<div style="text-align:center">**Ideology in Practice**</div>

1. Introduction

The concept of *ideology* is highly contested and there is no consensus on how, or even whether, it should be used in critical theory. Is there any point in holding onto the notion? If we care about justice and changing the world, does it help?

I think the concept of ideology is indispensable. However, what is ideology and how does it function? I will argue for a "practice first" approach to ideology. On my view, the core phenomenon is a social practice: social practices rely on a collection of social meanings – what I call a cultural technē - to organize us in relation to the material world. An ideology is a cultural technē "gone wrong" – one that shapes us to enact structures of domination and subordination. This conception of ideology is *functionalist* and *pejorative*. It is not, however, doxastic: an ideology is not a set of beliefs or even a set of propositions.

2. The Critique of IDEOLOGY (not "Ideology Critique"!)

Let us begin with a rough conception of ideology. Consider Stuart Hall:

> ...has especially to do with the concepts and the languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination; or which reconcile and accommodate the mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation. (Hall 1996/2006, 24-25)

The challenge of a theory of ideology is, first, to understand how we, collectively, enact social structures. This is a question about how members of society develop kinds of "practical consciousness" [practical orientation] that enable them to coordinate their behavior. The more specific, and more pressing question is how, without being coerced, we come to enact *oppressive* social structures. Surely, most of us are not knowingly and intentionally dominating others or allowing ourselves to be dominated. Yet this happens nonetheless.

We should ask: (i) How do we come to have shared outlooks or "practical consciousness." (ii) Why do we consistently act in ways that frustrate our own self-interest, or in ways that result in injustices we abhor? And not just a few of us, and now and then, but pretty much all of us all the time? Two sorts of answers to these questions are often found in Marx: economic determinism, and what I will call "ideology as illusion."

a. Economic Determinism
Economic determinism is the view that all social phenomena – including our practical consciousness – can be causally explained (ultimately) in terms of economic forces. The problems with ideology lie in its origin and its effects. This passage in Marx is suggestive:

> The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1859/1977)

This sounds like bad social psychology. It is also generally agreed that this is not a fair representation of Marx's view; the idea that relations of production *condition* (but don't determine) consciousness is the more plausible interpretation. Contemporary materialists have adjusted their commitment (Young 1990, 33):

> …a materialist account [is] one that considers phenomena of "consciousness" - e.g., intellectual production, broad social attitudes and beliefs, cultural myths, symbols, images, etc. - as rooted in real social relationships. This should not imply "reducing" such phenomena of consciousness to social structures and social relationships, nor does it even mean that the phenomena of consciousness cannot be treated as having a logic of their own. Nor should it mean that phenomena like attitudes and cultural definitions cannot enter as elements into the explanation of a particular structure of social relationships…This requirement mainly calls for a methodological priority to concrete social institutions and practices along with the material conditions in which they take place.

Economic/social/material relations *and* culture are relevant to injustice. How do we locate ideology within a (neo)-materialist model of this sort?

b. Ideology as Illusion
Perhaps the powerful manage what's generally believed, and ideology's failure is in our representation of the world: we act in self-defeating/unjust ways because we are led (propaganda, fake news) to adopt false or unwarranted beliefs that mask our true interests. The problem with ideology is epistemic.

- *Problem of Accuracy:* Because ideology functions to create social reality, it sometimes "makes itself true." MacKinnon: "...the more inequality is pervasive, the more it is simply "there." And the more real it looks, the more it looks like the truth." (MacKinnon 1989, 101) This also helps explain why we persist in forming ideological outlooks. (Though it's complicated: ideology is often articulated using generics.)

- *Problem of Epistemic Respect:* If ideology is a matter of false or distorted beliefs, then we live our lives under a pervasive and systematic illusion. We are self-destructively deluded about the choices we make and the reasons for them. But this is not only implausible, it is doesn't show respect for our basic epistemic capacities.

- *Problem of Emancipation*: If the power of ideology lies in its falsehood, then what's needed to make the world more just is access to the truth. The truth shall set us free. But given the problem of accuracy, this is highly dubious.

3. The Problem of Materiality

One diagnosis of the problems posed in the previous section targets the idea of *representation*. Ideology doesn't misrepresent the world because it doesn't represent the world at all. I reject this approach, but even if we accept it, our original problem remains. How do we explain our ongoing and yet unintended participation in structures of domination and subordination? One answer is that they are just habits formed through a process of socialization.

Socialization is a crucial part of the story, but we should not replace economic determinism with cultural determinism. We *choose* to act in ways that perpetuate the structures. Judith Butler captures this with her notion of performativity. On a performative view, we enact social roles not in a deterministic or unthinking way, but by *constrained choice.*

> ….one does one's womanhood, one executes it, institutes, produces and reproduces it, wears it, flaunts it, hides it, but always stylizes it in one way or another. For gender is a corporeal style, a way of acting the body, a way of wearing one's own flesh as a cultural sign. (Butler 1989, 256)

> Gender is a mundane drama specifically corporeal, constrained by possibilities specifically cultural. But this constraint is not without some moments of contingency, of possibility, of unprecedented cultural confusion that will invariably work to destroy the illusion that gender constraint is a dictate from nature. (Butler 1989, 261)

Ian Hacking has a similar view. Intentional action involves an ability to represent what one is doing and to situate it within a frame of intelligibility or space of reasons. The intentional dimension of the act depends on one's cognitive repertoire. So navigation of social life depends on available cultural/conceptual resources.

How is performativity related to our questions about ideology? We started with the question: how does ideology stabilize structures of domination? We rejected economic determinism (ideology is not epiphenomenal). We rejected "ideology as illusion" (not all ideology is false, we aren't dupes). We rejected cultural determinism (we aren't cultural robots). We are now considering performativity: agency is constrained by "concepts and languages of practical thought."

But how do we link such constraint with structures of power and domination? It would be misguided to think culture, in itself, is subordinating. There is no agency at all without the cultural resources (language!) that society provides. Such resources constrain *and* enable. (Butler 1990, 148-49)

This is the problem of materiality for an account of ideology. Subordination involves constrained agency, but that cannot be the whole story. Agency occurs in the economy of social relations. On a performative view, the economic and material conditions of agency are occluded; this limits our explanatory and normative resources for critique.

4. Social Practices

Let's start with some cases to situate the discussion.
> *Practices:* Timing of meals; cuisine; clothing styles; academic lectures.
> *Interconnected practices = structures:* systems of food production & distribution, education, transportation, market exchange/wage labor.

- Practices are a site of socially organized agency.
- Practices produce, distribute, and organize, things taken to have value: artifacts, time, knowledge, status, health, security. They also distribute things of disvalue: toxic waste, menial work, vulnerability. I call these (+ and -) *resources.*
- Practices are, in some sense, "up to us," so are a potential site for change.

a. Practices provide a "stage setting" for action

In "Two Concepts of Rules," (1955) Rawls argues that practices (such as promising) are defined by a set of rules that are *prior to* the behavior and states of mind of the participants. They render our action meaningful. They constitute reasons for action.

> In the case of actions specified by practices it is logically impossible to perform them outside the stage-setting provided by those practices, for unless there is the practice, and unless the requisite proprieties are fulfilled, whatever one does, whatever movements one makes, will fail to count as a form of action which the practice specifies. (Rawls 1955, 25)

Standard examples of this include a move in a game, but most practices are informal and they need not be governed by rules.

Our conformity to a practice is not always guided by intentions and done for reasons. When acting intentionally we are capable of representing, in principle, *what we are doing* or at least *undertaking* to do. The contrast is "mere behavior," e.g., sneezing. Much of our behavior, however, is somewhere between the two.

- Our agency is responsive to the world and each other in ways that are not always accessible to the agent or governed by intentions. What action I perform depends not just on me, but on the social meanings of my milieu: in a foreign culture one's actions can offend or invite, unintentionally.
- One can also navigate a social world without needing to represent what one is doing. Embodying social codes opens doors. So practices are not

only necessary for (certain kinds of) agency, but behavior in their terms can also be sufficient for enacting a practice.

➢ Social agency occurs within a domain structured by shared (public) meanings for interpreting and coordinating with others.

➢ Agents can be confused or misled about the social practices that they enact and different agents can participate in the same practice with different intentions (e.g., men opening doors for women).

➢ Neither social practices nor social relations need be transparent: I may not understand the nature of my relations with others and may actually misunderstand them. (God's chosen people.) An explanatory social theory may explicitly debunk social self-understandings by re-describing our social relations in terms the participants would reject.

b. Coordination and Social Meaning

Practices are *normative*. This claim ambiguous. It might mean that the relevant regularities are in fact encouraged or enforced, or it might mean that they are *properly* or *appropriately* encouraged or enforced. For the time being, I'll focus on the *descriptive normativity* that makes a regularity a practice.

Practices provide, among other things, systems of coordination; and coordination is not optional for us: "solving problems of coordination with our fellows is our most pressing ecological task." (Zawidzki 2008, 198) Because of the huge cognitive demands of coordination across highly variable circumstances, humans cannot rely entirely on "preinstalled, competence-specific information" (Sterelny 2012, xi). Instead we rely on social learning, reliable cross-generational transmission, and material and technological resources for building on what came before (Sterelny 2012).

Culture defines the terms of coordination for a social group. William Sewell captures the idea: 'Culture may be thought of as a network of semiotic relations cast across society...' (Sewell 2005, 49). Social meanings include:

i. Simple meanings (pink means girl, red means stop);
ii. Narrative tropes ("First comes love, then comes marriage,…")
iii. Default assumptions ("Marriage is between one man and one woman"); concepts (MARRIAGE, FAMILY, SEX, RACE) and what are taken to be "analytic" truths concerning them;
iv. Heuristics (imitate-the-majority or imitate-the-successful (Hertwig 2013));
v. Familiar patterns of metaphor and metonymy ("Juliet is the sun," "The pen is mightier than the sword," (Camp 2006));
vi. Entrenched conceptual homologies (reason : passion :: man : woman (Balkin 1998, Ch. 10; Balkin 1990)).

This notion of *culture* is introduced as an explanatory device:

The point of conceptualizing culture as a system of symbols and meanings is to disentangle, for the purpose of analysis, the semiotic influences on action from the other sorts of influences − demographic, geographical, biological, technological, economic, and so on − that they are necessarily mixed with in any concrete sequence of behavior. (44)

Members of a group take the culture's concepts, scripts, and meanings to be *normative* for members of the group: we begin with the assumption that members will do things the "right way" and feel entitled to criticize them if they don't (Zawidzki 2008, 204-5). Joseph Rouse (2006) suggests that practices are dynamic patterns of action in which performances are mutually responsive:

…the bounds of a practice are identified by the ways in which its constitutive performances bear upon one another….One performance expresses a response to another, e.g., by correcting it, rewarding or punishing its performer, drawing inferences from it, translating it, imitating it…circumventing its effects, and so on. (530)

➢ Thus far, I've argued that practices (a) provide a "stage setting" for coordinated action that gives us roles to occupy, norms to follow, and reasons to act, and (b) do so by drawing on learned, locally transmitted social meanings that enable *mutually responsive or mutually accountable* performances.

c. Fragmentation and Agency

How does culture constrain us without undermining our agency? Culture is not a hegemonic system. It is as fragmented as the multiple practices that coordinate us in different contexts for different purposes.

• *A cultural technē is a set of tools:* Ann Swidler (1986) suggests that '[c]ulture influences action...by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles…' (p. 273). The fragmentation of agency in different practices provides resources and opportunities for critique.

• *Vectors:* Social vectors provide 'forms of causality that are conduit-like rather than strictly cause-effect, directional rather than distinctly determinative, and relational rather than cleanly linear.' (Richardson 2014, 221) Social practices and structures provide, in effect, a topography upon which specific causal factors interact to produce probabilistic effects; cultural scripts and narratives create valleys in the topography along which agency easily flows. Although it may be easier to flow in the valley, we have choices to climb the peaks instead.

d. Materiality and Resources

How should we understand the social "landscape"? Is it entirely up to us?

What things in the world *are* is never fully determined by the symbolic net we throw over them − this also depends on their preexisting physical

characteristics, the spatial relations in which they occur, the relations of power with which they are invested…The world is recalcitrant to our predications of meaning. (Sewell 2005, 51)

The social landscape is malleable, but not infinitely so. Something becomes a *resource* when it is regarded as having value (+/-) – whether economic, aesthetic, moral, prudential, spiritual. (Rabbits: pet, food, pelt?) It becomes, thereby, a potential site of a coordination problem. Access to it is something to be managed because access is a source of power or pleasure, etc. Social meanings evolve to enable us to perceive, produce, and organize the resource. If our schemas lead us to interpret some parts of the world as valuable for a particular purpose, but the world does not substantiate such valuing, then the practice becomes harder to sustain on its own terms, e.g., keeping tigers as pets, commodifying water. Coordination is, in part, a social engineering problem; but because practices are structured in relation to a (purported) resource, there is a further epistemic question: is this resource valued aptly?

This is not a simple question: We rely on cultural schemas not only to interact with each other, but also the world; this changes the world to conform to the schemas we bring to it. This has significant epistemic effects: the schemas we employ to interpret the world are confirmed by the world they have shaped. (This is the *accuracy problem* redux.) Thus it becomes difficult to even see that schemas/practices are problematic, for they appear to be warranted, e.g., we allow Nestle to drain local springs in order to bottle water, leaving a less potable public water supply, giving people reason to engage in the practice of drinking bottled water; thus reinforcing the decision to grant water rights to Nestle.

➢ Practices are embodied engagements with the material world that distribute things of purported (+/-) value.
➢ Normative evaluation of practices considers (a) their effect on what and how we value, and (b) how they organize us in relation to the things valued (or disvalued).

5. Practices and Ideology

Social practices are patterns of learned behavior that enable us (in the primary instances) to coordinate as members of a group in creating, distributing, managing, maintaining, and eliminating a resource (or multiple resources), due to mutual responsiveness to each other's behavior and the resource(s) in question, as interpreted through shared meanings/cultural schemas.

→ Schemas give us tools to *interpret* the value of resources (in a context, along some dimension) and to coordinate in their *production, maintenance, distribution, elimination, etc.*

← Resources are potential sites of value that can be shaped and transformed so that they (seem to) *warrant* and so *reinforce* the schemas we apply to them.

Culture, material conditions, and agency can create stable loops:
- Culture provides schemas for interpreting and responding to material conditions;
- Agents internalize the schemas as practical orientations in order to coordinate and communicate;
- Practical orientations guide us to act on material conditions and produce/distribute resources in accordance with the schemas,
- This shapes the world to facilitate our coordination and also to fit the schemas.

How does ideology fit into this picture?

➢ In the primary case, *an ideology is the cultural technē of an unjust/bad social structure*.
➢ A social *practice* can be ideological if the practice itself is bad/unjust. However, often practices (and their social meanings/schemas) can only be evaluated relative to their part in a broader structure.
➢ An ideology can be bad in several ways: (a) because it prevents us from valuing things correctly. (b) because it produces, distributes, and maintains what is valuable unjustly.
➢ Unjust practices and institutions guided or formed by an ideology are *ideological formations*, e.g., racism, sexism, etc. The interconnected web of unjust social practices are connected by a racist technē, e.g., residential segregation, police brutality, biased hiring and wage inequity, educational disadvantage.

The view I've sketched focuses on ideology as the cultural contribution to practical orientation. *Explicit* ideology (articulated propositions) is both an expression and rationalization of our practical orientation. On the whole, explicit ideologies, as rationalizations of our unjust practices, present our practices in ways that obscure or mystify them and their consequences; this makes them apt targets for critique. But explicit rationalizations are not an essential part of what enables or motivates a practice, and that's why a critique of such rationalizations is so often ineffective in promoting social change.

This does not mean, however, that philosophy is irrelevant to ideology critique. In addition to changing laws and criticizing individual actions, social justice requires cultural critique. Critique offers multiple sites for philosophical intervention, including the task of making ideology explicit so it can be subjected to epistemic evaluation, exposing the underlying social structure that guides agency, and amelioration of our conceptual repertoire. I'll discuss conceptual amelioration in the next lecture, and the normative basis for critique in the third.