playful state of mind where they have the desire to adopt alternative points of view because they have the desire to enjoy humor, which requires an inclination to shift perspectives.

If we imagine a different scenario in which CK happened to be a sociologist, e.g., presenting a case in a direct, serious, bona-fide manner, to the same audience, the frame-shifting, to the extent that it happens at all, might be just as sudden, but it would be, as Lakoff warns, "distressing", "traumatic", "disconcerting." This is not the case for the audience enjoying CK's

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[323] While the term "addiction" is a bit much, it nicely expresses the very strong inclination we have to laugh. Borrowing from Hurley et al. who borrow from psychologist-philosopher Allison Gopnik, our compulsion to laugh at humor is likely as powerful as our desire for sweets, music, drugs, and sex. With each of these examples and with humor, similar regions in the reward centers of our brains "light up" upon receiving the "fix." For one general example: "As the mesolimbic area contains dopamine-releasing 'reward centers', these correlations provide support for the claim that *finding funny* is a physiologically pleasurable state" (Jones 131). And there are the additional benefits discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 above.

[324] Borrowing from Sorensen, "Humor changes the situation because however serious the message is, it has a hint of 'Don't take me seriously,' and 'I'm not dangerous'" (171); but this is only a hint.

performance (a point lost in the transcripts alone). Furthermore, we can even imagine this account

as if it were part of a mundane conversation among people not convening at a night club or

comedy performance, and even if the conversants were in the default serious mode, they would

still register the relevant cues that CK is in play mode, and that he intends his audience to

interpret his comments from within a similar frame.[325] The tone of his voice (again, not

adequately represented in the transcripts alone) and the ludicrousness of the imaginative scenario

of going back to the year 2,[326] for example, encourage his listeners to view this as an instance of

humor rather than to try to make sense of it as a piece of bona-fide communication (see Chapter

4, and Raskin and Attardo 1994, 36, 38). Breaking the audience out of their serious mode enables

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[325] Cudd offers a good instance of subversive humor that does not assume an audience who is already in play-mode. She provides a pertinent example of the use of rhetoric which relies on absurdity when viewed initially, but upon reinterpretation, makes sense. Here, humor is used to make a serious point in ways force, fraud, or logical argument alone rarely do: one billboard [by the Guerilla Girls] boldly states that 'Even the U.S. Senate is more Progressive than Hollywood' and has a picture of Sen. Trent Lot's [not Progressive!] head on top of an Oscar trophy. Underneath are two boxes stating: 'Female Senators: 14% and 'Female Directors: 4%.' This is an arresting image, and relays the facts, both of which clearly, quickly, and *inescapably challenge* anyone to deny that women are oppressed in this society" (Cudd 202, my italics). This tactic creates a pleasant cognitive shift, as Morreall puts it, as we understand and enjoy the crux of the message, and as Cudd notes, this reveals a social incongruity within the U.S. Moreover, these statements used by the Guerilla Girls do assert that something is the case and, in addition to consciousness-raising, they want something to change. They are providing a literal claim stating something as mundane as percentages regarding numbers of female representatives and directors. But if that was all they did, then it would simply be a dull, but logical, assertion of facts designed to point our attention to something that should have been obvious. This illocutionary act, unfortunately, is itself less obvious to most audiences. So, by adding the humorous elements to the already mundane facts, we have a striking message seen through a playful lens. The humor does not take away from the illocutionary act in this case; it simply helps drive home the point in a manner that quotidian assertions of fact, the locutionary act, rarely can. Plus, we remember it, and if it is really good, the joke, along with the factual assertion, can quickly spread as a social meme through lightning fast social media. These strategies, says Cudd, can "empower the oppressed with a sense that something can be done and that a future free of oppression is possible. They embarrass the oppressor and reveal his shameful conduct to the world" (Cudd 204). While these means are rhetorical and naturally have their limits, their effectiveness lies in the fact that they can provide successful resistance against the underlying structure of civilized of oppression that is usually sustained by well-meaning people who at least profess to be for social equality. It exemplifies Orwell's incisive comment that the "joke is a tiny revolution" that can spread like contagious wildfire. For another example, see (Duncombe 44-5) where he advocates for "spectacular vernacular" or approaches to persuasion through "spectacle" or fantasy backed by the rational and ethical. See especially the example he gives of "Billionaires for Bush" who "By wrapping their facts in shtick (while also footnoting them) the Billionaires speak to our dual desires to be entertained *and* to know.…By acting out the roles of obviously phony billionaires buying politicians for their own advantage, the Billionaires encourage the viewer of their spectacle to step back and look critically at the taken-for-grantedness of a political system where money has a voice, prodding them to question: 'Isn't it really the current political system that's absurd?'" (Duncombe 148-9; see also Rowan 2011; Sorensen 172-3, 182; and Johanson 27 for more examples like this).

[326] I think this is humorous in part simply because there are so few numbers in the date, and we tend to expect historical references to have more than two numbers.

them to step back from the content sufficiently in order to make sense of it, and then to enjoy it. CK, in other words, places them at the appropriate distance from the content of his "study."[327] Moreover, given the nature of comedic story-telling, which is largely how I view this conversational piece, much of the needed details are left unsaid, which is similar to typical joke structures. These intentional gaps are left open for the audience to fill in—an audience that is now primed to be epistemically open, and thus, more susceptible to collaborative, multidimensional, and creative thinking outside of the preidentified conventions, even when remaining within those conventions might benefit them.

3. Collaborative flouting of conventions and finding meaning[328]

CK discusses a very serious topic from a playful attitude, but in so doing he violates a number of Grice's maxims on cooperation, such as saying things he lacks (or does not explicitly offer) adequate evidence for, speaking obscurely and/or ambiguously, and failing to be as informative as required (see Grice 45-50). Grice does not make explicit reference to slang or slurs, but he does discuss irony and hyperbole[329] that "*involve exploitation, that is, a procedure by which a maxim is flouted for the purposes of getting in a conversational implicature by means of something of the nature of a figure of speech*" (Grice 49, 52). In these cases, "though some maxim is violated at the level of what is said, the hearer is entitled to assume that that maxim, or at least the overall Cooperative Principle, is observed at the level of what is implicated" (Grice 52; see also Raskin and Attardo 1994, 34-6).[330] CK's time machine scenario, explicit and exaggeratedly offensive language, and overall tone of voice in the performance all "exploit"

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[327] Bergson also notes the benefits of playfulness in humor: "So, comic absurdity gives us from the outset the impression of playing with ideas. Our first impulse is to join in the game. [But then he adds the following misleading claim] That relieves us from the strain of thinking" (Bergson 90). He is taking a similar approach to humor that Morreall does in which the amused are detached from the object of laughter such that they have no practical concern regarding it.

[328] These were two separate elements discussed in Chapter 4; here I will merge the two in this analysis as they are deeply interconnected.

[329] In this same section he also addresses metaphor as a figure of speech that violates a maxim at one level, while maintaining the Cooperative Principle overall. This will be more relevant with the Chris Rock example below.

[330] An example of this would be the moral understanding *implicated* in the joke about GM from Chapter 3.

maxims with the intention of going beyond the literal language used, and, I argue, beyond the intention to just get a laugh.

Regarding the first point, CK remains within the bounds of what Raskin and Attardo call the "Cooperative Principle for joke-telling" (which I will extend to include the conversational performances addressed here). Adapting the maxims from Grice's Cooperative Principles of Conversation, they claim that the joke teller must "Give exactly as much information as is necessary for the joke; Say only what is consistent with the (world of) the joke; Say only what is relevant to the joke; Tell the joke efficiently" (Raskin and Attardo, 1994, 37).[331] To the extent that one violates any or all of these maxims, the humor fails and the audience will miss the point and remain confused in serious mode scratching their heads trying to figure out what the speaker could possibly mean in this (assumed) bona-fide communicative act, or assume he is lying.[332] For this reason I would add the general requirement that audience and speaker both be in the same mode—playfulness. When all conversants involved are in this same mode, cooperation among them is far more likely. They are all more inclined to follow the wit's implicatures as they oscillate among the literal and metaphorical meanings. With this criterion of playfulness, the potential for collaborative understanding is greater even in a scenario in which traditional conventions are being flouted and one's rigidly held presuppositions are being exposed.

One of Grice's maxims that appears to be violated is the truth-condition. For example, the idea that a white man's feelings cannot be hurt is a significant point. On a superficial reading, a one-dimensional interpretation, it is straightforwardly false—of course white men's feelings *can*

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[331] As I will argue below in the section on thought experiment, CK meets, or at least does not violate, any of these maxims, aside from the assumption that meaning and truth are quarantined within the joke-world. The maxim to remain consistent "only within the joke-world" is (unintentionally) ambiguous. But given their claims about the lack of concern for truth in joking, the likely interpretation of this rule is that the content of the joke world stay in the joke-world.

[332] Of course, even if all the maxims are followed, this does not entail a successful humorous performance. Another option is to infer that the seeming paradox is intended as a thought experiment. Here is Ernst Mach on the relation between paradox and thought experiment: "…the presentation of paradoxes is exceptionally appropriate. Not only does one learn by means of paradox to best perceive the nature of a problem in which, indeed, even the paradoxical content is problematic, but the conflicting elements of a paradox permit thought no longer to come to rest. These elements produce the process which is characterized as a thought experiment" (Mach 455-5; Cf. Pierce and the discussion on Socratic *elenchus* above).

be hurt. But one of the central elements of humor is that it is not fruitful to read it one-dimensionally, even when the humorist is being explicit and seemingly direct, as CK appears to be with his claim that it is "clearly better to be a white male." He means this—that is, he takes the assertion seriously even as he playfully presents it.[333] I think he succeeds in presenting this message to an audience that has not likely absorbed it consciously through more direct methods.[334] CK is being direct, but only *indirectly* through humor in play mode. That is to say, he is being direct within a *fictional* setting that has meaning and implications that are internally consistent, but also extend beyond that creative construction—there is a correspondence between the moral implicature in his thought experiment and the "real" world. He is joking and does have as one of his intentions to get his audience to laugh. But this does not mean, as Raskin and Attardo assume, that the content and meaning within his play-world cannot bleed into reality and affect "flesh-and-blood people" (Lugones 87).

Returning to his deliberate use of ambiguity with the final comments of the bit, "'Shouldn't have called me a cracker. Bringing me back to owning land and people'", we can now view this as an *opportunity* for his audience to interpret the conclusion in a humorous manner. From a playful attitude, we are more likely to read this as a condemnation not approbation of white male privilege, as an interpretation in the latter vein is simply not as funny as the former, to say nothing of the moral ignorance it would entail. Interpreted seriously as a straightforward claim there is little room for humor other than the laughter from above--from the "winner's circle" (Harvey 1999, 7; see also Chapter 1, section V). As I have argued, this form of

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[333] I have had my feelings hurt, many times in fact. But *never* has this been the case because of the fact that I happen to belong to a particular socially constructed group—white, male, heterosexual, etc.

[334] At least there is significant anecdotal evidence that explicit and direct methods of *pushing* multiculturalism and the data revealing the consequences of white privilege, e.g., onto college students often can have the opposite effect than desired. I have collected such data from colleagues as well as from my own classes in which I have tried both direct and indirect methods to infuse voices in philosophy that have been historically marginalized. This data needs to be more formally collated and replicated, but my informal analysis shows that students at community colleges, at least (a more representative sample of the populace than that found in Universities—see Henrich et al.), are much more *open* to just listening to the historical facts and the current statistical data regarding privilege, implicit biases, and the disastrous effects on the oppressed when the data is presented playfully.

laughter is system-sustaining, or the sort Bergson seems to endorse, the laughter *from* those with

power *at the expense of* those without, with the goal of maintaining the status quo.[335] But this sort

of ridicule does not involve playfulness, and thus, it lacks a necessary condition to even qualify as

humor, and the contradiction, if recognized at all, remains unresolved and not funny. The literal

reading remains confusing and has no resolution as we interpret the referent of "cracker" to be

offended by a term that connotes success, at least in Lockean sense of the liberty and ability to

pursue property. But there is resolution and enjoyment if we understand CK to mean something

like "owning property unfairly and commodifying people is not anything to be proud of." When

given the option between two interpretations of a joke or comic strip, one that relies upon

superiority and domination and the other that subverts such dominance, most people choose the

subversive rendering as the more amusing (see Morreall 2009, 109-110; Weaver 40-1; Veale on

jokes; and McGraw and Warner especially Chapter 3, on cartoons and for conflicting data on this

point). In addition, the audience "is allowed to construct" the meaning collaboratively,[336] as the

ambiguity is not over-specified and they are not forced to a single, convergent idea. The listeners

have the joyful co-burden of choosing how the piece should be understood (see Grice 54 on

ambiguity in conversation), and given the predilection to humor, and the playful, epistemically

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[335] Although Bergson does claim that the object of laughter is always rigidity (inelasticity) in thought or action, he adds the following problematic assertions: "Laughter must be something of this kind, a sort of SOCIAL GESTURE. By the fear which it inspires, it restrains eccentricity…" (18). In the same text he claims that "Each member must be ever attentive to his social surroundings; he must model himself on his environment; in short, he must avoid shutting himself up in his own peculiar character as a philosopher in his ivory tower. Therefore society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing, which, although it is slight, is none the less dreaded. Such must be the function of laughter. Always rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly, a kind of social 'ragging.'… The truth is, the comic character may, strictly speaking, be quite in accord with stern morality. All it has to do is to bring itself into accord with society" (Bergson 65-6). He continues, "Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness" (Bergson 91). Turning Bergson's insight on its head, I follow Willett's claim that "Laughter liberates the blind perpetrator of the prevailing social norms…. As laughter lets loose the reins of conventional moral judgment, audiences cast off rigid prejudices and punitive moral categories, and experience as revitalizing libidinal energy flowing free" (Willett 55).
[336] See (Chapter 4, section iv and Veale 422-3; Oring 56; Gilbert 18, and especially 55 on the "audience's playful participation"; and Duncombe 131: "Jokes are active, social things. More than any other form of communication they demand participation from their audience").

open mode, the audience is more likely to interpret the conclusion in the way CK intends *because*

it is funnier, not because they have no other options.[337] So, given our addiction to mirth, it is not

surprising that we would seek out humor wherever it might possibly be. Not coincidentally, this

more amusing interpretation is also the more accurate one epistemologically and morally

speaking. As I will show in the following section, this funny interpretation is the more egalitarian

and truthful one, which should appeal to those who are consciously professed truth-seeking *and*

mirth-seeking egalitarians—which is most of us today. CK's indirect and playful approach

invokes imaginative counterfactual scenarios that collaboratively engage his audience and "crack

open" their proclivity to seriousness, priming them toward attitude change.

4. Playing with Thought

The claim that there are similarities between humor, jokes in particular, and thought

experiments is not new. Morreall makes a brief mention of the connection (2009, 126-9), and in

the Routledge Encyclopedia entry on "Thought Experiments", David Gooding notes that

> The degree of abstraction possible in a thought experiment depends on how much both its
> author and its readers have participated in the culture of the experiment. In this respect
> thought experiments have much in common with jokes. Both are sparse, carefully crafted,
> narratives which include only essential details.[338] There is a punch-line requiring an
> insight which changes our understanding of the story. In both cases we see the point
> without its being articulated as an argument. (Gooding 396)

There is much in this brief analogy that needs elaboration. The degree of participation in each

other's cultures or narratives will be addressed in detail below in section III with Lugones' world-

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[337] Consider the following that we find humorous because it is the more enjoyable, and in fact, more
sensible of an interpretation: "When the unfaithful artist heard his wife coming up the stairs, he said to his
lover, 'Quick! Take off your clothes!'" (Marmysz, 136). Here, one initially plausible, even obvious
expectation is "subverted", but not rendering the entire joke irreconcilable; instead an opposing, yet still
sensible script encourages us to shift to another interpretation. This is not outright contradiction, as that
would be less funny, if at all. It offers a creative alternative to perceiving an ambiguous reality, showing
there is more than a single meaningful way to complete a story, and that when there is the possibility for a
humorous rendering, that will likely be the one adopted rather than making the assumption that it is a
supremely stupid adulterer, or the speaker has incomprehensibly committed a *non-sequitur*, which might be
the case if the final pleading was something like "42!" or just about anything else not at all meaningful on a
different, creative interpretation.
[338] I would add that sometimes the essential details are intentionally omitted, placing some of the task for
meaning-making on the audience.

traveling. The economy and painstaking choice of words has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

The "Aha!" recognition of insight through reframing has also been covered, but in this section I

will continue to focus on that and the idea that neither jokes nor thought experiments depend

upon direct argumentation for their persuasiveness.

In many cases in which counterfactuals are employed, a purely historical "what if"

account is envisioned,[339] but such hypothetical thinking can also project forward (Gendler 2004,

1157, 1160; Gilbert 177-9) through imagining what would have to be the case for a desired state

to be actualized.[340] One of the most common forms of imaginative play with thought in

philosophy is where one constructs a fictional world or scenario that might not explicitly or in

every minute detail correspond to reality, but is intended to persuade readers that some salient

point that is true in the counterfactual world is also true in the real world. This is so with

subversive humor as well where comments are made *counter-to-the facts* as we know them in one

sense, but intuitively true in another.

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[339] See (Kahneman and Tversky 1982, 201-208) on the "simulation heuristic." This is included under the larger category of "availability bias", which in this case covers mental operations or "simulations" that "bring things to mind", in particular, the "construction of examples or scenarios" (201) which are counterfactual fantasies, yet efficacious on behavior. For one example of an ironic if not humorous counterfactual, see Douglass' speech to the Plymouth County Anti-Slavery Society in 1841, where he subverts through reversing the traditional roles, playing the southern preacher who perpetuates the constructed natural essence of the slave: "Oh, consider the wonderful goodness of God! Look at your hard, horny hands, your strong muscular frames, and see how mercifully he has adapted you to the duties you are to fulfill! While to your masters, who have slender frames and long delicate fingers, he has given brilliant intellects, that they may do the thinking, while you do the working" (Douglass 2011, np). To explain, "Not only is Douglass mocking the functional roles–presumably set in religious stone–of slave and master, but also their respective natures as portrayed by his caricatured preacher. He is using the language of the slave-owners, manipulating the very words of his oppressors in a manner that immediately and disarmingly exposes the error of their beliefs: this is a man who can think; he is a human being who possesses a creative wit" (Kramer 2013, 629-30). This is also a variety of thought experiment that can be at once persuasive for an audience and a psychological buffer for the oppressed: "Reversing passively experienced events in a revision of reality, adult play may allow the experiencer, in this instance, actively to control circumstances, keep up courage and envision feelings of success and achievement. This allows one to cope with less than ideal life conditions. The inversion of reality can result in a healing catharsis…By breaking down the rules and behaviors ingredient in cultural situations, the comedian may increase the participant's awareness of the tacit cultural knowledge with which he operates" (Koziski 71).

[340] This kind of imaginative thought has commonly been practiced among athletes who, for example, "practice" shooting free throws in the "laboratory of their minds" resulting in comparable improvements to those who actually practice on the physical court. It is also invoked with subversive humorists as they imagine alternate realities in which they are no longer oppressed. See (Gilbert 178) on the humorous thought experiments of the marginalized and (Duncombe Chapter 7 *Dreampolitik*; and Harvey 2010) on the efficacy of imagination in protest.

The "fictions" employed in both subversive humor and thought experiments are not intended to remain solely internally consistent within the imaginative construction, having no practical implications for the real world corresponding to the joke-worlds. For example, the GM joke from Chapter 3 consists of claims[341] counter-to-the-facts regarding the potential behavior of the car company, but *not* wholly fictional and counter-to-the-*moral*-facts in the sense that the author is implying that there is a huge incongruity between the professed ideals of the company and their actual behavior. The ambiguity in this efficient joke allows the audience to be open to both renderings, but if in play mode, nudges them to follow the more humorous translation. Using this simple example as a starting point, we can evaluate CK's performance as an instance of thought experiment in which much of the content is not intended to be taken literally, and yet our intuitions are that he is motivated to convince us that (some of) his ideas are true. In Gendler's words, he wishes to "demonstrate" to his audiences specific conclusions that are "novel justified true beliefs about the [social] world" (Gendler 1998, 411). So, not only can we infer that CK is non-existentially serious, but that much of what he says is convincing.

CK's act does not attempt to be historically accurate, so critics who grumble about his anachronistic use of "white" in the year 2 miss the point, in much the same way that disparagers of thought experiments complain that some physical/causal impossibility renders the "conclusions" of the imaginative case false or weak. It is true that in some cases CK is unequivocal that he is just "making shit up" (*Oh My God*, 2013), or, as he cautions in the setup of some particular detail to a story in *Shameless* (2007), "it doesn't matter cus' I'm gonna lie to you." But that does not take away from my point that he is serious with his humor about social reality; he is serious in the same way that philosophers are serious even though they have commonly "made shit up" in thought experiments.[342] CK employs a similar device with his

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[341] Morreall would not permit them to even be called "claims" as they are not intended to propose that anything is actually the case.

[342] But one must still be vigilant that the thought experiment does not completely stray from reality. Recall Dennett's worry (2013, 183).

humor, and in many ways is more effective than philosophers in making the implicit explicit for his (much larger and more diverse) audiences who then spread his word.[343]

The subversive wit directs an audience's attention to some serious flaw in our conceptual heuristics that remain potent even if below the level of consciousness, and in Kahneman's lingo, waken our System 2 from its laziness. Anthropologist Stephanie Koziski puts it this way: "Many standup comedians jar their audience's sensibilities by making individuals experience a shock of recognition. This occurs as deeply-held popular beliefs about themselves—even the hidden underpinnings of their culture—are brought to an audience's level of conscious awareness. The standup comedian can elevate his audience to a new cultural focus" (Koziski 57).[344] The *anthropological* comedian can see from within a culture, mirror the elements she wants to make prominent back to us in a way that makes it appear alien, thereby startling us out of our complacency regarding our own social realities. It hardly bears mentioning the "alien" elements involved with so many philosophical thought experiments, whether attempting to ascertain the difference between Martian pain states and human ones, or questions of personal identity involving teletransportation to another planet, etc. The important connection here is not between extraterrestrials and earth-dwellers as such, but the intentional use of hyperbole in both humor and thought experiment used to highlight an otherwise hidden aspect of reality and render it extraordinary.[345] In this way a specific point is being emphasized in comparison to some

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[343] "A humorous story is like a meme that cannot be stopped. This is one of the reasons rebellious humor can be so successful in reaching distant and disparate audiences" Kramer 2013, nt. 14). See also Provine (2000, 129–133; and McGraw and Warner Chapter 4) on the laugh epidemic in Tanzania, and Carpio (2008, 80 nt. 17) on the replication of Richard Pryor's subversive performances by various audiences, and (Duncombe 46) on the popular success of satire. But see also the cases where satire backfires (Chapter 2 above).

[344] Willett (84) makes a similar argument but does not offer an account for how such consciousness-raising works.

[345] Recall Shelly's comment on poetry making the ordinary appear extraordinary. The comedian, like many philosophical thought-experimenters, "exaggerates or distorts his observations as a participant observer talking to people in his own society about the familiar cultural rules and behavior patterns in *their* and *his* own society. The audience may hear their own behavior described as if it is an alien culture in the sense that they knew that information all along but no one ever said it like that to them before. However, even though the comedian and his audience share culture, part of the cultural knowledge with which they operate is tacit (that is, hitherto unspoken)" (Koziski 61).

quotidian aspect of reality and in some cases the extreme nature of the constructed scenario facilitates the desired frame-shift, enabling the audience to take on the perspective intended by the witty thought experimenter.

CK is not relying upon his audience's observations or even our capacity to be persuaded through logical argument,[346] but instead he is stoking our imaginations triggering the appropriate emotions and our *own* ideas that, as Ernst Mach puts it, "are more easily and readily at our disposal [available] than physical facts. We experiment with thought, so to say, at little expense" (Mach 452). Or, we might say, at an expense that is worth the reward; CK makes it an enjoyable practice, grabbing our attention, enabling a playful mode that places us in an appropriate distance from the object of study emotionally and cognitively. Gendler makes a similar point regarding the role of imagination in thought experiments: "What this means is that imaginative rehearsal can bring us to new beliefs that may be unavailable to us if we reason in a disinterested purely hypothetical way" (Gendler 2004, 1160). Her point, borrowing from Damasio's research on "somatic markers" which encode *intelligent* responses to emotionally salient data whether from one's immediate environment or a make-believe scenario, is that direct confrontation with an issue, assuming deductive or inductive inferences as the only means to reach a belief is often insufficient.[347] This is the case with patients trying to overcome neuroses where, for example, "People who are afraid of public speaking *imagine* themselves speaking before an audience until they become comfortable with the idea" or "people who are afraid of flying *imagine* themselves being safely able to do so until their adverse reactions begin to fade" (Gendler 2004, 1160). It is

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[346] This does not imply there are no physical observations or arguments to support the claims CK makes; indeed, I think I have offered some of them in the previous chapters, but as far as a consciousness-raising device, CK's thought experiment "captures our imaginations" in order to demonstrate a point more effectively than straightforward argument. See (Duncombe Chapter 2); protest cannot rely solely upon spectacle, but argument without imagination also leaves potential audiences wanting. There are arguments that can be made for CK's point, and we might even be able to reconstruct his performance into an argument, removing all of the indirect, non-bona-fide, ambiguous language, and imaginary scenarios. But I will show below with an example from Richard Pryor, such an attempt has the potential to lose the audience.

[347] And if we follow Mach on thought experiments, such reasoning is also not *necessary*. Just as the actual experiment in a laboratory is not necessary, the persuasiveness of the thought experiment alone can render explicit argumentation superfluous.

important to note that in many of these cases if asked whether they believed flying really is dangerous, e.g., the person in question would explicitly state they do not believe it is, as they are aware of the numerous statistics which reveal the greater likelihood of being stung and killed by a bee, than dying in a plane crash, but the greater fear of flying remains. But this fear, which seems somewhat unresponsive to reasons in direct fashion, akin to Gendler's Skywalk examples, *is* responsive to mental imagery in fictionalized constructions. This is also the case with implicit biases that are less-than-reasons-responsive, that require "sub-rational mechanisms" to unearth and amend them.[348]

Most openly egalitarian truth-seekers are quite capable of understanding logically the arguments put forth by theorists who have similar conclusions as CK, but, due to willful ignorance, an inclination to epistemic closure, and the desire to maintain the status quo at some level, direct strategies lose a degree of demonstrability and persuasiveness. Such arguments often fail to "tap into" the "stores of unarticulated knowledge of the world which is not organized under any theoretical framework" (Gendler 1998, 415). In Swift's terms, the notions and beliefs that were not reasoned in, and thus not propositionally or logically constructed and connected, cannot be deconstructed (solely) through logic.[349] Koziski, in a prescient paper written well before IAT tests, notes that "Covert behavior is not merely hidden because informally learned, but includes a component of ignored, repressed behavior patterns and commonly-learned attitudes running counter to the culture's articulated ideals" (Koziski 59). She presents a compelling case that many comedians are anthropologists who are effective in revealing the hidden features of social reality that, once excavated by the comedian, seem almost obviously true: "The comedian as licensed

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[348] See (Gendler 2008a, 566; and Chapter 2 above). Sullivan's discussion of habit follows similar lines: "It is to suggest that the hidden, subversive operations of unconscious habits require indirect, roundabout strategies for transformation" (Sullivan 2006, 9).

[349] To remind the reader of a point from Chapter 2: I did not arrive at my bias and concomitant stereotypes against pickup drivers through logical analysis of the data; but that did not stop me from acting on that bias.

spokesperson[350] can grasp and articulate contradictions in the culture of which other Americans may be unaware or *reluctant to openly acknowledge*" (Koziski 65, my emphasis). But thought experiments and humorous narratives "allow us to make use of information about the world which was, in some sense, there all along, if only we had known how to systematize it into patterns of which we were able to make sense" (Gendler 1998, 415). This is most obviously seen with observational comics who succinctly point out facets of our world that would otherwise remain hidden in plain sight.

CK, and especially Dick Gregory, Richard Pryor, Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, Ellen Cleghorne, for example, are very much observational comics but with a subversive edge.[351] They are cultural anthropologists without the stuffiness, and armed with narrative thought experiments and tantalizing humor that immediately and efficiently creates (I think a better term than "systematizes") patterns that we can easily comprehend—very persuasive weapons.[352] I think CK's account of white privilege is as effective as the thought experiment described by Gendler regarding the moral failings of King David (see Chapter 4, section III. iv.), and for the same reasons. For instance, "One way of thinking about how the thought experiment works is this: it brings the [reader] to recognize the inadequacy of his conceptual framework for dealing with phenomena which—through the contemplation of this imaginary case—he comes to recognize as

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[350] I interpret this to mean that we are willing, in extremely large numbers, to pay for the humorous performances of comedians, who in many cases point to the incongruities between our ideals and our beliefs and actions (see Johanson 26 for more on this). Moreover, we offer professional comedians much greater leeway in criticizing people in power, even if the comedian comes very close to or in fact crosses, a line of acceptability. We permit them a cloak of immunity, but only up to a point (see Chapter 1, section V, for some of the limits that we should place on wielders of wit).

[351] In contrast, Jerry Seinfeld, e.g., is strictly an observational comedian; he is a non-threatening messenger or reporter of society rather than a critic or revolutionary. For more on this point, see (Gilbert 124).

[352] Part of the performance I did not include in transcribing the CK piece is reminiscent of Rawls' Original Position where one does not know, behind the "veil of ignorance", what role one might play in society, and thus the thought experiment primes our intuitions to seek out the fairest system possible, largely for our own self-interest. CK confesses how great being white is: "If it was an option, I would re-up every year. Oh yeah I'll take white again…." This manner of presentation, like Rawls' compelling scenario which encourages us to consider how we might create the most just society, reveals to listeners that it is true—"it is better to be white" in this contingently constructed social world. CK quickly adds, "I am not saying white people are better; I'm saying that *being* white is *clearly* better. *Who can even argue with that*?" This last claim is similar to something Douglass states in his *Fifth of July* speech about the obviousness (on logical grounds) of the horrors of slavery—it is so obvious that it would be "ridiculous" to argue about.

always having been part of his world" (Gendler 1998, 412). David cannot help but see through

the lens presented by Nathan's imaginative construction in which a moral wrong has clearly been

committed. The behavior in the fictional case is inconsistent with David's own imperatives in his

lived experience, and the moral truth in the imaginary analogue is not meant to remain wholly

aestheticized from reality—this is a point David now sees after having his consciousness raised

indirectly.[353]

A rhetorical attempt at consciousness-raising must have something like this in order to be

successful, especially regarding the sorts of oppression dealt with here. Gendler adds, "But

another thing that distinguishes good thought experiments [and subversive performances] from

bad is their ability to direct the reader's attention to inadequacies in her conceptual scheme that

she herself recognizes immediately, *as soon as they are pointed out to her*" (Gendler 1998, 413,

my italics).[354] It is true the comedian is directing our attention, but only in the fashion of offering

helpful hints and openings to find the flaws for ourselves; she is not giving all of the relevant data

(if even possible) all at once, doing all the work.[355] The audience must become participants in the

fault-finding process with the subversive humorist in a manner not found in direct logical

argument, bona-fide unambiguous protest, or even straightforward sociological-anthropological

accounts presented through thought experiments. The mirth-seeking audience wants to tarry along

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[353] Lippmann offers similar advice: "This is as true of the high politics of Isaiah as it is of the ward boss. Only the pathetic amateur deludes himself into thinking that, if he presents the major and minor premises, the voter will automatically draw the conclusion on election day. The successful politician—good and bad—deals with the dynamics—with the will, the hopes, the needs and the visions of men'" (Quoted in Duncombe 36).

[354] In some cases, the observation comic/anthropologist just asks a question almost in riddle form, as with Ellen Cleghorne's pertinent query: "Why is it that 'When white women are naked, that's pornography,' but 'when black women are naked, that's anthropology?'" (Quoted in Gilbert 82). Gendler even adds a note comparing thought experiments to riddles where contexts are created "making suddenly intelligible what previously appeared to be a nonsensical description" (Gendler 1998, 413, nt. 25). Sorensen makes a similar point when he notes that "through absurdity, we can gain new insights that we cannot reach, or at least are more difficult to reach, with reason and logic" (Sorenson 173).

[355] "I suggest that an audience may be engaged in some reflexive stocktaking as the comedian exposes the alienations, injustices, incongruities and immoralities that contaminate human life…. 'In night clubs these days…You get thinking…you know your mind is doing something, and you know you're enjoying it, but it isn't until later that you realize that you've been thinking'" (Koziski 70, quoting an anonymous cover liner from *The Golden Age of Comedy*).

with the subversive wit to hear them out—this is less likely the case with all of the direct methods above and even with the indirect thought experiments insofar as they are presented with little or no humor.

My analysis of CK's piece covers the various ways in which subversive humor can confront and expose covert oppression. In the following examples, I will provide performances that attempt to bring to light specific elements of civilized oppression, but without repeating in detail the analyses of each mechanism at play in the subversive humor. In the next subsection on Richard Pryor, I focus on how he exposes what I have been calling a spirit of seriousness, but does so playfully and non-argumentatively.

ii. Richard Pryor against the Spirit of Seriousness

Reflect on the closing track from Richard Pryor's *Bicentennial Nigger* (1976), which is quoted in full with Glenda Carpio's parenthetical explications:

> Ise sooo happy cause I been here 200 years . . . . I'm just thrilled to be here [with a chuckle that peppers the rest of the performance, a kind of 'yak, yak, yak'] . . . . I'm so glad you took me out of Dahome [chuckle] . . . . I used to live to be a hundred and fifty. Now I dies of high blood pressure by the time I' fifty-two . . . . That thrills me to death [chuckle]. I'm just so pleased America is gonna last. They brought me over here on a boat. There was 400 of us come over here [chuckle]. I just love that . . . it just thrills me to death . . . . You white folks are just so good to us . . . . We got over here and another twenty of us died from disease . . . then they split us all up . . . . Took my momma over that way, took my wife that way, took my kids over yonder [chuckles] . . . . I'm just so happy [chuckles] I don't know what to do. I don't know what I'm gonna do if I don't get 200 more years of this . . . . Y'all probably done forgot about it. [Pause. And then, in Pryor's own voice] But I ain't goin' never forget. (Carpio 76)

The performance is filled with incongruity on many levels, not the least of which is Pryor's brief history of the horrors of slavery with "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" playing in the background.[356] His sarcastic play-acting of the happy-go-lucky slave or Jim Crow era black man

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[356] In Carpio's quotation, she omits Pryor's opening words: "You all know how black humor started; it started on slave ships…" For this track, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_MRhwjnJ4F0. Accessed 7/27/14. This brilliant juxtaposition highlights the unmistakable evils perpetrated against many *particular* families in contrast to a backdrop proclaiming and praising the ideals of the U.S., wrapped up in religious mystifications espousing truth and justice. It is not clear where God ends and the U.S. begins in this patriotic hymn.

translates as a playful performance, and this engages the audience, which importantly, is comprised of both black and white patrons. This is both a direct confrontation with the painful issue of slavery, but indirect as well, through his use of wit that pulls in an audience in ways traditional protest or argument often fail to. This piece is reminiscent of Douglass' *Fifth of July* speech which is less playful than Pryor's but packed with irony. In both instances, Douglass and Pryor are not relying upon direct argumentation in their respective and certainly overlapping themes. In fact, Douglass makes this point striking as he attempts to open the eyes of the "lovers of ease" (1852, 8) who are celebrating the greatness[357] of the nation:

> Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look today, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? … To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding.—There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him…*At a time like this, *scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed*. (Douglass 1852, 18-19, 20, last italics added)

The aesthetic, indirect, ironic approaches of Douglass, and the same found in Pryor with the added element of playfulness, offer greater hopes of breaking a populace out of serious complacency than do more direct methods. They are exposing what should already be grasped at a fundamental level, and they are doing so in a way similar to that found in philosophical thought experiment. Douglass claims we all *already* comprehend these ideals (at some level) as we have "already declared" them.[358] But in the terms of contemporary cognitive psychology, our cognitive biases discourage us from consciously seeing from the perspective of marginalized people. Their views challenge the presumption that our ideals have been successfully inculcated. As Douglass

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[357] Douglass, ahead of his time, seems well aware of the first-country exceptionalism biases especially prominent during national holidays: "I remember, also, that, as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in in [*sic*] their own favor. This is esteemed by some as a national trait—perhaps a national weakness. It is a fact, that whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had *cheap!* will be found by Americans" (Douglass 1852, 12).

[358] Jane Gordon is correct that "laughter is uniquely pedagogical precisely because it turns on a standard of accuracy. What is so enjoyable about good humor is how precisely it describes features of our world that we know to a point of sedimentation. It unsettles what have become ossified so that we can again consider the ways in which we constantly reconstitute our social worlds" (Gordon 2007, 168).

states and other subversive comedians presume, the frame shifting needed to see in this way will likely not come about through explicit argumentation.

Imagine trying to get across all that Pryor does in that brief sketch without humor; that is, picture a rendering of the presentation in the form of a philosophical argument or a white-paper, wholly devoid of ambiguity, vagueness, double-entendre, irony, sarcasm, innuendo, mimicry, role-playing, hyperbole, etc. We would be left with the last six (justifiably) defiant words proclaimed from serious mode in bona-fide, yet intentionally ungrammatical speech: "But I ain't goin' never forget." This seriousness is incongruous with the playfulness preceding it, indeed, a playfulness that lasted for the entire performance. The audience has been encouraged to follow Pryor to the end, tarry along with him through his portrayal of the many tribulations that continue to affect black people in the U.S., and joyfully listen to him expose the white population's purposeful neglect of this past that is causally related to the present. Through all of this, and after the very last serious line, the audience is with him and laughing *with* him. But this is not merely the laughter of delight—it is a revealing, consciousness-raising mirth that gets audiences thinking about important matters that would otherwise remain buried.[359]

iii. Chris Rock on Subtle Linguistic Stereotypes

Recall from Chapters 1 and 2 the account of normalized language that subtly constrains oppressed people through stereotype and cliché. Such language is so common that it hardly reaches one's consciousness when used, and yet can be extremely effective at sustaining an unjust system. This is so even when the language appears to be complimentary toward an individual who has (unexpectedly) accomplished something. Consider the example of faulty heuristics regarding racial oppression experienced by the *successful black* psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, and thus someone seen as an *exception* to the rule, as described by Lewis Gordon: "We see here the logic of rule and exception, where the system could be maintained in spite of individual progress:

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[359] This paragraph is an adaptation and extension from (Kramer 2013).

regarding an achieved black person as an exception to a rule of black inferiority only maintains

the rule. The logic is preserved through an inversion with whites: a white person's failure is

treated as an exception to the rule of white superiority" (Gordon 2011, 21). To help put this into

perspective, I appeal to comedian Chris Rock to make the point more *explicit*.

> Colin Powell can't be president … whenever Colin Powell's on the news white people always give him the same compliments, 'How do you feel about Colin Powell?' 'He speaks so well', 'he's so well spoken', 'he speaks so well', 'I mean, he really speaks well', 'he speaks so well'. Like that's a compliment! Speaks so well's not a compliment; speaks so well's some shit you say about retarded people that can talk. What do you mean he speaks so well?…He's a fucking educated man, how the fuck do you expect him to sound? You dirty motherfuckers, what're you talking about? 'Speaks so well', What voice were you looking to come out of his mouth? What the fuck did you expect him to sound like? 'I'm gonna drop me abomb ta-day, I be pres-o-dent', get the fuck out of here. (Rock, quoted in Weaver 40)

Rock is attacking "subtle white racist attitudes to black vernacular and linguistic competence", as

sociologist Simon Weaver puts it,[360] through mimicking comments directed at Colin Powell. He

is exposing the stereotypes wielded, often nonconsciously and maybe even with the best of

intentions, against black speech; namely, that it is not the norm, it is not expected to fit into the

dominant discourse. Colin Powell can *only* be seen as an "articulate" exception to the rule of

black ignorance; a rule that is sustained by the subtle "compliment", because he is viewed as an

anomaly.

But Rock reveals that it is more complex than that, and does so somewhat

controversially. In the performance, he amusingly juxtaposes the language of well-meaning, but

condescending whites, with the well-meaning, yet condescending language people often use to

describe the unexpected linguistic capacities of a person who is mentally disabled.[361] Rock shows

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[360] It is important to note in relation to worries of misinterpreting subversive humor in a racist or stereotypical fashion, that Weaver claims that "a racist reading would need to distance itself completely from Rock's preferred meaning, perhaps by concentrating on the final line of the quote, which impersonates the stereotypical depiction of Powell" (Weaver 40-1). But in the larger context the "outright mockery of white racist attitudes" reduces the likelihood of that interpretation.

[361] Rock's politically incorrect use of "retarded" might have been replaced with something else less offensive, and maintained both the point and the humor, although, it is not obvious what substitutions might have worked. Perhaps making the comparison to "2 year-olds that can talk" would do. This example also reveals the complexities of privilege and oppression; while Rock is a member of an oppressed group, he, like Pryor before him, is prone to use oppressive language against others who have less power than he does.

whites how they themselves see blacks, even as the whites fail to recognize that this is the frame

through which they define blacks—as mentally deficient and childlike.[362] So the privileged whites

can remain complacent as their system-justifying stereotypes are still "accurate"—we can't be

racist if we are saying something that is positive *and* true—Colin Powell *is* articulate. But in

Grice's vernacular, the implicature, at least understood by black people and hopefully white

audiences after this performance, is that "so well-spoken" is patronizing not uplifting when

attributed to a "fucking educated *man*" who might potentially run for the most powerful office in

the world.

Rock is making salient to whites in general a very common experience of black people

that, when taken individually, appears harmless, but when black people are constantly confronted

with such comments (see Yancy 2012), it starts to become a problem. He is showing that the

problem is with white *willful* ignorance, not black ignorance as such. But if this is a case of

implicit stereotyping that slips out against the person's explicit desires, and one has *consciously*

professed good intentions, then how can Rock's abusive language be justified? I would say the

reasons are the same for CK's use of "assholes". They are not calling out individuals in the crowd

for ridicule,[363] presuming some degree of superiority over them. Both comedians are addressing

very serious matters from a playful attitude, and they remain within in this mode and the audience

recognizes this, which places them in a similar attitude. This is seen in his hyperbolic

denunciation of those who use such putative compliments. The incongruity between the claim by

whites that is ostensibly merely a *faux pas*, and the "dirty motherfucker" rebuttal to the infraction

can be interpreted as Rock leaving the playful realm of creative and imaginative construction, and

sinking into a spirit of seriousness and even perpetuating a negative stereotype against "the angry

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A charitable interpretation of this performance would be to read his use of the inappropriate term as part of
the general attack of stereotypes. But the ambiguity here reveals a worry with using humor as subversion.
[362] These stereotypes have a long history. See (Cowen 1-2, 8).
[363] However, in some cases even this is permitted and enjoyed by those very audience members who have
been "lucky" enough to have seats up front, in *shooting* range of the comedian. This is especially so if it is
a known insult comic.

black man", or it can be treated as a performance in which he means what he says in one sense, but is being obviously hyperbolic in another. The seeming extreme nature of the insult in response to the innocuous condescension shocks the audience in a way direct argument would not—it shows them that it is not innocuous after all—and really, they already know this.

III.   "World"-Travelling Through Subversive Humor

According to Maria Lugones, "World-travelling" is a capacity to access or come to know[364] the multiple and complex constructions of oneself or the "self" of another. The bulk of this section will be an argument that subversive humor can allow for non-ontologically expansive world-traveling among privileged audiences, even though "being-whitely" is always a concern whenever the powerful travel geographically, biographically, linguistically, or even chronologically, as discussed in the CK bit. I made note of this worry in Chapter 1 on Lugones' description of what I have been referring to as ontological expansiveness, in this case with respect to world-traveling: it is a "maximal way of being at ease" (Lugones 90). Sullivan provides additional situations in which privileged people with the best of intentions travel to other cultures and end up commodifying, fetishizing and/or exoticizing them. This ends up meeting the interests or furthering the comfort and ease of those privileged travelers rather than inclining them to learn anything deep about other people, much less work toward ameliorating their oppressive situation.[365]

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[364] Here "knowledge" can imply the traditional true, justified, belief triad, but without the presumption of objective, one-dimensional certainty *felt* by those who presume to know all there is to know about those whom they stereotype. Indeed, Lugones' point is that the better we come to know another person, or ourselves, the more we come to the recognition, like cosmologists studying the vast universe, that there is so much more mysterious, open-ended, and *surprising* about other subjects. In short, we come to see that our knowledge is incomplete (see Lugones 88, 97), and as long as we adopt a playful attitude, this ignorance is not paralyzing, but in fact, thought and act-inducing.

[365] On issues concerning the commodification/exoticization due to urban gentrification of inner cities where jazz and soul food, e.g., can be consumed by whites but now with police protection against the "bad blacks", see (Sullivan 2006, 126). For the commodification and exoticization of Native American culture, see (Sullivan 2006, 133). For an account of ontological expansion of an oblivious white tour bus trip to a black church in Harlem where the church is described to the tourists as if it were a wild zoo with exotic inhabitants see (Sullivan 2006, 164 Quoting Patricia Williams).

One response to dismiss such concerns regarding subversive humor, is to claim that when whites *tour* in this way, it does not really constitute "traveling" in Lugones' (nor my) sense, in much the same way that racist and sexist jokes fail to constitute humor even though they seem to meet many of the conditions necessary for wit. But they, like the ontologically expansive world-traveler, lack the sort of playfulness promoted in previous chapters, and both take on the role of the arrogant perceiver/tourist for whom all spaces, language, and *worlds* should be (by natural or divine right) freely and *comfortably* available to them. But to see the importance of playfulness in traveling, we need a clearer understanding of world-traveling and how subversive humor can facilitate it.

Lugones is influenced by Arthur Danto's use of "world" in aesthetics where he analyzes the lived spaces (worlds) of a woman who uses these spaces to express feminist viewpoints, e.g. These subversive spaces are inhabited within a dominant culture (another world), but they imaginatively and symbolically express a transgression of the conventions and expectations of that culture. To the extent that those conscious only of the hegemonic world finally come to explicitly see (through world travelling) the world(s) inhabited by the marginalized, they are described as "'individuals whose feelings and thoughts will be modified upon grasping the meanings conveyed or transformed by the expressions'" (Lugones 23, quoting Danto). Lugones examines the notion of worlds and traveling among them in the context of her own experiences of being viewed as playful by some people and constructed as unplayful by others. That is, she comes to experience "ontological confusion" based upon the different worlds she inhabits and the contradictory attributes she might have among them. She does not always understand the ways in which she has been constructed in some worlds, and in others she does, but refuses to accept it.[366]

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[366] In the same way, Yancy describes his encounter with the white woman in the elevator who visually constructs him but in a way he does not see himself. This creates the negative side of double consciousness: "I feel trapped. I no longer feel bodily expansiveness within the elevator, but am corporeally constrained, limited. I now begin to calculate, paying almost neurotic attention to my body movements, making sure that this 'black object', what now feels like an appendage, a weight, is not too close, not too tall, not too threatening. 'Double layers of self-awareness must interrogate the likely meanings that will be attributed to

These are each worlds to which one can travel back and forth, and importantly, they remain "purposely incomplete" (Lugones 88; see also Gordon 2000, 88, and Chapter 4, section I above). This is in part due to the dynamic complexity and interaction among them, some of which are happily inhabited, others are stereotypically constructed, but all of which constitute the *bundle of worlds*, to borrow from Hume, which is the ever-changing self.

In the context of this dissertation, the world-traveler or the wit who seeks to cultivate world-travelling in others, promotes a positive form of what W.E.B. Du Bois calls "double consciousness."[367] I contrast the positive with the negative because Du Bois' original conception seems to have both. In one sense, this way of seeing is forced upon the oppressed and is clearly negative. Hence, Du Bois asserts that "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois 3).[368] But to be able to see oneself as others see you can also be a desirable capacity, because along with such multidimensional seeing comes an epistemic advantage lacking in those who have no need nor desire to see as others do, especially if the vision of the others happens to be from below where

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every utterance, gesture, action one takes.' Thus, she challenges my act of pressing my meaning into service which would function to counter her interpretations, even as I am cognizant of what I intend" (Yancy 2008, 858-9, quoting Linda Alcoff).

[367] Or, following Lugones, we might refer to it as "multi-consciousness." This is a mild point of contention Lugones has with Danto's conception of "possible worlds" in relation to the actual world. Regarding the latter, Danto fails "to understand that world in its tense multiplicity" (Lugones 25). Furthermore, and related to my arguments regarding the real-world implications of the moral intuitions primed in humorous thought experiments, Lugones does not interpret "worlds" in a wholly symbolic, merely logically possible construction. She evaluates social reality "in terms of multiple actual worlds… [comprised of] flesh and blood people" (Lugones 25, 87). In this way, Lugones' approach to overcoming oppression is similar to Gordon's confrontation with anti-black racism, which he views as "a form of bad faith because it is an effort to evade facing human beings in their ambiguity or, as we prefer, in the flesh" (Gordon 1999, 136).

[368] In a related way, Lugones argues that "all people who have been subordinated, exploited, and enslaved have been forced to travel to 'worlds' in which they animate subordinate beings" (Lugones 17, 77). But she notes earlier that "your having that double consciousness about yourself in space is transgressive" (9). Moreover, this advantaged perspective assists in resistance to oppression: "Ironically, however, it may be political groups on the fringes that best appreciate and understand the mainstreams of culture in this country. Outsiders often have a clearer vision of the center than those deep within it, and for years these activists have been using their vantage point to observe how fantasy and spectacle are used by spinmeisters and marketers before trying such tactics themselves" (Duncombe 24; see also Johanson 31 on fantasy and humor against oppression).

one perceives that the promises of our explicit ideals are constantly being implicitly broken.[369]

Du Bois is clear that this divided self can be debilitating and that one desires to "merge his double self into a better and truer self" (3), but he is adamant about the worries of assimilation,[370] and adds that "He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (Du Bois 3). Since the doors of opportunity are now more subtly closed, or at the very least much more difficult to open for black people due to many of the hidden pressures covered in previous chapters, fostering a positive form of double consciousness in those who are stopping the door can be helpful.[371] It can

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[369] This epistemic privilege also provides a further psychological boon when the world-traveling involves a playful humorous attitude, as it places the oppressed in the appropriate cognitive and emotional distance to better handle an extremely difficult situation, and it provides them with the recognition that they are not essentially inferior and cannot have their freedom completely stolen. These points can only be hinted at here, but the psychological benefits of adopting a humorous attitude are connected with epistemic privilege possessed by the oppressed who have been forced to use the language of the oppressors: "'When you have mastered the dominant discourse but are still able to stand apart from it (in the margin), you are in the best, most informed position to critique it.' In this way, the 'stigma' usually associated with 'marked' or marginal individuals may be transformed rhetorically into a critical lens" (Gilbert quoting P.H. Collins 5, see also 33). So, part of the psychological buffer that humor provides is the social insight which is cultivated by the inclination and skill of recognizing moral incongruities.

[370] Young also looks at the harmful and empowering aspects of this multi-perspectivity: "Double consciousness arises when the oppressed subject refuses to coincide with these devalued, objectified, stereotyped, visions of herself or himself. While the subject desires recognition as human, capable of activity, full of hope and possibility, she receives from the dominant culture only the judgment that she is different, marked, or inferior… Double consciousness, then, occurs because one finds one's being defined by two cultures: a dominant and a subordinate culture. Because they can affirm and recognize one another as sharing similar experiences and perspectives on social life, people in imperialized groups can often maintain a sense of positive subjectivity" (Young 60; see Watkins 68-9 and Alcoff 44 for a similar positive description).

[371] For an analysis of double consciousness in the context of subtle racism, see (Yancy 2008, 847, 858). Yancy's analysis of raising white consciousness regarding racism in the context of the quotidian can be informed by Lear's account of Kierkegaardian irony in which the subject becomes *unsettled* or *disrupted* upon recognizing the gap between the social construction of one's identity, and one's commitment to an egalitarian self. That is, the experience of irony, according to Lear, occurs when there "is a peculiar form of detachment *from the social pretense*" (Lear 278). See also (Lear 272, and 273-4, 280) on his view of irony fostering a sense of the uncanny, where the familiar is rendered unfamiliar and strange. This weirdness is less likely to be felt if one accepts only the social pretense as reality. In the terms used in this dissertation, if one remains in a spirit of seriousness, epistemically closed, then one is less inclined to shift or detach from the constructed roles of self and other. To use one of Lear's examples, one fails to understand the difference between the following questions, only one of which is ironic assuming some degree of pretense: "'Among all Christians, is there a Christian? 'and 'Among all the ducks, is there a duck?'" (Lear 270-1). His point is that ducks do not put on airs.

reveal to them not only how they actually see difference, but how, from the perspective of the marginalized, they *should*.[372] Such multivalent seeing uncovers the complexities of other subjects—human beings who cannot be summed up through stereotype and cliché. This reduces one's inclination toward seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and complacency.

So in that sense, it is also beneficial for the privileged person as it contributes to self-monitoring—an aid to *knowing thyself*, or to having true justified beliefs about oneself and others.[373] It offers the professed egalitarian the opportunity to align her moral and epistemic ideals with her habitual mode of being, as the successful subversive wit provides the stage (mental spaces) upon which one can be *conscious* of both. Importantly, consciousness-raising in this way can also inculcate in the privileged audience an acceptance of tension even when that discomfort competes with one's desire for complacency, ease, and the feelings of certitude. Addressing both a spirit of seriousness and ontological expansiveness, "As John Dewey explains, 'the quest for certainty is a quest for peace which is assured, an object which is unqualified by risk.' A settled way of transacting with the world seeks to eliminate the uncertainty of change and finds comfort in the lack of movement, understood both psychologically and geographically" (Sullivan 2006, 153). A subversive wit can summon this epistemic openness to cognitive dissonance, and yet incline one to world-travel in an "ontologically confused" (as opposed to "expansive") but potentially illuminating manner.

In contrast to a logic[374] of purity in which ambiguity, unclassifiability, and "ontological confusion" (Lugones 86) are avoided, subversive humor uses what Lugones calls "curdled logic"

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[372] Not coincidentally, this capacity is commonly found among humorists see Morreall 1999, 4-6; Roberts 142; Hazlitt 65).

[373] "Rather than seeking the wholeness of the self, we who are the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we are heterogeneous and multiple in our affiliations and desires. Social movement practices of consciousness raising, I note, offer beginning models of methods of revolutionizing the subject" (Young 124). To adopt a point from Yancy, subversive humor "provides an opportunity to have [the privileged person's] identity challenged, cracked and rendered ambiguous, a form of uncertainty that begins to expand her sense of interpersonal possibilities and moral imagination" (Yancy 2008, 868). See also (Gordon 2000, 93; Lear 290; and Chapter 4, section I above).

[374] Or "politics of purity" (Monahan 2011).

which favors dynamism, permeable boundaries among "worlds", and the creation of tensions which lay the groundwork for "epistemic shift[ing]" among multiple views, thereby pacifying "aggressive ignorance" (Lugones 18).[375] I follow Lugones' perspective on resisting oppression: "My perspective is in the midst of people mindful of the tensions, desires, closures, cracks, and openings that make up the social" (Lugones 5), and that it is a "playful attitude" that allows us to "Notic[e] the tensions from within a logic of resistance [that] enables one to acquire a multiple sensing, a multiple perceiving, a multiple sociality" (Lugones 11). From the perspectives of the oppressed *and* the privileged, this double consciousness provides an "awareness of the possibility of an alternative situation—that [the oppressed] has a perspective on the world, that he [or she] is a human being" (Gordon 1999, 134-5; see also nt. 338 above on Douglass' witty role reversal). Moreover, when this multi-vision comes about from playful subversive humor, it stands as a "protest in the face of mistreatment [that] signals the victim's refusal to comply with such manipulations of their intellectual and moral judgment. They know they have a right to fairer treatment and their protests convey that they have not been intimidated or browbeaten into thinking otherwise" (Harvey 1999, 77).[376] The epistemic privilege possessed by the oppressed can be seen as a necessity for survival,[377] but this does not entail that insight into social incongruities is only possible for those in subordinate positions. Du Bois' (not Rawls') "veil of ignorance" can be lifted by privileged but professed egalitarians even if they are inclined toward a spirit of seriousness.

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[375] By "aggressive ignorance" I understand Lugones to mean the same thing, or very nearly the same, as Mills' "collective amnesia", or Yancy's "structured blindness" 2008, 862, or Gordon's "willful non-seeing" and "epistemic closure." The similarities between Lugones' "curdled logic" and playfulness in thought discussed in the previous chapters should be apparent. See especially (Chapter 3, section II).

[376] See also (Morreall 1983, 101; 1999, 28-9) on the "liberating effect of humor."

[377] Quoting Weldon Johnson, Mills notes that "'colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them.' Often for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists, studying the strange culture, customs, and mind-set of the 'white tribe' that has such frightening power over them that in certain time periods can even determine their life or death on a whim'" (Mills 2007, 17-18). Lugones asserts the same: "I think that most of us who are outside the mainstream of, for example, the United States dominant construction or organization of life are 'world' travelers as a matter of necessity and of survival" (Lugones 88). But survival in this sense relies upon a non-solipsistic world-view. Unlike the privileged, the marginalized do not have the luxury of assuming theirs is the only valid perspective on reality.

While I agree with Mel Watkins, quoting Alan Dundes, that "'the American Negro has had subtlety and irony forced upon his art…the consequences of split vision—the ability (or, for Du Bois, an enforced burden) to see oneself and others from multiple perspectives'" (Watkins 27, 68), I think this ability (and burden) can also be shared (Yancy 2008, 860-2); it is what the successful subversive humorist facilitates but in an eye-opening, collaborative way. For example, Glenda Carpio quotes John Limon on some of Pryor's socio-political performances:

> Audience members – at the very least, blacks and whites--laugh from different perspectives and "in and out of symmetry"…. In this and other performances…black folk "see themselves as whites see them," in the tradition of double consciousness articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois, "but they like what they see," and whites "now see themselves from the outside as well; but they are content, for the length of the occasion, to lend their mechanical bodies to the comic machinery." Blacks and whites "laugh from different positions that go in and out of symmetry," argues Limon, but "they all laugh." (Carpio 74)

"Symmetry" can have many meanings, but I think in this context it refers to the bonding (see Koziski 68) fostered by Pryor's performance, in which seriousness is literally cracked through the contagious smiles and laughter witnessed in the audience. Blacks and whites in that same audience still have their own perspectives, but they are reinterpreted through a non-dominant frame.[378] For many in the crowd this might be the first time such seeing has happened, and although the perspective adjustment might be brief, often that is all that is needed to raise consciousness. Though rhetorical, it is the first step in protest against an unjust situation.[379] This is not a passive audience who sleepily, antipathetically absorbs vacuous content, but a collaborating, participating multitude that can now "see" from a

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[378] "When in one 'world I animate, for example, that 'world's' caricature of the person I am in the other 'world.' I can have both images of myself, and to the extent that it can materialize and animate both images at the same time, I can become an ambiguous being. This is very much a part of trickery and foolery. It is worth remembering that the trickster and the fool are significant characters in many nondominant or outsider cultures. One then sees any particular 'world' with these double edges and sees absurdity in them and so inhabits oneself differently" (Lugones 91-2; see also Boskin and Dorinson 85-6 on the "wise fool" exposing the pretense of the self-righteous).

[379] "The first essential element in successful resistance is raising consciousness about particular cases of oppression and building a moral case against them" (Cudd 201). For Cudd, this is both a theoretical and rhetorical endeavor, but it is no less effective for being so: "Rhetoric is both a cognitive and affective strategy that challenges stereotypes of oppressed groups and the false consciousness that accompanies oppression, and persuades and motivates change" (Cudd 202; see also Gilbert 177-9 and Basu 388 on the persuasiveness of humorous rhetoric).

common ground *that was always already there,* even if they each came into the

performance from very different "worlds." The humorist encourages a playful attitude, "the

attitude of play that is an openness to surprise and that inclines us to 'world'-travel in the

direction of deep coalition" (Lugones 98). Pleasurable collaboration, non-threatening

playfulness, and insight into social incongruities through imaginative thought experiment,

are all part of the subversive wit's battery. These are civilized tools that provide

opportunities for "Constructions of 'playlike worlds' visited in a reflexive mental state

outside the confines of objective social life [that] may represent the ideal culture America

falls short of achieving" (Koziski 71).[380]

i.   Dave Chappelle on Ontological Expansiveness and Epistemic Privilege

I will close this chapter with one more example that illustrates the epistemically

privileged and insightful eye of the marginalized but also the point of view of the humorist,

who sees incongruities and can draw others to their viewpoint for the moment in order to

"share his or her perspective" (Roberts 133). It comes from a standup performance by Dave

Chappelle. In it he humorously *understates* through a narrative example the obvious fact

(among black people in the U.S. today) that black men have to be extremely socially aware

of their surroundings, how they carry themselves, and how they might appear to others, in

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[380] Although there is not space to make the argument explicit, the preceding stands as a defense of Robert Roberts' claim that humor constitutes a virtue. Roberts views most humor as resulting from incongruity, and proposes that humor is a moral virtue on the basis of the insight it provides: "The concept of virtue is thus the concept of a congruity between one's character and one's nature, and thus of the live possibility of lacking congruity between character and nature—of falling short of one's telos. Given this, one form of humor closely connected with the virtues would be a representation of moral failures as incongruities" (Roberts 130). I would phrase the point differently: the world and our place in it is rarely the way we would wish it to be. Since it is very difficult to achieve the desired congruence between our (moral) desires and reality, individually or culturally, it is clear that there is the real possibility of a perceived incongruence between the way things are and the way we think they ought to be. Such recognition leads to entertaining what it would be like if my actual "character", or the "character" of the nation, were congruous with our respective consciously professed goals. In many ways this is the starting point of all moral thinking. Without the perception of inequality or injustice, for instance, there would be no impetus to make an effort to change the world or self for the better. So a moral failure would constitute an incongruity, and this will more likely be acknowledged by the individual who has cultivated a sense of humor, or one who has been cajoled into a playful attitude, for many of the reasons offered in this dissertation.

particular to police officers. By extension, they also need to be wary of how others think

and behave around them. There is not space to offer the entire presentation here, but the

following is the crux in which Chappelle and his white friend "Chip" are high on marijuana

as they notice the police nearby:

> "[Chip shouts] Dave! It's the goddamn cops [then Chappelle as Chip, takes a long *comfortable* drag on a joint, and in Chip's voice] I'm gonna ask him for directions"…[the cop tells Chip to move on after giving him the directions. Then, Chappelle in his own voice] That's all that happened, that's the end of the story. Now, I know that's not amazing to some of you, but you ask one of these black fellas here, that shit is fucking incredible. A black man would never dream of talking to the police high. That is a waste of weed. (Chappelle *Killin' Them Softly*, 2000)[381]

The humorous retelling of this common occurrence stands as an instance of consciousness-

raising. It reveals that there is a marked difference between whites and blacks regarding how they

carry themselves, and that this is not a worry found only in a racist past. Rarely do white parents

have to instruct their children on how to act around the police or in department stores for fear of

being watched and accused. To borrow from Chris Rock, white parents have no worries that they

or their children will ever be guilty of "shopping while *white*" or "driving while *white*", as being

white automatically expands the spatio-temporal freedoms for that person: there is virtually no

place or way of being that is off-limits to them.[382]

Chappelle notices realities about both blacks and whites calling to mind Dubois' double

consciousness. White audience members, again perhaps for the first time, come to see the *absurd*

ease with which they get to navigate through social spaces in the midst of power in contrast to the

absurd difficulty marginalized people constantly experience. Of course, there is playfulness here,

even though he presents the story as one might retell it to a friend documenting certain routine

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[381] For this example, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaHudA-39xo. Accessed 5/15/2013. This performance cannot be properly described without viewing it. Interestingly, I have not been able to determine whether "Chip" is actually one of Chappelle's friends or if this is an instance of the comedian "making shit up." As noted in section II above on thought experiments, to be overly concerned about the fictional nature of the ontologically expansive friend is to miss the point. There is not space for a discussion of the history of "weed" and its criminalization, although that is a relevant history here.

[382] However, if you fit the profile of a black teen, which is already to be "guilty" of something, then even walking down a street (unarmed) can lead to being killed by police. The very recent shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri will likely stand as one among way too many cases in point.

facts, this is still part of a performance, and not all of the normal rules of conversation apply. In this way, as a comedian he is granted some degree of immunity with respect to his language and especially his presumption of police brutality and subsequent cover-up through planting drugs on the black victim.[383] But it would be odd to deny the accuracy of the ultimate message. What Chappelle is describing is not something new especially for black males, and it *should not* be news for whites either, but due to many of the occluding factors discussed here, the reality of the situation has not seemed to filter through—even with the numerous *video-taped* cases of police brutality against black males. Notice also that he ends the performance with "that's it. That's the end of the story." Chappelle simply recounts what is to him a rather mundane, everyday-type experience. But through his comedic performance, we are encouraged to take another (or a first) look at something that has always been right in front of us—invisible in plain sight until expressed in a manner that can evoke the desire to listen—to hear the other person out.

IV.   Conclusion

The title of this chapter, "The *Art* of Subversive Humor", is multiply ambiguous because it conveys that such humor is aesthetic, pleasurable in and of itself, and not amenable to scientific dissection.[384] But it is also a skill that can be honed into a powerful tool of persuasion in circumstances where arguments and scientific data, e.g., are less effective. The latter are reputably (or notoriously) objective, straightforward, intentionally abstracting from particulars in the effort to avoid bias, emotionality, and subjectivity. These direct approaches have their place, but they are ill suited by themselves to raise consciousness about the lived experiences of those suffering under systematic oppression and even less effective at world travelling.

The use of subversive humor against oppression is not without its problems. Since such humor can be viewed as a weapon, and these sorts of weapons can be misunderstood and misused due to inbuilt ambiguity, they can potentially backfire, and undermine the laudable intentions of

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[383] This is from the same skit, just a few moments after the portion quoted above.

[384] See Harris and Rabinovich's quotation from E.B. White (Chapter 3 nt. 169 above).

the subversives. While there are similar worries of misunderstanding and misappropriation of the resister's weapons with other approaches to combating oppression, the purposeful introduction of confusion, hyperbole, and absurdity is unique to subversive humor.[385] Relatedly, the harsh language used by many subversive humorists is abusive on one level, and if the audience is not properly primed to engage their play mode, that might be the *only* level of understanding. But the forceful language is also expressive rather than directly adversarial when viewed from a playful attitude. Granted, there is a fine line here, but when in play mode, the audience is better able to distinguish between these senses, and will be less likely to take offense, at least with the cases offered here in which they are paying to hear a performance.

Part of what helps the humorist make this connection with their audiences is the very thing that can be potentially problematic--use of incongruity, dissonance, and even absurdity. The inclination to collaborate with the wit in an effort to understand and enjoy the humor, disposes the audience to help play with the multi-faceted meanings available, and to think creatively and critically within the constructed fictional spaces. But the non-existentially seriousness opens the eyes of the participants to a fact that transcends the joke-frame in a similar way that moral truths, e.g., within a thought experiment can apply beyond the logically possible world to this world. Such humor allows us to see in a novel way how a patent absurdity has been ignored or purposely hidden. Moreover, borrowing from Sorensen, "It [is] not necessary to invent new absurdities, because reality in itself [is] absurd enough" (182), and the subversive humorist makes this incongruity salient in a manner that encourages self-reflection and potentially attitude change. We come to see that an element of social reality within the context of the quotidian is hardly innocuous, frivolous, or mundane. Indeed, through a subversive humorous rendering, we come to *properly* see, as Chappelle puts it, that "that shit is fucking incredible."

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[385] The use of art, poetry, and music in opposition to subjugation might have similar issues.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have addressed one way in which resistance to the psychological harms of civilized oppression is possible. Since the harms of such oppression are rarely obvious, even to those who are oppressed, and since the marginalization is systemic and persistent in everyday interactions non-consciously transmitted by well-meaning people, some kind of consciousness-raising is needed. Traditional means of protest seem insufficient to this task. These direct approaches are less effective when the goal is to uncover systemic problems and then change the implicit biases, cultural essentializing stereotypes, and subtle racist attitudes that sustain psychological harms. The commitments to a given world-view that privileges oneself often defy logic and counter-evidence, and since these attitudes are rarely adopted consciously through direct argumentation initially, a less direct avenue to uprooting them is needed. For many reasons, I argue that subversive humor can be such an approach.

Laws prohibiting explicit discrimination and violence against others solely on the basis of race or gender are clearly improvements toward a more just society. But these legal remedies have not eradicated the underlying biases and stereotypes which remain causally effective on behavior even for people who consciously profess egalitarianism and a desire to pursue truth. For most people today, there is the long-term goal of egalitarianism and truth-seeking, but at the same time, though not always consciously advanced, there are the competing goals of comfort, complacency, and maintenance of a status quo that favors the privileged. The spirit of seriousness, ontological expansiveness, and cultural stereotypes feed only the latter goal of self-satisfaction among the privileged. The reciprocal relationship among those mechanisms of oppression creates a feedback loop of willful ignorance that is difficult to expose, much less break.

However, when one is in play mode, as opposed to the default serious mode, and especially a spirit of seriousness, one is more inclined to adopt multiple perspectives, think

creatively and openly about oneself and others, and recognize potential errors in one's own (and others') system of beliefs. More to the point, in play mode, one is more likely to recognize an incongruity between one's professed ideals and one's actual thought and behavior; something that is usually ignored by privileged people. In all humor, some degree of playfulness is necessary, while attempts at humor that perpetuate rather than undermine stereotypes, e.g., are not playful in the sense I use the term here. Playfulness implies freedom of thought in which rules and hierarchies are viewed as contingent and malleable rather than necessary and inviolate, as assumed under a spirit of seriousness. The subversive humorist relies upon a playful attitude in her audience, but she also can help to facilitate such an attitude through the use of humor primarily by exploiting our robust yearning for mirth. There are many types of playfulness, but the play that is inculcated and then used in humor is especially addictive and positively rewarding—as opposed to most addictions. The desire for dis-ease through tensions caused by humor overrides the desire for comfort and "cognitive ease" when in a spirit of seriousness.

When we experience humor, we are being compensated for doing the work needed to recognize a flaw in our heuristic system, as argued for in Chapters 3 and 4. False beliefs or erroneous expectations are exposed through humor, and this sort of mirthful mind-candy becomes self-replicating and can foster a humorous attitude in people who want to make sense of their situation. This presents an incentive to pay attention, if not hang on every word of the humorist, and reach the end of a joke that provides unexpected meaning to a seemingly absurd set-up. This is so even if the humor acts as a "social corrective", as Henri Bergson (18, 46, 91) puts it, for one's own rigid behavior. In contrast to Bergson, by "correction" I have in mind the disclosing of errors that sustain an unjust social system and the prideful thoughts and behavior of privileged people who tenaciously hold onto the mystifications of the serious.

There is a major distinction between the mystifications of the serious and the socio-political imaginative protests of the marginalized. Those in the "borderlands" between the dominant and subordinate spheres politically, socially, linguistically, have a greater insight into

social truths related to those very grey, dynamic, complex, "curdled" spaces, and so too do subversive humorists. The subversive wits are not merely playing with words, ideas, or their audiences. They are not lying, even though we know they are joking. They are not unconcerned with justification of beliefs, even though they flout the rules of logic, language, society, and especially, hierarchy. To be sure, they are *playing*, but they are non-existentially serious about the content of their humor. They are interested in raising awareness *and* fomenting change. The tools of humor allow for this as they present the "case" in a non-bona-fide, indirect, playful, imaginative, and yet persuasive manner. It is not pure fantasy untethered to reality; indeed, it starts from that very real, lived, phenomenological experience of the oppressed. It starts with the facts, but as Douglass and Pryor, e.g., show us, we already had (or certainly should have had) these facts from the start. In this way, they reverse the role of that *played* by the mystifiers in a spirit of seriousness who invent fantasies *with no bearing on reality* to sustain a status quo, or a "fantasyland of moral approbation" (Alcoff 49).

Subversive humor reveals errors in cultural stereotypes and the epistemically and morally flawed perspectives of those in a spirit of seriousness or attitude of ontological expansiveness. Revealing and undermining such serious attitudes does not preclude a sense of playfulness. On the contrary, it is the very playful element of the subversive humorists' protest that encourages collaboration not only among all of the like-minded, consciously aware folks who see their own privileged status for what it is and habitually work toward changing the system that remains unjust largely because of that privilege, but also those who prominently display their egalitarianism but act in belief-discordant, system-justifying fashion.

Coming to recognize that there might be a glaring error in one's system of beliefs, or that one's behavior is incongruous with one's ideals (or the ideals of one's beloved nation) can be disturbing, and for that reason, one often hides behind many of the psychological ploys outlined in Chapter 2 and section I of Chapter 4. The most prevalent of these mechanisms is a variant of the first-person exceptionalism bias--a common facet of hubris--and the concomitant negative

stereotyping against those for whom the system has contributed greatly to their failure, while supporting those with privilege.

There are degrees of hubris of course: some will arrogantly boast about how they are fully responsible for all of their successes and those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame. On the other hand, it is still a manifestation of hubris when one remains willfully ignorant of one's own biases and stereotypes that adversely affect others, even as that person consciously expresses all of the positive multicultural platitudes. The latter is the most trenchant, because mostly hidden, element of the sort of oppression addressed in this dissertation. But it is also the sort of implicit attitude subversive humorists are well equipped to unveil.

The subversive humorist provides a means to detect committed stereotypical beliefs in active mental spaces, motivates appropriate emotions in the audience, collaboratively flouts conventions and engages the audience to find/create meaning in non-bona-fide, indirect language, and as a variety of thought experiment, her humor acts as a tool of persuasion. With respect to civilized oppression, this requires cognitive shifting that would otherwise be unpleasant and perhaps even humiliating if it came about through a direct, lecture-like fashion by someone else. That is, it is much harder to change minds and implicit attitudes wholly from the outside, so to speak, rather than encourage the individual to make the change for himself.[386] This is all the more so when the change involves some cherished and presumed fundamental element of one's identity that was never "reasoned in."

Shifting frames due to direct, forceful means places the listener on the defensive, potentially leading to an even more closed attitude, and thus, pushing one toward the "arrogant perceiver" end of the spectrum described by Marilyn Frye, rather than toward the open world-traveler sought by Maria Lugones. The latter expands rather than shrinks one's culture or world

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[386] "When he becomes aware of these inner conflicts, the conversion process has already reached an advanced state. 'If you want to conquer another man', wrote [Richard] Gregg, 'do it … by creating inside his own personality a strong new impulse that is incompatible with his previous tendency'" (Sharpe 723).

while in the playful *excursioning* mode, in that one is receptive to difference, surprise, and seeks novelty. As discussed in Chapter 3, this attitude fosters creativity, critical thinking, and an inclination to see from multiple perspectives in the positive sense of Du Bois' double consciousness (Chapter 5). Subversive humorists foster this attitude in themselves and audiences even when there is abrasiveness and other conventional rule-violations within the joke-script or imaginative thought experiment. We rightfully permit a high degree of convention-shattering for the comedian, the cultural anthropologist (Koziski) or shaman (Hurley et al). Part of this latitude also allows for collaborative meaning-making among wit and audience that is not found in most bona-fide communicative modes in which ambiguity, vagueness, omission, and hyperbole, e.g., are rarely tolerated. This collaboration places much of the task of meaning and understanding on the audience, which means that they "own" the attitude change, to the extent that it occurs, or they are "co-authors" of it, which can help alleviate the anxiety and discomfort due to a shift in perspectives. When one is playful one can discern the intentions of a speaker in ways not available in the default serious mode; meanings are not absolute and fixed, but contingent, as are the hierarchical and oppressive structures resisted by the subversive humorist.

There is more than consciousness-raising involved with many instances of subversive humor. In the examples I have covered, there is the goal of persuading audiences that something in the joke world is also true in the "real" one. In this way, it can be informative to view subversive humor as akin to, if not a species of, philosophical thought experiments in which possible worlds are constructed and comparisons are made between a case in question and the fictional case in such a way that the truth espoused by the thought experimenter can be seen as obvious, and hardly in need of strict, straightforward argumentation, after it has been imaginatively, creatively presented. Importantly, following the analyses of Mach and Gendler, the thought experiment, like subversive humor, employs the thoughts and ideas already in the mental spaces of their audiences, allowing them to "experiment with thought, so to say, at little expense" (Mach 452).

With examples of thought experiments like Gendler's *King David*, we note how one's conceptual framework can be shifted, and one's eyes opened to something one already knows, at some level, but had not heard expressed in such a way. This is especially so with subversive humor that grabs our attention and attacks the presumptions of serious, ontologically expansive people who are inclined toward remaining ignorant of their stereotypes. Subversive humor effectively pops the bubble of self-satisfied certitude, but not in a destructive, combative manner. When presented humorously, the subversives circumvent our inclination to habitually rationalize away any inconsistencies or attempt to make any counter-evidence fit our cherished opinions, or dismiss as trivial the plight of the oppressed. Subversive humorists let us see how extraordinary civilized oppression really is; not because it so rarely happens, but because it happens so much, affects so many people, and in so many everyday situations in the freest, best, and most enlightened democracy in the world. This is incongruous. To put it bluntly, borrowing again from Dave Chappelle, the subversive humorist reveals to us that "that shit is fucking incredible."

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