

**Week 11 Sociology 621**  
**WHAT IS IDEOLOGY?**  
**November 10, 2014**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

**1. Multiple uses of the term “Ideology”:**

There is a deep problem in the use of the word “ideology”. Several common associations:

- ideology as *false ideas*: ideology as the other of science
- ideology as *systematized gestalts* of beliefs: ideological vs chaotic ways of thinking
- ideology as a *multidimensional concept* mapping all socially-relevant beliefs

I do not have a fully elaborated proposal for the linkage between the terminological conventions and the conceptual field we are exploring. This will create more ambiguities than in some of our other discussions. But I will try to use the following convention:

**An Ideology** = the reference is to a system of beliefs, with no presumption of coherence

**Ideological practices** = reference is to the process of producing beliefs incorporated within subjectivity

**2. Ideology and Other Aspects of Social Relations/Practices** (recapitulation)

2.1 *Ideology as a practice, contrasted with political and economic practice.*

**economic practice** = process of producing use values through the transformation of nature as a raw material.

**political practice** = process of producing social relations through the transformation of social interactions as a raw material.

**ideological practice** = process of producing conscious dimensions of subjectivity through the transformation of individual lived experience (raw material) into beliefs: *Ideology = cognitive: content of thinking.*

**cultural practices** = process of producing the *nonconscious* dimensions of subjectivity: personality, dispositions. *Cultural practices produce habitus.*

**theoretical practice** = process of producing knowledge of social relations through the transformation of ideology as a raw material.

[Perhaps we can give specificity to **religious practices** in these terms: practices which produce existential meaningfulness, meaning-in-life: Marxism could constitute a religious practice in such terms. This might also underwrite a contrast between spiritual practice and religious practice -- religion as alienated spirituality]

**Ideological practice is the social process through which lived experiences are transformed into cognitive products – beliefs and values –integrated into a person’s subjectivity.**

Example: Michael Burawoy's analysis of the labor process. His argument = workers participate in their own exploitation actively -- that is, they consent to their own exploitation -- not by virtue of subjective orientation which they *bring to the shop floor from outside* (through socialization, etc.) but because of *the forms of subjectivity that are produced through the process of competition and conflict on the shop floor itself*. The heart of his analysis is thus the actual social process through which given forms of subjective orientations are produced and reproduced through the daily practices within the labor process.

### 2.2 Once again: Type vs Dimension of practice:

- (1). Ideology in this sense should be seen as a **dimension** of practices rather than simply a type of practice.
- (2). When the ideological aspect of a practice is its central **intention** or purpose, we can speak of **an** ideological practice: One can "do" ideology. Education is an ideological practice in this sense: the central task is transforming subjectivity, especially the cognitive aspects of subjectivity.
- (3). Ideology is a contradictory practice: the forms of subjectivity produced by ideological practices are never wholly integrative of capitalism, never purely functional. In Burawoy's analysis while consent is produced, so is resistance/solidarity. The problem is to understand the material conditions for each and the balance between them.

### 2.3 Ideology, Culture, Consciousness, unconscious subjectivity

In a simple way I link **ideology** → **conscious subjectivity** and **culture** → **unconscious subjectivity**. The basic idea can be illustrated if we look at gendered aspects of ideological and cultural practices:

**Patriarchal ideology** = beliefs in the naturalness of the sexual division of labor, in the desirability of men doing aggressive competitive jobs and women, nurturing, emotional work

**Patriarchal culture** = socialization of masculine and feminine attributes of personality differentially in men and women so that men are dispositionally more aggressive and women more nurturing

**Bourgeois ideology** = belief in the efficiency and of private enterprise and the justice of distributions generated by markets

**Bourgeois culture** = unconscious dispositions, habits, personality structures conditioned to participate effectively in markets and competition

A given, concrete practice -- disciplining a child, reading a book, etc. -- may contain both ideological and cultural aspects, of course.

2.4 Fundamental issue for the transformation of social relations = **contradictions between ideological and cultural practices**: many men believe in nonaggressive nurturance (ideology) even though they have been socialized as aggressive, non-nurturant personalities (culture). Changing ideas can lead to changes in behavior which result in changes in dispositions. This kind of contradiction is at the heart of Therborn's analysis of ideology.

## II. THERBORN'S ANALYSIS

### 1. Basic Definitions:

Goran Therborn takes off from Althusser's central conceptualization of ideology as a **subject-producing practice** (Althusser referred to this as the way ideology *interpellates* social subjects, which essentially means "hails" them as subjects or identifies them as subjects).

Therborn's project is essentially to take the generic notion that ideology transforms individuals into subjects and develop it in ways that make possible the concrete historical investigation of ideology. While much of his analysis revolves around clarifying a host of conceptual distinctions -- and thus it reads a little like a dictionary in places -- the discussion is filled with more substantive theoretical propositions and analyses. The analysis revolves around four main objectives:

- To generate a set of concepts which make possible the **historical investigation of ideology**. This implies moving from the level of abstraction of what Althusser called "ideology in general" to the level of "ideologies" but doing so in a way that draws on the more general conceptual framework.
- **To expand the concept of ideology to encompass nonclass subjectivities/subjects.** Throughout the analysis Therborn is very insistent upon the importance of grasping the process of the formation of sexual subjectivity as well as class subjectivity (and various other kinds of subjectivity). He sees people as being multiple subjects, interpellated in many different relations with a multiplicity of subjectivities. The problem is to understand the specificity and interconnectedness of these subjectivities, not to collapse them into a unified class subjectivity.
- To give an account of the **content and specific forms of interpellation** (subject-formation) rather than treat it as a homogeneous unified process. This implies decomposing the general claims about the effects of ideology into a number of intersecting components of subjectivity.
- To provide a way of grasping the **fundamentally contradictory character of the process of subject-formation**, rather than treating contradictions as simple "disturbances" (as does Althusser). This is essential if the analysis is to avoid the functionalist pitfalls that Althusser sometimes approaches. People are interpellated both as subjects of the ruling class ideology and as countersubjects.

It is impossible to carefully go through all of the steps of his exposition in this section, so I will emphasize the third and fourth of these objectives, although some mention will be made of the others as well.

Before going any further, it would be good to state Therborn's formal definition of ideology:

**ideology** = "*The operation of ideology in human life involves, fundamentally, constituting and patterning how human beings live their lives as **conscious, reflecting initiators of acts** in a universe of meaning....In this sense, ideology constitutes human beings as subjects.*"

And elsewhere he states that to study the ideological aspect of a practice is

“to focus on the way it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity”

This is similar to Althusser’s definition, but is somewhat more exhaustive in its specification of the formation/transformation of subjectivity in general, and it posits a more active image of human action in seeing the problem of subjectivity as the patterning of subjectivity of human beings as “conscious, reflecting initiators of acts in a universe of meaning.”

To embark on such an investigation, Therborn proposes a whole series of new concepts and conceptual distinctions. These concepts then form the basis for some general claims about how Marxists should study ideology, ideological struggle and ideological transformation. We will first examine these new concepts and then turn to the methodological prescriptions which follow from them.

## 2. Conceptual Distinctions on the Terrain of Ideology

Therborn’s conceptual innovations can be clustered under two general headings: distinctions in the dimensions of ideology and its effects; and the relationship between the discursive and nondiscursive practices of ideology.

### 2.1. Modes of Interpellation

1. *Interpellation*: Therborn specifies the Althusserian concept of interpellation in a new and much more precise way as a dual process of *subjection* and *qualification*: subjection implies forming the subjectivity of individuals under a general model of subjectivity, subjecting them to a given standard; qualification implies the suitability of such subjectivity for specific roles (positions within relations) in society.

- **Subjection** thus refers to the effects of ideology on individual subjectivity;
- **Qualification** refers to the effects of such subjectivity on the individual’s insertion into social relations.

If the analysis was purely functionalist in character, then there would be a perfect coincidence between these two aspects of interpellation: it would be the requirements of qualification which would homeostatically dictate the forms of subjection. But Therborn insists that the correspondence between these two aspects of interpellation is not by any means guaranteed, that the correspondence itself is a result of struggle, and that a variety of forms of noncorrespondence/contradiction can occur. This is of great importance for understanding the role of ideology in social change rather than simply in social reproduction.

2. *Modes of interpellation.* The subjection-qualification of individuals involves three interconnected forms of interpellation. “Ideologies,” Therborn writes subject and qualify subjects by telling them, and relating them to and making them recognize:

- a. what exists
- b. what is good
- c. what is possible

These are characterized as three successive lines of defense of a given social order. The investigation of an ideology, then, involves analyzing how the subjective recognition of each of these is formed/transformed, what their content, is, etc.

**Note on an ambiguity in the analysis:** under the rubric “what is good” two sorts of subjectivities are included: the *cognitive belief* in what is good, and the *motivational orientation* of what is good. Thus, it is not entirely clear whether the bourgeois value in competitiveness is being treated mainly as a value/norm or as a personality/character structure, or both. As I indicated, I think it is useful to distinguish ideological and cultural practices precisely in these terms: subjection/qualification thus involves both the creation of a set of **beliefs** and **dispositions** (compare this to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* as a cultural embedded pattern of dispositions). This distinction is especially important for understanding the kinds of contradictions which make progressive change possible: the distinction between the character-structure and cognitive-structure aspect of values/norms reveals potential contradictions between the kind of people we are and the kind of people we’d like to be. This is important, for example, in struggles over sexism/male domination on the left, in which men genuinely believe that it is bad to be competitive/aggressive in discussions, but have difficulty in not acting that way.

## 2.2 Material Matrix of Ideology: discursive and nondiscursive practices, sanctions & affirmations

These interpellations do not occur simply because of the pronouncement of the words reflecting these ideologies. Interpellation -- the formation and transformation of subjectivities -- is the result of a systematic process of *affirmations* and *sanctions*.

**Affirmations:** In affirming practices, “if an interpellated subject acts in accordance with the dictates of the ideological discourse, then the outcomes predicted by the ideology occurs.”

**Sanctions:** Sanctioning practices constitute the punishments invoked for contravention of the dictates of ideological discourse.

This distinction between discursive and nondiscursive practices is not so obscure, even though every discursive act necessarily has a nondiscursive side to it. As Therborn says,

“there is some difference between being pronounced ‘dead’ by a hostile critic and being assassinated.”

The point at hand is that **ideologies are affirmed and sanctioned not just by words, but by nondiscursive practices** which back up/reinforce the discursive practices of ideology. (Note Therborn’s interesting discussions of excommunication as a form of sanction involving both

discursive sanctions--being pronounced excommunicated--and nondiscursive sanctions--being denied various things, shunned, or being burnt at the stake, etc.).

One crucial consequence of this analysis = going beyond the simple force/consent dichotomy as the basis of ruling class domination: all force presupposes consent at least in the sense of forms of subjectivity which make the application of force effective, and all forms of ideological interpellation presuppose a system of sanctions/affirmations which include elements of coercion.

### 2.3 The Analysis of Contradictions and Transformations of Ideology

These diverse concepts which decode the complexity of ideology and establish the social processes which affirm/sanction ideology provides the basis for Therborn's account of the transformation of ideologies, the contradictions of ideology and ideological class struggle. The starting point of this analysis is what could be termed an *intergenerational perspective* on ideology, which is then linked to a specific set of theses about contradictions and transformation.

**1. Intergenerational perspective on ideology → Transformations of ideologies always presuppose an existing ideology:** *people are transformed from one kind of subject to another, not from being non-subjects into subjects.*

To explain change, then, we must understand why a given form of subjectivity is not simply passed on from one generation to another:

“A parental generation will always mould its children according to its own form of subjectivity; and if ecological, demographic, socio-economic and any inter-societal relationships remain the same, the younger generation will face exactly the same affirmations and sanctions of the existing ideologies as the parental one. It follows that the explanation of the generation of ideologies will have to start from processes of change in the structure of a given society.... It is these changes then which constitute the material determination of the rise of ideologies.”

Contrast to idealist view which “assumes that just through the power of ideological imagination each new generation of humans can emancipate themselves from ideological formation by their parents, even though facing exactly the same situations as the latter” (=affirmations and sanctions).

### 2. Key idea = Changes in social structures change have two general consequences:

**(a) social structural change alters the forms of sanctions/affirmations.** The emergence of capitalism means that capitalist-subjectivity begins to be affirmed/rewarded while feudal affirmations and sanctions are weakened; stagnation means that certain subjectivities cease to be affirmed in ways that they once were; in post-industrial, advanced capitalism the relational/material affirmations of the “work ethic” are weakened.

**(b) social structural change generates disjunctions between subjection and qualification.** In the process of change people will exist that have been subjected to one set of ideological interpellations which no longer adequately qualify them to live effectively in the world, to make sense of who they are. This generates the kinds of cognitive disruptions that make people open to new ideologies.

### 3. Contradictions & the temporality of change

These arguments open the way for the systematic accounts of ideological contradictions. Several possibilities:

- a. Structural change in modes of production change the matrix of material affirmations and sanctions. This means that old subjectivities no longer constitute the basis for qualification into roles/relations.
- b. Class struggle over affirmations/sanctions can set up competing systems of interpellation, competing “material matrices.” Unions impose sanctions on certain kinds of competitiveness among workers, thus counteracting the affirmations of the market. Result = **clashing subjectivities based on clashing affirmations/sanctions.** (i.e., coexistence of antagonistic class-alter ideologies.) These are examples how conscious, motivated practice can establish the material framework for the transformation of subjectivities by producing contradictions (or intensifying them).
- c. The different interpellations of the same individual may contradict each other: the different/multiple subjectivities may not be congruent with each other. For example: the forms of subjectivity of women within bourgeois/patriarchal sex-gender interpellations are not congruent with the form of interpellation of women as graduate students within competitive bourgeois academic relations. The former demands passivity, gentleness, the latter demands aggressiveness, assertiveness, competitiveness. Such contradiction can motivate a variety of responses: struggles to change the affirmations/sanctions in the academic relations; rejection of the female subjectivity of the sex-gender system (women “act like men”); struggles to transform the sex-gender relations of affirmation/sanction.
- d. **Fundamental importance of temporality of change:** the speed of social change as such becomes crucial. If change is very slow, then smooth adjustments are possible (for example, if changes that require new subjectivities take several generations to accomplish); if change is much more rapid -- many dramatic changes within a single generation -- then subjective reconstitution becomes problematic. Life-cycle perspective on the operation of ideology.

**4. Can new ideas and Ideological struggle “change people’s minds”?** Often in sociological discussions of the role of ideas and ideology, a central problem is the extent to which ideological appeals and campaigns can change people’s minds. The issue here is not so much the basic question “do ideas matter”, but in a sense: can “ideas change ideas.” Here is how I think we should think about the issue:

- It is always possible for a given individual that simply thinking about problems, hearing novel ideas, chewing them over, and engaging in what can be called “internal dialogue” can result in a change of beliefs and ideas.
- The question, at hand, is whether exposure to ideas and introspection can explain the widespread change in ideas.
- This is where Therborn’s model has its power: it explains the conditions which make it more or less likely that ideological changes will generalize and become a social force.

- Example: There were theologians arguing the sorts of things Luther argued for generations. Why did the ideas “catch on” – become a powerful social force – in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and not the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century?

[Additional Elements of Therborn’s model: Not discussed in the lecture]

**2.4 Dimensions of subjectivity/the universe of ideology**

A second way in which ideology is structured revolves around what Therborn calls the “universe of ideology.” The precise status of this concept is not clear viz-a-viz the categories of modes of interpellation. One way of thinking about it is that this universe is a way of talking about the kind of subject which is being formed, whereas the modes of interpellation designate aspects of the formation of that subject. In any event, this discussion centers on two axes of distinction:

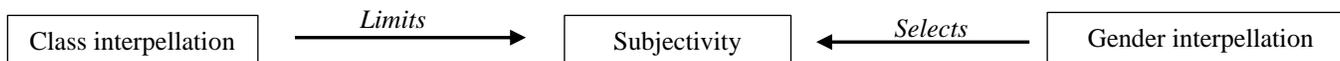
- i. existential vs. historical ideologies/subjectivities
- ii. inclusive vs. positional ideologies/subjectivities

The heart of the analysis of class ideologies is the investigation of historical-positional ideologies, i.e., ideologies which create social subjects within the social relations of production. But as Therborn emphasizes, such class-positional-historical ideologies always presuppose an inclusive historical interpellation, since classes always exist as common members of historical social formations/modes of production.

**Class vs. non-class ideologies**

Class is only one of a variety of positional-historical ideologies. Therborn emphasizes that in every society people are multiple subjects, tht is they are interpellated into multiple relations with multiple “subjectivities.” A male electrical worker is interpellated as a worker in the social relations of production, as an electrician craft artisan in the occupational structure, and as a male in the sex-gender relations. And in each of these relations, there are different subjectivities -- forms of what exists, what is good, what is possible

Therborn insists on the radical nonreducibility of these diverse forms of subjectivity/interpellations to class interpellations. In particular, sex-gender subjectivities are not derivable or reducible to class subjectivities. But he does argue in a somewhat vague way that “more” of the patterning of subjectivity is structured by class ideologies than by nonclass ideologies in class societies. He thus seems to argue that:



The important issue here is that class-subject formation does not exhaust ideology, both because positional-historical ideology is only one type of ideology, and because class relations constitute only one--although perhaps the most decisive--basis for historical-positional interpellations. We live multiple subjectivities/identities, and the problem is to understand the structure of their interconnections and contradictions, not to collapse one into another.

**Ego and Alter Class ideologies**

Individuals are interpellated into class positions through class ideologies. But because a class position is a relation, not just a role, this interpellation involves a double reality:

- interpellation with respect to the position itself = ego ideologies = identity

- interpellation with respect to the other of the position = alter ideologies = relation to other identities

Ego-ideologies constitute the identity of subjects; alter ideologies relate one class to another as relational subjects. "It is these class alter-ideologies which constitute the subjects of class struggle and class collaboration."

Bourgeois and proletarian ego-ideologies, thus, can be seen as defining the forms of subjection-qualification necessary for individuals to fulfill the practices of these respective class locations. Thus, for example, Therborn lists as ingredients of proletarian ego-ideology as involving: "an orientation to work, to manual labor, including physical prowess, toughness, endurance, and dexterity. The wage-contract further implies a distinction between work and leisure work being for the purpose of consumption and family reproduction" and so on.

Alter-ideologies, on the other hand, specify the subjective form of domination/subordination within the relations of exploitation. "The crucial aspect of alter-ideology is, in the case of the exploiter class, the rationale for their domination over other classes, and in the case of the exploited classes, the basis for their resistance to the exploiters."

An essential part of ideological class struggle, then, is whether workers are interpellated into bourgeois alter-ideology or into proletarian alter-ideology, that is, whether the subjective orientation of workers to capitalists is based on the logic/rationale for bourgeois rule or proletarian resistance. Both usually coexist in some uneasy balance.

Using these distinctions, Therborn gives a very interesting account of the emergence of proletarian alter-ideology in early capitalism. He writes that "Proletarian alter-ideology could...draw upon previous peasant and artisan ideology in resisting the march of capitalist commodity relations. But the sanction of defeat compelled the working class-information to abandon peasant and artisan solutions to its proletarianization."

The emergence of a distinctively proletarian alter-ideology of resistance to capitalism was the result of concrete struggles of workers on the basis of specific subjective orientations. This is crucial: just as ideologies interpellate individuals as specific kinds of subjects with specific subjectivities, the practices of individuals and classes transforms those ideologies/interpellations through the experience of victories and defeats.

### III. MICROFOUNDATIONS FOR THE THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

#### 1. STATING THE PROBLEM: What Are “Micro-foundations” and Why Bother?

##### 1.1. model of action:

Individual subjects are subjectively characterized by:

a. *preferences*: what a person wants (includes values which may internally select/rule out certain preferences). Some notes about preferences:

- These need not be viewed as fixed -- preferences change and are often fuzzy.
- individual action often involves forming or discovering preferences, not just acting pre-given preferences

b. *information*: perceptions about what exists, what options are available

c. *theories*: conceptions about what will be the consequences of given choices for their preferences, given the information

d. *mental capacities*: including both conventional things like cognitive abilities and skills, but also creative capacities, problem-solving ability, intuitive abilities, empathetic capacities, flexibility, etc.

e. *nonconscious psychic processes*: underlying drives, “the unconscious”, personality, dispositions, habits, emotions

They are objectively characterized by:

f. *resources* of various sorts at their disposal (capacities to act = real power relations)

g. *causal environment of choosing*. This includes, some obvious things like the feasible set of possible choices. But also much more interesting things like: the social-interactions which affect how individual capabilities are actually deployed. For example, “problem-solving capacity” and “creativity” may be mental capacities – some people have these more developed than others. But their actual use in social action is heavily conditioned by interaction and communication. The aphorism “two heads are better than one” is actually a deep claim about problem-solving.

h. a *causal environment of the effects of their actions* (while people chose their actions in terms of anticipated effects – which is part of c – their actions have real effects which depend upon what other people do).

On the basis of these subjective factors (preferences, information, theories, capacities and nonconscious psychic structures) and given the available resources actors/subjects make choices about what to do, and the resulting actions have actual consequences for the subject and others.

a+b+c+d+e = subjectivity

a+b+c = ideological processes of subjectivity (consciousnesses)

## **1.2. Four aspects of Micro-foundations:**

- (1). **Micro-mechanisms of consciousness formation:** mechanisms through which preferences, information and theories are produced = the micro-formation of ideologies.
- (2). **The micro-mechanisms of nonconsciousness formation:** mechanisms through which nonconscious psychic processes are formed and transformed = the micro-formation of personality, habit, etc.
- (3). **Micro-process of choice-making:** given preferences, information, theories, and other psychic structures, how are choices actually made, how are strategies formed, etc. One class of models of this sort of process, with relatively simple assumptions about cognition, etc. = rational actor models.
- (4). **Micro-processes of creative action, problem-solving:** This is different from a simple “choice” per se: choice among options → pretty clear preferences/goals, etc. Here the issue is the creative act of coming up with new solutions, new ideas, etc. which often involves the discovery transformation of ends. This is what the work of Hans Joas is about. In creative action means and ends co-evolve through problem solving.

In Therborn’s analysis, this process was elaborated in terms of *affirmations* and *sanctions* = basically a behaviorist model of reinforcement, etc. = **A simple learning model of belief-formation.**

Elster offers a more complex model for the formation of beliefs and values, a model rooted in cognitive psychology.

## **1.3. Why Bother?**

- a. general point: a complete theory contains micro-foundations
- b. Methodological point: in the case of theories of ideology the analysis of mechanisms is especially important given the object of explanation -- beliefs: to have confidence in our beliefs about beliefs we need some knowledge of the causal mechanisms involved.
- c. To transform beliefs we need knowledge of their mechanisms of production

## **2. TYPES OF EXPLANATIONS OF IDEOLOGIES (465ff in Elster)**

Note: Object of explanation in Elster’s analysis is somewhat narrower than our previous discussion of ideology as the process of subject-formation:

“beliefs and values that have society as their object as well as their explanation”.

### **2.1. Autonomy of Thought**

A precondition for micro-processes to have much substantive interest is for thought to have a certain kind of autonomy. If all categories of thought were pure, instantaneous reflections of material conditions, there would be little reason to care about micro-foundations. Belief-formation is of interest because it is not a simple reflection and has enduring effects on action.

Important issue = whether the *social* cause or the *cognitive* cause sets the basic limits: constraint vs. maximand in Elster’s views. Elster feels the more plausible = class interests constitute a constraint rather than maximand (i.e. minimal correspondence is needed)

## 2.2. Types of Explanations

a. *interest* explanations vs. *position* explanations

b. *causal* explanations vs. *functional* explanations

- all position-explanations are causal
- interest explanations can be causal or functional:
- a belief may be explained because it is shaped by interests or because it serves interests. NOTE: *a belief that is shaped by interests does not necessarily serve interests*: there is no inherent reason for functionality to always be produced (eg. wishful thinking).

c. Examples:

- **interest-functional explanation**: Capitalists believe that socialism is undesirable because it actually serves their interests to believe this.
- **interest-causal explanation**: radical workers in the 1930s often believed that the USSR embodied communist ideals. “The wish is parent to the thought”. This is a psychological mechanism. It might not, however, have really served their interests to hold this belief (i.e. it could lead them to be uncompromising in situations where compromises would be beneficial). Arguably the collapse of the Weimar Republic was in part due to the unwillingness of communists to form alliances with social democrats.
- **position-causal explanations**: commodity fetishism. The position you hold in the world directly generates certain kinds of mental states. Our view of the Sun setting is a positional-causal explanation of the belief that the sun goes around the world.

## 2.3. Cognitive and Motivational explanations

Cognitive psychology: motivational explanations (hot) vs. cognitive explanations (cold)

Four-fold table:

		EXPLANANDUM	
		MOTIVATIONAL	COGNITIVE
EXPLANATION	MOTIVATIONAL	adaptive preferences	wishful thinking
	COGNITIVE	mental bookkeeping	availability heuristic: extend to the whole knowledge of parts

a. **adaptive preferences** = sour grapes: frustration changes preferences. Key type of positional explanation. Critical consequence = **resignation**.

b. **wishful thinking** = acting on beliefs shaped by interests: note these often will not serve interests (but may: self-fulfilling prophecy, etc.)

c. **mental bookkeeping** = cognitive classification system shapes preference orderings. Two examples:

1. “Children” lack judgment and therefore need and deserve paternalistic regulation instead of autonomy. If certain categories of adults are therefore like children, they should be treated in the same way. Classifying women or blacks or the disabled or the retarded as “children” has, at various times, been used to support the values that justify paternalistic treatment of these categories.

2. Another example: amniocentesis and abortions for fetal deformity -- is this an example of reproductive freedom or phobias against lack of physical perfection? (Note opposition of various handicapped groups to abortion). Also: classification of “personhood” re fetus/child.

c. **availability heuristic** = illegitimate extension of knowledge from particular to general: Joe is poor because he didn’t work hard therefore the explanation for the level of poverty is laziness.

HOT explanations = motivational = causal *interest* explanations

COLD explanations = cognitive = causal *position*-explanations

### 3. MECHANISMS FOR RULING IDEAS TO BECOME RULING:

Question: How do ideas of the ruling class -- ideas that are in the interests of the ruling class -- become the ruling ideas of the époque? That is: how do these ideas become dominant **among intellectuals**? If we reject a purely functionalist explanation, how do we account for this?

Parallel to the state is not entirely compelling. In the state, financial dependency of the state on capital is the pivotal mechanism that insures minimal correspondence: the state must ensure the reproduction of favorable conditions of accumulation. But financial inducement is not credibly the appropriate mechanism for ideologies: “Why should the ruling ideas be the ideas of the ruling class?”:

“No Micro-foundations are provided [by Marx] to explain why the ideas that correspond to the outlook of the ruling class should gain disproportionate acceptance among intellectuals” (473)

Possible Answers:

- repression
- financial support gives differential survival value
- negative selection against systematically anti-ruling class ideas.

Not entirely convincing because idea-production is not so resource intensive. Note: *this is probably why there are usually more counterhegemonic ideas than counterhegemonic politics.*

## 4. MECHANISMS OF IDEOLOGICAL BELIEF FORMATION

### 4.1. Inversion

Two forms:

- a) **Abstraction:** equivalent to reification -- taking a concept of something to be real, with the empirical instances simply instantiations of the abstract concept. Cause of reification = fixity of the categories of thought: because of one's preoccupation with ideas they become seen as having causal power.
- b) **Projection:** religion as prime example: individuals project their powers onto an alien being: "religious distress is the expression of real distress"

### 4.2. Particular & general interest

Representation of particular interests as general social interests = a general tendency for all classes. Mechanisms:

Wishful thinking: "The transformation of narrowly conceived self-interest into a vision of general interest, by the intermediary of wishful thinking"

Note: no necessary functional explanation here, or conscious deception. The process is a psychological one of wishful thinking in Elster's views.

Comments:

(1) To claim that wishful thinking impels people to see their own interests as general interests and to really believe this (rather than just to admit that they are selfish, etc.) implies something about the role of morality in human motivations -- perhaps á la Kolberg: the development of moral principles, superego, etc., means that the guilt in being egotistical/selfish produces the cognitive shift (wishful thinking). There has to be some sort of psychological foundation to moral-thinking in order for wishful thinking to generate legitimations.

(2) Wishful thinking can help to underwrite hegemony:

- psychological mechanisms of wishful thinking → stability of the distortion to ruling classes.
- plausibility to *other* classes of the wishful thinking claim may be a condition for hegemony.

### **4.3 local & global vision**

version 1: what is causally true *ceteris paribus* is true without constraint.

version 2: statements that are true for any given agent are true for all agents taken as a totality.

EXAMPLES:

1. Each individual worker bargains a wage = to what that individual worker could produce as an individual. The capitalist hires 100 workers and makes a profit. The profit appears to come from capital. But in fact it comes from the cooperation -- the enhanced productivity derived from cooperative labor.
2. Marginal wages: each worker is paid the marginal product, each being treated as the last hired/next to be fired. But if the collective worker were paid the collective marginal product, there would be no profit.
3. Workers facing unemployment: since I would be worse off without being employed by capitalists, society would be worse off without capitalists. Feudal peasants would be worse off without protection of lords, therefore giving the surplus to lords is justified & society would be worse off without lords (like gangster protection racket).
4. Capitalist's money fetishism: each capitalist thinks profits can be gained from speculation.

### **4.4 Conceptual Imperialism**

Improper cognitive extensions of understandings in time and space: ethnocentrism, anachronism.

## APPENDIX: ALTHUSSER'S TREATMENTS OF IDEOLOGY

Althusser's core work on ideology is concerned with three interconnected issues:

1. the functions of ideology;
2. the process of ideology;
3. the mechanisms of ideology in general.

### Functions:

The analysis of functions begins with the perfectly intuitive observation that for society to continue to exist, it must produce, and for it to produce the conditions of production must be reproduced. Those conditions consist of forces of production and relations of production.

The forces of production themselves consist of means of production and labor power. The former are reproduced directly within the economic sphere. The latter, however, are reproduced in families, and thus involve a much more complex process. This analysis of Althusser's was very important, if sketchy, because it opened the way for a more systematic analysis of the role of women in the reproduction of labor power in the family and provided a basis for an account of the specificity of the sexual division of labor in the family. The heart of the analysis, however, centers on the reproduction of the relations of production. "How is the reproduction of the relations of production secured?", Althusser asks. The answer = by and through ideology.

The essential function of ideology from a social point of view is thus specified as the reproduction of the relations of production.

### Process of Ideology:

This function is performed through apparatuses. It is a material process. Ideology is not primarily understood as ideas in people's heads, but as a social/material practice institutionalized in apparatuses: or as Althusser puts it:

"The existence of the ideas of his belief (i.e. the cognitive form of the beliefs) is material in that his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (p. 158).

Althusser then goes to great pains to identify this material apparatus as a state apparatus--the I.S.A.s. The reason for this is, I think, primarily to establish ideological apparatuses as locations of domination and class power, and to reject all empiricist definitions of the state (in which the state is defined by its formal, manifest "public" status). Althusser wants to develop theoretical concepts in which the unity of the concept is a consequence of the unity of real effects in the world, and in such terms the juridical boundaries for the state are clearly inadequate. This is what pushes him towards a functional definition of concepts, such that the state becomes all apparatuses of social reproduction, regardless of their form. I would argue that since the character of the unity of ideological apparatuses and the way in which they produce their effects

are so different from the state in the normal sense of the word, that more is obscured than clarified by calling both “state” apparatuses.

### **Mechanism of Ideology**

This is undoubtedly the most famous of Althusser’s formulations on ideology, and I think the aspect of his analysis which constitutes the most important breakthrough, opening up an extremely interesting terrain of new work. The essential mechanism by which ideology functions to reproduce social relations through the material process of the ideological apparatuses is by “*transforming individuals into subjects.*” The basic logic is as follows:

In order for a social system to function in a stable way, to be reproduced, it is essential that the individuals who occupy places in that structure be able to perform their duties/practices “by themselves,” “on their own,” that is, that they be formed in such a way that they are able to act as appropriate subjects within the structure. “Subject” in this context has a double meaning, both of which are intended: subject as author of one’s acts; and subject as subjected to an external rule authority (as in “a subject of the King”). Ideology is the process by which subjects in this double sense are formed. They are “interpellated”--hailed as specific subjects--in the sense that they are given an identity that inserts them into a structure of social relations, and that in one way or another they “recognize” this identity.

When Althusser adds that “ideology is eternal” or that “ideology has no history” what he means is that this mechanism is constitutive of all human society, that the process of transforming human individuals into subjects is a panhistorical process. He does not mean (emphatically) that the specific content of this transformation is eternal: ideologies do have a history, and thus different kinds of subjects are formed in different kinds of societies.

Althusser then proposes a specific way of conceptualizing this mechanism in his discussion of interpellation and imaginary relations. He contrasts two images of the cognitive effects of ideology on individuals:

- a. ideology is an imaginary representation of reality
- b. ideology is an imaginary representation of the relationship of the individual to reality

In the first instance, ideology is simply distorted perception of the real; in the second, ideology represents the relation of the subject to the real. This latter kind of imaginary (=in the imagination) representation constitutes the process of interpellation since it makes possible the subjective insertion of the individual into social relations: ideology tells you your place in relations.

Althusser adopts an extremely complicated metaphor in his discussion of Christian theology when he refers to the Subject with a capital S and the subjection of subjects to the Subject as being the universal form of interpellation. This just an elliptical way--I think--of saying that interpellation as a social process is structured around a unifying principle, which in class societies is subordination to the rule of a ruling class: that is, interpellation is always to a structure of social relations dominated by a mode of production and a given class’s domination.

### Criticisms of Althusser's Argument:

1. There is really one a perfunctory lip service given to contradictions in the process of the formation of subjects/subjectivity: using the metaphor of ideology as a concert, Althusser writes: "This concert is dominated by a single score, occasionally disturbed by contradictions (those of the remnants of former ruling classes, those of the proletarians and their organizations)..." (p. 146). But there is no systematic character to the contradictory formation of subjectivity.

This underdevelopment of the contradictory character of the process is reflected in the functionalist tendencies in Althusser's argument. He begins by positing certain requirements for the reproduction of production relations--conditions of existence of those relations. And he derives the functions of ideology from the necessity of fulfilling those conditions. But he does not ask how it come to pass that the functions are forthcoming--why doesn't society just collapse? Why are functions fulfilled? And he doesn't provide us with a way of comprehending the variability in the forms of fulfilling functions or the effectiveness of requirements of reproduction are fulfilled simply by virtue of being requirements. The way out of this is hinted in various claims that class struggle transforms relations and apparatuses, but this is clearly an underdeveloped line of thought in the analysis.

2. The transformation of individuals into subjects is seen as a purely class-subject process. There is no discussion of nonclass subjectivities/subjects.

3. The structure of subjectivity that constitutes an "interpellated subject" is completely unspecified, and when it is discussed it is almost entirely cognitive. Great stress is placed on such things as nationalism, moralism, etc. This is also reflected in the emphasis on educational ISA's. Ironically, then, the upshot of the analysis is really a stress on consciousness/conscious aspects of subjectivity.

The cognitive bias has two aspects (emphasized by Theborn in his critique of Althusser): a) only scientific knowledge counts as "true" knowledge; all other forms are distortions of one sort or another (practical experience cannot count as knowledge); b) human beings are motivated as subjects only by what they know (true or imaginary) = patently false. Human beings are motivated by fear, resignation, love, etc., as well as by knowledge of situations, etc.

4. No concepts for the analysis of ideologies are given, only for the analysis of ideology-in-general. This is an explicit restriction on the discussion, but it greatly reduces its usefulness, since for political and historical purposes the important problems are the decoding of specific ideologies.

5. Finally--and to many critics most importantly--Althusser's analysis risks seeing human actors as being purely passive recipients of ideology. Babies are born into relations in which their future-interpellation is already inscribed. They somehow or other absorb various inputs/experiences in the material practices and rituals of the family ISA which transforms them from baby-individuals into baby-subjects. But no discussion is presented at all of the baby's role in the process. But, if babies are to be formed/constituted as subjects, they must have certain capacities, capacities which enable them to engage these practices, recognize themselves, and form themselves in their interaction with the practices of their parents. And to say all of this is to suggest that there may be psychological structures, capacities, needs, drives, etc., that

characterize human individuals and make them able to be interpellated in specific ways by ideology but which have a distinct autonomy in the process of interpellation itself. Ian Craibe has put this problem this way: "If it is the case that we can talk about psychic structures which are as it were, 'put to use' by the social formation to produce appropriate subjects, then the implication is that these structures have a real and not just epiphenomenal autonomy, and that they can outlast any particular social formation." There is no reason to assume a perfect correspondence between these two orders or domains of structure, and this--as we shall see in our discussion of Marxism and Feminism--opens the way for the thesis that the struggle for transformation of male-female relations and subjectivities is radically irreducible to the struggle for the transformation of class relations.

### **A note on Althusser's concept of Ideology and the theory of Alienation**

Althusser goes to great lengths to distance himself from theories of alienation. Indeed, he sometimes goes so far as to say that Marxism has absolutely nothing to do with the conceptual terrain discussed in terms of "alienation." This is his famous or infamous thesis about the radical "epistemological break" between Marx's early works and his later works.

While there are real differences between Althusser and so-called "humanist" Marxists, I think that in fact much of the theory of alienation is attempting to conceptualize parallel processes to Althusser's (and perhaps especially Therborn's) account of interpellation in class societies. Let me briefly try to establish that claim:

Alienation is a process by which human capacities are appropriated from human actors and turned back against them as an "alien" power: activities of self-creativity are transformed into self-domination. In these terms alienation can be viewed from two angles: (a) as a way of talking about a relation of domination (domination = appropriated human capacities); (b) as a way of talking about the formation of human subjectivity under relations of domination (human subjectivities are formed in such a way that such capacities can be appropriated). In either case, there is a close link between Althusser's theses about interpellation of subjects and theses about alienation: alienated subjectivity is the necessary form of subjectivity of human individuals interpellated into alienating social relations. The various ways Marxist-humanists have discussed such subjectivity--Marcuse's "one-dimensional man" and "repressive desublimation;" Sartre's "serialization;" etc.--can then be seen as specific accounts of such interpellation.

Where Althusser decisively does differ from these "humanist" accounts is in the thesis that in all societies there is a social process of the formation of subjectivity, not just class society. While the form of subjectivity in capitalism may be a distortion/alienation of "species being," of human natural capacities, this does not imply--in Althusser's account--that in Communism human natural being is directly formed into subjectivity without the intervention of social practices. Those social practices may form a type of human personality and subjectivity that is liberating, actualizing, corresponding to certain innate capacities and potentialities, but it is nevertheless a social product. Subjectivity can never be a process entirely of undetermined, free self-creation.