

Ideology and Intersectionality¹

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Abstract

Analytic philosophers increasingly make reference to the concept of ideology to think about how representational structures can lead to oppression, and argue that the distinctively pernicious functioning of things like propaganda and generic generalizations need to be explained in terms of ideology. The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, it aims to serve as an introduction to (some of) the best contemporary work on ideology in the analytic tradition. Second, it proposes a novel challenge for any such theory. The challenge turns on the nature of intersectionality: it is hard to see how to render consistent the claims that ideology creates or sustains oppression with the claim that oppression is intersectional, without making substantial modifications to extant theories. The conclusion will be that certain projects in contemporary philosophy of language need to further develop their theories of ideology.

Introduction

Much recent interesting work in philosophy of language is concerned with how language is *misused*. Some of this work is roughly continuous with previous work that presupposed what we could call an ideal speech situation: a picture of communication according to which language was a vehicle for truth, and truths were slowly added to the common stock in a

¹ I thank Herman Cappelen, Daniel Vanello, and two readers. I especially thank the reader who marked up the manuscript as that improved the paper a lot.

conversation by orderly utterances following Grice's conversational maxims (à la, respectively, Stalnaker 1978, Grice 1989; see Cappelen and Dever 2021 for this framing of the field of contemporary philosophy of language). Thus people like Sarah Jane Leslie, in addition to doing important work on the semantics of generics (2008), also published important and influential work on how those peculiar semantics can be used to oppress (2017). One way of reading the work of Jason Stanley is as focusing on getting right what exactly semantic content, the content literally expressed by a given sentence in a given context, amounts to. Early Stanley was concerned with how much of a contribution compositional semantic value gives to what is said (1997), or again to what extent the acceptability judgements of certain subtle binding² speak to the contextualism/minimalism debate (Stanley and Szabó 2000). Late Stanley (2015) seeks to explain how propaganda can bring about changes in what speakers accept without rationally persuading them of the truth, and he does so by joining together feminist philosophy of language (such as Langton and West 1999) and contemporary work in formal semantics (Murray 2014). Sally Haslanger's hugely influential work (some collected in her 2012) yokes together the externalist tradition in philosophy of language with novel theorizing about the nature of social ontology to propose her 'revisionary' or 'ameliorative' analyses. The thought here, roughly, is that even if certain words, such as 'woman', aren't *misused*, they are nevertheless used in a way they shouldn't be, because a way that obscures facts about the social world, such that women are often oppressed by virtue of being women. An ameliorative analysis of 'woman' highlights that fact by making it part of the meaning of the expression that to be a woman is to be oppressed; for the ameliorative analysis, our everyday 'woman' is inadequate for our social and political ends.

² Such as the putative literal truth of sentences like 'every teacher praised every student' in a context where one is assessing how each teacher behaved with regards to their and only their class. The felt content is something like 'every teacher *in the school* praised every student *in their class*', although this is controversial, to say the least.

That's by no means all there is to this recent turn to misuse. Slurs are a newly central topic in semantics, and while not obligatory reading for any semanticist, are perhaps what e-type anaphora was a few decades ago: something with its own rich literature which one needed to have mastery of to do work in adjacent fields. In that literature (for an overview of which see Jeshion 2021), we're still trying to get right some of the same things we try to get right about anaphora: is slurring a semantic phenomenon (Hom 2008), and if so, how; is it pragmatic or use-theoretic (Anderson and Lepore 2013); does it exploit some level of content that isn't propositional content (such as presuppositional or expressive content, or implicature (Potts 2007 among others)). For another example, consider 'woman'. A growing literature is trying to clear as to its semantics in a way that will be socially and morally acceptable, and one of the proposals for doing so is to adopt a contextualist theory of the term (Saul 2012, Diaz-Leon 2016 and references). In both of these cases, old frameworks are used to answer new questions.

If we see, at least on this way of looking at things, a sort of continuity---a swap from sluicing to slurring, but the same basic toolbox used to think about them---in some cases we've introduced new theoretical tools from other traditions. Thus some use the Nietzsche/Foucault idea of genealogy, to think about how our concepts arise, and how their etiology might detract from their accuracy in depicting the world (Srinivasan 2019, Queloz 2021). The idea here is that our representational apparatus often arises as a result of---to use Srinivasan's phrase---'alethically indifferent mechanisms' (2019: 132) such as the prevailing social or moral authorities of the society we inhabit. Learning that many of our concepts are contingent on

where and when we happen to find ourselves, we ought to reduce our confidence that they are successfully tracking reality.

The topic of this paper is another import: 'ideology'. Arising from Marx and later thinkers downstream of him, ideologies they are something like distorting ways of viewing and valuing the world, imposed upon us, perhaps, by short-circuiting our rational faculties or exploiting power (as when, in a totalitarian regime, all mass media are government-owned and relay the government's messages).

Ideology is a central concept for many working in what's sometimes called 'social and political philosophy of language'. Sally Haslanger (2011), for example, argues that well-studied linguistically and cognitively tricky features of generics help inculcate ideologies. Jason Stanley (2015) argues that one of the bad things about propaganda, which he conceives of as a certain type of "claim[s]" or "argument[s]" (47), is that it uses and entrenches ideology.³

Accordingly, if either Haslanger or Stanley are right, and ideology is essential to explaining certain important linguistic devices, it's imperative, for this part of philosophy of language, that we have a viable theory of ideology. My argument here is that we have no such viable theory, thus that these influential views in contemporary philosophy of language are on shaky foundations.

More specifically, I have two aims in this paper. The first is simply to present what I take to be the best, most recent, and most influential work on the concept. The second is to suggest that despite the merits of the various views, there are problems for for these views of ideology. Some of these are rather unsophisticated—I suggest it's unclear that there's a

³ See also Swanson (2019) for some other cases where it's argued language expresses ideology.

unified phenomena all thinkers are thinking about---but one, hopefully, is novel and interesting.

That turns on the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989 being the locus classicus).

Intersectionality is a theory of how oppression and discrimination is non-additive in a peculiar way: the oppression one faces by standing in multiple discriminated-against social roles (such as being both Black and a woman) is greater, or can't be cashed out in terms simply of, the oppression one faces as a Black person and as a woman.

This is a problem for theorists of ideology because, as we'll see, the one thing they agree upon is that the function of ideology is to establish or maintain relations of oppression. A natural way to read that is that racist ideology establishes or maintains racist oppression, sexist ideology sexist oppression, and so on. But if intersectionality is true, then it's not the case that the oppression one suffers is simply a combination of racist and sexist oppression. I argue ideology theorists can't capture this while holding that ideology functionally determines oppressive relations. Racist ideology and sexist ideology, even taken together, can't capture the excess oppression that results from their intersection. I conclude by suggesting ways out of this argument, pointing out that it requires us to completely rethink our concept of ideology as relatively discrete collections of representational items.

Preface, and two arguments

Argument 1: No Unity

My topic is whether 'ideology' can play the role in contemporary social philosophy of language that people like Haslanger and Stanley think it can. An obvious enough way to begin assessing this is to see whether the word 'ideology' picks out anything unified in the

world.. So in this first section, as a pre-theoretic introduction to the concept, I will simply list what the main theorists take to be examples of ideology in the search for unity.

The list

(* anti-Black racism in the United States (Shelby 2003, 2014, Haslanger 2017, Stanley 2015:59)

(* National Socialism (Stanley 2015:3)

(* The worldview, when it comes to questions of science, of someone brought up in an anti-science cult (Stanley 2015: 199)

(* Analytic political philosophy (Mills 2005)

(* ‘The belief that “seventh grade girls who wear crop-tops are cute”’ (Haslanger 2007)

(* The worldview of someone who owned slaves in the antebellum south about the rightness of their living conditions (Stanley 2015: 192-5)

(* The belief, of someone whose identity involves the false belief that the French are untrustworthy, that the French are not trustworthy (Stanley 2015: 198-9)

(* Capitalist society, with material inequalities (Stanley 2015)

This list is non-exhaustive, and I don't have much of an argument here, but I would just point out that prima facie the claim that there is some unified phenomenon is questionable. And if there is no unified phenomenon under discussion, then it's unclear whether 'ideology' ought to be an important part of our social and political philosophy of language toolbox.

Of course, there are things we can say in response: it seems that racism is for many a paradigm example, and so, even if our thinkers disagree on some cases, it might be that there's enough of an agreement on the central cases to say that there's a common subject under discussion. We would use racism as if it were a sample, and say that anything sufficiently similar to that counts as ideology. I agree: this argument is weak, and I only really expect it to lessen one's belief in the usefulness of ideology a small amount. Moreover, as a reader of a previous version of this paper pointed out, this form of argument threatens to massively overgenerate, as for pretty much anything interesting enough to draw philosophers' attention there will be different and competing conceptions of what the thing is. That different philosophers say very different things about 'meaning' isn't a reason to ditch the concept of meaning. Agreed—so let's move on, and hopefully we can find something to anchor our use of 'ideology' in a way that concepts such as semantic value or implicature help anchor and sharpen (by differentiation) uses of 'meaning'.

Argument 2: No Baptism

Baby logic tells us terms have intensions and extensions. They stand for a set of objects, an extension, which is determined by some perhaps descriptive condition, an intension. The above argument can be seen as challenging the idea that the putative extension of 'ideology' has the unity we'd expect of a term which carves the social world at its joints. Turning to a putative intension of the term, we can make a similar challenge. In particular, we can argue that the term hasn't been given an intension that could determine its extension.

One way to make this point is by looking at the history of the use of 'ideology' (and its cognates in other languages). It is hard to hear the word 'ideology' without a whole intellectual tradition coming to mind, coming from Marx and Engels and reverberating

through their twentieth century followers, from French thinkers like Althusser to analytic Marxists like Jon Elster, to social critics and theorists of all sorts (for a very helpful list, see Shelby, cited below).

If a term had a very clear original usage that we could use to steer our own, contemporary use, that would be a good reason retain the concept. For example, there are surely some unclaritys in Aristotle's notion of arete, but it still, arguably, picks out a notion important to his moral philosophy and one we can use, two thousand and a bit years later, in a completely different context, to think about moral theory. If it were the case that 'ideology' were similarly even roughly defined in some canonical text, our faith in its usefulness should be higher, and we could then use that original use to try and sift through the opposing phenomena proposed as examples of ideology to see which were most faithful.

But it wasn't, a fact the literature is clear on. Here's Shelby, whose groundbreaking work we'll look at in detail later:

Philosophical reconstruction is required here, not only to defend ideology critique against its detractors, but also because *Marx does not offer us anything close to a precise definition of "ideology."* In early works, especially the collaborative writings with Engels, his general conception of ideology must be gleaned from the few examples and remarks he offers in the context of broader discussions of historical materialism. But these examples and brief comments *do not provide us with an unequivocal general conception of ideology, much less a theory of the phenomenon.* In later writings, Marx, again without explicitly defining the notion, proceeds to analyze particular forms of ideological thought--demystifying their illusions,

disclosing their distinctive social functions, and explaining their relation to the material conditions that he claims causes them to be produced and widely accepted...partly on the basis of these various examples, remarks, and particular analyses of Marx and Engels that I will reconstruct the concept of ideology (2003: 154-5; my emphases)

In a recent overview article, Swanson concurs: "Suffice it to say that there is likely not a unique, determinate Marxian use of 'ideology'," (2021: 332) and notes that examples of ideology he'll consider don't "refer[] to ideologies under that mode of presentation, [so] I make connections explicit where appropriate" (336). Both thinkers make two points: that there is no clear definition, and that they'll sometimes read 'ideology' into work that doesn't explicitly mention it. This seems methodologically problematic. If a term were clearly defined, then arguably it would be okay to read it into the work of people who don't use the term. For a just-so example: if Kripke had, for some strange reason, never read Frege, but nevertheless frequently talked about cognitive significance, it would be okay to discuss his views by using the Fregean term 'Sinn' or 'sense'. And this is because 'Sinn' is relatively well-defined (in this just-so story, at least): it's the more fine-grained aspect of meaning that accounts of cognitive significance. By contrast, Fregean 'colouring' is less well-defined-- Frege only talks about it in a few places and it's hard to get clear as to exactly what it means (see Sander 2019 for recent discussion). For that reason, I claim, it would be less acceptable to gloss any remarks Kripke made about meaning using 'colouring'. I think this generalizes: glossing others' work with ill-defined words is risky, bearing large downsides and few possible benefits. And I suggest theorists of ideology need to be more alive to that risk.

Cognitivist and not-cognitivist theories of ideology

That's all by way of preface. Both those arguments are extremely provisional, and were there a clear consensus about the nature of ideology in the recent literature, certainly the second argument would be defanged and most probably we could get to grips with the disunity argument (maybe some of the examples above are mislabelled, something we can only see once we see what the concept amounts to). The body of this paper is concerned with presenting two types of contemporary theory of ideology. Both are very influential and indeed very useful ways of understanding the social world, but both, I believe, suffer from the same problem.

I will borrow from Sally Haslanger in distinguishing between cognitivist and not-cognitivist theories of ideology (2017: 7ff; see also 2012[2007]: 413).⁴ Cognitivist theories focus on belief and sets of belief as the bearers of ideology. Opposing positions, such as Haslanger's own, are more practice-based. I will treat them in turn. Having done so, we'll be able to assess the suitability of the concept of ideology for work in applied philosophy of language.

Cognitivist theories

A fundamental theory in the cognitivist line is Tommie Shelby, whose 2003 is a contemporary classic. His view is very clear, and fundamental to the recent discussion, so we'll spend a decent amount of time on it. He is concerned, both in his 2003 and 2014 papers, to give an account of racism as ideology. He begins with the core component notion of a

⁴ 'Cognitivist' is Haslanger's word; 'not-cognitivist' is my ugly coinage to avoid 'non-cognitivist' given that it's already taken by metaethicists.

form of consciousness. A form of consciousness is a subset of the beliefs held in common by a given group, in a given time and place, with these properties:

- a. The beliefs in the subset are widely shared by members in the relevant group; and within the group, and sometimes outside it, the beliefs are generally known to be widely held.
- b. The beliefs form, or are derived from, a prima facie coherent system of thought, which can be descriptive and/or normative.
- c. The beliefs are a part of, or shape, the general outlook and self-conception of many in the relevant group.
- d. The beliefs have a significant impact on social action and social institutions (Shelby 2003: 158)

As Shelby notes, we don't want to call any set satisfying these conditions ideological; Shelby's example here is liberalism. So we need to find a further thing, an I-property, such that form of consciousness + I-property= ideology. He goes on helpfully to canvass various possible I-properties, from all across twentieth century thought (162-3). Space precludes quoting them all,⁵ but Shelby divides them, following Geuss 1981, into three dimensions: ideology has an epistemic dimension, a functional dimension, and a genetic dimension. It has certain epistemic flaws; it performs a certain function role in society, and it has a particular

⁵ Now is as good a time as any to point out that the literature on ideology within and without philosophy is absolutely vast, and I can't hope to cover it adequately. What I can hope to do is focus in on some salient and famous discussions, hopefully provide a preliminary map of the logical space, and advance a criticism that will apply to many views, albeit perhaps not all, including many not discussed here.

etiology. Shelby aims to propose an I-property that will capture these three aspects. I will treat the three dimensions in turn.

The Epistemic Component

Ideologies have different epistemic properties than forms of consciousness, Shelby says. The beliefs that comprise an ideology have or lack some epistemic properties that forms of consciousness don't. One might think, given racism is a paradigm ideology, that this property is simply falsity. Importantly, for Shelby this is not so. The reason for this is interesting: feature d of forms of consciousness tells us that forms of consciousness, thus ideologies, direct behaviour. But flat-out false beliefs, Shelby thinks, don't successfully direct behaviour. If ideological beliefs were just false

we would not be able to coordinate our actions through them as effectively as we do. Instead, ideologies often work, as Kai Nielsen reminds us, “by presenting and inculcating a false or slanted perspective that arranges the facts in a misleading way, or fails to mention certain facts, or places them in an inconspicuous context.” Rather than being simply false, then, ideologies are typically more or less distorting or biased in some way. (165)

He gives an example, of widely held belief "that (most) black women who receive welfare support are poor because they are lazy, irresponsible, and promiscuous" when in fact ample research shows that in fact those in receipt of welfare are often victims of the generally poor state of housing, education, and the job market, whose weakness disproportionately affects Black people. The key idea is

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. (166)

I take it the idea is that there are two competing hypotheses about the undeniable fact that some Black people rely on welfare programs. There's the one backed up by sociologists, and there's the one peddled by right-wing mass media. Both structural inequality (decades of mistreatment; bad schools; predatory financial institutions; the prison complex) and individual properties (laziness or irresponsibility) are, in general, good ways of explaining many social phenomena, while—at the risk of stating the obvious-- nonsense isn't. We are all of us familiar with lazy people, irresponsible people, promiscuous people, and with the fact that such people's lives are hampered by these qualities. In light of that, suggesting these properties as general explanations of Black poverty, especially if the media bashes one over the head with it, might have some credibility.

Of course, the laziness-based explanations aren't good ones. But, as quoted above, Shelby thinks that ideologies needn't peddle straight-out falsehoods, as opposed to biased or defective or distorted ways of thinking. But what exactly is the cognitive defect that isn't necessarily falsehood? Shelby lists:

There are many types of cognitive error that are typical of ideological thinking— inconsistency, oversimplification, exaggeration, half-truth, equivocation, circularity, neglect of pertinent facts, false dichotomy, obfuscation, misuse of “authoritative” sources, hasty generalization, and so forth. (166)

This is a list that should be pleasingly familiar to readers of this volume. Many of them are well viewed as violations of Gricean principles, misleading in the technical sense, and misuse of generics. It's by now familiar that such language misuse can lead to bad social consequences of the sort discussed elsewhere in this book.

Shelby's idea that ideology is distorted or partial interesting but questionable. It sounds as if he is saying that the belief, of Black women on welfare, that they're lazy and so on, isn't false but merely partial and distorted and indeed that this non-falsity is an important component of an ideology if it is to guide action. Arguably that's more than we want to admit to the racist. Surely it is false, generally speaking, that Black women are on welfare because they are lazy (of course some might be; many people of all races are lazy).

It seems that Shelby needs something with rather unique properties to play the epistemic role. We (I have just argued) want it to have some negative epistemic status worse than merely distorted or partial (we want to judge racists qua epistemic, and not just moral, agents); but we also want it to have some positive status that enables it to guide action. But then we're looking for a 'Goldilocks' epistemic property that is bad but not too bad, and good but not too good. Prima facie that seems a tricky ask.⁶

While plausible, then, I think there's cause to wonder whether the epistemic dimension of Shelby's theory is entirely satisfying. And there's some reason to think that the requirements both he explicitly seeks and I suggest we want don't fit well together.

⁶ See, however, Rahel Jaeggi on "the interpenetration of true and false" (Jaeggi 2017: 67). Jaeggi is an important and influential ideology theorist about whose work I don't discuss only for reasons for space.

The genetic component

At the heart of Shelby's theory of the genesis of ideology is the Marxist idea of false consciousness. Shelby tells us:

To hold a belief with a false consciousness is to hold it while being ignorant of, or self-deceived about, the real motives for why one holds it: the individual who suffers from a false consciousness would like to believe that she accepts a given belief system (solely) because of the epistemic considerations in favor of it, but, as a matter of fact, she accepts it (primarily) because of the influence of noncognitive motives that operate, as Marx was fond of saying, “behind her back,” that is, without her conscious awareness. (170)⁷

False consciousness serves several important explanatory ends for Shelby: first, it helps explain why people accept ideologies. Imagine a working class white person who believes that Black women welfare recipients are on welfare because they're lazy, irresponsible, and promiscuous. Such a person will quite likely have dealt with the some of the same structural forces that have held the Black woman down---intergenerational poverty, difficulty finding jobs, a failing educational and health system. One wonders: how can they not see the similarities? The genetic component promises an answer:

⁷ Engels is arguably slightly helpful here: “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives”, Letter to Franz Mehring of 1893, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1893/letters/93_07_14.htm

given that ideologies suffer from fundamental cognitive defects and yet are widely held, it might seem that ideology-critique assumes that most humans are quite credulous and perhaps even stupid. But if ideologies are held with a false consciousness, then this unflattering and elitist view of ordinary people need not be assumed. It is a mundane fact about human beings that we are sometimes prompted to accept beliefs by motives that have little to do with a concern for truth or justification. Though presumably we do not do so consciously, we sometimes believe things because to do so would, say, bolster our self-esteem, give us consolation, lessen anxiety, reduce cognitive dissonance, increase our self-confidence, provide cathartic relief, give us hope, or silence a guilty conscience. When these and other noncognitive motives are psychologically operative, we easily fall into epistemic error. (171)

That is to say, if one is in the grip of an ideology, one holds a set of beliefs with false consciousness. That means that the explanation for one's holding that set of beliefs is to be found in various relatively universal 'non-cognitive' motives such as the ones mentioned above. The genesis of ideological beliefs, then, is those non-cognitive motives, as opposed to one's credulity or stupidity, and this whole story is the genetic component of a theory of ideology.

The genetic component, then, manages to explain why epistemically problematic ideologies can be maintained. The white person, themselves, perhaps ignorant of the cause of their poverty, will attribute it to bad luck in their case and inherent laziness in the case of their neighbour.

It also explains, Shelby tells us, why they're difficult to give up. To use an analogy that isn't his, if you have a leak you think is caused by your faucet, but is actually a problem with the pipes' water pressure, you'll be less likely to be able to fix it because you'll spend all your

time watching faucet rather than pipe videos on DIY Youtube. So with your system of beliefs: if you don't know that it goes wrong because it's held to boost your self-esteem rather than track the truth, you'll be less likely to fix any errors in your system, because you'll find that any correction by reality that doesn't also boost your self-esteem is unlikely to change what you think.

Shelby's discussion is relatively programmatic, spanning a few pages of a very rich paper. There is certainly more to be said about how non-cognitive factors influence what we believe. For example, sticking within just philosophy, we could study the impact of evolution on the beliefs we accept (e.g. Street 2006 and much else). We could study 'genealogy', the already-mentioned study of how concepts come into existence in response to historical and social forces, as opposed to being merely representations of reality (Queloz 2021), We could do both together (Srinivasan 2019). Outside philosophy, swathes of behavioural psychology tells us how either our social position or quirks of our brain or how we reason systematically misleads us.⁸

All this is to say that the idea that there is a genetic component to ideology that serves to explain why people hold defective sets of beliefs seems *prima facie* plausible and one susceptible to a more detailed treatment than Shelby or I present. Hopefully what we've seen is enough to show that, and that will suffice for the purposes of this paper.

The functional component

⁸ I hesitate to cite work here as an outsider as I don't know what has replicated, but the sort of thing I have in mind is the work made famous by Kahneman (2011) or by Haidt (2012).

Shelby points out that even if we have an epistemically distorted set of beliefs engendered by false consciousness, we don't have ideology: he points to Freud and Nietzsche on their explanations of religion, which debunk religious beliefs by giving them an etiology in subrational processes but which, at least arguably, aren't talking about ideologies. And indeed the tradition helps here, as he points out it's common among Marxists to take an ideology to be a constellation of beliefs that "helps to establish and/or stabilize ... relations of subordination" (173) such as "labor exploitation, land and resource expropriation, imperial conquest and annexation, political disenfranchisement and marginalization, social repression and exclusion, expulsion and genocide." (173)

It's these relations of subordination that round out the concept of ideology. Ideologies cause things, they have a certain function in the generation of unjust social structures.

an ideological form of social consciousness contributes to establishing or stabilizing relations of oppression in virtue of its cognitive defect(s). (174)

This will be very important going forward, as we'll see it's the core feature shared by the different conceptions of ideology we'll consider, and the core feature my criticism will focus on.

Assessing Shelby

Shelby's pioneering work is rightly influential. Bringing the tools of critical theory descending from Marx into an idiom analytic philosophers can feel at home in is worthwhile,

and has shaped subsequent discussion of ideology in the analytic tradition.⁹ Nevertheless, his view isn't without problems. I will focus on one particularly trenchant one Sally Haslanger has repeatedly voiced, before presenting my new problem once I've discussed her positive view of ideology.

Haslanger has made the case that Shelby's concept of the ideological is too cognitive in several places (2017; 2021). In 2017, for example, she asks, if ideologies are just sets of beliefs, which sets are the ideological ones? She writes

In defining ideology in terms of shared beliefs, cognitivism seems to be committed to the idea that the content of the ideology is determined by the attitudes of the majority; ideology is just what most people believe, or believe together. But how do we identify the relevant ideological beliefs?

Consider an oligarchy: suppose the ruling elite is invested in an explicit ideology and structures the society to embody it; the masses may then enact it but on the basis of a completely different set of beliefs or even multiple divergent sets of beliefs. (6)

The thought here is that a society's ideology can be oligarchic, even though the majority of people don't believe that oligarchy is the right way to structure political power. If one thinks

⁹ Space prevents me from considering the third big contemporary ideology theorist, Jason Stanley. I think this is acceptable as he admits his theory is "influenced principally" by Haslanger and Shelby (2015: 184). Although he doesn't use the Geussian framework, his view is clearly cognitive, ideology being marked by beliefs that are hard to rationally revise (epistemic component) and has a genetic component, the beliefs deriving from self-interest (see e.g. 200 for both these claims). His view also has a functional component, found throughout the book (see 203 and talk of groups 'hindered from acting in their own self-interest' for one manifestation of this). I believe my main criticism goes through against him, but won't make the case here.

ideologies are sets of beliefs, then asking the question as to which ideology a given society encapsulates may give more than one answer.¹⁰

That is surely right. Take Stanley's example of the capitalist, meritocratic ideology. Readers of this paper, while fully involved in the capitalist system, nevertheless play their role in that system with, I take it, a certain cynicism and discomfort. In Haslanger's 2021, she again points out that shared belief, as opposed to shared presupposition, is not the right thing to put at the centre of ideology. Again, consider the Stanley example: we may not believe that economic distributions accord with merit, but we often need to presuppose it to understand political discourse, or make sense of universities' deans and sports coaches' salaries. Or, again, we presuppose things about the police force when watching Brooklyn Nine-Nine that we don't actually believe. In Haslanger's words:

I am fully aware, for example, that according to the contemporary ideology in my social milieu, women are (supposed to be) deferential to male peers. I disagree with this, but also sometimes abide by it, sometimes use it to my advantage, sometimes explicitly challenge it, and often flaunt it. My non-conforming actions may contribute to changing the sexist ideology in my immediate context (though backlash occurs!), but the public assumption of gendered deference – and sexist ideology more generally – remains broadly entrenched. In some social contexts, the majority may not believe the ideology, although they act in accordance with it because it is the (dominant? Proper? Enforced?) framework of meanings and values that is used to guide social interaction ... *Ideology, then, does not seem to be aptly characterized as common*

¹⁰ Of course, one could just accept this, perhaps by saying that a society can house more than one ideology at a time. As my weaselly phrasing ('house', 'encapsulates') suggests, there are worthwhile questions about how we should think of the relation between a given society and the ideology or ideologies that may be present in it. I have nothing informative to say about this, but I hope that for neither my expository nor critical purposes will this matter.

belief, but as what individuals accept or presuppose for the purposes of interaction

(2021: 4¹¹; my emphasis)

This seems right: if sexism is an ideology, many of us presuppose (to make sense of a vast array of social phenomena) various tenets of it without believing them. Many of us unreflectively assume, learning that a mixed-sex couple has just had a baby, that it's the mom who'll take work leave, and perhaps even that that's better, morally speaking, that she rather than the dad do. But on reflection we realize that that's a value judgement we inherited from our society and not one we want to actively assert.

It's worth wondering exactly how Shelby would respond to Haslanger's point about the presupposedness of ideology. There are passages where he seems to grant ideological formations this common, taken-for-grantedness we assume of presupposition (he talks of how ideological belief "frequently constitut[es] a part of so-called common sense", of how nothing could be more "obvious" than racist ideology in a racist society). But *prima facie*, it seems like a challenge Shelby's theory needs to rise to. And having presented it, it's time to look at Haslanger's own theory.

Not-Cognitivism about ideology: Haslanger.

¹¹ I was unable to get the book version of this material, so am relying on the final version posted on Haslanger's site:
https://sallyhaslanger.weebly.com/uploads/1/8/2/7/18272031/haslanger_ideology_in_practice_final_aug2021.pdf

Sally Haslanger, across at least 15 years, has been working on her own theory of ideology.

The aim here is to present it. I will concentrate on her most recent presentation, from her lecture 2021 'Ideology in Practice' that has been published as a--short--book by the Marquette University Press.

At the heart of Haslanger's theory is her idea of a 'cultural technē'. Of them she says

‘cultural technē’ is the general term for a set of cultural tools; one might think of it as ideology in the descriptive sense... I do not assume that all cultural technēs are ideological. Some organize us in good and just ways; those that (roughly) organize us in oppressive ways are ideological. (2021 fn13)

And again, she tells us it is:

a framework of meanings and ideas, what I call a cultural technē, is ideological to the extent that it produces or perpetuates oppression. In other words, oppression occurs systemically and reproduces itself; ideology is a component in the system that contributes to the system’s reproduction. The specific role of ideology, on this account, is to mask the real workings of the system; those in the grip of an ideology have false or distorted ideas. (13)

Where for this latter point she references Shelby, and 'framework of meanings and values' is a repeated refrain in her paper. Again:

a cultural technē is a cluster[] of concepts, background assumptions, norms, heuristics, scripts, metaphors, (and so on) that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect...(19)

Taken together, Haslanger's framework is notably different from Shelby's.¹² We've already seen Haslanger call into question the role of shared belief in accounting for ideology. She also says "my account of ideology is sympathetic with the criticisms that ideology should not be evaluated primarily in terms of truth and falsehood (21). After noting that her theory is broadly Althusserian, she (approvingly) says

Althusser is very explicit that ideology is not merely a set of ideas or beliefs. In fact, it is one of his main theses: "Thesis II: Ideology has a material existence." (1917/2014, 258). He elaborates the thesis later: "I now return to this thesis: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (9)

This is all somewhat abstract, we'll consider an example in a second. But the important thing to note is that Haslanger clearly disagrees with the epistemic component of Shelby's theory

¹² For more on the influences of and some similar views to Haslanger's own, one could consult the work of Robin Celikates (e.g. 2017). That work reveals that the position presented as Haslanger can be found in disciplines such as anthropology. Ignorance and space precludes further discussion.

of ideology (ideologies aren't composed of distorted beliefs)¹³ but clearly agrees with the functional component, that ideologies produce or sustain oppression. This will be central to my positive argument.

As an example, Haslanger talks about being a wife, and how that is constrained by one's adoption of a particular cultural *techne*.

One cannot intentionally become a wife without there being an institution of marriage situated within a broader frame of cultural meaning. Navigation of social life depends on the cultural *technē*, i.e., it depends on a sensitivity to social norms and shared meanings that are part of the "common ground." Because our conceptual repertoire is inevitably limited, some forms of action are unintelligible....Butler and Hacking have offered a way to locate a kind of agency constrained by shared "concepts and languages of practical thought" – or what we have been calling a framework of meanings and values –that have social origins. The problem is not, first and foremost, that we misrepresent the world; rather, we lack certain conceptual tools to make apt choices. (17)

I think we've gotten somewhere. For Shelby, the genetic problem of ideology was that it was produced by certain problematic epistemic mechanisms. For Haslanger, by contrast, it seems

¹³ Actually, that's a bit quick. A reader pointed out that Haslanger might merely deny the necessity, for something's being ideology, that it be a set of beliefs with the characteristics Shelby lays out. She might be happy to say that it's sufficient, for her, for something to be an ideology that it be a set of beliefs with the characteristics. That might be right; what seems nevertheless true is that for Haslanger the really interesting part of the theory of ideology, the thing she is most interested, is notably not-cognitivist. I discuss that immediately below.

that the problem of ideology is fundamentally a problem of lack: we lack concepts that enable us to make sense and act on bits of the world.

This is not all there is to Haslanger's view. An important part of cultural *technē* is what Haslanger calls 'schema'. I confess to being less certain about her schemas, so I'm moving into interpretation from exegesis, but I think the way to read Haslanger here is as saying that the schema in the cultural *technē* are concepts for certain social actions. But they are strange concepts: they are, I think, concepts which are required in order to perform the action which the concept stands for. That's a mouthful, so an example: there are some actions we can't perform but by doing them under the description of a given concept. Consider our concept of a nut. It is part of the concept that nuts are food, but that is not a bald metaphysical truth about nuts; for something to be food is not merely for it to be edible (in a vegetarian society, animals aren't food).

These schema concepts are, I think, the most important part of Haslanger's theory of ideology. Ideology opens up and forecloses possibilities of action by supplying or withholding the concepts we need to perform actions. It is this that gives Haslanger's theory the materiality that, as an Althusserian, she requires, and enables her to avoid what she takes to be problems with cognitivist theories like Shelby's. In a previous paper, she expresses her view about the practice-laden and materialist theory of ideology neatly when talking about racism. Racism is an ideology and:

Racism, on my view, is constituted by an interconnected web of unjust social practices that unjustly disadvantage certain groups, e.g., residential segregation, police brutality, biased hiring and wage inequity, educational disadvantage, etc. These are not random practices, but are connected by a racist technē. (2017: 13)

Racism is a practice. With that in mind, I think we can answer the question that has puzzled all theorists of ideology: how can we think and act in ways contrary to our interests? For Shelby, the answer is that we are subject to distorted beliefs. For Haslanger, the answer is that the shared conceptual scheme we have renders visible oppressive courses of action while obscuring liberatory ones. Or again, the world is given to us already rich with meanings, as a Heideggerian *Zuhand* object, one which--to change idioms from phenomenology to cognitive science--comes with certain affordances, which are themselves determined by the technē. It is hard to disagree with Haslanger's analysis when presented with the sheer data of the foreclosed possibilities many face (the world one inhabits as a poor person with the prison system hanging over one is surely different, a different world, than the one most readers of this paper live in).

Assessing Haslanger's view

I think there are several helpful lessons to be drawn from Haslanger's discussion. The first is positive. We wondered at the start of the paper whether there was, or could be, unity to the topic of 'ideology': whether the different theorists weren't going to be just talking past one another. But Haslanger, using the Geussian tripartite framework, is completely clear as to where her theory is similar and where it is different from the cognitivist: she differs from the cognitivist on the epistemic, while agreeing about the functional component (see 2017: 2-3).

We get, then, by considering the two theories in detail and up close, a kernel that is shared between the theories in terms of function. And we could use that kernel, were we so minded, to make a general definition:

Ideology. An x that produces and sustains oppression

Where I don't use 'x' solely to be over fastidious, but to indicate that there is a slot for a variable element in this definition, filled differently by different theorists.

We could then argue about the particular cases introduced above as we saw fit, and, having our own Marx-inspired conception, it wouldn't matter much if we couldn't find much in the *ipsisima verba* of Marx's work. Ideology, then, is on solid ground.

Well, no. I want to finish by ruining the harmony I've created, by presenting a general complaint, arising from a core theoretical commitment of contemporary social philosophy, that challenges the functional component and, as far as I can see, every extant theory of ideology.

Before doing that, let me refocus discussion a bit. We've just gone into a couple of most of the important contemporary theories of ideology. But notably we've said little about language. But this is a book about language. That might seem like a lacuna.

The point to recall is that for many of these theorists ideology is closely connected with language. Recent years have focussed our attention on misuse of language, and undoubtedly two of the most famous bits of language discussed are propaganda and generics. But they are,

for at least Haslanger and Stanley, vehicles or products of ideology.¹⁴ So the success of their theories of language turns on the success of their theories of ideology. Now I give reason to doubt those theories are successful.¹⁵

Intersectionality: a general problem for ideology

A founding concept of contemporary social theory is intersectionality.¹⁶ Coming from legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, it's the idea that oppression or disadvantage is not, to use her word, "single-axis" (1989: 139). Crenshaw brought this out in her seminal 1989 by considering several court cases. The actual details are, at least to this non-lawyer, a little subtle, so I'll concentrate on the most famous case discussed by Crenshaw and the one that is often used to explain the concept. In *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, a number of eminently qualified Black women complained that Black woman were not hired for various roles they were qualified for That is to say, they brought a complaint of discrimination with regards to the class of Black women. At the time, there was legal protection against discrimination based on sex, and against discrimination based on race. And the court claimed that was where it had to stop, claiming that

The prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination, clearly raises the

¹⁴ What about Shelby? It's less clear that he links up language and ideology. One could argue that in his 2014, where he argues that racism is an ideology, he is thereby committing himself, at least weakly, to the claim that names of races (which may be of course be empty names).

¹⁵ Some interesting extant criticisms of the use of ideology include Srinivasan 2016 and Sankaran 2020.

¹⁶ For a helpful discussion of ways of understanding intersectionality, and how one can formalize these understanding using certain formal tools, see Bright et al. 2016

prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora's box (DeGraffenreid, 413 F Supp at 145; quoted in Crenshaw 142).

That is to say, the court refused to recognize Black women as a target of unique discrimination that wasn't merely the 'sum of racism and sexism' (Crenshaw 1989: 140).

This means, Crenshaw argued, the law fails to make room for Black woman as the subject of discrimination that can't be simply covered by the separate laws against sex and against race discrimination. As Crenshaw wrote in a slightly later paper

many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separate (1991)

As that later article, and her work in general shows, intersectionality is not just an arcane legal fact. It's a conceptual or moral issue about the nature of oppression. There are various ways to try to phrase it, but one is that the oppression one faces as a Black woman is not simply the 'sum' (to use Crenshaw's phrase) of the oppression one faces as a woman and as a Black person.

Intersectionality is widely recognized as a core analytical tool for contemporary social theory, and its insights into the nature of discrimination are ones which any theory in this domain ought to capture. But the theory of ideology is in this domain: the function of ideology, the

one thing the cognitivists and not cognitivists agree on, is that it leads to unjust or oppressive social arrangements. So it should capture the intersectional nature of this injustice, and in particular that the oppression one suffers as being a Black woman is not simply the sum of that which one suffers from being Black and that which one suffers from being a woman.

But--and this is the main claim of the paper--I don't see how extant theories can manage this. To see this, consider a--partly fictionalized and just-so--story from the early 80: the use of the Laffer curve to justify lower tax rates. The idea is that lowering tax rates can serve to increase tax receipts, for reasons one can interpolate: taxes (it is claimed!) being an incentive against work, their lowering will lead to more work, thus more tax. Although never seemingly empirically confirmed, it was used as a spur to the low tax policies of Reaganomics.

Here's some facts about the Laffer curve: it is plausibly distortional. It might not be strictly speaking false that there's an inverse relation between taxation rates and tax receipt (there might be a grain of truth to it) but any relation must be extremely qualified. It is plausibly introduced by false consciousness. Just as racists use debunked theories of race to give a veneer to their prejudice, so those who didn't want to pay taxes used the sheen of the supposed science of mathematical economics to justify their holding low-tax policies.

Moreover, it helps keep in play relations of oppression. In particular--and this is the important fact--the former widespread belief in the truth of the Laffer curve plausibly intersectionally oppresses Black people, by virtue of the fact that it oppresses the low income, and those categories--Black people and low income people---intersect. If tax receipts fall, then, given the army still needs its trillions, consumption taxes rise; these taxes are regressive, hitting disproportionately the poor, and Black people were and still are disproportionately poor. The Laffer curve, then, is a piece of ideology that oppressed Black people. But it seems incorrect

to say that the supply-side economics of the Reagan period was a racist ideology.¹⁷ The Laffer curve, if it ideologically oppresses Black people, surely does so in a different, more indirect way than the roughly contemporaneous ‘welfare queen’ ideology. But surely extant theories, defining ideology as distortional or incomplete representational items, with a particular etiology, and which sustain oppression, ought to count the Laffer curve as ideologically oppressing Black people. All the conditions are satisfied for these theorists to call it ideological, but if it is ideological, it’s surely not in virtue of the way it oppresses Black people (again, by contrast, ‘welfare queen’ ideology *would* rightly count as one ideological in virtue of how it oppresses Black people). Extant theories can’t distinguish Laffer curve ideology and the welfare queen ideology, and one diagnosis for this is that its conditions are too weak to capture the intersectionality of oppression. Since that’s surely a fundamental desideratum of a theory of ideology, extant theories are insufficient.

Here's another example. Let us take Crenshaw's original case, which involves the oppression a Black woman encounters by virtue a Blackwoman. For the ideologist, this results from the presence in society of an ideology which has this oppressive function. But how? It's not as if we can take the racist ideology, and take the sexist ideology, and work out--excuse the awkward phrasing--the contribution each makes, and then add them. No: the contribution is greatly than what each ideology, taken separately, sums to. I don't see how the ‘ideology’ ideology has the tools to capture this fact.¹⁸

¹⁷ One can deny this! Or at least question it, as a reader did. One could hold that supply-side economics is a racist ideology, albeit one less blatant than the 'welfare queen' ideology. While I'm not sure about that, I'm tempted to just turn it into a dilemma. If one denies my premise that supply-side economics is not a racist ideology, then your concept of racist ideology is suitably wide that I think earlier considerations about the unity of the concept start to reassert themselves.

¹⁸ A reader alerts me to a body of work that might help here, one that goes metonymically by ‘kyriarchy’. As I understand it, the idea here is that the atomist, additive framing I assume (separate racist and sexist ideologies we can perform (perhaps very non-classical, if we’re to account for intersectionality) mereological operations on) is a misrepresentation, and instead we need to consider oppressive social roles as inherently complex: as racist-sexist systems, where this can’t be factored out into separate oppressive roles. If this is so: great! I think

The reader might be non-plussed. You might grant all the above and say that it's simply a reflection of familiar granularity issues surrounding, in this case, the determination relation holding between ideology and oppressive outcomes. I agree this sounds promising: but granularity issues are still issues that need to be solved, and it's not at first glance obvious what the right thing for the intersectional ideology theorist to say. I will finish up by considering one plausible line of counterargument.

A tentative conclusion: holism about the ideological

How should the ideology theorist respond to this? How can they make room for intersectionality in the functional part of their theory? As far as I can see, there are two moves available here. One can sever the functional link between ideology and oppression. If one does that--and having presented the accounts, I hope this worry is tangible—one falls foul of the lack of unity criticisms which started this paper. The one thing which I think we can confidently ascribe both to the cognitivist and Haslanger-esque theoreticians is the idea that ideology seems to engender or support oppressive social arrangements. But if I'm right, that can't be straightforwardly true. To the extent that we have one, the mereology of sets of beliefs is simple and arithmetic: one belief and one belief is two beliefs.

what I'm about to suggest fits very nicely with this, and offers a vision for future work I hope to pursue, one that blends all of intersectionality, ideology, kyriarchy, and philosophy of language together.

But ideological beliefs determine oppression, we're told. And oppression isn't arithmetic in this way. One can suffer extra oppression by landing at the intersection of oppressed characteristics. That means that it we can't simply determine someone's oppression (I pardon the somewhat awkward phrasing) by looking to their, say, racial oppression, and then looking to their gender oppression, and just 'adding them up'. There's an extra that comes in by virtue of the fact that they are both women and of colour, say. That extra is something over and above, something that I don't believe any theory of ideology we've canvassed will be able to capture. Crenshaw, interviewed by Vox, tells us:

Intersectionality was a prism to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren't being appreciated by the courts. In particular, courts seem to think that race discrimination was what happened to all black people across gender and sex discrimination was what happened to all women, and if that is your framework, of course, what happens to black women and other women of color is going to be difficult to see.¹⁹

The big worry is that analytic Ideologie-Kritik, attempting to find and dissolve oppression by looking at ideology will be like the courts, overlooking the intersectionality of oppression.

But there's a response available: holism about the ideological. In a sense, if you're really on board with intersectionality of oppression, and the link between ideology and oppression, then this should seem attractive. Ideological beliefs--to mimic Quine--come to the tribunal of

¹⁹ <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-genderdiscrimination>

oppression altogether, and we can only assess ideology in toto, as the sum and intersection of all the given ideologies floating about in society at a time. And that in turn is going to have consequences for philosophy of language. Theorizing about generics or about propaganda, or in general any form of language implicated in ideology, will have to somehow be done together. An ideological holism might lead to something in the vicinity of a semantic holism. This is nothing more than suggestive, and fully to make the case requires a paper of its own. For what it's worth, at least to my moral sensibility, the view seems reasonable. If the mereology of oppression is as Crenshaw says, then why not too the mereology of content, given the links between the two? But one thing is clear: none of the paradigm ideologies with which we began--National socialism, racism, and so on—would count as ideologies in this new and strict sense, and the relation between particular linguistic forms and ideology must be considerably more complicated than has been considered so far. Ideology, if the argument of this paper is right, must be a holistic phenomenon, or it must be nothing.

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