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ABSTRACT

A critical theory of ideology must incorporate an analysis of distorted belief unless it is to rest on a simplistic reductionism. And an analysis of distorted belief must focus on the inner constitution of consciousness unless it is to rest on a problematic claim to a privileged access to truth. This essay endeavours to provide such an analysis. Distorted beliefs arise as a result of deception, the action of the unconscious, or irrationality. In each of these cases the distortion is motivated by a rogue pro-attitude, that is, a preference other than for true belief which then exercises an illegitimate influence on belief. Rogue pro-attitudes can derive from any one of a reason, desire, or need.

IDEOLOGY AS DISTORTED BELIEF

One way of classifying theories of ideology is to distinguish between descriptive and critical ones. Descriptive theories portray ideology as an integral part of our normal undistorted ways of thinking. To call a statement or belief "ideological" is not necessarily to condemn it. Critical theories portray ideology as an unhealthy departure from a normal or ideal way of thinking. To call a statement or belief "ideological" just is to condemn it as a distortion. It is arguable that recent scholarship has come to favour descriptive theories. The alternatives on offer here include theories that present all of our belief-systems as ideologies, theories that identify a particular feature of political beliefs as a source of ideology, and theories that relate ideology to beliefs which inspire action.¹ I do not want to argue that all, or even one, of these theories are substantively incorrect. But I do want to point out that they all involve some loss of conceptual diversity. They do so simply by excluding any critical dimension from our understanding of ideology. To some extent, our concepts of belief, political belief, and action-orientated belief already do the work that these theories want to ascribe to our concept of ideology. Thus, given that many people do attach critical associations to the term "ideology", there is at least a case for trying to devise an acceptable, critical account of it.

The Marxist tradition has ensured that critical concepts of ideology centre on the idea of a false consciousness that mirrors social relationships of power and exploitation.² One reason for the growing support for descriptive theories of ideology appears to be a growing dissatisfaction with the Marxist view of social consciousness as a passive reflection of material life.³ Once we allow, as surely we must do, that consciousness does not arise as a passive reflection of material life, then if we are to sustain a critical

concept of ideology, we need an account of how distortions can enter into consciousness. Either we adopt an unacceptably rigorous determinism, which allows no autonomy to social consciousness, or we need an account of how and when people come to adopt a distorted view of the world. After all, if people do not adopt the beliefs they do as a necessary consequence of the nature of the social base, then presumably there is a sense in which they do so for reasons that make sense to them, in which case a critical theory of ideology must include an account of how people can have reasons for adopting distorted beliefs. The fact is: if the distorted nature of ideological consciousness is not just a consequence of a passive reflection of the material base, it must arise because of some sort of failure in consciousness itself. Once we reject a simplistic reductionism, we have to ground a critical concept of ideology on an analysis of the nature of distorted belief.

Another reason for the growing support for descriptive theories of ideology appears to be a growing reluctance to assume one has a privileged access to truth, a scientific viewpoint from which to declare ideological beliefs false.⁴ Once we take a suitably modest view of our epistemological location, then if we are to sustain a critical concept of ideology, we need an account of distorted belief couched in terms of the inner constitution of consciousness. Either we adopt a highly suspect presumption of the validity of our own standpoint, or we need an account of how beliefs can be distorted irrespective of the adequacy of their representation of the world. After all, if the distorted nature of beliefs is not a matter of their being inadequate to the world, then presumably there is a sense in which it is a matter of their inner constitution, in which case a critical theory of ideology must include an account of distortions internal to beliefs. Once we reject the idea of a pre-existent truth to which we have access, we have to ground our critique of ideology on an analysis of distortions that afflict the inner

constitution of consciousness.

The preceding considerations define the question I want to address. How should we unpack the concept of distorted belief that must inform any adequate, critical theory of ideology? Although the answer to this question will not provide us with a complete theory of ideology - this would require an account of the relationship of at least some distorted beliefs to something akin to relations of power - it will provide an account of how ideology initially manifests itself in consciousness - and so an account of the sort of beliefs that we would have to relate to relations of power. Thus I do not hope to provide a complete theory of ideology. My concern is only with the analysis of distorted belief on which a complete theory of ideology could be constructed with the aid of suitable theories of power and the diffusion of beliefs. Let us accept that we can not define ideological beliefs simply as reflections of a corrupt material life. This means we initially must define them by means of a purely formal analysis of the nature of corrupt belief. Let us accept also that we can not have access to a pre-existent truth. This means we initially must define corrupt belief by reference to the inner constitution of consciousness.

In order to identify the nature of distorted belief, we first need to grasp what counts as a normal, undistorted belief. Because we want to avoid equating distorted beliefs with false ones, we must define undistorted belief in terms of the normal constitution of consciousness, not truth. Equally because we want to devise a critical theory of ideology, we must define normal belief in a conceptual, even normative, manner, rather than an empirical one.⁵

We want a normative conceptual account of the inner workings of consciousness against which to identify unhealthy distortions. The extent to which people actually fall victim to the distortions we describe is irrelevant. Without getting bogged down in what are complex issues, I think we safely can say here

that normal beliefs are sincere, conscious, and rational, where rationality is equated only with consistency: the possibility of deception presupposes a norm of sincerity; Freud and others have taught us to look on unconscious beliefs as somewhat pathological; and we usually find inconsistent beliefs troubling, and even look for a way of reconciling them.

No doubt some people will be troubled by the implication that sincere, conscious, and rational Nazis might hold normal beliefs. There are two points to note here. First, a commitment to analysing distorted beliefs in terms of the inner constitution of consciousness means Nazis indeed might hold normal beliefs in this sense. Second, this does not mean we can not criticise their beliefs. We can say their beliefs are false. And we also will be able to condemn their beliefs as ideological provided we can relate them back to distorted beliefs by means of suitable analyses of power and the diffusion of beliefs. So, the varieties of distorted belief that I want to analyze are insincerity, the unconscious, and the irrational.

To begin, I want to consider the nature of deception. When someone tries to deceive someone else, they try to make that person believe something they themselves believe is false. This definition of deception concentrates on people attempting to bring someone to believe something, as opposed to their succeeding in doing so. It does so because my interest lies with the distortion associated with insincerity; that is, the way insincerity produces a gap between expressed and actual beliefs. In cases of insincerity expressed beliefs are distorted irrespective of the success or failure of the attempted deception. Similarly, this definition of deception requires deceivers only to believe that what they tell others is false, not to know that it is. No doubt successful deception requires the deceiver to impart an actual falsehood, but, once again, my interest lies in all cases in which expressed beliefs differ from actual ones, and this does not depend on issues of truth. Finally, this

definition makes lying a type of deception, not a synonym for deception. When people lie, they try to make others believe something they believe to be false, but people can try to make others believe something they believe to be false by means other than lying. People can engage in deception not only by expressing beliefs directly contrary to those they hold, but also by subtly misrepresenting their beliefs. They can put a particular gloss on a statement they believe to be more or less true, they can answer a question so as to side-step an issue, or they can express just one aspect of their beliefs on a subject. For example, imagine that a politician believes a worldwide trade-cycle and government incompetence have combined to bring about an economic depression. If the politician told an interviewer that the worldwide trade-cycle had caused the depression, they might not be lying, but they still would be practising deception by implying that the depression was in no way the fault of the government.

All instances of insincerity involve some sort of disjunction between actual and expressed beliefs. How should we unpack these two sets of beliefs and the disjunction between them? Consider the actual beliefs of deceivers. The fact that someone practices deception does not imply their actual beliefs are either unconscious or irrational. Thus we can explain the actual beliefs of deceivers in the same way we explain normal beliefs. No doubt the evidence we have of the actual beliefs of deceivers generally differs from the evidence we have of the actual beliefs of sincere people, and no doubt this difference in types of evidence is such that generally we have more trouble identifying the actual beliefs of deceivers than those of sincere people. Nonetheless, the extra difficulty in attributing beliefs to deceivers does not affect the way in which we should explain the beliefs that we do attribute to them. We can explain the actual beliefs of deceivers by relating them to things such as their webs of belief, the traditions into which they have been socialised, and

their experiences of life.

Next consider the disjunction between actual and expressed beliefs. When we investigate such a disjunction, we concern ourselves with an action, not just beliefs. We ask why someone performed the act of deception that they did. We ask why they expressed beliefs other than their actual beliefs. Here if we are to explain any action we must refer to the relevant pro-attitudes as well as the relevant beliefs.⁶ To explain a disjunction between actual and expressed beliefs, we have to refer to the pro-attitudes that motivated the deceiver. For example, imagine that politicians try to absolve the government of blame for a depression by saying it was caused by a worldwide trade-cycle, although they actually believe the government to be partly responsible for it.

We might explain the gap between their expressed beliefs and their actual ones by referring to the pro-attitude they hold towards enhancing the popularity of the government. A pro-attitude enables us to explain why someone performed an act of deception; that is, why a deceiver expressed beliefs other than their actual beliefs.

Whilst the pro-attitude behind an act of deception often will be a hidden preference for a definite outcome, this need not be so. Sometimes deceivers act as they do due to an open preference for a definite outcome. If they want to prick pomposity or to expose folly, they might well tell other people about the outcome they hope to bring about. In these cases we might be able to justify a claim that a particular pro-attitude motivated an act of deception by reference to statements in which the deceiver openly acknowledged this was so. Moreover, sometimes deceivers act as they do due to an open pro-attitude that does not point to a definite outcome. (Shakespearean comedy provides several examples of deception motivated by a simple delight in fun or mischief.) In these cases we have to explain the act of deception in terms of

a vague pro-attitude with little positive content.

Finally consider the expressed beliefs of the deceiver. Deceivers express beliefs other than their actual ones in order to mislead other people about something, so presumably they choose to express the beliefs that they do precisely because they think other people will understand or react to these beliefs in a certain way. Deceivers express the beliefs they do because they think social conventions will lead people to understand them in a certain way.

Thus we can explain why deceivers express the beliefs they do by referring to their actual beliefs about how others will react to the beliefs they express.

We can explain the expressed beliefs of a deceiver by showing the deceiver thought expressing these beliefs would promote a state of affairs for which they had some sort of preference. For example, when politicians say that a worldwide trade-cycle caused a depression they believe to be in part a result of economic mismanagement by the government, they do so because they think that other people will take them to be absolving the government of blame for the depression. They do so because they expect thereby to enhance the popularity of the government. The actual beliefs of deceivers about how others will react to the beliefs they express usually will be conscious, rational beliefs. Thus we can explain the ways in which deceivers believe other people will understand the beliefs they express in the same way we explain normal beliefs.

I want to turn now to unconscious beliefs. Consider a politician who the pundits agree is about to lose an election. Imagine that the politician sincerely believes they will win the election, dismissing the experts and opinion polls as miss-leading. Imagine also that the politician nonetheless acts as though they will lose the election by distancing themselves from the campaign so as to avoid blame for defeat, making preparations to move out of

their official residence, and starting to plan the writing of their memoirs. This type of self-deception, like deception, encapsulates a difference between expressed and actual beliefs. Consider first the actual beliefs of self-deceivers. These beliefs are exactly like normal beliefs except that they have been barred from our conscious, that is, to adopt Freudian terminology, repressed. Thus we can explain someone's unconscious beliefs in the same way as we do normal beliefs. We can make sense of them by reference to things such as their whole web of beliefs, the traditions in which they were raised, and their experiences of life. For example, the politician might believe unconsciously that they will lose the election because the pundits have told them so, and they think the pundits generally know what they are talking about, and anyway they think governments typically do lose elections when the economy is in a mess. Moreover, they might believe (consciously or perhaps unconsciously) that the pundits know what they are talking about, and that governments often lose elections when the economy is in a mess, because these beliefs were conveyed to them as part of an intellectual tradition during the process of socialisation.

Next consider the disjunction between actual and expressed beliefs in cases of self-deception. This disjunction arises because of the operation of both a censor and a pro-attitude. Self-deception, unlike deception, involves hiding unconscious beliefs from oneself, so there must be a censor to prevent self-deceivers from consciously recognising their actual beliefs. Also, self-deception, like deception, is an action, not a belief, so there must be a pro-attitude that motivates it. Crucially, a pro-attitude and the action of a censor are sufficient to explain the action of the unconscious. We have no need to adopt the paraphernalia of Freudian psychology; no need to ascribe an instinctual basis to the unconscious. We can understand perfectly well how

self-deception can occur due to a pro-attitude and a censor alone.

The pro-attitudes that inspire acts of self-deception, unlike those that inspire acts of deception, must be hidden. A self-deceiver can not possibly be conscious of the way in which the pro-attitude influences their beliefs. True, the pro-attitude sometimes can be a part of the conscious as well as the unconscious, but when this is so its actual operation must be excluded from the conscious, and so hidden. Because the operation of the pro-attitude must be hidden from the self-deceiver, the self-deceiver can not tell others about it. Thus we can justify a claim that a particular pro-attitude underlay a given instance of self-deception only by referring to the hidden implications of the actions of the self-deceiver. We can not do so by referring to the utterances of the self-deceiver. Moreover, the pro-attitudes that underlie self-deception, unlike those that underlie deception, must be preferences for a definite outcome. People always have some sort of a preference for holding true beliefs, so only an even stronger preference for a definite state of affairs can make them act so as to prevent their holding what they think are true beliefs. People can not deceive themselves out of sheer mischief. They must want their beliefs to be true unless they have a particular reason not to do so. This means that we always can give quite specific content to a pro-attitude that inspired an act of self-deception.

Finally consider the expressed beliefs of self-deceivers. Although these beliefs belong in the conscious mind, we must explain them if we are to explain the precise nature of a given case of self-deception. Because people have some sort of preference for true beliefs, they almost always try to make the beliefs with which they deceive themselves as convincing as they possibly can. This means that they try to make the conscious beliefs that they express more or less internally coherent. Thus we can begin to explain the expressed

beliefs of a self-deceiver as we do normal beliefs by presenting them as a coherent web. Nonetheless, we can not explain the emergence and the nature of these webs of belief in the way in which we would normal ones. We can not do so because self-deceivers adopt the conscious beliefs they do because of the abnormal action of the unconscious. Because the expressed beliefs of self-deceivers always represent an attempt to realise a primary aim other than truth, an explanation of them must refer to this aim. Thus we can explain the expressed beliefs of a self-deceiver by referring to the unconscious operation of a pro-attitude. This means we need to show how their conscious beliefs fit in with the pro-attitude that motivated them. Crucially, because we can make sense of the expressed beliefs of self-deceivers simply by portraying them as webs of belief centred on unconscious pro-attitudes, we need not follow Freud in insisting on the importance of relating the content and result of the unconscious to the sexual experiences of childhood.

I want to turn now to irrational beliefs. It is irrational to believe things that are inconsistent with one another. What does this irrationality consist of? If people believe two contradictory beliefs X and Y, they might have good reasons for believing X, so believing X can not be the source of their irrationality, and they also might have good reasons for believing Y, so believing Y can not be the source of their irrationality. Their irrationality consists in their believing X and Y together when X and Y are inconsistent with one another. Critics might object that this concern with consistency is culturally specific, so our definition of irrationality applies only to people within certain cultures. This criticism arises out of the ambiguity of our concept of consistency. Here a strong concern with consistency can suggest an attempt to adhere to all the varied logical operations we today take to be valid. Perhaps the validity of some of these logical operations really is

specific to particular cultures, though no doubt the validity of others is not. But a weak concern with consistency can suggest an attempt to adhere to whatever logical operations one considers to be valid. This makes consistency consist solely in following the logical maxims one accepts for oneself, not in following the logical maxims our particular culture takes to be valid. Thus if we define irrational belief in terms of a weak concept of consistency, we can meet the scruples of our critics. Irrational belief represents a failure to relate one's beliefs to each other in accord with one's own second-order beliefs about the nature of best belief.⁷

It is possible that our critics still might object that the idea of second-order beliefs about the nature of best belief is a culturally specific one. But this is not so. If someone had no second-order beliefs about the nature of best belief, they would be unable to decide what to believe and what not to believe, which would mean they would be unable to hold any beliefs at all. Thus because anyone who has beliefs must have second-order beliefs about the nature of best belief, our definition of irrationality is not a culturally specific one.

Philosophers distinguish between hot and cold cases of irrationality according to whether or not the irrationality is motivated by a pro-attitude.⁸

Cases of hot irrationality resemble distortions that arise when the operation of an unconscious pro-attitude results not just in a gap between expressed and actual beliefs, but in expressed and actual beliefs that actually contradict one another. No doubt some cases of hot irrationality could not occur if the people concerned had conscious or preconscious knowledge of all their beliefs.

But we can not reduce hot irrationality to a form of the unconscious because the person concerned could be aware of all of the relevant beliefs either consciously or, more plausibly, preconsciously. For example, a politician

might believe consciously that they are going to win a forthcoming election whilst also being aware that they are kidding themselves as they truly believe they are going to lose. It is true, however, that we can explain cases of hot irrationality in much the same way as we do distortions produced by the action of the unconscious. We can explain the main system of beliefs as we do normal beliefs. We can explain the rogue belief or rogue set of beliefs as we do the expressed beliefs associated with the unconscious, that is, by showing how they coalesce around the relevant pro-attitude. And we can explain the place of rogue beliefs within the whole mind by reference to the operation of a rogue pro-attitude.

Instances of cold irrationality are a bit different. Sometimes people hold beliefs contrary to their belief about the nature of best belief simply because their reasoning is at fault. Reasoning is a skill, and, as with all skills, we can exercise it more or less competently. When people fall short of an ideal competence, they make mistakes that are not the result of their pro-attitudes exerting an illegitimate influence on their beliefs. Cold irrationality consists of unmotivated mistakes in reasoning; that is, mistakes that are due to incompetence, not rogue pro-attitudes. Psychologists have found that one common mistake is to ascribe undue weight to evidence that is near at hand not because of an illegitimate pro-attitude but simply because it is near at hand. People can do this even when they are aware of the danger. For example, a politician might believe they are going to win a forthcoming election the pundits say they will lose because they put too much weight on the assurances of their close advisors that they will win. Their belief about best belief might encourage them to pay as much heed to the pundits as to their close advisors, but they still might fall into the trap of overweighing evidence that is close at hand; and they might do so not because of a rogue

pro-attitude, but simply because this is a mistake people do make.

Clearly we can not explain cold irrationality understood as unmotivated incompetence in the way we do other beliefs. We can not explain it by giving reasons for it precisely because it is unmotivated: we can not give reasons that are beliefs because the beliefs in question are irrational, and we can not give reasons that are pro-attitudes because the irrationality in question is not motivated. Cold irrationality is inexplicable in its very nature. Of course, we can describe the common traps that people fall into, and we can show how these common traps produce common patterns of incompetent reasoning.

However, the existence of such traps does not explain why people fall into them. The best we can do is to assimilate a case of cold irrationality to a pattern that recurs in similar cases, but this is not to explain it. The best we can do is to describe the sort of mistake that arises when reasoning fails in a certain way, but this is not to explain why reasoning fails in this way in a particular instance.

In general, therefore, we can explain distortions by reference to the pro-attitudes that motivate them: insincerity occurs when pro-attitudes prompt people to engage in deception; the unconscious appears when pro-attitudes lead people to express beliefs other than their actual beliefs in what are acts of self-deception; and the irrational appears when pro-attitudes illegitimately influence the reasoning process. The only exception to this rule are cases of cold irrationality. However, I propose that we ignore any problems which cold irrationality might pose. I think we reasonably can do so, firstly, because cold irrationality is inherently inexplicable, and, secondly, because there are obvious difficulties in the idea that ideologies can be unmotivated in the way it is. Explanations of distortions work by pointing to the influence of rogue pro-attitudes on the beliefs people express.

My concern in what follows, therefore, will be to expand my account of ideology as based on distorted belief by filling out the concept of a pro-attitude. I want to specify what sort of things are capable of generating pro-attitudes, and so motivating distorted beliefs. Pro-attitudes can arise from any one of our intellect, our emotions, or our physiology. If we asked someone what pro-attitude had given them a motive for acting as they did, they could reply by mentioning any one of a reason, a desire, or a need. Of course people can have mixed motives, but this implies only that several different pro-attitudes can motivate a given action; it does not imply that any of the pro-attitudes concerned can derive from something other than a reason, a desire, or a need. Similarly, people can have open or hidden motives, but this implies only that they can be willing or unwilling to acknowledge the way in which a given pro-attitude prompted their action; it does not imply that the pro-attitudes they do or do not acknowledge can derive from something other than a reason, a desire, or a need. All pro-attitudes derive from reasons, desires, or needs. I will consider each in turn.

When a pro-attitude rests on a reason, we describe the motive for the relevant action as a conviction that a state of affairs is unacceptable, or admirable, or both. Reasons are convictions; that is, beliefs about what is good and what is bad. They are products of the intellect. They are the result of the process of thinking. Moral convictions provide the clearest examples of reasons. For example, Hindu fundamentalists who want to make the slaughtering of cows illegal because they are convinced doing so is morally right have as a motive a pro-attitude that is based on a reason. They want to ban the killing of cows because their intellect tells them this is the right thing to do. However, moral convictions are not the only reasons capable of generating pro-attitudes. Reasons can be convictions about the way things

are, or about what is appropriate, which have no substantive moral content. For example, a Brahmin in India might not eat meat simply because members of their caste are vegetarians; not because they think eating meat is wrong, nor even because they think they should respect caste rules, but simply because that is the way things are for people like them.

When a pro-attitude rests on a desire, we describe the motive for the relevant action as a feeling that a state of affairs should be altered or established or both. Desires are emotions; that is, sentiments about what is to be hoped and what is to be feared. They are products of the passions. They are the result of our feelings. The unity of consciousness means that we can reflect on our desires, and when this happens we might act on a desire we have thought about, but it is still the desire, understood as an emotion, not the reason, understood as a conviction, which constitutes the content of our motive. Sometimes we act because we desire something. For example, white supremacists who try to avoid blacks because they are afraid of them have as a motive a pro-attitude that is based on a desire. They try to avoid blacks because they have an emotional fear of them.

When a pro-attitude rests on a need, we describe the motive for the relevant action as a physiological impulse to end a state of affairs, or to bring a state of affairs into being, or both. Needs are requirements of the body. They are groups of physiological states, whose absence would prevent the survival, or at the very least the normal functioning, of the body. People automatically act to sustain themselves unless they definitely choose to do otherwise, and when they automatically act to sustain themselves the pro-attitude that prompts them to do so is a physiological need. For example, people who eat because they are starving, or sleep because they are tired, have as a motive a pro-attitude that is based on a need. They eat and sleep

because their bodies need food and rest if they are to survive, or at the very least if they are to function normally. It is important to recognise that we can explain actions by referring to needs only in so far as we are able to unpack statements about needs as statements about physiological states that we know to be essential either to survival or the normal functioning of the body.

This is why we can not legitimately extend the concept of physiological needs to incorporate psychological drives. The concept of a drive represents a misguided attempt to interpret the concept of a desire using the language of natural science. Really, because we have no reason to assume that people have psychological drives that they must satisfy somehow, we ought to translate our pseudo-scientific talk of drives back into the language of folk psychology.⁹ Needs can explain actions only because they have a physiological nature.

My analysis of folk psychology suggests that any one of a reason, a desire, or a need can give people a pro-attitude, which then can prompt them to perform an action, including the adoption of distorted beliefs. However, a number of scholars have tried to reduce all pro-attitudes to one or other of needs, desires, or reasons. To defend a pluralist analysis of pro-attitudes, I want to argue that these reductionist programmes fail.

Because physicalists think all human actions have physiological causes, they often reduce reasons and desires to needs, drives, or the like. For example, Freud sometimes suggested that we could use certain instincts as a basis for causal explanations of all human actions. His account of the preservative and aggressive instincts points to a reductive view of reasons and desires, irrespective of whether they are conscious or unconscious.¹⁰ He suggested that physiological tension constituted a sort of pain, which then activated the mental processes that prompted people to act.¹¹ It is true that we sometimes associate a specific physiological state with a specific type of

action. For example, stomach contractions can indicate hunger, which often prompts people to eat. Nonetheless, the fact that we sometimes associate a physiological state with an action does not sustain a physicalist position. It establishes only that needs can motivate actions, not that needs alone can motivate actions.

Any attempt to associate all actions with prior physiological states confronts insurmountable obstacles. For a start, we can not identify most actions with an antecedent physiological state. We know of no physiological state that usually precedes voting, rioting, or reading a political tract. Moreover, even when we can identify an action with a given antecedent physiological state, this state does not seem to be necessary to bring about the corresponding action. It does not do so precisely because people can act voluntarily in accord with a desire or a reason that does not have any physiological basis. For example, people might choose to eat, even though they are not hungry, because they feel like tasting a particular dish, or because they think they should try to put on weight, and, in these cases, their eating presumably will not be preceded by stomach contractions. Physicalists might argue that even when people eat when they are not hungry, there still must be antecedent physiological states that prompt them to do so. However, because they can not begin to describe these physiological states, and because we have no evidence that these states exist, therefore, their physicalism represents a mere aspiration, a research programme based on a faith in science. Thus, at least for the moment, we can not unpack the concept of a pro-attitude solely in terms of physiological needs, drives, or the like.

Humeans often attempt to reduce all pro-attitudes to desires, conceived as emotions or dispositions, not to needs conceived as physiological states.

Hume argued that reason alone does not have the power to move us to act. Thus because he paid little heed to the role of needs, he concluded that the pro-attitudes which motivate us always must be desires, defined as passions or emotions.¹² He reduced all pro-attitudes to desires on the grounds that, first, we act to realise a state of affairs only if we prefer it to another state of affairs, and, second, reason alone can not give us preferences. Why can reason not give us preferences? Hume argued that the objects of reason had to be propositions; that is, descriptive statements that are either true or false. Thus, he concluded, because propositions do not exist in space and time, reason can not have as its object things in space and time, so reason can not influence human actions, understood as things that clearly do occur in space and time.

This Humean argument fails because of its inadequate characterisation of reason. When we reason, we do not just contemplate propositions, we also take a stance towards them. When we reason, we do not just process statements as true or false, we also come to accept them as true or false. Here the stance we take towards a proposition is a psychological state, which exists in space and time. Thus, because our reason leads us to take a stance in space and time, it can influence our actions in space and time. When our reason leads us to take a proposition as true or false, we thereby give ourselves a motive for acting or not acting in a particular way. Hume's argument fails because the objects of the process of reasoning are not propositions, but rather our convictions about propositions, and, although a proposition can not give us a motive for action, a conviction that a proposition is true or false can do so.

Critics might object that the stance we take to a proposition is a matter of desire, not reason. This objection is most implausible. Surely when we say someone is convinced of something, we do not conceive of their

conviction as an emotion. Rather, we take their conviction to be a product of their reason, although we might think that their reasoning was faulty. For example, imagine Hindu fundamentalists banned the slaughter of cows because they were convinced that this was the right thing to do - they did so because they took the proposition "this state should prohibit the killing of cows" to be true. Surely their conviction that the law should prohibit the slaughter of cows is a thought which provides them with a reason to perform an action, not an emotion which provides them with a desire to do so.

Humeans sometimes offer us a rather different argument in favour of the reduction of all pro-attitudes to desires. Hume suggests that reason can lead us to recognise something as a means to an end, but it can not commend an end to us. We adopt the ends that we do as emotional commitments, not reasoned convictions. All human actions ultimately arise from desires because desires alone can give us our basic ends. For instance, a Humean might say, if we ask the Hindu fundamentalists why they banned the slaughter of cows, and they said that they did so because they thought it was the right thing to do, we can ask them why they have a preference for doing the right thing, and, if they reply they do so because they think doing the right thing brings good karma, we then can ask them why they have a pro-attitude to good karma, and so we could go on until they expressed a basic emotional commitment, perhaps saying that they fear pain. To explain basic preferences, we must refer to desires.

This Humean argument for the reduction of pro-attitudes to desires is valid only if we so deprive the concept of desire of all content as to render the argument vacuous. Pro-attitudes differ from beliefs because they inspire actions to alter the world, whereas beliefs attempt to grasp the world as it is, including what future possibilities could be realised through what acts. This difference sustains a parallel one between reason as commitment and

reason as conviction. When our reason commits us to an attempt to realise something it gives us a pro-attitude. When it convinces us of the truth or falsity of something it gives us a belief. The Humean argument is that reason itself can not take us from convictions to commitments. Humeans say that we can commit ourselves to something only on the basis of a desire. This is true if vacuous; otherwise it is false. If we define reason in terms of conviction alone, and if we also define desire to include reason as commitment, then of course reason can not give us a pro-attitude. However, the Humean argument loses its plausibility once we break this charmed circle of definitions. If we do not define desire to include reason as commitment, we have no reason to assume that the commitments we adopt as a result of our reason must be the same as those we adopt as a result of our emotions. Crucially, because the Humean reduction of pro-attitudes to desires can be made to work only by definition, it has no explanatory value. If all pro-attitudes by definition spring from the passions, any explanation of pro-attitudes in terms of the passions must be vacuous.

The foregoing argument points to a more general critique of emotionalism, understood as the reduction of pro-attitudes to desires. All forms of emotionalism confront the difficulty that we can distinguish between thinking something desirable and actually desiring it: wealthy entrepreneurs can think higher taxes desirable without desiring them. This distinction gives rise to one between reasoned commitments to what one thinks desirable and one's actual desires, and in turn this distinction clearly implies that we can not reduce pro-attitudes to desires. Pro-attitudes can arise from reasoned commitments defined in contrast to desires. Emotionalists can overcome this difficulty only by arguing that we necessarily desire the things we think desirable. But this argument is either vacuous or false. If the

things we think desirable are by definition things we desire, then it is vacuous. But if the things we think desirable are not by definition the things we desire, it is false simply because we often do not feel any desire for something we think desirable.

The rationalist equivalent of emotionalism and physicalism is the reduction of all pro-attitudes to reasons at the expense of desires and needs. Rationalism fails because things other than reason can give us pro-attitudes, and sometimes even pro-attitudes contrary to those suggested by reason. Our desires and needs sometimes override our reason so as to lead us to act in one way even though we think acting in another way would be preferable. A reason for performing an action encourages us to do so, but it does not impel us to do so. When a reason gives us a definite preference for a particular action, we still might perform a contrary action because of either an emotional desire or a physiological need. Someone might think something highly desirable, and they might even desire to desire it, and yet they still might not actually desire it, so they might consciously choose to act on a contrary desire. We often encounter just this sort of behaviour. Indeed, the overriding of reasons by desires or needs accounts for some of - and quite possibly all of - the cases people usually describe in terms of weakness of the will. It is not really that the will is weak, and so unable to compel the body to act in accord with a pro-attitude. It is rather that a desire or need trumps the reason, so the pro-attitude we act on is not the one our reason would wish us to act on. Consider a case in which desire overrides reason. A politician might think it highly desirable that they should tell the electorate about corruption in the government, but nonetheless not do so due to fear. Their reason gives them one preference, their desires give them another, and they act on the latter. Now consider a case in which a need overrides a reason.

Someone might think it highly desirable that they should stop smoking, but nonetheless so crave a cigarette they have one. Their reason gives them one preference, their physiological needs give them another, and they act on the latter. Rationalists who would reduce all pro-attitudes to reasons can account for these sorts of cases only by saying that the people involved have a reason, not a desire, for going keeping quiet about corruption, and a reason, not a need, for having a cigarette. But to say this would be either to say something false, or to make rationalism true by definition, and so vacuous.

Physicalism, emotionalism, and rationalism all rest on the strange assumption that any acceptable account of human motivation must be a monistic one. Only a prior commitment to monism could lead philosophers to reject the pluralism that is implicit within our folk psychology and instead attempt to reduce all pro-attitudes to a particular psychological or physiological source. But why should we prefer a monistic to a pluralistic account of human motivation? What stands against our accepting the obvious plurality of our physical and mental requirements and capacities? Because needs, emotions, and thoughts can take all sorts of things as their subject matter, it is possible that a single object might be the subject of a need, a desire, and a reason. What is more, the unity of consciousness, and the unity of mind and body, both imply that individuals can think about their emotions or their needs, and want to have certain needs or thoughts, and perhaps even need to have certain thoughts or emotions. But the fact that our various physical and mental capacities can go to work on the same things, and even on one another, does not imply that we can reduce any one of these capacities to another one. All of these capacities are basic.

I have tried to develop a critical concept of ideology as distorted

belief so as to avoid both an unacceptable reductionism and a problematic claim to a privileged epistemological position. On my account distorted beliefs arise not as a passive reflection of distortions in our material life, but as a consequence of an illegitimate process of belief-formation within mind itself. On my account distorted beliefs are not defined as false ones but as ones in which the inner constitution of consciousness is flawed. What corrupts the process of belief-formation, at least in the first instance, is the operation of a rogue pro-attitude within the mind of the believer. Here a rogue pro-attitude is a need, desire, or reason that leads someone to adopt a belief in accord with a preference other than one for holding true beliefs. Ideological beliefs can be defined as distorted or corrupt, and so criticised, without our presupposing that we have a privileged access to truth.

Earlier I pointed out that although an analysis of distorted belief could provide the basis of a non-reductionist theory of ideology, it could not provide a complete theory of ideology. By way of a conclusion, I want now to indicate briefly how one might move from an analysis of distorted belief to a complete theory of ideology. The first question here is: how does an analysis of distorted belief relate to the concept of power, which must have some role in any adequate, critical theory of ideology? The outline of the answer to this question seems quite clear. A distorted belief is an ideological belief when the pro-attitude that motivates it is a preference for greater power. This means that ideological beliefs can not derive from the illegitimate action of a need, but only a desire or a reason. Because we do not have a physiological need for power, it must be emotive or intellectual preferences for greater power that motivate the distorted nature of ideological belief. This also means that distorted beliefs need not serve the actual interests of those who hold them. Because the distortions arise out of their preference

for power, not their actual power, if they are mistaken in their view of what will bring them power, the distortions might not serve their supposed purpose.

Ideologues can dupe themselves. However, the detailed answer to this question seems far from clear. The content of the concept of a preference for power must depend on an adequate analysis of the concept of power, and to provide such an analysis is no easy task.

The nature of the relationship I have proposed between distorted beliefs and power raises a second question for any prospective theory of ideology. How does a distortion produced by a preference for greater power come to manifest itself in the beliefs of others who do not hold the illegitimate pro-attitude? Ideally a complete theory of ideology would incorporate not just an account of how people come to voice distorted beliefs because of a preference for greater power, but also an account of how other people then come to hold these same distorted beliefs. Once again, the outline of the answer to this question seems quite clear. Although some of those who adhere to an ideology must hold it as a distorted belief, although their beliefs must be corrupted by a preference for greater power, not all the adherents need do so. Others can come to adhere to an ideology in good faith; that is, as a result of the normal process of belief formation. This means that the distorted beliefs at the heart of the phenomenon of ideology might be only a small part of the total phenomenon. Because people sincerely, consciously, and rationally can adopt beliefs that others developed insincerely, unconsciously, or irrationally, ideology can spread beyond its origins in distorted belief. However, here too the detailed answer to this question seems far from clear. A proper account of how people transmit their distorted beliefs to others must depend on an analysis of the social diffusion of beliefs within different institutional contexts. Perhaps one might draw here on something like

Althusser's concept of the state apparatuses.¹³ My own inclination, however, is to say that the process by which ideological beliefs are diffused often owes at least as much to the inherent plausibility of the beliefs as to any institutional setting. This seems to me to be implicit in the claim that the others do not have distorted beliefs in the sense of beliefs that are corrupted by a rogue pro-attitude of their own. If my inclination is right, there will be interesting work to be done on how the constraints of plausibility affect ideologies.¹⁴

NOTES

1. For examples of these approaches to ideology see respectively M. Seliger, Ideology and Politics (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976); M. Freeden, "Political Concepts and Ideological Morphology", Journal of Political Philosophy 2 (1994), 140-64; and I. Adams, The Logic of Political Belief (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).
2. See especially K. Marx, "Preface to A Critique of Political Economy", in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. D. McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 388-91.
3. cf. M. Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77, ed. C. Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 118.
4. cf. Ibid., p. 118.
5. Thus my approach to ideology is different in kind from that associated with other scholars who relate ideology to psychology. Whereas I use a normative account of consciousness to develop a critical theory of ideology, they use an empirical psychology to develop a descriptive theory. See, for example, M. Billig, Ideology and Opinions (London: Sage, 1991); and S. Rosenberg, Reason, Ideology and Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988). Billig ties ideology to the rhetorical nature of everyday thinking. Rosenberg ties it to Piaget's empirical psychology. Both see ideology as distorted only in so far as it is corrupted by the social context. Again, I do not want to argue that their theories are wrong as descriptive accounts of all or some of our thinking. I merely want to say that we lose some conceptual diversity if we fail to define ideology in an inherently critical way.

6. I have taken the concept of a pro-attitude from D. Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes", in Essays on Actions and Events (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Doing so enables me to highlight the fact that desires are just one of several bases for our preferences and so motives.

7. This approach to consistency also allows for the fact that people need not regard contradiction as a great evil, a point made in M. Billig, Ideology and Social Psychology (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982). It is certainly possible that someone's concept of best belief might be compatible with contradictory beliefs, and this is so even if we take a much stricter view of contradiction than does Billig. Someone might believe two contradictory things, and they might do so on the grounds that this is the best understanding of the world currently available, whilst also seeking to find a way of reconciling them.

8. See, for example, D. Pears, Motivated Irrationality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

9. So, I am not arguing that we do not have drives at all. I am arguing only that we do not have drives that we must satisfy somehow. If we have drives, we do not have to act on them; we can choose not to do so for a reason. Thus if we have drives they are not akin to physiological needs, but rather to psychological emotions.

10. See particularly S. Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes", and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", in The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. & trans. J. Strachey, 24 Vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), Vol. 14 (pp. 109-40) & Vol. 18 (pp. 1-64).

11. S. Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology", in Complete Psychological

Works, Vol. 1 (pp. 283-397).

12. D. Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

13. See especially L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)", in Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays, trans. B. Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 121-73.

14. For an example of how the plausibility constraint of consistency (and there are others) can constrain a politicians see Q. Skinner, "The Principles and Practice of Opposition: The Case of Bolingbroke versus Walpole", in N. McKendrick, ed., Historical Perspectives: Essays in Honour of J. H. Plumb (London: Europa Publications, 1974), pp. 93-128.