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Propaganda, Inequality, and Epistemic Movement

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Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr.

ABSTRACT: I analyze Jason Stanley's model for how propaganda works, paying close attention to Stanley's own rhetoric. I argue that Stanley's language be supplemented with a vocabulary that helps us to attend to what sorts of things move democratic knowers (epistemically speaking), what sorts of things do not, and why. In addition, I argue that the reasonableness necessary for considering the views of others within democratic deliberation ought to be understood, not as an empathic, but as an interactive capacity. Finally, I critique some of the ways in which Stanley speaks about the marginalized populations he aims to support.

Keywords: Propaganda, Ideology, Epistemology.

RESUMEN: Analizo el modelo debido a Jason Stanley sobre el modo en que funciona la propaganda, prestando atención en particular a la retórica del propio Stanley. Argumento la conveniencia de que el lenguaje de Stanley se complemente con un vocabulario que nos ayude a prestar atención a las cosas que motivan a los agentes de conocimiento democráticos (epistémicamente hablando), a las que no lo hacen, y por qué. Adicionalmente, argumento que la razonabilidad que se necesita para tomar en consideración los puntos de vista de otros en la deliberación democrática debería entenderse como una capacidad no de empatía, sino de interacción. Finalmente, critico alguna de las formas en que Stanley habla de las poblaciones marginadas a las que quiere dar apoyo.

Palabras clave: propaganda, ideología, epistemología.

Propaganda is rhetoric that is intended to move its audience directly to action, bypassing the capacity to deliberate. Moreover, the force of propaganda is typically not experienced as outrightly coercive but rather appears to align with the will even while it may move actors in a way that is counter to their consciously held or avowed commitments. How words are able to do so and the implications for democracy are the subject of Jason Stanley's new book, *How Propaganda Works*. Examining the ways in which language can be used propagandistically, Stanley is deeply concerned with how material inequality can render persons susceptible to the kind of propaganda that undermines democratic deliberation, and in particular can unfairly exclude from consideration the voices and concerns of materially disempowered groups. For these reasons, his analysis gives those who are working at the intersection of political philosophy, philosophy of language, and epistemology much to consider. In what follows, I first relay some of the details of Stanley's argument, paying close attention to Stanley's own rhetoric as something that might move readers in ways consonant

with or counter to the book's aim of supporting democracy. Ultimately, I recommend that Stanley's language be supplemented with a vocabulary that helps us to attend not just to what knowers believe and fail to believe when engaging in democratic deliberation mired by pernicious propaganda, but to what sorts of things *move* democratic knowers (epistemically speaking), what sorts of things do not, and why.

Emphasizing epistemic movement over belief, I argue, not only helps to keep in focus the way propaganda works, but also reveals some problems with Stanley's appeal to the need for empathy in democratic societies. Instead, I argue that the sort of reasonableness necessary for considering the views of others within democratic deliberation ought to be understood, not as an empathic, but as an interactive capacity. Finally, I critique some of the ways in which Stanley's book fails to be sufficiently interactive with regard to marginalized populations, precisely those whom the book aims to support.

Understanding propaganda (and how the language we use to understand propaganda works)

Stanley's book seeks to demonstrate the mechanisms by which propaganda, or speech that mobilizes ideals for a particular purpose (2015, 52) by way of emotion (2015, 53), operates. One of the book's main concerns is the way a particular kind of propaganda, "undermining demagoguery," impedes the principles of democratic deliberation and hence democracy itself. Undermining demagoguery, on Stanley's account, is vexing not only because it can be hard to identify, but also because it can be offered sincerely and through the use of true claims (2015, 41-46). It is, therefore, hard to identify not only when coming from others, but even presumably when spoken by oneself. The key to understanding how undermining demagoguery works, Stanley argues, is to understand the relationship of propaganda to flawed ideologies. For Stanley, an ideology is "the record of expectations of various goods built out of regularities of convention... the beliefs that unreflectively guide us through the social world." (2015, 184). In this vein, ideologies are not just sets of individual mental states, but are tied to one's self-conception, shared with others, and informed by structural features of our environment, including social structures (Stanley 2015, 185). Consequently they can be hard to shake, but might be more easily dislodged under different social conditions. This is the foundation for Stanley's argument that democracy requires material equality, since, on his account, the structural conditions of material inequality give rise to flawed ideologies that make citizens susceptible to undermining demagoguery, which works to impede democratic deliberation by using terms and phrases that implicitly contradict the ideals to which they explicitly appeal (Stanley, 2015, 158-162).

Because undermining propaganda works through implication, the speaker can distance herself from the undermining aspect of her speech by contending that she is only forwarding the explicit at-issue content of what she says. On the one hand, the explicit content of undermining propaganda will appeal to an ideal the propagandist expressly avows and may even sincerely avow. On the other hand, undermining propaganda will do so by use of language that implicitly relies upon and encourages conventions that undermine the expressed ideal (Stanley 2015, 168- 169). Because the undermining aspect of the propagandist's speech is contained in the habits of mind and conventional associations that certain words trigger it can remain hidden even to the propagandist herself. In this fashion undermining demagoguery is able to mobilize and entrench in citizens conventions that are anti-demo-

cratic, while keeping this fact out of the public sphere and away from democratic scrutiny. For example, pundits in the U.S. who call for measures to stop voter fraud in order to secure fair elections may gain audience because of a flawed ideology in white citizens that associates fraud with blackness and brownness while associating fair elections and citizenry with whiteness. This flawed ideology has a long history in the United States, one that not only undermines fairness, but also ignores the history of voter suppression in the U.S. in the service of white supremacy. Without even mentioning race, calls to stop voter fraud can mobilize and solidify racist associations and active ignorances while shielding them from public debate, since the explicit content of the claim appeals simply to fairness. Another example that illustrates this mechanism is the "no special rights campaign," which in 1991 successfully added to the charter of Cincinnati, Ohio an amendment explicitly prohibiting the creation of laws that would ban discrimination against gays and lesbians. Here, the contradiction in passing an amendment securing special rights for heterosexuals on the basis of an appeal to "no special rights" was masked by an ideology that perceives gays and lesbians as a "special interest" group in contrast to heterosexuals, who are perceived simply as "normal."

However, these examples (and almost all of the examples in Stanley's book) may operate in a way that does not allow us to fully understand the force of undermining propaganda insofar as the flawed ideologies that support them may be too easy for readers to reject. The advantage of illustrating undermining propaganda with such examples is that one can clearly identify the contradictions within them and so analyze the mechanisms by which they work. The disadvantage of such examples is that they do not give readers any insight into how we ourselves might be taken in by (and even make) claims that undermine the ideals our claims express. In other words, I think Stanley's insistence on what he calls the sincerity condition (i.e. that propaganda may be spoken sincerely) could do more work to make readers who agree with him more self-reflective. If we are to be more reflective in our judgments and less taken in by undermining propaganda, it is important to consider examples that help not just to highlight the way undermining propaganda undermines, but also to illuminate the force with which it is able to captivate. We might then better understand and more fully appreciate what is at work when we ourselves are swayed by undermining propaganda. For this reason, I consider another example that depends upon a flawed ideology to which I am sometimes susceptible insofar as I would like to think of myself as a person who is just even while I occupy a social position that in many ways is unjustly privileged in relation to others.

The work that Rachel McKinnon and others have been doing to point out the problems with "ally culture" (McKinnon forthcoming) reveals that the idea of being an "ally" to non-dominantly situated persons can operate as undermining propaganda. While it is important for those who do not suffer under a particular oppression to recognize and struggle with others to respond to the injustice of oppression, the term "ally" used to designate such persons often (if not always) has the effect of undermining this very task. Conversations of the following sort demonstrate the problem. Person A stands in a relation of dominance to person B but wants to work toward changing the systems of oppression that make this the case. However, because person A has lived in a position of dominance relative to person B's social position for so long, person A will at times habitually say and do things that are harmful to person B, despite person A's avowed commitments. When this happens and person B points it out, person A might respond by saying, "But I'm on your side! You know I would

never do anything to hurt you!" Person B tries to bring the conversation back to the point by saying: "But can't you see how what you just did/said is harmful?!" To which person A replies with one of the following, "I'm deeply offended and hurt by the fact that you think I'm not your ally!" or "We need to work together if we want to overcome injustice, so you really need to trust the fact that I'm your ally." or "If you can't even get along with people who support you, how are you ever going to change people who are *truly* against you?" In this example, person A is governed by a flawed ideology that insists, among other things, that recognizing the injustice of oppression entails that one is no longer part of the system that perpetuates it, a false inference held together by the term "ally."

This example reveals two additional aspects of flawed ideologies that give further insight into the way in which they can operate perniciously in the service of social power. First, I have no doubt that person A is feeling something painful at the moment person B points out the harm A has done, as I have sometimes felt when the harmful effects of my words and actions have been pointed out to me by people whom I claim and would like to support. It is worth noting however that in the face of this difficulty the dominantly situated person can fall back on habits that situate non-dominantly situated persons as responsible for all the affective labor in our interactions with one another. Second, it is worth noting that insisting on a dominantly situated person's allyship in the face of a non-dominantly situated person's claim that she was harmed is a way of keeping epistemic attention focused on the world as experienced from dominant social positions and away from the world as experienced from non-dominant social positions. These two additional points bring into focus the degree to which dominantly held flawed ideologies can govern our affective and epistemic interactions with one another in ways that maintain relations of dominance and oppression.

In contrast to the language of "allies" and "allyship" McKinnon's recommendation that we use the language of "active" and "passive" bystanders helps to keep in mind that those who are privileged in relations of dominance and oppression can still perpetuate harm even when consciously not wanting to do so (McKinnon forthcoming). McKinnon's language also helps to keep in mind that the work of struggling against injustices is ongoing and that the privileged person always has the option of walking away from this struggle. Indeed that is one of a dominantly situated person's privileges: not having to face systematic injustice. Changing the language we use to describe who we are and what we are doing is one (although not the only) way we can redirect epistemic attention in order to struggle against flawed ideologies in ourselves and others. Still, flawed ideologies have a way of keeping people on what Patricia Williams describes as "a linguistic treadmill;" as she explains, "no word I use to positively describe myself or my scholarly projects lasts more than five seconds. I can no longer justify my presence in academia, for example, with words in the English language. The moment I find some symbol of my presence in the rarefied halls of elite institutions, it gets stolen, co-opted, filled with negative meaning" (1995, 27). Williams' words remind us that there is no permanent "fix" that will ensure that our words will do what we want them to do. In other words, flawed ideologies can infiltrate and work with our language in unforeseen ways so that to resist pernicious propaganda, particularly under conditions of dominance and oppression, requires continual vigilance concerning the ways in which words move and fail to move language users to action.

Considering how to combat the sort of propaganda that undermines democracy, Stanley contends that there is *another* kind of propaganda (a "good" kind) that may be nec-

essary to dislodge (and even to undermine) obstacles to the realization of democratic ideals. This he terms "civic rhetoric," the purpose of which is to appeal to emotion in order to increase reasonableness (2015, 111), or taking the concerns of all into account. Understanding why propaganda, in the form of civic rhetoric, may be necessary in such cases requires again understanding how propaganda works in tandem with ideology. Recall that an ideology is "the record of expectations of various goods built out of regularities of convention... the beliefs that unreflectively guide us through the social world" (2015, 184). In other words, for Stanley an ideology describes the ways in which epistemic attention is generally directed and coordinated with others. These coordinated regularities and associations, or shared habits of mind, comprise our ability to make sense of the world to ourselves and others. Coordination here comes about through practice and habituation; it is also facilitated through structural features of one's environment, including social structures. Democratic deliberation is also supposed to be a kind of coordinating, although here it involves (ideally) the giving and considering of reasons in favor of accepting or rejecting particular claims which will then be used to govern our action together. In the latter, claims may be found to be true or false, and they are subject to reasons—this is how we are supposed to come to non-coercive agreement. In the former, things are a little trickier, which is why Stanley argues that civic rhetoric and material equality are necessary to disrupt and prevent what he calls *flawed*, but not *false*, ideologies.

A flawed ideology contains regular expectations and shared conventions that, if articulated in the form of a belief, contradict the ideal(s) forwarded by the propaganda with which these expectations and conventions are set in motion. To return to a previous example, if the word "fairness" is regularly associated with people who are white[1] and the word "fraud" is regularly associated with people who are not white, the problem with propagandistic appeals to ensure fair elections by combatting voter fraud is not with the expressed ideal of "being just" but with an ideology (or set of shared conventions) that regularly associates light skinned people with (and habitually expects dark skinned people to be enemies of) this ideal. To combat the undermining aspect of the propaganda is not to disagree with the avowed belief it directly expresses, but to work to change the implicit associations and expectations that the words used to express the belief trigger. In other words, the problematic feature is contained not in what the propaganda *says*, but in what it *does*, which is embodied in how people respond to it.

In the case of undermining demagoguery, appeals to our accountability to one another, or "reasonableness," implicitly engage flawed ideologies that ignore and exclude the voices of particular people, thereby decreasing accountability and reasonableness. This kind of propaganda cannot be remedied by more appeals to accountability and reasonableness since the appeals themselves work in tandem with flawed ideologies, ways of acting in the world, that run counter to the ideals expressed by accountability and reasonableness. Ironically, in such cases appeals to reasonableness and accountability will lead to less reasonableness and less accountability. What is needed then is not a new ideal, but rather a new way of acting. Remedies to undermining demagoguery must therefore help those taken in by it to act differently. If the problem of undermining demagoguery is located in the expectations and habits of mind shared by a community, remedies must work to change those ex-

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[1] It is worth noting here that the same word "fair" can mean both "just" and "light skinned."

pectations and habits. Stanley's examples of civic rhetoric do precisely that. These examples include the writing of Black American intellectual Fannie Barrier Williams, the visual images of police brutality against civil rights marchers in Selma Alabama, and John Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things" as analyzed by Ingrid Monson. In all three cases, readers, viewers, and listeners are being called upon and encouraged to pay attention to aspects of the world that their ideology disposes them to systematically ignore. Importantly, in each case they are not being asked to espouse a different or new set of beliefs but rather to attend to the world differently.

Here we can begin to see how Stanley's own rhetoric, which emphasizes belief, may be unhelpful for remedying (and may even undermine Stanley's expressed desire to remedy) the problems of flawed ideologies. While our ways of attending to the world can be articulated in terms of a set of claims or beliefs, thinking about what is happening with what Stanley calls "flawed ideologies" *as* an actual set of claims or beliefs makes it seem as though the ideology which guides one's attention to the world is something of which one is consciously aware or even of which one could become aware on one's own. While beliefs and belief structures are things we cannot simply change at will, in common parlance people often speak of beliefs as things they *avow* and *hold*. For example, it is quite common for a white person to say "I don't hold racist beliefs" (and sincerely believe that to be the case) even though her perception of the world is structured by racial implicit bias.[2] As with the example concerning allies and ally culture, I am concerned here about the way in which public discourse regarding the harms to historically oppressed groups is often reduced to talk about what people believe (or want to believe) as opposed to the actual harm people, in conjunction with historical institutions and practices, do. My contention here is not that the language of belief cannot sensibly be used to describe flawed ideologies; in fact I think it can. Rather I am arguing that nonetheless we *ought not* use the language of belief to describe flawed ideologies because of the way in which the language of belief itself might engage a flawed ideology. Specifically, I am concerned with the way dominantly positioned persons may have a habit of expecting that they are the final arbiter concerning the significance of their actions and that they need not consult others outside of themselves (or at the very least not those in relation to whom they have social power) in order to discern whether they are acting in ways that are responsible to others. The language of belief calls attention to the subjective state of the individual who holds the belief, so using this language to describe the set of expectations and habits of attention embodied in a flawed ideology can be easily coopted into an expectation that one's avowed subjective state (what the subject intends and takes herself to mean) is all that matters in our interactions with others. Thus, the language of belief fits too neatly with a flawed ideology that makes dominantly situated persons less accountable to others by systematically returning their attention to their own subjective states instead of to the *effects* of their actions on others.

In contrast, I recommend shifting to a different rhetoric to describe flawed ideologies, one that emphasizes action and movement.[3] The language of action and movement (as op-

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2   One might object that this just means people ought to stop talking about beliefs in this way. However, what I say about belief in the next paragraph warrants dropping the language of belief.

3   Phyllis Rooney's attention to how a shift from "knowledge" to "knowing" as a starting term can broaden the scope of concern in epistemology (Rooney 2012, 358-360) has been very helpful for me in thinking about the idea of epistemic movement.

posed to the language of belief) calls closer attention to what flawed ideologies *do*. What needs to change in order to dislodge demagoguery is not to avow new beliefs or to express affirmation of new claims, but to change coordinated epistemic action. In this light, civic rhetoric is more aptly understood as the art of disrupting and attempting to change the way we attend to the world, so as to widen our scope of attention. The framework of "ideological beliefs" calls epistemic attention to the world as experienced by the person governed by the ideology, whereas the terms "epistemic action" and "epistemic movement" call attention to what those ideologies *do* to the people with whom the one governed by a particular ideology interacts. Moreover, whereas the language of belief can be separated from epistemic actors, the language of epistemic action and epistemic movement reminds us that (1.) knowers are affectively *moved* to reason about and know some things as opposed to others and (2.) knowing (along with other epistemic practices) is always embodied and situated in the world.

These points are connected to something that is not prominent in Stanley's account (although it is mentioned toward the end of the book and funds Stanley's account of civic rhetoric). That is the importance of social movements in changing the world and the way we regard it. The argument for material equality in *How Propaganda Works* frames the solution to undermining demagoguery as being possibly one of two things: either to have individuals change their mental states or to institute structural change so as to remove features of our social world that lead to flawed ideologies. Having framed things in this way, Stanley argues for the latter. However, framing solutions in this manner fails to show us how institutional structural change is possible—after all change must be implemented *by* people.

One of the reasons why Stanley thinks we need to focus on material equality as opposed to changing individual mental states is the way ideologies are held stubbornly in place given their relation to our conception of ourselves and our communities. As Stanley puts it quite nicely, "individuals... don't like to leave their friends behind" (2015, 186).[4] However, I may not always need to leave my friends behind if we are similarly oppressively situated in the world in ways that allow for resistant epistemic communities. This is clearly seen in the case of racism and white supremacy in the U.S. It is not the case that racism has been unnoticed by, unintelligible to, or uniformly accepted by Black people in the U.S.. Instead it is more apt to say that racism and its effects have been systematically and relentlessly ignored by white people in the U.S., despite the efforts of Black Americans to call attention to and combat it.

Stanley's skepticism about changing individual belief states appears to align, however, once again too closely with the flawed ideologies that support and maintain dominant interests. I am skeptical, too, that dominantly positioned people will (or are even able to) change their ways of perceiving and approaching the world, particularly if they steadfastly refuse to be epistemically moved by actual non-dominantly situated persons with whom they regularly interact. However, insisting on the resilience of flawed ideologies for those who are harmed by them fails to acknowledge that there are things *pressing* on non-domi-

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4 We might add to this, changing one's way of moving through the world epistemically speaking can make a person less intelligible (and sometimes quite unintelligible) to the people with whom one has come to know the world together.

nantly situated people that can *move* non-dominantly situated people to perceive the world differently. This can be seen, for example, in LGBT politics and activism. If one is non-dominantly situated with respect to sexuality and/or gender identity, one will be raised in a society that encourages one to repudiate one's own desires and understandings of oneself. Moreover, one will be encouraged to attend epistemically to the world in ways that make one's desires and experiences unintelligible to oneself. But this repudiation and unintelligibility is for many people *unsustainable*. This is why many LGBT persons are forced to leave their families and communities; it is also why LGBT people can become literally *unintelligible* to the families and communities they leave. In such cases, unintelligibility is owing to being governed by different ideologies, that is different expectations and regularities of convention. Finally, in some cases those who are dominantly situated in relation to, but nonetheless love their family members and friends who are LGBT more than their ideologies can bear, are sometimes moved to abandon those ideologies. From this perspective, thinking about the epistemic importance of creating and sustaining new communities where we can learn to attend to the world differently is *pressing*. In addition, dominantly situated people, if they are to change, need to pay attention to and learn to use the epistemic resources and resistances already available to those historically oppressed who have developed less flawed ways of epistemically moving through the world.

Reasonableness, empathy, and considering the views of others

These points may appear to be compatible with Stanley's characterization of reasonableness as requiring "*empathy or the capacity to put oneself in another's shoes*" (108). It is important, however, to distinguish what I am recommending from the notion of empathy and the project of "putting oneself in another's shoes." While it is clear that democracy requires one to "take one's proposals to be accountable to everyone in the community" (Stanley 2015, 108), this need not require feeling what others feel, or being able to perceive what others perceive without concrete engagement with them. Consequently, we can excise the importance of taking one's proposals to be accountable to all from talk of empathy and inhabiting others' perspectives. Furthermore, there are a number of good reasons for doing so.

Black feminists and feminist of color have, for example, long called attention to the damage incurred by analogizing experiences of oppression to one's own experiences as a way of attempting to inhabit another's perspective and/or be empathetic. Such exercises have a way of epistemically exploiting those in relation to whom one is privileged, while simultaneously making invisible important aspects of the experiences one is claiming to understand.[5] In addition, the desire to inhabit another's perspective may in fact actually lead one to attempt to *change* or actively suppress that perspective because the information contained therein is very painful.[6] Finally attempts to empathize may imply a kind of symmetry where there is no symmetry at all. Part of recognizing another person's oppression relative to one's privilege is acknowledging that asymmetry.[7]

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[5] See for example Grillo and Wildman 1991.
[6] See for example Ahmed 2010.
[7] See for example Iris Marion Young 1997.

One might object that these concerns demonstrate why *true* empathy is the ideal we ought to strive toward, and that the worries raised here are things that happen when an appeal to empathy is working through a piece of pernicious demagoguery. While I would agree that the examples I have called attention to are indeed failures, my caution against positing empathy as a process that will make knowers accountable to one another is that making empathy the goal may supplant the actual goal of being accountable to one another. In other words, calls to empathize may, in a vein similar to the language of belief, work in tandem with a flawed ideology that calls attention to the subjective states of dominantly situated individuals instead of to the voices of those who are non-dominantly situated. We can begin to see that this is the case if we ask what empathy does or adds to the imperative to consider other people's perspectives. Why not just seek to consider others' perspectives and then ask them if we've gotten things wrong? Why add empathy into the mix?

It strikes me that empathy is often added to the equation so as to locate a standard for success at considering other people's perspectives in a way that allows the one being evaluated to dispense with the actual person whose perspective one is purportedly considering. Because empathy is associated with a feeling that is located within individuals, it is easier to claim by individuals than the accountability to others it is said to guarantee. For this reason, the turn to empathy can function similarly to the way "good intention" functions in white discourse as a way to deflect charges of racism and racist harm. That is, white people in a white supremacist society often assure themselves of their goodness and non-complicity in racist institutions by way of something they appear to control individually: their intentions, even if their actions and the institutions by which they are privileged can have harmful effects regardless of intention. Likewise, empathy draws our attention to the empathizer's feelings and/or thoughts, something that we must consult the empathizer to access. However, if we are to discern whether we have successfully and adequately considered another's concerns, interests, and/or perspectives, our attention should be drawn not to ourselves but rather to those others. The most straightforward way to assess whether I have seriously and adequately considered or understood another's perspective is to *ask them*.[8] In light of these concerns, reasonableness, as the capacity to take into account other people's perspectives, ought to be understood as an interactive (and not an individually empathic) ability.

Attending to injustice and disempowered populations

My concern with the language of belief to describe flawed ideology and with the ideal of empathy to describe accountability to others stems from a concern with a flawed ideology characteristic of relations of dominance and oppression: the tendency (or habituated convention) of directing epistemic attention toward the subjective experiences of those domi-

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8   This, of course, is complicated by the fact that structural conditions sometimes make it nearly impossible for non- dominantly situated persons to answer truthfully, since disturbing those in relation to whom they are oppressed may be dangerous or because dominantly situated persons are epistemically incompetent with regard to genuinely engaging in non-coercive epistemic interaction with non-dominantly situated knowers. See for example Henning 2015 and Pohlhaus, Jr. 2012.

nantly situated and away from the world as experienced by non-dominantly situated subjects. For this same reason, I am deeply concerned by Stanley's argument that structural inequality will lead those who are disadvantaged to accept flawed ideologies that regularly expect that they themselves are inferior to those with material power. Again, I am worried about what these arguments *do*. Specifically, I am worried that such arguments encourage us to think of non-dominantly situated persons as causally related to one another in a manner that does not engage them as full epistemic agents. By this I do not mean to say that we should not recognize that all people swim in the waters that encourage *all* of us to approach reality with perceptual biases that advantage dominantly situated persons (I think we do). What I am worried about is making arguments that suggest that the social positioning of non-dominantly situated persons specifically causes them in particular, in virtue of their non-dominant positioning, to approach the world in a way that accepts their supposed inferiority. First let me point out though some direct problems with the arguments Stanley uses to support his claim that the oppressed will be particularly susceptible to flawed ideologies used to justify their own oppression.

One problem is that there are so many different examples Stanley draws upon to make his argument without really distinguishing among them and without recognizing that relations of dominance and oppression are *multiple* and *complexly figured* in relation to one another. Instead, he writes of only two social positions: "the advantaged elite" and the "negatively privileged" as if one could not be both at the same time. There are significant differences in how various axes of oppression work and people are complexly situated within them. Failure to acknowledge these complexities has been a *serious* problem for theories of oppression that focus on only one axis of oppression such as Marxism and hegemonic white feminism. Likewise I think it is a serious flaw in *How Propaganda Works*.

To take one example, Stanley uses the belief held by a majority of U.S. citizens that the war in Iraq was justified as evidence that those who are disadvantaged will be swayed by ideologies that justify their being disadvantaged (2015, 241-246). However, the flawed ideologies that mobilized support for the war drew on Islamaphobia and colonialist ideologies that figure U.S. citizens as superior to those in Iraq even while they do so in order to gain support for what is against most U.S. citizens' interests. In other words, U.S. citizens' acceptance of the war in Iraq need not be equated with an acceptance by those who suffer due to serious inequities in the U.S. that they are less deserving than the wealthy. There is a difference between believing something that is falsely presented as in your interest and believing that your own interests, perspective, and day to day living are not worthy of consideration.

In addition, I worry about the way Stanley uses social psychology to support his arguments as though the mechanisms by which they work are self-evident and where those mechanisms are framed in causal (as opposed to agential) terms. For example, he calls attention to the empirical studies on stereotype threat to argue that the "undeniably real psychological phenomenon of stereotype threat is the naturalistic basis for the adoption of the flawed ideology of the elite group by the negatively privileged group" (Stanley 2015, 240). But is this really what is happening in the mechanisms described in such cases? Why describe the added epistemic disadvantage of needing to be aware of how others' perceive you and knowing that those others will negatively perceive you as actually accepting that negative perception? And why describe the rational withdraw from a game so clearly rigged as

accepting the negative perception that pushed you out of the game? Why not see the refusal to play as a refusal to accept the unfair terms of the game itself?

The "puzzle" of why the oppressed don't "throw off their chains" may only be a puzzle if (1.) we do not recognize that ideologies are multiple and complexly related due to multiple axes of oppression and (2.) we fail to perceive resistance to oppression. I don't think, however, that Stanley's argument for material equality hangs on the idea that the oppressed will buy into their own inferiority. It is enough to warrant epistemic alarm that those aspects by which one is privileged in relations of dominance and oppression can lead one to systematically disregard those in relation to whom one is privileged and that we are all complexly figured in relations of dominance and oppression.

If we follow the line of reasoning that says material inequality is bad for democracy, in part, because it leads those who suffer from inequalities to believe in their own inferiority, we might fail to attend to the ways in which those who suffer from inequalities *have* resisted their unjust treatment as well as the ways in which those who benefit from inequalities have shut down this resistance while thinking (or at least claiming) that this shutting down of resistance is necessary and just. To ignore the resistance of those who suffer from inequities is characteristic of dominant flawed ideologies. Consequently, it is imperative *not* to do so.

Calling attention to how propaganda works sheds light on how our own language and arguments can participate in the undermining of the ideals we espouse. For this reason it is important to attend not only to what we say, but to how we say it and to what our way of saying things *does*. Stanley's analysis of how flawed ideologies can work in tandem with what we say in a manner that is self-undermining provides an important lesson. Ultimately, it is one that leads me to disagree with some of the ways in which Stanley has framed his arguments, not so much because of what they say but because of what they do. Specifically, by emphasizing the language of belief, forwarding the ideal of empathy, and (in places) framing non-dominantly situated subjects as causally determined objects, Stanley's rhetoric aligns too closely with the interests of privileged subjects in relations of dominance and oppression. Instead the rhetoric we use to analyze pernicious propaganda must not only accurately reflect how propaganda works but also disengage from and resist the flawed ideologies that allow it to work.

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