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Mapping Conceptions of Ideology in Contemporary Philosophy

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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In this paper, I look back to the work of early members of the Frankfurt School, seeking to elucidate the original usages and conceptions of the term “ideology” in early critical theory and philosophical discourse. I utilize the work of Raymond Geuss’s book *The Idea of a Critical Theory* to map the ways in which the term “ideology” was being used in various contexts and fields of study. I produce a comprehensive outline of the various conceptions of ideology propounded by Geuss in his book (descriptive, pejorative, positive), demonstrating the application of these conceptions of ideology in the works of Karl Marx and Charles Mills. Marx’s work is exemplar of the function of ideology critique in constructing a critical theory, while Mills’ work demonstrates the utility of Geussian ideological criticism in the pejorative sense applied within the field of ethical theory. Later, I turn to the recent work of Jason Stanley in his book *How Propaganda Works* in order to compare the early conceptions of ideology proposed by members of the Frankfurt School with the conception of ideology presented by Stanley, a conception influenced by the work of other recent analytic philosophers but with a twist. I adopt the framework of Geussian conceptions of ideology in my analysis of Stanley’s account, noting ways in which Stanley deviates from traditional conceptions of ideology and produces unique views about the critique of ideology, specifically through his form of epistemic criticism and his emphasis on the role of conceptual schemes in theories of ideology. I will show that Stanley makes a decisive new addition to the concept of ideology that improves it by revealing the influential role played by conceptual schemes in developing flawed ideologies, presenting an understanding of how flawed ideological beliefs develop in connection with one’s various identities, and divulging the particular ways in which flawed ideological beliefs are democratically problematic.

PART ONE: GEUSS'S TYPOLOGY OF IDEOLOGY

In Part One, I produce a comprehensive outline of the various conceptions of ideology propounded by Geuss in his book (descriptive, pejorative, positive), demonstrating the application of these conceptions of ideology in the works of Karl Marx and Charles Mill. Marx's work is exemplar of the function of ideology critique in constructing a critical theory, while Mills' work demonstrates the utility of Geussian ideological criticism in the pejorative sense applied within the field of ethical theory.

IDEOLOGY IN THE DESCRIPTIVE SENSE

Defining the term "ideology" has proven a difficult task, given its various usages and its employment, across disciplines, to answer myriad different questions. However, this is the task taken up by Raymond Geuss and those members of the Frankfurt School from whom he draws much inspiration, guidance, and reference. In the course of his project, Geuss denotes three research programs (descriptive/explanatory projects, critical projects, positive projects) which engage in constructing theories of ideology and proceeds to detail the various usages of "ideology" found in these three contexts. The first of these programs is that of anthropology, engaged in the empirical study of human social groups.

In the exercise of developing a theory of ideology, commonly undertaken by anthropologists to describe and better understand certain features of a particular society, the resulting ideology formulated for further study will be that defined by Raymond Geuss as "ideology in the purely descriptive sense," capturing "those beliefs which members of a [human] group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, desires, values, predilections, works of art, religions, rituals, gestures, etc." (Geuss 5).

In this broad sense, any given group of human agents will have an ideology. There will also be present in the ideology descriptions of differences in those beliefs, attitudes, etc. shared among certain members of the group, as the ideology is not *only* those beliefs, attitudes, etc. which *all* members hold; within every human group there remains diversity, variety, and conflict (5). This all-encompassing sense of ideology is both non-evaluative and non-judgmental. Further, it will contain both discursive elements (beliefs, concepts, ideas) and non-discursive elements (attitudes, rituals, forms of artistic activity, characteristic gestures). To illuminate this distinction, one may look to religion, noting that the religion of a group is part of the ideology, a discursive element, while important aspects of religion, such as Baptism in Christianity and other religious rituals, fall under the non-discursive elements of the ideology. This distinction between discursive and non-discursive elements is separate from a distinction between implicit and explicit elements sometimes made. To Geuss, it seems obvious that beliefs and other discursive elements could be either explicit or implicit, as they may be held by agents either explicitly or tacitly; although, the role of the explicit-implicit distinction seems to have little bearing on the non-discursive elements of characteristic gestures or works of art, but perhaps remains applicable to others, such as attitudes (6).

In some cases, a desire to further examine a narrower subset of the beliefs, attitudes, and concepts held by a group will lead one to use the term “ideology” to refer only to those discursive elements of the “ideology in the purely descriptive sense,” only the beliefs held by the agents in the society, as was the case with Habermas in his usage of “ideology” (8). Habermas subdivides the entire set of beliefs held by agents in two ways:

- (1) One can distinguish between “ideologies” (i.e., subsets of the set of all beliefs) on the basis of differences in their “manifest content” (i.e., by reference to differences in what the beliefs are *about*) ...
- (2) One can distinguish between ideologies in this very narrow

sense in terms of their functional properties... the way elements of the ideology influence action (Geuss 8).

In this way, 'religious ideology' could refer either to the set of beliefs held by agents regarding superhuman entities (beliefs with religious 'manifest content') or to the functional role of beliefs and attitudes in regulating religious behavior and practices (8). While every human group will have an "ideology in the purely descriptive sense," it will not necessarily be the case that all human groups will have ideologies in these narrower senses, i.e., early hunter-gatherer societies will not have a 'fiscal' ideology.

Although the two may appear synonymous, "ideology in the purely descriptive sense" is distinct from "ideology in the sense of 'world-view;'" the former encompasses *all* the characteristic beliefs held by agents of a group, but not all these beliefs held by members of the group apply to their worldview. The idea behind this sense of 'ideology as world-view' derives from the fact that human groups "do not just 'have' randomly collected bundles of beliefs, attitudes, life-goals, forms of artistic activity, etc." (10). These "bundles" somehow fit together through complex relations to form a coherent whole, with a characteristic structure, often discernible to the outside observer (10). Thus, "ideology in the sense of world-view" consists in a subset of those beliefs which make up the "ideology in the purely descriptive sense," but the elements of this subset have the following properties: they are widely shared among agents in the group, they are systematically interconnected, they are not easily given up by the agents, they maintain a deep influence on behavior or action of the agents, and they deal with central issues of human life, i.e., give interpretations of things such as death, the need to work, sexuality, etc., or central metaphysical issues (10). The loosely defined nature of these properties permits room for disagreement in the way in which certain properties are weighted, or ordered, and in what qualifies as an element of the worldview. Further, varying degrees of more strict or relaxed

adherence to these properties, compounded by the determinants one uses to pick out a human group, will factor into determining whether every human group will have a worldview in the same way every group has an “ideology in the purely descriptive sense.”

This conception of “ideology in the sense of world-view” bears similarity to the notion of “ideal-as-descriptive-model” presented by Charles Mills within the context of ideal theory applied in ethics and moral theory. This model takes some natural or social phenomenon, *P*, and presents an ideal in this sense as a representation of *P* which purports to be descriptive of *P*’s crucial aspects, or essential nature, and how it actually works, or its basic dynamic (Mills 166). Because this descriptive modeling process necessarily “abstracts away” from certain aspects of *P*, it will be the case that one make simplifying assumptions about *P* determined by what one takes to be the most important features of *P*, including some features while excluding others from what becomes the “schematized picture” of the actual nature and actual workings of *P* (167). The ideal-as-descriptive-model remains closest to the actual reality of *P* by refraining from idealization; furthermore, potential idealized models of *P* would first need to examine the descriptive model to better understand the peculiar features of *P* which explain its dynamic and provide insight into why *P* fails to reach ideality. Given that the ideal-as-descriptive-model will essentially involve an inclusion-exclusion process in terms of what aspects of *P* constitute the model, it more closely resembles “ideology in the sense of world-view” as opposed to “ideology in the purely descriptive sense.”

The final descriptive sense of ideology presented by Geuss is “ideology in the programmatic sense,” bearing similarity to Daniel Bell’s “total ideology,” so defined as “an all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality, it is a set of beliefs, infused with passion, and seeks to transform the whole way of life” (Geuss 11). Drawing on Bell’s four properties of a “total

ideology,” “ideology in the programmatic sense” is defined as a program or plan of action based on an explicit, systematic model of how the society works; Geuss excludes the latter two properties detailed by Bell in favor of keeping this sense of ideology descriptive.

IDEOLOGY IN THE PEJORATIVE SENSE

Now the advent of the second, and perhaps more interesting, research program in which theories of ideology may arise brings us into the realm of critical theory. This program of “criticism of the beliefs, attitudes, and wants of the agents in a particular society” originates from the observation “that agents in the society are *deluded* about themselves, their position, their society, or their interests” (12). This project is not an explanatory one, as before, but aims at freeing agents from their delusions via illuminating to them *that* they are deluded, and act in ways contrary to their true interests as a result of this delusion. This is the project of critical theorists, generally, and Karl Marx, particularly, in his work *The German Ideology*, evidenced in the Preface:

Hitherto men have always formed wrong ideas about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be....The products of their brains have got out of their hands...Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, the dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of concepts. (Marx 29)

This is what distinguishes critical theory from scientific theory, their differing aims and application. While scientific theories aim at successful manipulation of the external world for ‘instrumental use,’ to “enable the agents who master [these theories] to cope effectively with the environment and thus pursue their chosen ends successfully,” critical theories aim at emancipation and enlightenment, “making agents aware of hidden coercion, thereby freeing them from the coercion and putting them in a position to determine where their true interests lie” (Geuss 55). Within this program, “ideology” will be used in a critical, pejorative sense;

“‘ideology’ is ‘(ideological) delusion’ or ‘(ideologically) false consciousness’” (12). Here, I adopt Geuss’ usage of the term ‘form of consciousness’ (FOC) to refer to “a particular constellation of beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, etc.,” to then expound on the Geussian three kinds of criticisms, following from which a FOC comes to be ideologically false, either in virtue of some *epistemic* properties of its constituent beliefs, its *functional* properties, or its *genetic* properties (12).

The epistemic approach to determining ideological falsity looks to the epistemic properties of the FOC, such as “whether or not the descriptive beliefs contained in the [FOC] are supported by available empirical evidence, or whether or not the [FOC] is one in which beliefs of a different epistemic type (e.g., descriptive beliefs and normative beliefs) are confused” (13). There are four ways in which a FOC will be considered an ideology in virtue of its epistemic properties, by containing a mistake of epistemic status, an objectification mistake, a mistake about general group interests, or a mistake which takes self-fulfilling beliefs to be not self-fulfilling. The first way in which a FOC is ideological in the epistemic sense is when a FOC is necessarily dependent on mistaking the epistemic status of its component beliefs. This occurs when the FOC takes a belief to be cognitively meaningful which is not actually empirically verifiable, making a mistake about the epistemic status of the belief. Consequently, all theological FOC are to be rejected as ideological because they are based on a mistake about the epistemic status of one of their central component beliefs; more specifically, they are a set of beliefs, attitudes, etc. dependent upon a false assumption that there can be cognitively meaningful discourse about gods, which are not empirically verifiable (13). Alternatively, a FOC which contains an ‘objectifying’ or ‘naturalizing’ mistake is an ideology. The FOC may hold a false belief that some social phenomenon is a natural phenomenon; for example, in the

case of the “divine right of kings,” the FOC contains a belief that naturalizes social relations in claiming that God appoints and justifies the king, taking it outside the realm of human control. The third way in which a FOC is ideological is in its maintenance of a false belief that the particular interest of a subgroup represents the general interest of the group as a whole. Finally, a FOC is ideologically false “if it mistakes self-validating or self-fulfilling beliefs for beliefs which are not self-validating or self-fulfilling” (14). Here, the central objection is not to the holding of self-fulfilling beliefs among agents; if one knows that their belief is self-fulfilling, there is nothing inherently wrong with holding that belief. However, the use of self-fulfilling beliefs “in a context of justification of action where their justificatory force depends on misconstruing them as non-self-fulfilling” is what is objectionable in this case (14).

The functional approach to determining ideological falsity takes three forms in which a FOC may be an ideology in virtue of its functional properties. In this sense, a FOC is ideologically false in virtue of the functional role it plays in stabilizing, supporting, or legitimizing such things as reprehensible social institutions, unjust social practices, relations of exploitation, hegemony, or domination (15). There remains some ambiguity in this case which necessitates a distinction between supporting or stabilizing and legitimizing or justifying; a belief which legitimizes or justifies a social practice tends also to support the practice, but not vice versa. The second kind of functional sense of ideology captures those FOC which hinder the “maximal development of the forces of material production,” the view most closely associated with Marxism (18). Finally, a FOC which serves “to ‘mask social contradictions’” is an ideology in the functional sense (18). The notion of ‘masking social contradictions’ does not necessitate false beliefs, however, since ‘masking’ may involve only diversion of attention from the social contradictions. Geuss notes the complexity of the concept of ‘social contradiction,’

but refrains from treating it adequately in this discussion, focusing instead on only the ‘major’ social contradiction in society which he views as the Marxist contradiction “between the relations of production and the forces of production” (18). The ‘contradiction’ in this case arises when the relations of production come to fetter the development of the forces of production, thus it is clear to see the connection or a potential move one might make from this approach to ideology to the second approach (18).

Because ideology in the critical, pejorative sense dealt with in this section is to be a delusion or false consciousness, it is important to make clear why ideologies in this functional sense are to be rejected as a delusion or in some sense false. Although there may be other grounds for rejecting some beliefs in a FOC, perhaps if one becomes aware that a FOC they accept leads to more massive frustration of their own interests than is necessary and chooses to change or reject the FOC, but it is not necessarily implied that the rejection is performed on the grounds of falsity. The crucial point which qualifies a FOC as a ‘delusion’ or ‘false’ is that the agent’s retention of that FOC depends on the agent’s “being in ignorance of or having false beliefs about its functional properties” (19). If the agent were to be made aware of some certain facts about the functional properties of their FOC, they would no longer hold that belief, thus the FOC is ideologically false.

Geuss’ third major mode of determining what makes a FOC ideologically false comes in the form of the genetic approach, identifying the FOC as an ideology in virtue of some of its genetic properties, “that is, by virtue of some facts about its origin, genesis, or history, about how it arises or comes to be acquired or held by agents, or in virtue of the motives agents have for adopting and acting on it” (19). It follows that a FOC may be ideologically false in virtue of the fact that “the ‘beliefs and attitudes’ which compose it are related in a causal sense to the social

situation and thereby to the interests of the believer” (19). Alternatively, FOC may be an ideology in the genetic sense because they are “‘expressions’ of the position of those who hold them, that is, because their origin can be traced to the particular experiences of a particular class in society with its characteristic perceptions, interests, and values” (19). This appears to be the view of ideology adopted by Marx in saying:

The social structure and state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, however, of these individuals, not as they appear in their or other people’s imagination, but as they *actually* are, i.e., as they act, produce materially, and hence work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will. *The ideas which these individuals form are ideas either about their relation to nature or about their mutual relations or about their own nature. It is evident that in all these cases their ideas are the conscious expression--real or illusory--of their real relations and activities, of their production, of their intercourse, of their social and political conduct...If the conscious expression of the real relations of these individuals is illusory, if in their imagination they turn reality upside-down, then this in its turn is the result of their limited material mode of activity and their limited social relations arising from it. (Marx 41, fn**)

It becomes clear, in this passage, the connections between the three kinds of criticism which make up ideology in the pejorative sense. Elaborating this sense of genetic ideology further, a FOC is an ideology if it arises in a society dominated by a particular social class, as it will be the ‘expression’ of the class-position, or viewpoint, of that dominant class; this view is also adopted in Marx’s work (38). Finally, Geuss draws on the “analogy between psychoanalysis and social theory which is so dominant [in the Frankfurt School],” suggesting that ideologies may be understood as ‘collective rationalisms,’ or as systems of beliefs accepted by agents for reasons they could not acknowledge (20). Here, again, the question of how these genetic senses of ideological falsity are rejected as ‘delusion’ or ‘false consciousness’ is brought to bear. The key here lies in the statement “could not acknowledge.” In the case of ideologies, the issue is not just that agents accept a FOC for unacknowledged motives, but that they accept the FOC for motives which they *could not* acknowledge; therefore, “*if* agents had to acknowledge that *these* were their

motives, they would...no longer be motivated...to continue to accept the ideology...they would see that there is *no* reason for them to accept it” (21). The genetic sense of ideology requires agents to be ignorant of or have some false belief about their true motives for accepting the FOC.

The three modes of criticism in this program, which identify a FOC as ideology in either an epistemic, functional, or genetic sense, make up the usages of ideology employed in critical theories. Guess notes that, “interesting theories of ideology will be ones which assert some connection between two or more of the three modes” (22). This is one of the senses in which Critical Theory is ‘dialectical,’ “in that it explicitly connects questions about the ‘inherent’ truth or falsity of a form of consciousness with questions about its history, origin, and function in society” (22).

IDEOLOGY IN THE POSITIVE SENSE

The third research program in which theories of ideology may arise is that which sets for itself the task of constructing an “ideology in the positive or laudatory sense.” This positive sense of ideology is initiated through the understanding that all humans have wants, needs, desires, and interests which are appropriately satisfied by the set of habits, beliefs, and attitudes of a given culture. Humans have certain “deep-seated human needs,” among these is the need for a “‘meaningful’ life and the kind of identity which is possible only for an agent who stands in relation to a culture” (22). Beginning from these wants, needs, desires, and the objective position of a particular group of agents, the task of constructing an “ideology in the positive sense” attempts to identify what ‘ideology’ will most likely “enable the members of the group to satisfy their wants and needs and further their interests” (22). This sense of ideology differs from both the descriptive and pejorative senses in that the descriptive sense is an ideology one

‘finds,’ while the pejorative sense is an ideology one finds and then isolates for further criticism; the positive sense is an ideology to be created or invented, not found. The ideology is “something *to be* constructed, created, or invented” (23). An example of the creation of a positive ideology can be found with Lenin, who, in his call for party intellectuals to help the labor movement construct an ‘independent ideology for itself,’ was not calling for a description of those beliefs and attitudes already held by the laborers, nor was he calling on party intellectuals to disperse some false consciousness among the working class. Lenin’s “independent ideology for the labor movement” consisted in the set of those beliefs and attitudes which would best enable the workers to restructure society in their own interest” (23).

IDEOLOGIEKRITIK

Now, we investigate the central practice propounded by the Frankfurt School, that of Ideologiekritik. The Frankfurt School dictates three theses of Ideologiekritik which lend insight to the objective aims of the practice and its structural procedure. Ideologiekritik holds that “radical criticism of society and criticism of its dominant ideology are inseparable,” insisting that all social research must have as its primary goal the formulation of a “critical theory of society of which Ideologiekritik would be an integral part” (26). Ideologiekritik is “itself a cognitive enterprise, a form of knowledge,” not merely engaged in a form of ‘moralizing criticism’ but criticism of a FOC for being false or a delusion (26). It also differs significantly in cognitive structure from natural science, requiring for its “proper analysis basic changes in the epistemological views...inherited from traditional empiricism” (26). Critical theories employing Ideologiekritik will share the cognitive structure of being ‘reflective’ or self-referential; thus, “it is itself always part of the object-domain it describes” (55). The practice of Ideologiekritik

proceeds in three possible modes which relate narrowly to each of the three modes of criticism. The first mode focuses on the epistemic criticism and makes up the ‘positivist’ approach. The second approach is taken up in terms of the functional properties of a FOC, specifically focusing on ‘ideology as a world-view that stabilizes or legitimizes domination,’ to study the relation between the falsity of a FOC and its functional role in legitimizing oppression. The third mode approaches Ideologiekritik in terms of the genetic properties of a FOC, seeking answers to the question of how a FOC can be ‘false’ in virtue of something about its history, origin, or genesis. For the purposes of this paper, we do not require further elaboration of the three specific modes of Ideologiekritik, but each mode maintains the theses of Ideologiekritik in its process. The cognitive exercise of Ideologiekritik is an intrinsic feature of critical theory. It is the mechanism by which critical theory illuminates to the agents of a particular group those coercive forces which prevent them from realizing their true interests and shows the agents which way to move toward the ultimate goal of critical theory--emancipation and enlightenment. It is a theory of this sort which would avoid the various negative concepts and assumptions to be found in the ideal theory denounced by Mills.

MILLS

In constructing his argument against the use of ideal theory in ethics, Mills takes a critical position against various aspects of ideal theory which he views as problematic, and which could be resolved if replaced with a type of theory more closely resembling critical theories as detailed above. “Ideology in the positive sense” shares its aim and structure with the “ideal-as-idealized-model” of Mills. This model produces an idealized model of what ideal *P* should be like, ‘should’ in this case not necessarily referring to a moral ‘should’ but a ‘should’ of the technical

functionalist kind, in the sense of “an ideal vacuum cleaner” (Mills 167). The ideal-as-idealized-model is ideal in the sense of ‘exemplar,’ of how *P* should work. In the context of moral agents, dealt with by Mills in this paper, idealization of this sort involves a modeling of “what people should be like (character), how they should treat each other (right and good actions), and how society should be structured in its basic institutions (justice)” (168). However, Mills warns against the implementation of ideal theory as an approach to moral theory due to the reliance of ideal theory on idealization to the point of “exclusion, or at least marginalization of the actual” (168). Ideal theory constructed in this way utilizes a basic apparatus containing some, if not all, of six concepts or assumptions detailed by Mills which lead to this marginalization of the actual: idealized social ontology, idealized capacities, silence on oppression, ideal social institutions, idealized cognitive sphere, strict compliance.

The first of these concepts is a modern type of idealized social ontology which assumes the “abstract and undifferentiated equal atomic individuals of classical liberalism,” and in doing so, “abstracts *away* from relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression which, of course, profoundly shape the ontology of those same individuals, locating them in superior and inferior positions in social hierarchies” (168). Mills’ warning against inclusion of an idealized social ontology in ideal theory may also be extended to the process of creating a positive ideology. One way to avoid this abstraction away from reality is to narrow the scope of the positive ideology being constructed to apply only to a particular group, with acknowledgement of the unique social position, exploitation, coercion, and oppression of that particular group, to then parse out an ideology which would enable this group to most satisfy their wants and interests, given their circumstances. This was the project carried out by Lenin,

the construction of a positive ideology reserved for those working-class members of the labor movement in particular.

Mills finds that the basic apparatus of ideal theory typically includes idealized human capacities, as well. Human agents are characterized in this theory as having “completely unrealistic capacities attributed to them”; these unrealistic capacities are often unrealistic for even those belonging to the privileged minority, let alone subordinated and marginalized groups whose development of natural capacities has already been hindered by lack of equal opportunity, and who find themselves disabled in crucial respects (168). The apparatus will also involve ‘silence on oppression,’ neglecting to acknowledge “actual historical oppression and its legacy in the present, or current ongoing oppression... the ways in which systematic oppression is likely to shape basic social institutions (and the humans in those institutions)” (168). Without a proper mapping of that oppression, understanding of the reproductive nature of that oppression and those social institutions will be fettered. This is the redeeming quality of critical theory and its employment of ideology in the pejorative sense, that this project produces a theory of ideology with respect to the oppression and coercive forces acting on the agents in a human group to reveal these realities to those agents and, following their awareness and acknowledgement of those realities, guide agents to the actions necessary for freeing themselves from this oppression and coercion. In doing so, agents may be enabled to attain their ideal conditions for satisfaction of their wants and interests.

Further criticizing the concepts and assumptions which make up the basic apparatus of ideal theory, Mills points to the ‘ideal social institutions’ of ideal theory. Here, “fundamental social institutions like family, the economic structure, the legal system” are conceptualized in “ideal-as-idealized-model terms, with little or no sense of their actual workings as they may

systematically disadvantage women, the poor, and racial minorities” (169). Further, ideal theory presupposes an ‘idealized cognitive sphere’ where the “consequences *of* oppression, for the social cognition of these agents, both advantaged and disadvantaged, will typically not be recognized...and little or no attention paid to the role of hegemonic ideologies and group specific experience in distorting our perceptions...of the social order” (169). Finally, ideal theory involves ‘strict compliance,’ rather than utilizing a ‘partial compliance theory,’ in which all human agents are presumed to do their part in acting justly and upholding just institutions (169).

Mills encourages readers, here, to reflect on this list of the constituent concepts and assumptions of ideal theory, defamiliarizing themselves from all other literature on the subject which may have influenced them into initially believing this mode was the appropriate way to do ethics and notice the absurdity of that belief. Aspects of ideal theory, like strict compliance, are revealed as unrealistic, unhelpful, and perhaps even antithetical to the goals of ethical theory.

The problem facing ideal theory becomes quite clear:

In modeling humans, human capacities, human interaction, human institutions, and human society on ideal-as-idealized-models, in never exploring how deeply different this is from the ideal-as-descriptive-model, we are abstracting away from realities crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions, and thereby guaranteeing that the ideal-as-idealized-model will never be achieved. (Mills 170)

Again, this appears to be where ideal theory fails and critical theory succeeds. The ultimate purpose of theoretical ethics being to guide human action, bettering human agents and their world, the framework set forth by ideal theory exposes itself as unhelpful and antithetical to that purpose. If ever the ideal-model is to be achieved, a non-ideal theoretical approach will be necessary, one which refrains from abstracting away from the real to instead expound the descriptive-model, criticize the faults in that model, and produce realizations through the conceptual labor of a different mapping of social reality which sheds light on agents’

perceptions, so they are no longer blind to realities of which they were previously unaware. This is the work done in critical theory and Ideologiekritik.

The central claim of Mills' paper is that 'ideal theory' is ideology, in the pejorative sense. The evidence for this claim, according to Mills, is that ideal theory is ideology in its being a "distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the nonrepresentative interest and experiences of a small minority of the national population--middle-to-upper-class white males--who are hugely *over-represented* in the professional philosophical population" (172). Mills exercises the epistemic criticism approach to ideology, here, by showing that ideal theory contains a false belief to the effect that the particular interest of some subgroup (middle-to-upper-class white males) is the general interest of the group as a whole, although he does not pursue his argument in these terms. Mills holds that "ideal theory can only serve the interests of the privileged, who, in addition--precisely because of that privilege (as bourgeois white males)--have an experience that comes closest to the ideal, and so experience the least cognitive dissonance between it and reality, ideal-as-idealized model and ideal-as-descriptive-model" (172). The dominance of ideal theory thus far in the field in which Mills is operating should not be taken as "conscious conspiratorial manipulation, but rather in terms of social privilege and resulting differential experience, a nonrepresentative phenomenological life-world (mis)taken for *the world*" (172). The dominance of this mistake has been reinforced by professional philosophical discourse and the absence of opposing perspectives from individuals with group interests contradictory to the dominant model; however, it is clear that the interests of women, people of color, and the poor and working class cannot be served by ideal theory in its ignorance of female subordination, centuries of white supremacy, and inequitable class societies which "impose economic constraints to limit nominal freedoms" (172).

This argument against ideal theory laid out by Mills finds ideal theory to be ideological in the epistemic sense. Further argument could be made for ideal theory as ideology in the functional sense as well, as ideal theory operating in this way seems to justify or legitimize unjust social institutions and practices, and hegemony, in its neglect to construct an ideal which serves subordinated groups, serving and reinforcing only those interests of the privileged minority. The extent to which ideal theory qualifies as ideology in this functional sense would be determined by the extent to which ideal theory is actually capable of legitimizing these social institutions, social practices, and hegemony. Given that it exists in the theoretical realm, this may not tangibly be the case, but in its abstract theoretical form, the properties of this functional sense of ideology are satisfied.

CONCLUSION TO PART ONE

At this point in the paper, we have mapped the idea of critical theory, at the heart of which is the criticism of ideology. We have established the three differentiated senses in which the term “ideology” is used and applied in research programs engaged in producing theories of ideology, consisting of ideology in the descriptive, pejorative, and positive senses respectively. Even within these three senses, we have further narrowed the usages of the term to denote specific types of descriptive, pejorative, and positive ideologies, demonstrating their application in philosophical discourse through the works of Karl Marx and Charles Mills. Now, I turn to work of this paper in utilizing these traditional conceptions of “ideology” comparatively with the account of “ideology” presented by Jason Stanley in his book, *How Propaganda Works*. Stanley’s goal in this book is to “explain how sincere, well-meaning people, under the grips of flawed ideology, can unknowingly produce and consume propaganda” (Stanley x). His overall

argument for the effectiveness of propaganda relies on the presence of flawed ideological beliefs, held by agents in society, which are exploited by propaganda, lending to its effectiveness. In combination with his account of propaganda, Stanley must produce an account of ideology, which will be the central focus of this paper. I will begin by mapping Stanley's account of propaganda found in the book, noting its unique qualities compared to the accounts of ideology we have previously witnessed. I pay special attention to areas in which he deviates from traditional conceptions of ideology, and areas where he seemingly integrates aspects of the ideological criticism found in Geuss but frames the critique in his own terms. I then elucidate his particularly unique and significant contribution to the study of ideology, that of his emphasis on 'conceptual schemes' as a crucial part of an individual's ideology with a functional role in affecting the development of flawed ideologies. I chose Stanley as the subject of study in this project as opposed to other recent analytic philosophers, like Sally Haslanger and others, because Stanley's conception of ideology draws great influence from the work of these individuals but expounds their work in constructing his theory with a more specific purpose of illuminating the ways in which flawed ideologies are democratically problematic, i.e., pose serious problems to democracy by impeding proper democratic deliberation. His theory of ideology provides unique insight into how elements of ideology, such as conceptual schemes and legitimizing myths connected to one's identity, directly influence the development of flawed ideologies in agents and how these flawed ideologies prevent agents from proper democratic deliberation, posing serious problems to liberal democracy.

PART TWO: STANLEY'S NOTION OF IDEOLOGY

Stanley's notion of ideology is developed in a book devoted to analyzing the practice of propaganda in contemporary liberal societies. Ideology helps explain how "undermining propaganda" becomes effective. Undermining propaganda is defined as "a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals" (Stanley 53). Involved in undermining propaganda is this gap between that ideal presented in the propaganda and the actual aim of the propaganda in eroding or undermining that ideal. He claims that the success of this form of propaganda essentially relies on two things: "people having beliefs that are resistant to available evidence, the evidence that reveals the tension between goal and ideal...[and] beliefs that are resistant to evidence must themselves be flawed in some way" (178). His primary interest will be to parse out the ways in which 'ideological beliefs' can be flawed, then explain how flawed ideological beliefs arise from flawed social structures, specifically as a result of material, social, and economic inequalities at the structural level. He narrows the scope of his account of ideology to focus only on the "purely epistemic notion of flaw" in relation to ideological beliefs to in turn elucidate his argument that "certain ideologies have epistemic flaws, in addition to what one might regard as the epistemic flaws of all ideological beliefs," claiming that these flawed ideologies are particularly democratically problematic (181). On this view, only those flawed ideological beliefs which are democratically problematic, in being barriers to the acquisition of knowledge and affecting political judgment about central issues in liberal democracy, are particularly worrisome and should be abandoned.

Stanley's favored conception of ideology is constituted by those beliefs that are "the record of expectations of various goods built out of regularities of convention...that

unreflectively guide our path through the social world” (184). Later, he asserts that these beliefs may also be understood in their likeness to stereotypes, as more or less consistent pictures of the world to which agents’ habits, capacities, comforts, and hopes have adapted themselves, regardless of whether this picture of the world is complete. Given the memory capacities of the human brain, it is necessary that agents have some sort of ideology, or stereotype, which guides them through the social world, through background knowledge. Drawing inspiration from Marx’s view that “the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force,” Stanley includes in his notion of ideology this legitimization narrative that the privileged, or ruling class, tell themselves about why they are deserving of that privilege (Marx 67). This inclusion is tied to Stanley’s account that agents’ ideologies are closely connected with their various identities. He claims that, in the sense of his conception of ideology, everyone has one, because everyone has a social world. Furthermore, because “our ideologies are guided by a desire to retain a sense of normalcy, especially when normalcy is pleasant, they characteristically lead to beliefs that are connected to one’s positive self-image, in the way Marx describes” (Stanley 184). These beliefs are problematic and result in flawed ideologies, which Stanley will argue have their source in flawed social structures. To clarify further, Stanley asserts that an ideology, in his sense, is “simply a social ‘script’ that governs one’s expectations, normative and practical...we all have ideologies, in this sense, and only some of them are flawed in the relevant sense,” ‘relevant sense’ referring to their feature of being barriers to the acquisition of knowledge (200).

Stanley’s conception of ideology is a new contribution to the acknowledged conceptions of ideology found in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. His notion of ideology is more individuated, referring to those ideologies held by individual agents rather than groups. Stanley

fails to make clear whether the ideology of an individual is meant to include all those beliefs, attitudes, motives, desires, values, dispositions, and characteristic behaviors of the agent, in which case it takes on a purely-descriptive-sense, or if the ideology is made up only of those ‘ideological beliefs.’ Stanley also employs a vastly different usage of the term “ideological” from that found in Geuss. Where “ideological” was used in critical theory to refer to a FOC which is an ideology in the negative, pejorative sense, here Stanley’s use of “ideological” takes on a sense of neutrality, more similarly resembling that of a Geussian ideology in the descriptive sense.

For Stanley, an ‘ideological belief’ bears the properties of being closely connected to one’s various identities and, consequently, resistant to rational revision. The most crucial aspect of Stanley’s ‘ideological belief’ is that these beliefs are ideological precisely because of their rational unrevisability, in combination with additional epistemic flaws; they differ from ordinary false beliefs, which are revisable in ways that ideological beliefs are not. These ideological beliefs are often born of social practices, lending to one’s social identity in connection to friends, family, and their community, thus abandoning these beliefs poses a problem to the individual of challenging their own identity and potentially isolating themselves from those to whom they are connected in this identity. It seems in this individuated context, ideology comes to resemble a descriptive “ideology-in-the-sense-of-world-view,” in that the beliefs which make up the ideology are central to the agent’s conceptual scheme, in some cases connected to other agents in their social group, not easily given up even in the face of counterevidence (given their close ties to the agent’s identity), and hold a wide and deep influence over the agent’s action and behavior. Stanley’s overall approach to ideology differs from those with which we are familiar in several ways, particularly in his evaluation of ideologies in virtue of their ‘epistemic flaws,’ as well as in

his aim for this project--to show how ideological beliefs can be flawed and why these flawed beliefs are democratically problematic.

The particular flawed ideological beliefs with which Stanley is concerned are those with epistemological defects, those which have epistemic flaws of a kind that present persistent barriers to knowledge acquisition of social realities. His approach to 'epistemic flaws' bears some similarity to Geussian epistemic criticism, in that the epistemic properties of the belief in question are evaluated by determining whether they are consistent with available empirical evidence or mistaken about their epistemic status, resulting in an 'epistemic flaw.' One epistemic flaw presented by Stanley is that of the legitimization narrative, which may be construed as an example of those self-validating beliefs mistaken by the agent as not self-validating, evaluated in epistemic criticism. Stanley takes a weaker position than that of critical theorists, however, in refraining from insistence that any belief found to be epistemically flawed must be rejected. Instead, only those flawed ideological beliefs which are *democratically problematic* must be addressed. An agent's flawed ideological belief that prevents them from realizing their favored sports team will not win the Superbowl every year poses no problem to democracy and is not of immediate concern. His standard for epistemic flaw is defined only by the beliefs' barrier to knowledge acquisition. In the case of legitimizing myths, which are false beliefs lending to a flawed ideology, privileged individuals adopt a belief that they are in some way deserving of their privilege, more so than those in inferior positions, which will prevent them from acknowledging particular social realities and injustices, thus hindering knowledge acquisition. This constitutes Stanley's standard for epistemic evaluation of beliefs in determining whether they are flawed.

In using the descriptor “flawed” to refer to ideological beliefs, Stanley’s approach differs from critical theory in that the three modes of criticism aim at determining ideological *falsity* of a FOC, dependent on the FOC containing a false belief or delusion. Flawed ideological beliefs in Stanley’s work seem to qualify as being false or delusions, in that they are often mistaken about their epistemic status as not empirically verifiable (i.e., their resistance to rational revision) or involve a delusion in the form of legitimizing narrative beliefs; however, he does not use this language. His primary aim with this account is his explanation for why these delusions or false beliefs develop in the ideologies of individuals, as connected to their various identities. He argues that false beliefs and delusions which justify an agent’s social position through self-legitimation are motivated by self-interest, to protect an individual’s positive self-image and social value; this is why these beliefs are so resistant to rational revision, that they are closely intertwined with the agent’s identity and, as a result, the agent is emotionally attached to the belief. This relation of ideology to agent identity appears to have been more or less implied in understandings of ideology mentioned previously, yet Stanley’s particular emphasis on this aspect of ideology is unique to his account. Further, he holds a unique position that not all ideological beliefs bearing these properties are epistemologically problematic; “ideological beliefs can be true, and can be knowledge,” even if they are resistant to rational revisability (197). Only those ideologies with negative epistemic flaws that become problematic in liberal democracy by being disabling in “the domain of democratic decision making” are flawed in the sense he is after (198). Therefore, only those flawed ideological beliefs which are democratically problematic should be abandoned, a view which differs from the goal of critical theory to free agents of all false beliefs and delusions.

This criticism of ideology performed by Stanley, I argue, is actually a functional criticism approach. In looking to the role of beliefs constituting an ideology which *function* as barriers of knowledge acquisition, particularly acquisition of knowledge about social realities and injustices, Stanley is illustrating flaws in an ideological belief which serve to “mask social contradictions” (Geuss 15). The social contradictions are those facts about the reality of the social world and existent injustices in the society which are masked, or hidden, from the agent by their ideological belief. In the case of privileged individuals in a society of unequal distribution of goods, the privileged develop an ideological belief that they are justified and deserving of their privileged position as a result of accidental forces (i.e., birthright), which is false, and this belief masks injustices against negatively privileged individuals via a conception of superiority versus inferiority. Similarly, in a society of equal distribution of goods, individuals who lack resources may develop a belief that their lack of resources is a social injustice, which is false, and this belief will prevent them from recognizing their own faults in contributing to their position. The function of the belief is what is at issue in Stanley’s work. Adopting this functional approach to criticism, in the sense of masking social contradictions, also accounts for Stanley’s claim that an “ideological belief can be true” (Stanley 197). As we saw in Geuss, a FOC can be an ideology in the functional sense even if it does not contain false beliefs because it serves to mask social contradictions by diverting attention away from these contradictions, or in Stanley’s case, hiding them from view altogether. An ideological belief may not be false, but it diverts attention away from evidence or realities contradictory to the belief, satisfying the condition that the belief be resistant to rational revisability.

I turn now to Stanley’s most important contribution to theories of ideology--his emphasis on the function of “*certain conceptual schemes*” which mislead agents about the world (202). In

the same way self-interest and social identity may lead to flawed ideologies, “self-interest can lead us to adopt a set of concepts that prevent us from gaining knowledge about the social world” (202). In his discussion of how the particular conceptual schemes maintained by an agent misrepresent reality, Stanley provides an example of a situation in which lacking a crucial concept in one’s conceptual scheme performs this function. The story is of a woman working at Cornell University who was repeatedly sexually harassed over a period of years. However, the concept “sexual harassment” was not yet articulated, preventing her from recognizing her “ongoing mistreatment”; “this is a clear example in which the failure of her ideology to have a concept robbed her of the tools to understand her own oppression” (202). This is the sort of epistemically disabling ideology introduced by Stanley. Lacking crucial concepts in one’s conceptual scheme has the same effect on negatively privileged groups who lack the concepts necessary to isolate and understand their own oppressive social contexts. The idea behind this claim is mentioned by Mills in his argument for nonideal theory: “nonideal theory recognizes that people *will* typically be cognitively affected by their social location, so that on both the macro and more local level, the descriptive concepts arrived at may be misleading” (Mills 175). Mills provides an alternative view to this idea in which the conceptual schemes held by agents in subordinated positions will enable them to see more clearly certain social realities. He recalls the “innovation of using *patriarchy* to force people to recognize, and condemn as political and oppressive, rather than natural, apolitical, and unproblematic, male domination of women” (175). The realities of patriarchal oppression were more visible to women, the victims of that oppression, allowing for this perspective to influence the introduction of a concept which acknowledged and explained that oppression.

Given the role played by concepts in an ideology, Stanley asserts that the concepts within an ideology can themselves be flawed as well. If we take concepts to be “a way of thinking of a property...for example, the concept ‘table’ is a way of thinking of the property of being a table,” then concepts may be flawed if they are empty concepts, i.e., lacking a property (Stanley 204). An example of this is found in the concept “woman” as supposedly connected to properties of female submissiveness and helplessness. These properties of ‘submissive’ and ‘helpless’ are not actual properties attributed to all women; therefore, the concept is flawed in that it does not denote a property. Concepts may also be flawed in their being both empty and leading to false beliefs of a certain kind, through inferences. Inferences made on the basis of empty concepts, for example, the inference from “x is a woman” to “x is helpless and in need of care,” are not valid because the concepts themselves, being empty, do not permit such inferences. Finally, concepts may be flawed if their employment “impedes one’s acquisition of knowledge” (206). Relating this back to flaws in ideological beliefs, Stanley asserts that certain concepts may mask the dependence of certain propositions on one another, by ‘propositions’ is meant here the content of beliefs; these concepts are flawed because they “prevent the rational acquisition of knowledge and revision of beliefs...about the social world” (208). Stanley’s introduction of concepts and conceptual schemes of agents to the larger practice of ideology critique is a significant, unique contribution on his part. By homing in on the concepts held by agents with flawed ideological beliefs, about the world or about themselves, additional factors which explain how these beliefs arise and reproduce are illuminated. In tying this back to his work of demonstrating how flawed concepts and ideologies of this sort are democratically problematic, Stanley references Manfred Stanley’s “ideology of technicism” which is an ideology that “undermines democracy, by undermining the autonomy of those who are unfamiliar with the technicist concepts...[and]

makes citizens feel unqualified to participate democratically in the formation of laws that govern their behavior” (209). This is further evidence of the effect of flawed ideologies lacking in crucial concepts on rational and democratic deliberation, in this case employed by ‘experts’ intentionally to marginalize particular groups through this effect.

The account of ideology presented by Jason Stanley in his book is lacking in some respects compared to traditional accounts of ideology through its particular ambiguities about what beliefs specifically constitute an individual’s ideology and through his narrower project of identifying and condemning only those flawed ideologies relevant to liberal democracy; however, the weaknesses of his account are weaknesses as such only if his approach was to be applied more broadly to ideology, which is not his project in this book. He presents unique ideas about the epistemological flaws of particular beliefs and the way these beliefs arise in connection to the social identities of agents. Most important is his introduction of the role played by ‘conceptual schemes’ to the realm of ideology critique, producing a new mechanism by which the development of flawed ideologies in agents may be investigated and explained.

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