Explaining Ideology: Mechanisms and Metaphysics

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Abstract: Ideology is commonly defined along functional, epistemic, and genetic dimensions. This paper advances a reasonably unified account that specifies how they connect and locates the mechanisms at work. I frame the account along a recent distinction between anchoring and grounding, endorse an etiological reading of functional explanations, and draw on current work about the epistemology of delusion, looping effects, and structuring causes to explain how ideologies originate, reproduce, and possibly collapse. This eventually allows articulating how the legitimating function of ideologies relates to the constitutive and causal role they play when embedded into the facts they are originally designed to anchor.

Keywords: Ideology, Anchoring and Grounding, Etiological Functions, Delusions, Looping Effects

1. What (if anything) is ideology?

Ideology has been recently reclaimed to social sciences as a theoretical tool to account for the allegedly ubiquitous fact that people accept and enact, possibly against their own interest, unjust social arrangements (Haslanger 2017a, Jaeggi 2009, Celikates 2017, Shelby 2003, Stanley 2015: 178ff., Stahl 2016, Piketty 2019: 20ff.). In this context, ideology is meant to answer an explanatory question that requires the concept of ideology to be pejorative rather than descriptive (Geuss 1981: 12ff., Haslanger 2017b, Shelby 2003: 160). There is something wrong with ideology that is more than just a mistake or a moral wrong and distinctively contributes to explain why unjust arrangements persist in non-coercive circumstances. Ideology systematically hampers the capacity to recognize

them and induces subjects to cooperate in their own subjection (Habermas 1968: 310-311, Geuss 1981: 37ff., Haslanger 2017: 35, Celikates 2017: 58, Stanley 2015: 200ff.).

A classic example in the Marxian tradition is what Jerry Cohen labels the "basic bourgeois ideology" (Cohen 1978: 242). On this reading, political liberalism counts as an ideological delusion that distorts the "actual, earthly basis of the bourgeois world" to voice the particular interests of the bourgeoisie as universal (Marx 1846: 194). The distortion consists in representing the marketplace as "a very Eden of the innate rights of men" which makes for the "exclusive realm" of freedom, liberty, and property (Marx 1867: 281). While capitalists and workers meet as buyer and seller that are free and equal before the law, and only dispose of what is their own – namely capital and labor respectively (Marx 1867: 271) – their actual social relations are quite the opposite. Since workers do not own the means of production and are deprived of other means of livelihood, they are in fact forced to sell their labor power (Marx 1867: 271-272, 279-280).[1] Those who credit Marx with a conception of justice argue in this connection that workers are treated unjustly because they are forced to accept a labor contract that grants them no equivalent for surplus labor (Husami 1978: 47). On the other hand, those who attribute to Marx an "immanent" critique of capitalism read Marx as claiming that the bourgeois society fails to meet the standards of *its own* moral self-understanding (Benhabib 1996:107). On both readings, however, the ideological moment in liberalism consists in concealing the true nature of the capitalistic production relations by mis-representing them as conforming to allegedly universal ideas of freedom and equality (Marx 1846: 68). Another example is meritocracy. Meritocracy is widely taken to represent a self-serving ideology that provides the positively privileged with the sense that

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[1] In other words, workers are not free because capitalists enjoy a disproportionate negotiating power. Also, they are not treated as equals, because they are not rewarded fairly for the labor power they contribute to the capitalist. Finally, they cannot be said to own their labor power because they cannot withhold work – more specifically, while workers have a legal right to refuse to work, they have no power matching this right because they are forced to offer it to some capitalist or another if they want to survive and, in this sense, they are "owned not by any given capitalist, but by the capitalist class as a whole" (Cohen 1978: 223, see also 240).

they deserve their social position and prevent the negatively privileged from recognizing structural injustice (Stanley 2015: 216ff, see Young 1990: 200ff, Markovits 2019: 269-270). According to Stanley, in particular, it arises from the former out of a need for self-justification and is propagated by the education and media systems as well as reinforced by a variety of psychological mechanisms (Stanley 2015: 234 ff. 249 ff, 254-255, 259).[2] As a consequence, the structural factors that affect the distribution of advantages and disadvantages are obscured.[3] The general idea is that ideology contributes to legitimate existing social arrangements by mystifying them as natural, sacred, morally justified, or however inescapable, and operates through a variety of cognitive and social mechanisms that interfere with the exercise of our rational capacities.[4]

What is new on recent readings is applying to group-related issues, particularly race and gender injustice (Shelby 2003, 2016: 21ff., 22ff, Haslanger 2012: 446ff., 2017b), the pervasive role credited to culture in shaping social facts, a special emphasis on the embodiment of ideology into habits, artifacts, practical know-how, and generally into non cognitive skills, devices, and social and physical environmental constraints on thought and action (Haslanger 2017a: 16 ff., 2017c). This goes beyond Marx's superstructural view, as it allows ideology to enter social structures, to include both cognitive and non-cognitive elements, to look true to the facts it shapes while at the same time false,

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[2] This includes stereotyping, wishful thinking, and the "interest-relativism" of knowledge, that is the fact that those who face high-stake decisions must gather more evidence to act on belief than those who face low-stake decision (Stanley 2015: 252-254)

[3] Milanovic (2018: 16-19) argues for instance that "systemic forces" within liberal meritocratic capitalism work toward enhancing inequality – homogamic marriage patterns, the link between capital-income wealth and labor-income wealth, and the intergenerational transmission of cultural and economic resources.

[4] This is true also of Marx view of ideology as long as superstructure stabilizes production relations of production more or less in the same way in which four struts driven to the ground in a circle are less vulnerable to be shaken by the wind when they are connected by a roof: the roof is supported by the struts, but it renders the structure more stable (Cohen 1985: 231). On this reading, for instance, legal property rights are superstructural with respect to the power of allowing and inhibiting the use of a resource, but the latter is less secure when it is not legal. The same holds for ideology.

which adds further puzzles to traditional concerns about the intertwining of explanatory and normative demands placed on a theory of ideology, the pervasive irrationality it allegedly attributes to agents, and the privileged epistemic perspective it apparently involves (Heath 2001, Jaeggi 2009: 67ff., Haslanger 2017a: 14ff, Celikates 2006: 27ff., Geuss 1981: 26ff.).

Here I will not engage normative issues. Rather, I will focus on what it takes to formulate a reasonably unified account of ideology. Four questions recur. First, it is not obvious that ideology is more than a polemical concept. Interpretive approaches to social sciences traditionally cast doubt on the idea that a pejorative concept of ideology can be sensibly employed in understanding social facts (Celikates 2006: 27-29). A different concern has been recently raised to the effect that the same facts can be explained by plain strategic rationality. Simple cases relate to well-known collective action problems where rational agents get stuck in suboptimal equilibria (Heath 2001: 169-171). Subtler cases might draw on evidence that social categories like gender, class, facilitate the emergence of unfair conventions of coordination and resource division (O'Connor 2019: 40ff., 105ff.). This seems to fit with viewing ideologies as cultural tools that shape social practices by functioning to enable coordination and resource management (Haslanger 2017a: 20-23, 2017c: 156-157). It also suggests, however, that talk of ideology might be inadequate or at best redundant. In a nutshell, the argument is that cultural tools are themselves conventions and conventions are self-reinforcing for familiar strategic reasons. No irrationality, bias, or cognitive distortion needs to play a role and all relevant facts can be explained by strategic considerations (Sankaran 2019: 6-7, see O'Connor 2019: 3-5, 106-107). As it stands, talk of ideology is therefore explanatory inadequate, but it would be redundant if supplemented with a theory of strategic interaction (Sankaran 2019: 9, 13). Whatever the merit of the argument, it suggests that there must be more to ideology than being a coordination device to grant it a role in social science explanations.

Second, ideology seems to play several different roles in explaining why unjust arrangements persist. Ideology is commonly thought to rationalize and legitimate social arrangements, but it is often claimed that it also plays a role in constituting them and to enter causal processes that result in

structural injustice (Haslanger 2017a: 26, Jaeggi 2009: 67-68, Piketty 2019: 20-21). In particular, when construed as a "web of meanings, symbols, scripts and such" that facilitate coordinating and managing resources, ideology might be better understood as a "cultural techne gone wrong" that "organizes us in ways that are unjust" to the effect that the practices it informs "constitute unjust structures" and contribute to cause injustice (Haslanger 2012: 463ff., Haslanger 2017c: 159-160). This is far from claiming that cultural techne cause "all" injustice and rather suggests that the point is not their being "the cause" of injustice, but their "being a component in a social system that tends to reproduce itself" (Haslanger 2017c: 158, 160). However, ideology here plays a constitutive and a causal role that go beyond the legitimating role it is traditionally credited with. Whether and how these different roles relate is far from obvious. To understand how ideology works and how it relates to the social facts it undergirds, these multiple roles must be disentangled and suitably placed in the causal as well as the ontological order of explanation.

Third, resorting to ideology in social science explanations has been routinely claimed to credit agents with unrealistically defective cognitive capacities. Relying on the assumption that agents are prone to pervasive irrationality does not look explanatorily promising (Heath 2001) and patently fail to respect the ordinary exercise of human capacities (Haslanger 2017b: 15). Conversely, it seems to claim epistemic privilege for those engaged in detecting ideological motives behind common action patterns (Celikates 2017: 57). A sensible account of ideology should work under the assumption that people are endowed with normal rational capacities and refrain from invoking a privileged epistemic standpoint for ideological explanations.

Fourth, to the extent that ideologies are practically enacted and materially embodied, they do not consist just of "cognitive defects" (Haslanger 2017b: 7). Notably, similar considerations led Bourdieu to doubt the adequacy of the concept of ideology (Celikates 2006: 24-25). Cognitivist accounts of ideology seem at least to miss how cognitive attitudes "are connected to our unthinking responses, our bodily comportment, the social and material realities that constitute our milieu" (Haslanger 2017b: 13). Conversely, any account that allows ideology to operate at least partially

beyond belief needs to outline how the latter relate to the ideological contents they embody to locate their role in explaining how ideology works.

Eagleton (1991) notoriously remarked that a single definition of ideology can be hardly found in the literature and variations proliferate rather than converge toward a unified theory. This paper aims at advancing a reasonably unified account that satisfies some sensible constraints on what, if anything, might count as an ideology. Ideology is commonly defined along functional, epistemic, and genetic dimensions (Geuss 1981: 13ff., Shelby 2003, Stahl 2016: 239, Celikates 2017: 63-64). Making sense of ideology requires specifying whether and how they connect, locating the relevant mechanism to account for how ideologies originate, reproduce, and possibly collapse. In what follows, I frame the account of ideology along the lines of Epstein's distinction between anchoring and grounding relations (Epstein 2015: 80ff., 2016: 155ff.), endorse an etiological reading of functional explanations, and draw on recent work about the epistemology of delusion, looping effects, and structuring causes. On the resulting account, the etiological function of ideologies is ontologically located at the anchoring level and their epistemic properties are conjectured to result when ordinary mechanisms that commonly underpin occasional irrationalities get triggered under conditions shaped by the social arrangements their outputs are designed to undergird, while looping effects are read as turning anchors into grounded facts to the effect of reinforcing the conditions under which the relevant mechanisms trigger. The epistemology of delusions here connects the function of ideology with its epistemic flaws and structural etiology without crediting agents with unrealistic flawed cognitive capacities, whereas looping effects are given a specific explanatory role as feed-back mechanisms in a functional explanation.

2. An Explanatory Framework: The Etiological Function of Ideology

The first question to ask is what marks off ideology among the ordinary gears of social reality – common knowledge, shared beliefs, habits, social expectations and the like. As stated above, ideology is commonly defined along functional, epistemic, and genetic dimensions: it is not just a mistake or a moral wrong, but a systematic form of irrationality with a specific function and a specific etiology. A reasonably unified account of ideology will thus primarily focus on qualifying the functional, epistemic, and etiological properties of ideologies, explaining how they connect, and tracing how they are acquired by anything that might count as an ideology. Anything falling short of functioning to undergird social arrangements can hardly count as ideology. Hence, it is sensible to frame the account of ideology in the context of a functional explanation. However, there might be nothing epistemically flawed in the attitudes, habits, practices, or understandings on which agents rely. Further, the latter might be flawed for contingent or socially irrelevant reasons. For them to count as ideological, systematic distortions and social causes must factor in the process that brings them about (Elster 1986: 168-169, Stanley 2015: 179). In short, the following constraints must be jointly satisfied – the second is spelled out in terms of beliefs for reasons that will become clear as the argument develops:

i. **Functional**: ideologies have the function of sustaining and stabilizing social arrangements by inducing agents to accept and enact them.

ii. **Epistemic**: ideologies result from systematically distorted processes of belief formation that affect their epistemic standing.

iii. **Etiological**: the working of the mechanisms that distort belief formation can be traced back to social causal factors shaped by the social arrangements their outputs underpin.

Casting ideology in the context of a functional explanation has several implications. First, it suggests how the functional, epistemic, and etiological properties of ideology are connected. Many things conceivably conspire in the persistence of unjust arrangements. What is specific to ideology is

explaining how they persist in non-coercive circumstances by reference to the irrationality by which acceptance is induced. Ideology performs its function by *apparently* solving a legitimation problem that any social arrangement faces as it entails certain distributions of power and resources; how the latter are distributed must be justified to those who are bound by them in order to grant stability (Geuss 1981: 31 ff., 59-60, 69, Habermas 1968: 80, Habermas 1995, 112-113, Williams 1995: 5-6, see Veyne, 1976: 379, Searle 2010: 140-141, 165-166, Celikates 2017: 63, Shelby 2014: 23, Piketty 2019: 13). In this sense, the function of ideology hangs on its content. Ideologies perform their function by endowing agents with *apparent* reasons to accept, and hereafter to enact, unjust social arrangements. Apparent reasons are not real reasons, they are rather whatever agents treat as a reason because of entertaining some beliefs whose truth would give them a reason (Alvarez 2010: 140, 144ff. see also Williamson 2017: 179). The second and the third constraints specify that such beliefs would not be entertained were belief formation unaffected by distortions that trace back to the arrangements they give apparent reasons to accept. The main rationale to characterize the second constraint in terms of belief is that epistemic demands are naturally placed on truth apt-attitudes that take reasons as content and only derivatively elsewhere (see section 4.2).

Second, functional explanations need feedback mechanisms. On a common etiological reading, X has the function F of bringing about Y if (a) X causes Y and (b) X persists because it causes Y. Some mechanism hence must be present by which X's effects are fed back on its replication (Wright 1973, Millikan 1993: 13-14; Kincaid 1996: 111 ff.). Natural selection explanations are only one realization of a general scheme that allows for a broader variety of selection mechanisms (Kincaid 2007: 224). Cohen, for instance, traces Marx's account of ideology back to a view of cultural evolution that includes both Darwinian and Lamarckian elements; thought-systems do not originate from class interest, but they get selected by their effects in promoting it and change to adapt to changing environments (Cohen 1978: 291). More generally, learning, imitation, planning, rational choice play a role throughout functional explanations in the social sciences (Kincaid 2007: 227 ff.

239 ff.). In the last section I suggest that looping effects crucially contribute to account for how the effects of ideology on social arrangements feedback on the causal process that explain its persistence.
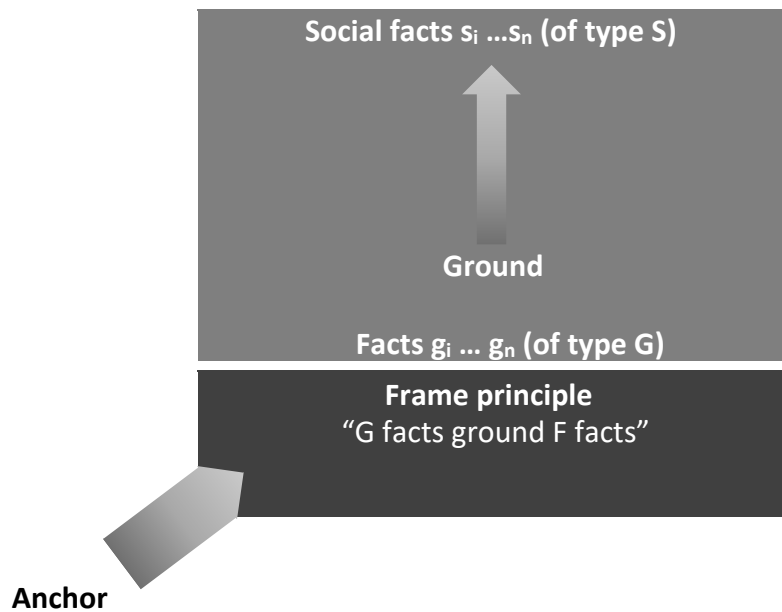
Third, focusing on the functional constraint suggests how to locate ideology in the causal and ontological explanatory order of explanation. Since the etiological function of an entity explains why it (continues to) exist, the legitimating function of ideology should be granted explanatory primacy. It is widely acknowledged, however, that ideology further plays both a constitutive and a causal role with respect to the practices and institutions out of which social structures emerge that further operate as structuring causes of unjust states of affairs (Haslanger 2017a; 2017c; Piketty 2019: 15, 20-21). In the next section I draw on the distinction between anchoring and grounding relations to locate the different roles of ideology in the metaphysics of social facts. In the last section I elaborate on the idea recently advanced in the literature that looping effects explain how ideologies get entrenched in the constituents of social reality and argue that a number of questions can be answered by taking them to turn anchors into grounded facts. In particular, this helps understand how some non-cognitive features of social arrangements might embody ideological contents and connects their constitutive and causal roles with the feedback processes functional explanations call for.

3. *A Metaphysical Framework: Anchoring and Grounding*

Epstein (2015) recently advanced a framework for social ontology that relies on distinguishing between grounding and anchoring relations. Grounding relations tell us what kind of facts make a further kind of facts to be what they are. Specifying grounding relations thus amounts to devise the conditions to be fulfilled for the latter to obtain. Take Searle's account for simplicity. Constitutive rules give grounding conditions in accordance with the formula "X counts as Y in context C" (Searle 1995: 27-29, see Epstein 2015: 75-77); they tell what kind of facts are metaphysically sufficient for certain kinds of social facts to obtain. Constitutive rules, however, are not free-floating. There are

other facts that set up what they are – in Searle's case, collective acceptance. These facts do not work as grounds. They rather set up grounding conditions to be what they are. Anchoring relations are designed to capture the relation between grounding conditions and the facts that put them into place. They tell what kinds of facts are metaphysically sufficient for other kinds of facts to have the grounding conditions they have. Grounding conditions can thus be spelled out in terms of principles that frame facts according to the relevant grounding relations and are set up by further facts that make for the relevant anchoring relations (Epstein 2015: 74-85). The distinction between anchoring and grounding tells apart two kinds of relations that play different roles in metaphysical structures and provides a framework for social ontology that allows for a variety of mechanisms to be at work in bringing about social facts (Epstein 2016: 163ff.) (Figure 1).[5]

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[5] A reason for casting ontological dependence in terms of grounding is that grounding allows structuring metaphysical relations according to fundamentality (Fine 2012; Epstein 2015: 70, Griffith 2019). While grounding relations are relations of constitution, however, anchoring is not. Therefore, their contribution to metaphysical structures is different. For instance, the grounding conditions for being a tiger are set up by evolutionary facts that are no constituent part of any tiger. Similarly, accepting a constitutive rule does not constitute institutional facts, but rather puts the relevant grounding conditions into place. See for discussion Schaffer (2019) and Epstein (2019).

Social facts $s_i \ldots s_n$ (of type S)

Ground

Facts $g_i \ldots g_n$ (of type G)

Frame principle
"G facts ground F facts"

Anchor

Facts $a_i \ldots a_n$ (of type A): attitudes, practices, regularities, historical facts, functional facts etc.

Figure 1. Anchoring vs Grounding – Adapted from Epstein 2015

In the present context, distinguishing anchoring from grounding allows locating ideology in the structure of social ontology. In fact, anchoring is where grounding conditions can be investigated and possibly questioned with respect to how they are set up – for instance, when found anchored by widespread false beliefs (Epstein 2016: 161). Claiming that they are affected by ideology is different from merely claiming that they are morally problematic precisely because it involves locating a flaw in how they are put into place rather than in their content. It follows that ideology performs its etiological function by contributing to anchor frame principles. Since the etiological function of an entity explains why it (continues to) exist, anchoring relations are the primary *locus* of ideology.

How does ideology work at anchoring? While a variety of facts might anchor frame principles, acceptance is critical when it comes to arrangements that regulate power relations, social positions, resource division, or legal rules (Williams 2005, Rawls 1971: 15ff., Hart 1961: 101ff., 201). The etiological function of ideology can be thus cashed out along the anchoring/grounding distinction by

saying that ideology functions in anchoring frame principles by affecting acceptance. Anchoring is a metaphysical relation, yet anchoring facts might be causally affected by other facts. In particular, taking acceptance as an anchoring fact is consistent with its being motivated by apparent reasons that features as contents of beliefs that are distinctively flawed – in fact, we will see, a specific variety of delusional beliefs. The functional constraint might now be refined as follows:

i. **Functional**: ideology performs the etiological function of sustaining and stabilizing unjust social arrangements by providing agents with apparent reasons to accept frame principles.

Another benefit of the anchoring/grounding framework is that it applies to different kinds of social entities. Conventions, social norms, artefacts, overt and covert social roles, and groups can be equally subject to this type of two-dimensional analysis, covering a number of possible takes on how the social world is made up. Talk of ideology might thus turn out to apply broadly. It most obviously relates to constructionist approaches to social ontology that straightforwardly allow false beliefs to affect acceptance (Searle 2010: 107, Mallon 2018),[6] but it might also apply to strategic accounts of social norms and conventions. Social norms, for instance, might be taken to rely only on conditional preferences and second-order beliefs about other people's normative beliefs – that is, social normative expectations (Bicchieri 2017: 35). The latter, however, are commonly entrenched in a web of further beliefs, values, norms that form shared cognitive schemata and can be widely affected by cognitive biases. Agents might thus accept existing norms because they fail to perceive them as problematic, mistakenly believe that they are superior to others, or lack knowledge of alternatives (Bicchieri 2017: 121-122, 135ff.). Conventions can be similarly entrenched. They can be harder to change when

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[6] It is controversial, however, whether Searle's account can explain "covert constructions" like race and gender, whose acceptance crucially depend on the false belief that they match natural kinds. Insofar as it takes social institutions to result from collectively imposed status function, Searle's account seems in fact to entail that institutional facts are known to be socially constructed (Mallon 2018: 451ff.).

people believe that they are valuable, that they are natural, or that there is no alternative (Sankaran 2019: 10-11). While acknowledging that in this sense schemata and associated scripts "are cognitive support for social arrangements", Sankaran maintains that talk of ideology is redundant here because the latter "do all the work ideology is supposed to do" (Sankaran 2019: 14). A lot here depends indeed on what work ideology is supposed to do. Schemata and scripts do not overlap with the prudential reasons and social expectations that make for the self-reinforcing features of conventions, but rather provide them with further cognitive support. Roughly, they constrain prudential reasons by barring alternatives in a way or another. On the present account, they would count as ideological if (and only if) they consist in, include, or are affected by beliefs that meet the relevant functional, epistemic, and etiological constraints.

In this sense ideologies might play a role even in strategic accounts of conventions and social norms provided that they are found lurking among the reasons that drive agents to endorse them rather than in the conventions and norms themselves. This is consistent with the metaphysical framework sketched above. Conventions and social norms don't work as ideologies because they rather count as frame principles. They can be affected by ideology, however, as a consequence of the beliefs they are entrenched in. Whether they are is a question to be answered by looking at how they are anchored. While this departs from a "practice first" view on which ideology primarily consists in a cultural techne (Haslanger (2017b: 16), the distinction between ideology and ideological formations drawn by Haslanger is fruitful here. On the present reading, ideology primarily works at anchoring social arrangements, but any practice, institution, or artifact that is shaped by ideology as a consequence of how it is anchored can be regarded as an ideological formation.

4. *Mechanisms*

Ideology is invoked to explain why people accept and enact unjust social arrangements under non-coercive conditions. In the former section I argued that it affects anchoring relations by inducing acceptance and I will turn later to the role it might play in their enactment, which requires ideology to operate *within* anchored frames. The notion of acceptance needed here is minimalistic. In particular, it does not need to involve a claim to the effect that collective intentionality is required to bring about social facts and it should not entail a claim to the effect that social entities are constituted by human attitudes. Both claims are controversial and the second seems to preclude that agents might entertain false beliefs about the relevant social entities (Mallon 2018, 438-449, Guala 2016: 164ff.). In the present context, acceptance might rely on individual attitudes only (Hindriks, Guala 2015), consists in the disposition to align with existing practices (Hart 1961: 255), or be implicated by social normative expectations (Bicchieri 2017: 121ff.).[7] Nothing here impinges on how it is understood provided that it allows acceptance to work at anchoring rather than at grounding social facts, which rules out that social entities are constituted by attitudes.[8]

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[7] The strain of commitment associated with acceptance might be accordingly weak for conventions that rely on empirical social expectations and strong for rules and agreements that entail obligation, while social norms that rely on normative social expectations might make for an intermediate case as long as they depend on our beliefs about the normative beliefs of others. For two views at the extremes of the spectrum, see Michael, Székely (2018) and Gilbert (2014: 39ff.). For the view that social norms rely on normative expectations see Bicchieri (2017: 29ff.) .

[8] In this sense, the claim that at least some social arrangements are anchored by acceptance is compatible with a broad variety of views about what acceptance entails. In particular, although the claim that attitudes are constitutive of social facts and the claim that collective acceptance involves collective mentality go often together (see Searle 1995, Gilbert 2014), there is no necessary connection between the two. Lewis's theory of conventions involves the former but not the latter – because common knowledge does not involve collective intentionality (Lewis 1969: 52ff.). Epstein's reading of Searle preserves the latter but not the former – because anchoring relations are not relations of constitution. Also, the claim that collective intentionality cannot be analyzed in terms of individual intentionality does not entail that it cannot be explained in terms of cognitive processes performed by individual minds (Tomasello 2008: 68ff., see also Bianchin 2015).

The space for ideology to operate depends on the fact that acceptance is not free-floating. A variety of considerations can motivate agents to accept social arrangements: that they are mutually beneficial, that they conform to some natural or sacred order of things, that they are valuable or morally justified, that they lack alternatives and so on. Hume's account of conventions and Weber's theory of legitimation are perhaps the most prominent examples (Hume 1751: 172, Weber 1922: 215). Ideology is accordingly designed to supply *apparent* reasons that induce acceptance by hampering the capacity to recognize flawed social arrangements because of misrepresenting them as responding to common or general interests, being natural or sacred, conforming to shared values or universal moral principles, lacking alternatives and the like (Habermas 1995: 112-113, Elster 1986: 171-171, Haslanger 2012: 468, Mallon 2018: 444ff., 454-455, Jaeggi 2009, 65). Given that apparent reasons are not real reasons, a distinctive distortion must be detected in the causal process yielding the relevant beliefs. Ideologies are legitimation myths we would not believe were beliefs to result from an epistemically safe causal history. The next sub-section considers how ideological beliefs that convey apparent reasons to accept might arise. The following sub-section turns to enactment.

4.1. Delusions

Ideologies are routinely taken to diverge from ordinary occasional cognitive mistakes because they involve irrational beliefs that are systematic and resilient owing to the fact of resulting from belief formation processes that non-occasionally violate epistemic norms. They are equally taken to diverge from psychopathological symptoms, however, because their explanation turns on "social causation" rather than on "individualized" causal factors (Elster 1986: 169, see Habermas 1968: 279-280). Two features are salient. First, ideologies resist revision because they result from mechanisms that systematically affect belief formation by lowering evidence sensitivity. A variety of mechanisms have been conjectured to operate in this connection. Ideologies have been taken to align with adaptive preferences in being endogenously secreted to reduce cognitive dissonance rather than exogenously

inculcated by propaganda or indoctrination (Elster 1983: 145, Elster 1986: 161, Veyne 1976: 377 ff.), with wishful thinking and sample biases in being possibly interest-induced (Elster 1983: 148 ff.), with partiality and perspective biases in endowing local cultural norms and social arrangements with the appearance of naturalness and universality (Sen 2002: 169-70, Cohen 1978: 115-16, Elster 1983: 142 ff.,), with attribution biases that are unsurprisingly active in racism (Gomez, Wilson 2006). Second, ideologies are routinely suggested to "originate in" or be "shaped by" the position agents occupy within social structures and the related interests, power relations, economic arrangements, distributive conflicts. Since irrationality does not itself amount to ideology and social facts do not cause belief by themselves, the cognitive mechanisms and the "social causation" involved in the causal process must be sorted out and suitably connected to shed light into how irrational beliefs might be socially induced to the effect of turning out *ideologically* flawed. The epistemology of delusions helps understanding how common mechanisms that account for occasional irrationalities might elicit systematic distortions under certain conditions, while the distinction between triggering and structuring causes sheds light on how social factors might affect belief formation. Let me expand on these two points.

Delusions emerge in a variety of psychiatric disorders characterized by atypical beliefs held in the face of contrary evidence like schizophrenia, depression, and OCD, which violate the norms of rationality, failing to integrate with already possessed knowledge and properly respond to evidence (Bortolotti 2010: 132, 138 ff.). They do not constitute a *sui generis* psychological kind, however. Rather, they exacerbate ordinary irrationalities. Confirmation biases, attribution biases, sample biases, alternative neglect, evidence overweight and other common mechanisms underlay everyday irrational beliefs. What marks off clinical delusions is their being systematic and resilient because severe psychopathological conditions underpin their triggering, which makes the mechanisms more likely to trigger, pervasive, harder to unset. For instance, attribution biases are systematic and resilient in paranoid ideation. Also, clinical delusions perform a defensive function in protecting subjects from forming beliefs that would cause more distress (Lancellotta, Bortolotti 2019). Still, patients tend to lose confidence in their delusions when faced repeatedly with counter-evidence and positive effects

are limited in time (Gunn, Bortolotti 2018). The upshot is that clinical delusions feature at the extreme of a continuum along which rational beliefs, religious beliefs, prejudicial beliefs and other irrational beliefs align according to their respective decreasing sensitivity to evidence (Bortolotti 2010: 150, 159-60). Irrationality is a matter of degree, not a difference in kind. Clinical delusions are nothing but beliefs whose formation and maintenance are especially vulnerable to irrationality due to pathological background conditions (Bortolotti 2010: 140).

Like clinical delusions, ideological beliefs are generated by mechanisms that are commonly responsible for ordinary faults and only diverge from the latter in their systematicity and resiliency. Also like clinical delusion ideologies perform a defensive function by protecting social arrangements from beliefs that would undermine acceptance, yet are vulnerable to critique and bound to collapse when the latter are shaken. Finally, their systematicity and resiliency also are explained by reference to the unbalanced conditions that underlay belief formation. Distinguishing triggering from structuring causes allows in this context to make sense of "social causation." While triggering causes explain what in a causal process caused C *which* caused E, structuring causes are designed to explain what "shaped or structured the process" – what made C cause E rather than something else (Dretske 1988: 42). Clinical delusions, in this sense, can be said to result when the mechanisms that underlay ordinary irrationalities are brought to trigger under conditions shaped by psychiatric disorders. Similarly, ideological beliefs might be conjectured to result when they are brought to trigger under conditions shaped by social positions, power relations, and distributive conflicts. While social facts can be hardly taken to be proximal causes of belief, they conceivably might structure the process of belief formation to the effect that common mechanisms for irrationality trigger frequently, non-occasionally, and are hard to unset. In both case, systematicity and resilience are explained by the fact that specific structuring causes underpin the triggering of common mechanisms.[9]

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[9] Emotional factors are likely to play a mediating role. Petrolini (2017) for instance argues that delusional patients do not suffer from cognitive impairments, but of executive dysfunctions resulting from "emotional imbalances" that affect their

Social arrangements might be suitably conceived in this context as structures constituted by intertwined networks of social practices or institutions and endowed with structuring causal powers that reach beyond those of single practices or institutions, possibly resulting in structural injustice (Haslanger 2016: 117, Shelby 2016: 28). The role they play in explaining ideology is a special case. Ideological beliefs is what belief formation brings about when distorting mechanisms that in normal circumstances only occasionally affect the process of belief formation get triggered under conditions shaped by social arrangement that involves asymmetric power relations and/or unfair distributions of resources. Triggering causes arguably involve a demand for justification that may arise from the need to settle conflicts without resorting to overt violence or induce compliance in non-coercive circumstances, and more generally from a need for justification that affect the positively as well as the negatively privileged. On Weber's reading, for instance, legitimation myths arise from the former (Weber 1922: 953-954), whereas Veyne (1976: 379) suggests that they are secreted "by [the] subjects themselves" to make sense of their own subjection. Both versions are found in Marx's accounts of ideology (Elster 1986: 168-169). Stanley (2015: 184) endorses a Weberian reading, while Elster (1983: 145) leans toward Veyne's reading.

Given that the mechanisms are common and differences depend on the structural factors that shape the conditions under which they trigger, it seems sensitive to locate ideologies somewhere in

ability to detect relevant evidence, monitor and replace irrelevant information, and look for alternatives (Petrolini 2017: 517-18). Emotional imbalances here are credited to endogenous causal factors connected with severe psychopathologies. However, psychopathologies are hardly the only sources of the mis-placed emotional significance that drives delusional belief formation. Interest-related belief that result form sample biases and dissonance reduction are most clearly driven by affective motives, but "positional parameters" that affect gathering and processing information on Sen's view of "objective positional illusions" are also likely to be emotionally charged insofar as they depend on internalized cultural norms and social roles (Sen 2002: 159, 164ff). Similarly, there is evidence that fear and anger might induce biased assimilation of information and underpin attribution bias (Coleman 2013, Suhay, Erizen 2018). More generally, ideological beliefs are commonly taken to relate with noncognitive motives that respond to socially wicked conditions – preserving self-esteem, giving consolation, silencing a guilty conscience and the like (Shelby 2003: 171).

the irrationality spectrum between epistemically safe beliefs and clinical delusion. Social factors here affect belief formation by affecting the triggering of the relevant distorting mechanisms to the effect of resulting in widely shared mildly delusionary beliefs. Their evidence insensitivity – or resistance – is higher than in ordinary mistakes because it is non-occasional, frequent, resistant to revision, yet weaker than in clinical delusions because social structuring causes are psychologically exogenous, historically contingent, conceivably easier to resist or escape than severe psychopathology.

Tracing differences back to different structuring causes also explains a further, rather obvious difference between clinical and ideological delusions. While the former involve atypical and private beliefs, the latter are typical and public. Clinical delusions idiosyncratically affect individuals because the relevant causal process is structured by psychologically endogenous mental disorders. Ideological delusions are widespread and public because belief formation is structured by social factors that are psychologically exogenous. Similar mechanisms are likely to trigger frequently across people living in similar social environments and to affect the psychological processes that underlie the formation of shared beliefs as well as to impact the creation and transmission of cultural common ground.[10]

This reading allows belief formation to undergo systematic distortions without crediting agents with pervasive irrationality because it entirely relies on ordinary mechanisms and suitably

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[10] Sperber's work on the explanation of culture and Tomasello's work on the origins of cultural practices provide two excellent examples of how the formation and transmission of shared beliefs and cultural common ground can be explained by the interplay of psychological and social mechanisms. Tomasello highlights conventionalization as a mechanism by which joint intentionality scales to collective mindedness (Tomasello 2014: 81: 138ff). Sperber attraction theory suggests that cultural phenomena depend on both the individual mechanisms that bring about the formation and transformation of representation and the interpersonal mechanisms that bring about their transmission, which makes the latter subject to psychological and ecological constraints that rule out strict replication – for instance, cultural transmission is affected by the background knowledge to which representations are relevant and by the recurrence of situations in which they contribute to action control (Sperber 1996: 60, 83-84, 106ff). Insofar as ideology is a matter of shared beliefs and cultural common ground, the mechanisms in virtue of which the latter emerge and propagate are crucial to account for how culture can be affected by the distinctive irrationality of ideologies.

structured conditions. By the same token, it allows the explanatory demand concerning ideology to be confronted without claiming epistemic privilege; whether or not a "system of thought" amounts to ideology is an empirical question answerable by ordinary social sciences.

Finally, mentioning social structuring causes in explaining ideology might shed light on how ideologies possibly collapse. Ideologies are commonly held to be shaken by social crises and vulnerable to critique because they are parasitic on the arrangements they function to support (Geuss 1981: 58ff., Cohen 1978: 293, see Habermas 1968: 287ff., Jaeggi 2009). This is consistent with their resulting from causal processes that (a) involve distorting mechanisms and (b) are structured by social factors. Social crises undermine the structuring causes of ideological delusions, which arguably makes the former less likely to trigger, less pervasive, easier to unset, while critique might induce agents to lose confidence in their delusions by facing them with systematic counter-evidence. The upshot is that, owing to their flawed origins, ideologies perform their etiological function only to a limited degree. They can temporarily contribute to stabilize problematic states of affairs but they are bound to fail in anchoring cooperative schemes that are stable over time (Habermas 1995: 68ff., Jaeggi 2016, Author).

4.2. Looping effects

Recent debates brought attention to the constitutive and causal role ideology plays in addition to legitimating unjust arrangements. I have argued that the latter is explanatorily prior because it makes for the etiological function of ideology. The constitutive and the causal role of ideology should therefore connect with its legitimating function. On the one hand, there must be mechanisms that embed ideologies into the arrangements they legitimate. On the other, there must be mechanisms by which the effects of ideologies are fed back into the causal process that makes ideologies persist.

Looping effects have been recently suggested to be involved in how social structures emerge from practices conceived as interdependent patterns of cultural schemata and material resources

(Haslanger 2012: 463 ff. 466-468, Haslanger 2017a: 18-20).[11] Critics have objected, however, that looping effects can hardly account by themselves for the structural features of social arrangements and that it is unclear whether and how they fit with the functional dimension of ideology (Celikates 2017: 60-61). On the present reading, loping effects need not be part of an explanation of how social structures emerge because ideology *primarily* functions to anchor social arrangements, yet they might explain how ideology gets embedded into their constituents, thus strengthening their structural causal powers and possibly adding new forms of structural injustice. Understood this way they account for how ideology *comes to* play constitutive and causal roles precisely because the latter are *derivative* with respect to the etiological function it performs in anchoring social arrangements. By the same token, looping effects are given a specific explanatory role in the context of a functional account of ideology because they contribute to explain how its stabilizing effects are fed back into its replication.

Looping effects were originally designed to account for why social kinds behave as "moving targets" of social science explanations and to require agents to be aware of the classifications under which they fall (Hacking 1995a, 1995b; Mallon 2016: 170 ff.). However, it has been argued that they work as well for covert social roles that do not require awareness and can have stabilizing effects that relate to causal and strategic salience. On the one hand, looping effects explain how people conform to covert roles because the relevant categorizations make certain courses of action salient to those who fall under them both by allowing action goals to be intended under related descriptions and by designing related social expectations (Mallon 2003: 346-348; 2016: 71 ff.). On the other, the relevant categorizations can be sub-doxastically represented and affect automatic psychological processes without occurring as belief content. Similarly, social expectations can be unintentionally designed by environmental constraints that induce apt dispositions to copy with existing cultural practices, social

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[11] Notice that this does not entail a causal account of how social structures result from practices, but is rather meant to be compatible with the claim that social structures are *constituted* by practices. Looping effects enter the picture by shaping the relationship between schemas and resources.

institutions, and material artifacts. On this reading looping effects extend to states and processes that require no agential awareness and to external constraints on thought and action shaped by social, cultural, and built environments – gender related dress code conventions, stereotype threats, and residential segregation are paramount examples (Mallon 2016: 76 ff., 83 ff.). For instance, institutions might elicit suitable dispositions and conveniently filter individuals for corresponding social roles, and categorizations might implicitly influence behavior – as in cases of implicit bias. In this sense, looping effects involve multiple causal processes. Either way, the belief contents that underpin categorizations percolate into social arrangements to the effect of reinforcing their grip on agents beyond belief precisely because they need not be present in their mind as long as they are enacted by habit, operated by bias, entailed by skilled coping, or embodied by the disparate sorts of know-how that enable coping with the social and physical environment.

Ideologies might be thought in this connection to be widespread beliefs, folk theories, or legitimation myths that involve social kind concepts whose referents associate with social roles and related powers, positions, treatments, and social expectations (Mallon 2018: 433ff.). Looping effects embed them in the behavior patterns, habits, implicit attitudes, automatic processes, and objective features of social and physical environments that are proper parts of social arrangements. Originally designed to function as (parts of) anchoring mechanisms, ideologies are turned by looping effects into (parts of) the facts they were designed to anchor. Shelby's work on ideological racism excellently illustrates the point. The loop starts from fitting people into social categories based on racial beliefs to justify forced labor in the plantation economy, yet racial beliefs end up being implemented into habits, institutions, biases, and policies as a consequence of how blacks are classified, treated, and respond to classification and treatments – which eventually reinforce racial beliefs (Shelby 2003: 165, 182).

> […] many of the behaviors that are associated with inner city poverty are a consequence of the historical effects of racism, continuing *de facto* racial segregation, failing schools, structural shifts in the economy, and high rates of joblessness. These factors also explain why too many blacks – though

fewer than most Americans think – are forced to rely on public assistance to meet their basic needs. But if one is blind to or simply ignores these structural factors, some of the conduct of the black ghetto poor can seem to confirm the stereotypes of racist ideology and thus to justify resentment toward black welfare recipients […] Moreover, blacks themselves have been susceptible to the influence of racist ideology. Long periods of subjugation can induce feelings of inferiority, helplessness, and resignation in the oppressed. Oppressed groups under these social and psychological conditions more readily accept ideological explanations and justifications. (Shelby 2003: 165, 182)

This might explain how looping effects impact social structures and relate to the etiological function of ideology. As Celikates (2017: 60) considers, not all looping effects affect social structures. Those that operate on their anchors, however, reinforce their grip on agents by embedding ideologies into the constituent parts of social arrangements. As a consequence, social arrangements are not only accepted, but also literally enacted by ideology. In these cases, it is sensible to expect that looping effects will shape further institutions, policies, understandings – think of educational and welfare systems, or of jurisprudential traditions. In other terms, it is likely that their effects will be systematic and long-lasting. Conversely, it is sensible to expect that they will spread and reproduce more likely than others as a consequence of how they affect social structures. Finally, by embedding ideologies into non-cognitive dispositions, automatic processes, and "unthinking responses" to the social and physical environment, looping effects strengthen the stabilizing effects of ideologies by making ideologies typically invisible and of course beyond question (Haslanger 2012: 467-468). In Searlian terms, looping effects shift their working to the background. While ideological beliefs convey apparent reasons to the effect of legitimating unjust social arrangements, non-cognitive mechanisms operate to the effect of preventing legitimation problems from even surfacing (see Bourdieu 1972: 188-189, see also Searle 1995 137ff., Searle 2010: 155ff.)

All this in turn helps to explain how ideology persists. First, reinforcing arrangements that work as structuring causes of cognitive distortions increases the likelihood that ideological beliefs get

reproduced. Second, turning anchors into grounded facts makes ideology true *within the frame* and supplies genuine evidence for corresponding beliefs – which explains how ideologies can look true to the facts (Haslanger 2012, 2017b, Jaeggi 2009: 67). Looping effects thus seem to work as feedback mechanisms that contribute to explain how the effects of ideologies are fed back into the causal process that explain their replication (Figure 2). Ideology causes unjust arrangements to persist and persists because it does, which is what etiological functions require.
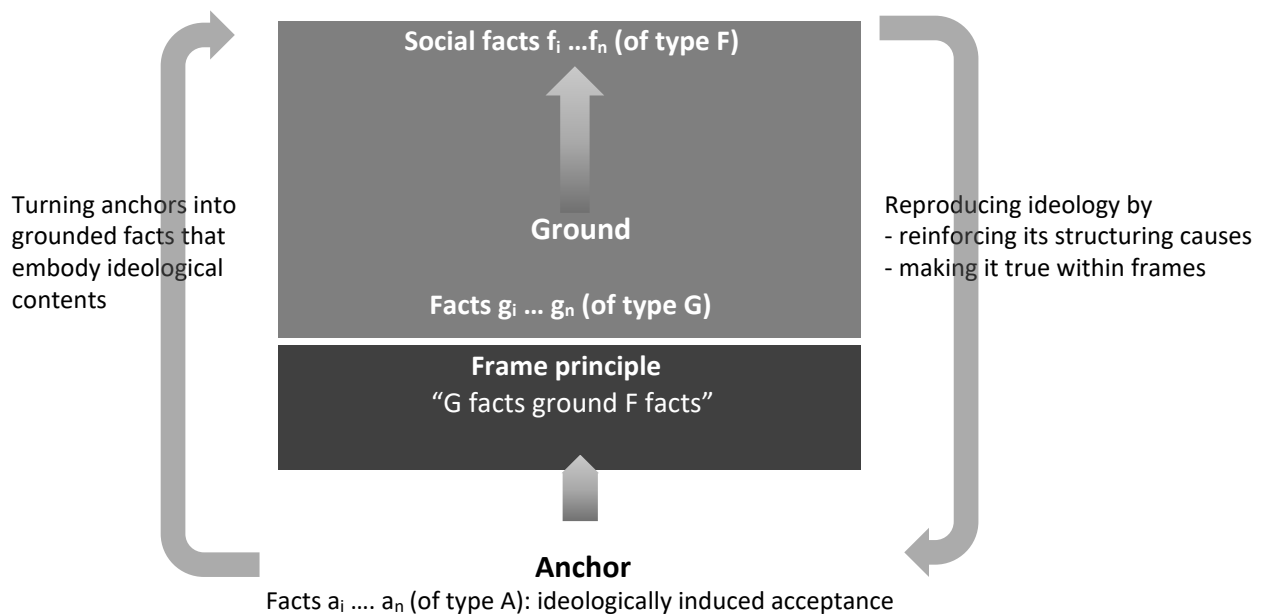
Turning anchors into grounded facts that embody ideological contents

Social facts f_i ...f_n (of type F)

Ground

Facts g_i ... g_n (of type G)

Reproducing ideology by
- reinforcing its structuring causes
- making it true within frames

Frame principle
"G facts ground F facts"

Anchor
Facts a_i .... a_n (of type A): ideologically induced acceptance

Figure 2: Looping effects as feedback mechanisms

An important implication is that looping effects shed light on how cognitive attitudes connect with the non-cognitive features of ideological formations because they explain how the latter might turn out to embody ideological contents. Looping effects explain how belief contents that originally function in providing (apparent) reasons to accept wicked arrangements come to operate through non-

cognitive mechanisms. Taking the latter as derivative with respect to the belief contents by virtue of which ideology perform its etiological function is crucial because it allows sorting them out from other, possibly innocent non-cognitive gears of social reality and crediting them with the functional, epistemic, etiological properties that are relevant to ideology. Tracing the process that takes the ideological belief contents to percolate into grounded social facts allows detecting whether and which of their parts count as ideological and explains how they come to possess those properties.

Suppose, for instance, that private property is constitutive of a social practice that arranges productive forces according to certain conventions of coordination and resource division, possibly resulting in legal institutions governing property and wage labor that interact with other institutional and non-institutional features of social arrangements to cause structural injustice. Suppose further that self-ownership is part of the ideology that backs the practice by connecting it with moral views about freedom and entitlement (Cohen 1995: 116-117). Its etiological function in stabilizing the relevant conventions can be expected to percolate by looping effects into carving policies, social roles, institutional routines, habits, implicit biases, social expectations to the effect of reinforcing their structural effects and possibly generating new forms of injustice, which in turn make for social facts that provide feedback on the causal processes that explain why ideology persists.

5. *Conclusion*

On the present reading, ideologies primarily perform a legitimating function at the anchoring level, yet they are turned by looping effects into constituent parts of the facts for which they are designed to anchor frame principles. This allows for disentangling the legitimating, constitutive, and causal role of ideologies while shedding light on how cognitive and non-cognitive elements are related in their working. In particular, it suggests that their constitutive and causal roles are derivative from their etiological function and only come to the forefront once ideology percolates into social

facts by looping effects. The epistemology of delusion connects the etiological function of ideologies with their epistemic flaws, while looping effects account for how they get embedded in the facts they are designed to anchor and their effects are fed back on their replication. The former helps to explain how ideologies originate and possibly collapse. The latter helps to explain how they reproduce. Looping effects are located as mechanisms that underlay the process and are provided with a specific explanatory role in the context of a functional explanation.

The resulting view is moderately cognitivist because the cognitive contents of ideology turn out explanatorily prior to their practical materialization into the arrangements ideology functions to undergird, but the idea that ideology widely operates beyond belief is preserved. What mainly favors a moderately cognitivist account is that ideologies perform their etiological function by virtue of their content. But two further considerations might be important. First, ideological formations are sorted out by the contents they embody from other possibly innocent constituents of social reality. Second, while changing them takes more than reasons (Haslanger 2017: 13ff.), the reasons to change attach to the contents they embody.

This reading also suggests that the primary causes of injustice are located in distributive conflicts and power imbalances that are originally external to ideology while acknowledging that ideology might exacerbate existing injustices and make new forms of injustice possible. Insofar as ideology is invoked to answer an explanatory question that concerns how unjust social structures persist in non-coercive circumstances, structural injustice cannot be originally constituted or caused by ideology. The original causes of racial injustice, for instance, are more likely in the power relations that characterize the economy of plantations than in the racial ideology that legitimate them. This does not entail, however, that ideological racism plays no role in constituting and causing further structural injustice. It only takes apart the etiological function of ideology from the constitutive and causal role it comes to play once materialized into the practices and/or institutions out of which social structures emerge.

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