# Ideology as Relativized A Priori

**Abstract.** We propose an account of the subject's cognition that allows for a full articulation of the phenomenon of ideology. We argue that ideology operates at the level of the a priori: it transcendentally conditions the intelligibility of thought and practice. But we draw from strands of post-Kantian philosophy of science and social philosophy in repudiating Kant's view that the a priori is necessary and fixed. Instead, we argue, it is contingent, and therefore revisable. More precisely, it is conditioned materially: it must be understood as an activity, continuous with and shaped by material social practice. We conclude with some remarks about the possibility of agency over one's relativized, materially conditioned a priori; that is, over the possibility of critique.

## 0.

According to its theorists, ideology is a form of consciousness that emerges from, stabilizes, and reinforces particular social and political arrangements. In his seminal work on the topic, Raymond Geuss characterizes ideology as a "worldview"; it is "widely shared", its "elements . . . are systematically interconnected", and it forms a seemingly coherent general outlook, which has a "wide and deep influence" on "particularly important" and even "central" aspects of the subject's sense of themselves, their lives, and the world (1981: 10). And moreover, it bears a particular relation to material social and political reality: it "arises or comes to be acquired or held" (19) by the subject in virtue of their being a part of a particular political-material order, while at the same time "supporting, stabilizing, or legitimizing" (15) this very order.[1]

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[1] Views that have been argued to be rooted in ideology include: that the wage contract holds between free and equal parties (Marx C, v.35; see Jaeggi 2009: 67–70), that colonized/racialized people and women hold their socially subordinate positions naturally, in virtue of their 'biological' features (Fanon 1952, Beauvoir 1949), that institutions such as prisons and the police serve to promote justice (Davis 2003, Gilmore 2007). Traditionally, ideology theorists have been critical of the associated political orders, thus using the term 'ideological' in a derogatory manner: this is the "pejorative" sense of ideology, as against the "neutral" and "positive" senses (Williams 1977: 69; Geuss 1981: 4–26). Our focus in this paper is on the *epistemological features* of ideology rather than evaluating ideologies as such; we turn to normative considerations—the prospect of critique—only by way of concluding our discussion in §V.

These features of ideology *qua* form of consciousness are striking: they intimate a particular picture of cognition's structure and relation to the material world. Our aim in this paper is to paint this picture: to investigate the nature that cognition must have if it is possible for it to relate to the material world in the way that theorists of ideology have claimed that it does. It will emerge that the usual contemporary approach to epistemology, what we call the *doxastic view,* on which cognition is rendered as particular epistemic attitudes towards determinate propositions, cannot accommodate ideology.[2]

Thus, our view is that we must do away with situating ideology at the level of the proposition, and instead see it as a modally structuring worldview, one which *transcendentally conditions* how thought and practice become conceivable or intelligible at all. We draw on Kant in terming this structuring background an 'a priori', in that it constitutes a condition of possibility for experience. Thus rather than seeing ideology *as* belief, or as the constituent components *of* belief, on our view, ideology structures the conditions of possibility *for* belief—it operates at the level of the a priori. However, we also follow two influential lines of appropriation and criticism of Kantian thought—the Marxist tradition, and a prominent strand of the philosophy of science (Friedman 2001)—in rejecting Kant's conception of the transcendental a priori as fixed and universal. Thus, we offer an account of ideology as a *relativized* (and therefore *revisable*) a priori. The key feature of ideology in the Marxist tradition is its being "conditioned and determined by the material relations of production" (Marx and Engels GI, 5:195). We propose to interpret this as the claim that the subject's a priori is what is materially determined. But we understand material determination not as a mechanical process or a brute causal force, but, following Marx and Engels, as continuous with *life* processes, of which cognition—the structuring of the a priori—is ultimately also a part. We thus conclude that the possibility of critique, which we conceive as a form of epistemic agency, can be derived from the very processes that contribute to the formation of the a priori.

Our main contribution is this: we give an account of the structure of the subject's cognition and its relation to the material world that allows a full articulation of the phenomenon of ideology, as theorized in the broadly Marxist tradition—we give, that is, the contours of a *Marxist epistemology.* This is most obviously relevant to those who, like us, take ideology to be an important phenomenon: it provides an epistemology on which it can be accommodated. Indeed, while many ideology theorists who have addressed the way in which ideology presents in consciousness have found some of its epistemological features puzzling or even mysterious, we show that they are only puzzling on the doxastic view; on our view, the mystery dissolves. This suggests that remnants of the doxastic view may be animating the thoughts of some

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[2] Haslanger (2017) makes a similar point; see fns. 4 and 5. In §IV, we show why we do not adopt her own solution.

theorists, even if, despite referring to ideology in terms of 'belief', this view is one they would reflectively reject.

But our contribution also has broader ramifications. It is relevant for those who, also like us, find the resulting epistemology appealing, for they might be interested to know that it has an intimate connection with a broadly Marxist political orientation. And it is relevant to those who do not share our inclinations at the outset. Those unsure about the notion of ideology, perhaps due to the decline in popularity of the classical notion after the 1980s,[3] or because of its recent surge in popularity amongst analytic epistemologists, might find in our account grounds to motivate the plausibility of this concept. And those attached to the doxastic view will find in our paper a reason to reject the notion of ideology, and therefore perhaps also any political project that might appeal to it. In any case, our paper will serve to further illustrate that political and epistemological questions are not independent, but indeed, are closely related, perhaps more than many contemporary epistemologists and political theorists would allow.

Our plan for the paper is as follows. We start out with the doxastic view, and we modify it in four ways: we claim that it must have a *transcendental* structure (§I); we *relativize* those transcendental conditions (§II); we establish that these relativized conditions are *materially* determined (§III); we construe material determination in terms of an *activity* continuous with the activity of cognition (§IV). On the resulting picture, ideology is to be conceived as a structuring activity, where this activity is a condition of possibility for thought: experience must be systematized—imbued with meaning, interpreted—such that it is always apprehended in accordance with a general worldview or perspective. This activity is continuous with, and therefore shaped by, material social practice. As such, it is one over which subjects can come to exert agency.

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[3] This decline can be traced back, in part, to Foucault, a notorious critic of the notion of ideology. He contends that "Marxism understands itself as a science, . . . as a sort of tribunal of reason that would enable a distinction between what is science and what is ideology. In sum, a general standard of rationality for all forms of knowledge" (Foucault 1984a: 1537; see also 1976: 38, 1980: 870). In the wake of Foucault, many have rejected the notion on these grounds: that there is no simple, absolute, unadulterated 'truth' accessible only to the ideology critic or academic, against which to define the notion of ideology (see e.g. Owen 2002, Celikates 2006, Eagleton and Bourdieu 1991: 266). But, on our account, ideology is not defined in contrast to such an unmediated truth; instead we hold that mediation is necessary for all thought, and we locate ideology at the level of this mediation. In fact, Foucauldians may find resonances with our own conception of ideology in Foucault's notion of the "historical a priori" (1966: xxiii, 172), which he draws from Kant (Bremner 2020), and which he himself sees as continuous with his later work (1984b: 1451).

# I.

Many theorists characterize ideology as a "set of beliefs" which are arranged into a "network" (Shelby 2003: 159) or "system" (Jaeggi 2009: 64) or "worldview" (Geuss 1991: 10). For instance, in his influential work, Shelby writes that ideologies are "beliefs", which are not "isolated", "but always [located within] a network of other beliefs" (2003: 157, 159). Elsewhere, he writes that ideology is "a widely held set of loosely associated beliefs and implicit judgments" (2014: 66). This terminology is more widespread; thus Jaeggi writes of ideologies that they are "systems of beliefs" (2009: 64), Eagleton calls them "ideas and beliefs" (1991: 28), and Railton writes that "an ideology is in the first instance a set of beliefs or values" (2000: 356). Haslanger remarks that one could read these claims as asserting that ideologies are "propositional" (2017a: 3), comprising a set of connected propositions believed by the subject.[4] This is what we shall call the *doxastic view* of cognition, here applied to ideology.[5]

The view that cognition in general has such a structure is widely assumed in mainstream epistemology today.[6] Roughly, the picture is as follows. A subject entertains a number of propositions and has *propositional attitudes* towards each of them. These attitudes include hope, desire, fear; but they also include the *epistemic* attitudes such as belief. Some of these beliefs may 'constitute' or 'amount to' knowledge, and they may be 'partial' or 'graded'—but what interests us is not what differentiates these various approaches as much as what unites them: that they theorize cognition as a collection of belief-like attitudes (of various normative statuses) towards particular propositions. This doxastic picture is highly reminiscent of Quine's famous 'web of beliefs' model (1953), on which an agent's cognition is modeled as a connected set of believed propositions, where those closer to the center of the web are less easily given up in the face of recalcitrant experience.

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[4] Haslanger makes this point by referring to Shelby's use of the term "belief" to characterize ideological forms of consciousness, and to his related comments cited above. But despite these citations, she qualifies her attribution of the doxastic view to him, because she remarks that it is not quite consistent with some of the other features he attributes to ideology (2017: 3n). Indeed this is precisely our point in this section: the doxastic view is inconsistent with core features of ideology, and so, although ideology theorists do sometimes refer to beliefs and other components of the doxastic framework, they presumably would not reflectively endorse the associated doxastic view.

[5] Haslanger calls this 'cognitivism' about ideology. We don't follow her in using this term because we think it incorrectly identifies the picture of ideological cognition as having a doxastic structure, which we agree should be rejected, with the notion that ideology in general takes a cognitive form. We are defending a version of the latter view, one which, we show in §IV, cannot be assimilated to the former.

[6] The popularity of the view can be gleaned from its being presupposed by the Stanford Encyclopedia entries on epistemology (Steup and Neta 2020), belief (Schwitzgebel 2021), and knowledge (Ichiwaka and Steup 2018).

The most appealing way to theorize ideology on the doxastic view is to understand it as the subject's having the attitude of belief towards a set of connected propositions; perhaps propositions with ideological content, or perhaps propositions which when believed together amount to ideology. These propositions fit together into a "network" or "system" that constitutes something like a general picture of how things are—a "worldview". Geuss proposes that ideologies are "central" in webs of belief "in Quine's sense" (1991: 10), suggesting a picture on which propositions with ideological content are believed by the agent in such a way that they are comparatively recalcitrant to being challenged.

Now, ideologies are typically said to be located in the "background" of cognition (Shelby 2014: 67), they are "generic knowledge structures that lie at the *base* of our understanding" (Bicchieri 2017: 132, cited in Sankaran 2020: 1454). And the suggestion here is that ideology is comparatively deep in the sense that it *gives rise* to beliefs. Thus Haslanger writes, "what people believe *derives from* the ideology that dominates their social context" (2017a: 8), or again that they don't "just consist of shared beliefs [but of] a *source* of beliefs" (2017a: 7). Ideology is located deep in the base or background of cognition, in a way that gives rise to the more surface-level, foregrounded parts of cognition.

In order to make sense of this, proponents of the doxastic view might appeal to the Quinean idea that ideologies are comparatively robust, in that subjects are relatively reluctant to abandon them. Thus Geuss writes that they are "central to the agents [in the] sense [that] the agents won't easily give them up" (1981: 10). They might argue that subjects generate more particular quotidian beliefs by inference from these deeper ideological beliefs. They would then interpret the claim that ideologies are the "source" of beliefs as the claim that they are an *inferential* source. But ideology in the Marxist tradition concerns not "the individual's thinking or reasoning", but "the very tools that" subjects have "*in order to* think" (Haslanger 2017a: 9). Thus ideology cannot be conceived of as itself a belief or set thereof which inferentially gives rise to more mundane beliefs. It does not simply *epistemically support* other beliefs, but, in some sense, it must make these beliefs *possible*.

But the doxastic view cannot accommodate this "source" in any terms other than those of epistemic support. This is because it operates with a conception of cognition as *flat*: the basic building blocks of cognition are in some sense all of the same nature (i.e. propositions in which the subject has epistemic attitudes). Thus, even if beliefs are connected into a 'system', this can only be taken to refer to their collection into a web of inferential epistemic support relations, on which each element of the web is *on a par*. It follows that if ideology theorists have identified a form of consciousness, cognition cannot have the flat structure characteristic of the doxastic view. As Srinivasan suggests, "ideology [cannot] be thought of in the familiar

terms of belief [and] evidence" and its "existence . . . reveal[s] the limits of these ways of conceptualizing the mind and its workings" (2016: 372).

In which sense, then, is ideology a source of belief? According to Jaeggi, it "constitutes our relation to the world, . . . the framework in which we understand both ourselves and the social conditions, and also the way we operate within these conditions" (2009: 64). Others echo this point: we use ideologies "for understanding the world and talking to one another about it in intelligible ways" (Sankaran 2020: 1444), for "framing our experience of the world and possibilities for action" (Haslanger 2017a: 7). Thus ideology operates at the level of "*interpretation*" (Jaeggi 2009: 64); its role is *hermeneutic*.

Haslanger accounts for this by claiming that ideology is "subdoxastic" (2017a: 7): for her, it constitutes "a language, a set of concepts, a responsiveness to particular features of things (and not others), a set of social meanings" (2017a: 9), a "network of semiotic relations" or "semiotic net" (2017a: 12, 14, citing Sewell 2005: 49; 2022: 6), or a "web of meanings, symbols, scripts, and such" (2017a: 16). She writes that an ideology is a "technē", a term she herself characterizes as a "placeholder" for the "clusters of concepts, background assumptions, norms, heuristics, scripts, metaphors (and so on) that enable us to interpret and organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect", some clusters of which "shape a particular practice" (2021: 62–63), and claims that "we should understand ideologies in terms of . . . concepts, rules, norms, stereotypes, scripts, and the like" (2017a: 18). But it is unclear how the loose aggregate of ingredients Haslanger conjures beneath propositional beliefs can cohere into something like an interpretation. In particular, elements of her account suggest a view of cognition where beliefs can be broken down into smaller components (such as concepts, symbols, etc.), which can then be stuck back together to form beliefs.

But on our view, if ideology is to play a hermeneutic role—if it is to operate at the level of the subject's interpretation of the world—it cannot merely consist in *parts* or *components* of the subject's thoughts or beliefs, but must instead constitute their *conditions of possibility*. This idea is most famously associated with Kant's theoretical philosophy. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that the categories of understanding and forms of intuition (space and time) are conditions of possibility for experience and knowledge. Kant's famous Copernican revolution consists in the revelation that the world is not immediately given to us, but is imbued with its form and shape by dint of our own cognitive activity: instead of presupposing that "all our knowledge must conform to objects . . . we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge", thereby making "the spectator revolve and stars . . . remain at rest" (Bvi-vii). Objects of knowledge, in other words, are *shaped* and *conditioned* by the workings of the mind. Thus in contrast to the doxastic picture, the subject *gives form to* the objects themselves, rather than merely *having epistemic attitudes towards* them.

Kant calls these conditions—the categories and forms of intuition—'transcendental a priori': according to him, they are necessary, universal, and constitutive of the objects of our experience. Moreover, Kant holds that the particular representations that we form in this manner are not collected by us into an aggregate or mere heap of disparate appearances, but must be integrated into a coherent whole or a unity: each individual representation, in other words, shows up as meaningful or significant to us only against a cognitive frame or background—one which *we* produce—that imbues experience in general with meaning and value. In the Appendix to the Dialectic, Kant calls this condition on experience the transcendental principle of *systematicity*: our acquisition of knowledge is guided by the ideal of integrating each individual proposition, to which we are separately committed, into a cognitive unity (A647/B675). In other words, our isolated experiences must be continuously made to cohere with the general cognitive framework, governed by the ideal of systematicity, by which we take anything to be sensical or meaningful at all.[7] At both the level of each isolated experience and general systematization of *all* experiences, Kant claims that the world shows up as intelligible to us only through the form conferred on it by our own activity of reasoning—through our a priori. As a result, "nothing in a priori knowledge can be ascribed to objects save what the thinking subject derives from itself" (Bxxiii).

If, on the Kantian picture, propositions can only be formed, and thus endorsed or not, against a hermeneutic background (the systematicity of the whole), we posit that this background—the *conditions of possibility* for thought—is the level at which ideology operates. This is not as far away from the views of classical ideology theorists as might initially appear; in fact, the productive mediation of experience by consciousness is something they stress. Thus Lukács writes that, in the shadow of the Copernican Revolution, critical philosophy "refuses to accept the world as something that has arisen (or e.g. has been created by God) independently of the knowing subject and prefers to conceive of it instead as its own product" (1923: 111). Similarly, Horkheimer acknowledges that "Kant proved that the world of our individual and scientific consciousness is not given to us by God and unquestioningly accepted by us, but is partially the result of the workings of our understanding. He further showed . . . that empirical perceptions which enter consciousness have already been shaped and sifted by productive human faculties" (1937: 158).

Indeed, the view that ideology operates at the level of the a priori even has echoes in Kant. He claims that the human understanding is prone to "transcendental illusion", "one inseparable from human reason", by which structural needs of cognition are mistaken for real objects in the empirical world, and therefore "continually entrap it into momentary aberrations ever and

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[7] For Kant, this ideal, as with all transcendental a priori principles, is universal and necessary; we return to—and reject—this aspect of Kant's view in §II.

again calling for correction" (A295/B352, A298/B355). Indeed, illusion is "necessary" for cognition in that it is impossible to seek systematicity or greater intelligibility in relating determinate thoughts or objects of knowledge to one another without also thinking beyond such a particular series of conditions to the thought of the *unconditioned* (A307-8/B364-5, A321-2/B378-9; see also Geiger 2003). Kant claims that the search for the unconditioned leads to "three kinds" of fallacious inference, each of which correspond to the three ideas of reason(A333-4/B390-1).[8] Thus, Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion holds that reason, by nature of its structural features, is prone to a kind of a priori ideology.[9]

We don't identify ideology in our sense with the Kantian doctrine of transcendental illusion for reasons we advance below, but we have seen enough of Kant's view to glean why we might attribute ideology to the a priori, and more generally, to motivate the move from the flat propositional picture of cognition to one which imbues cognition with a *transcendental* structure, where the surface-level thoughts or beliefs are made possible by the subject's interpretation of the world. It is in *this* sense that the "background" features of cognition can function as "sources" of belief (Shelby 2014: 67; Haslanger 2017a: 7).[10]

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[8] Kant invokes the metaphor of the 'focus imaginarius' in characterizing the three transcendentally illusory ideas, or a kind of optical illusion related to mirror vision (Grier 2001: 36–8), an image that recalls the one evoked in Marx and Engels' metaphor of ideology as a *camera obscura* (5:36).

[9] Indeed, this connection is one noticed by Max Horkheimer: "Just as reason after Kant, even though it knows better, cannot avoid falling into shattered but nonetheless recurring illusions, so too, ever since the transition from religious longing to conscious social practice, there continues to exist an illusion which can be exposed but not entirely banished" (1930: 129).

[10] Kant's conception of a priori concepts is not limited to the categories ('unity', 'plurality', 'negation') or to space and time as forms of intuition, but also to the regulative ideas of reason ('God', 'the soul', 'the cosmos', A798/B826, A318/B374, but also 'pure air', 'friendship', or 'gravity', A646/B674, 6:469, A662-3/B690-1), and to metaphysical principles of natural science ('weight', 'force', 'organism', B2-4; 5:418, 5:376), which arguably feature a different conception of the a priori than the aprioricity of the categories. For discussion, see [redacted]. Thus, as will be made clear in the ensuing discussion, our claim is not that ideology is a priori in just the same sense that the categories of 'causality' or 'possibility' are.

So far, we have moved from a view of ideology on which it operates at the *doxastic* level to a view where it operates at the *a priori* level.[11] In this section, we take a further step in *relativizing* the a priori.

For Kant, the a priori features of reasoning are "absolutely independent of all experience" (B2). He claims that, in the absence of categories such as 'possibility' or 'reality', forms of intuition of 'space' or 'time', or the apperceptive 'I' to which all of one's representations can be traced back and unified under, one would fail to have experience as such. It follows, Kant posits, that the a priori elements of cognition are "necessary" and "universal", and as such, are unchanging and absolute (B2-4). And it is relevant to note that, on this view, the transcendental elements of cognition are strictly contributions of the subject's mind; the material world only supplies the manifold of intuition received by sensibility without shaping or influencing the mind's a priori workings in any respect. So cognition is 'prior' to experience not only in the sense that it's required to have any experience at all, but also in that only its content, not its structure, is informed by empirical conditions.

But one of the central commitments grounding the classic conception of ideology has been that consciousness must be conceived as conditioned by the world in a much more substantive way. Thus, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels insist that "man . . . possesses 'consciousness', but . . . *not inherent, not 'pure'* consciousness" (5:43). Rather, "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is . . . *directly interwoven with* the material activity and the material intercourse of men", such that "ideology and [its] corresponding forms of consciousness . . . no longer retain the semblance of independence" (5:36-7). Here, Marx and Engels criticize conceptions of consciousness on which it is unaffected or unconditioned by material reality. They argue that a conception of

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[11] It might be objected that this is a false dichotomy, for Kant's famous "synthetic a priori judgments" seem to be both belief-like and a priori. But even though Kant does have some conception assimilable to 'beliefs' (thoughts in propositional form as "judgments") it is inaccurate to suggest that Kant posits no difference between the a priori and doxastic levels. Although the phrase "synthetic a priori judgments" has been a popular one in the 20th and 21st centuries, Kant makes more frequent references to 'a priori cognitions', 'concepts', 'thinking', 'conditions', 'principles', or 'grounds for the possibility of experience' (Axv, Bxvi; Axvi, Bxii; Bix; A846/B874; A101, A149/B188; A95/B128), 'a priori origin' (A2, A844/B872), or 'determined', 'given', or 'cognized a priori' (A813/B841, B134, A806/B834). This suggests that his reference to synthetic a priori judgments is shorthand for judgments which are generated by the (a priori) workings of cognition, indicating a distinction between the workings of cognition on the one hand, and its products (as 'judgments') on the other: the latter is a *derivative* of the former, even as the former has receded from view in much work on the a priori of the last century. See Kitcher: in constructing a priori knowledge, "we illuminate to ourselves just those structural features that the mind imposes on all experience" (2006: 36).

consciousness must instead recognize that it is 'interwoven with' material reality. The tradition of ideology theory has retained from them this claim: that the form consciousness has depends at least partly on the material world, rather than being independent from it.

Adopting this view of consciousness requires modifying what is usually taken to be a central feature of Kant's account of cognition. We discuss the first step of this modification in this section; we turn to a second step—concerning the specifically *material* dimension—in §III. We proposed in §I to locate the forms of consciousness that can constitute ideology at the level of the a priori.[12] Given what we have just said about the interwovenness of ideology with material reality, this means that the a priori must come to depend (in some sense) on material features of the world. Since these features are not absolute and unchanging, the a priori cannot be either. Thus, the a priori must be *relativized*: since it must be responsive to the world, it cannot be simply given to consciousness, as Kant had argued, but must instead be made contingent, and, as we return to below, potentially revisable.

As Friedman shows in his classic *Dynamics of Reason* (2001), the idea of what he calls the "*relativized a priori*" has an important place in post-Kantian philosophy of science.[13] Kant had sought to provide an a priori grounding for Newton's presuppositions regarding space and time. But as Einstein's relativity theory superseded Newtonian physics, these presuppositions were abandoned, and Kant's notion of the a priori came under threat.[14] In response, Reichenbach noted that "Kant's concept of a priori has two different meanings. First, it means 'necessarily true' or 'true for all times,' and secondly, 'constituting the concept of object'", that is, "order[ing] the perceptions according to a certain schema" (1920: 48–9). Drawing this distinction opens the prospect of retaining Kant's transcendental structure for

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[12] In what follows, we follow Reichenbach (1920) and Friedman (2001) in adopting the locution 'the a priori'; in doing so, we invoke it as a shorthand, at this early stage in our argument, for 'the a priori frame' (Reichenbach 1951: 48, Friedman 2001: 36) or 'the a priori structure of cognition' (Friedman 2001: 115, 120). While this usage also departs from Kant's (see note above), in §IV we return to a more faithful usage of Kant's own terminology in stressing that the a priori should not be conceived as an inert object (as 'frame' or 'structure') but the *activity* of cognition.

[13] See also Richardson (1998).

[14] Kant had argued that space having a Euclidean structure functions as the presupposition for all mechanical-scientific and empirical knowledge, and concluded that it must therefore be necessarily true (Friedman 1992, 2001). However, developments in geometry and in physics at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century brought to the fore the possibility of devising theories of physical space that presuppose a variety of non-Euclidean geometries, including Einstein's theory of gravitation which came to supercede Newton's. Thus it became clear at the turn of the century that, not only is the structure of physical space not *necessarily* Euclidean, it is in fact also not *actually* Euclidean, prompting a challenge to Kant's conception of the a priori. As Friedman claims, the point generalizes beyond the example of geometry of space: "Since deep conceptual revolutions or paradigm-shifts are a fact of scientific life . . . we are never in a position to take our present constitutive principles as truly universal principles of human reason—as fixed once and for all throughout the evolution of science" (2001: 64).

cognition—conditions of possibility for experience can be posited—whilst rejecting the necessary and unchanging nature of these conditions. This allowed Reichenbach and many of his successors to maintain that certain features of time and space must indeed be presupposed for laws of physics to be expressed at all, but that such features were amenable to change, as had been demonstrated in the shift from the Newtonian to the relativistic paradigm.

Michael Friedman (2001) argues that we should understand Carnap's *linguistic frameworks* (1934, 1950)[15] and Kuhn's *paradigms* (1962)[16] as instances of the relativized a priori—as contingent, revisable frameworks that constitute the conditions of possibility for cognizing the natural world. He writes that "what we end up with, in this tradition, is . . . a relativized and dynamical conception of a priori mathematical-physical principles, which change and develop along with the development of the mathematical and physical sciences themselves, but which nevertheless retain the characteristically Kantian constitutive function of making the empirical natural knowledge thereby structured and framed by such principles first possible" (31). Following Friedman, we propose to also take up Reichenbach's move in employing this notion of the relativized a priori, but to theorize ideology. The significance of rejecting the status of the a priori as universal, necessary, and given has been noted by classical ideology theorists: for instance, Horkheimer mentions the "thorough refutation" of Kant's conception of necessary and universal features of cognition "at the hands of Reichenbach" (1937: 176).[17]

A relativized transcendental account of cognition, we show in the rest of this section, already has considerable power to illuminate some of the central features of ideology. For instance, despite often being identified with "false consciousness" (Engels 1893: 766; Geuss 1981: 12), theorists have struggled with the idea that ideology is not false outright. Shelby writes that "a form of social consciousness may be ideological in ways that are not fully or accurately conveyed by simply calling [it] 'false'" (2003: 166). Instead, it "misrepresent[s] . . . realit[y]" (Shelby 2014: 66), it operates "through some form of masking" (Haslanger 2017b: 150), it is "deceptive" in some way (Eagleton 1991: 17); or in the most frequently used terms, it is an

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[15] See Bright (2017) for interesting considerations concerning logical positivists' use of linguistic frameworks in relation to political critique.

[16] It's interesting that Haslanger also makes the parallel between ideology and paradigms: "The epistemic task in addressing ideology is not to justify or critique particular claims, but to shift to a different paradigm" (2019: 11; see also discussion in Joaquin and Biana 2022: 173). Of course, the view that Kuhn's paradigms are to be understood transcendentally is not commonplace; indeed, Haslanger transitions immediately from the reference to paradigms to a citation to Quinean empiricism: "As W.V.O. Quine would say, beliefs 'face the tribunal of sense experience not individually, but only as a corporate body'" (2019: 11, citing Quine 1951: 38). So she may very well be interpreting neither Kuhnian paradigms nor ideology in a transcendental fashion. Still, the parallel is striking.

[17] See also Lukács' criticism of Kant's conception of a priori truths as given and fixed rather than created and changeable (1923: 110-124).

"illusion" (Marx and Engels GI 5:24; Horkheimer 1937: 211; MacKinnon 1989: 108; Balibar 1994: 54; Shelby 2003: 166; Celikates 2006: 21; Haslanger 2017b: 150) and a "distortion" of reality (Shelby 2003: 166, 2014: 66; Celikates 2006: 21; Jaeggi 2009: 73; Haslanger 2017a: 3; Sankaran 2020: 1442). Yet there is also a way in which ideologies can be true; as Eagleton remarks, "some at least of what we call ideological discourse is true at one level but not at another: true in its empirical content but deceptive in its force, or true in its surface meaning but false in its underlying assumptions", such that "not all ideological language characterizes the world in erroneous ways" (Eagleton 1991: 16–17). Jaeggi concludes that "this would mean that in the case of ideologies, we are dealing . . . with a peculiar inadequacy of the criterion of truth" (2009: 67).

There is much to be said about what it might mean to say that an ideology is false but not quite, or true but not quite, and indeed we turn to this question in depth in §III. But the view that we have constructed so far already allows us to go some way towards understanding this feature of ideology. In constituting the conditions of possibility for belief, the a priori forms of cognition produce what can show up as a "*candidate for truth*" (Hacking 1982: 174). They make possible the very judgments that show up as true or false in the first place; they establish what counts as "*true-or-false*" (160, 171).[18] Thus an agent who has undergone a transformation in her a priori form of thought will now structure experience in a different way; will produce different thoughts from the same material, different candidates for truth and falsity. As such, she can come to recognise thoughts that previously seemed to her true, as *distorted*: as if her previous form of cognition did not quite succeed at bringing out the proper contours of the thought, in such a way that it ends up seeming 'deceptive' or 'misrepresentative' or 'illusory'. For instance, expressing the thought that those constructed as women are thereby socialized to be more nurturing is not an easy feat; indeed any statement resembling "women are more nurturing" carries with it assumptions of essentialism about gender, and other features of patriarchal ideology.

Our view that it operates at the level of the (relativized) a priori illuminates several further features of ideology. Firstly, it helps us to see how ideology guides *what is salient*. Indeed, it is commonly claimed that, under ideology, "aspects of reality [are] masked or obscured" (Haslanger 2017a: 10), or "inconspicuous and almost invisible" (Jaeggi 2009: 81); that ideology "guide[s] our attention in ways that occlude important and valuable features of the world" (Sankaran 2020: 1444). If we take consciousness to be imbued with a relativized a priori structure, shifting our focus away from the dimension of truth to the dimension of intelligibility, this allows for a new picture of why ideology guides salience: particular features which are recalcitrant to the hermeneutical resources afforded by the a priori frame will show

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[18] Hacking associates this idea both with "Kant's idea of the origin of synthetic a priori" and with Foucault's historical a priori (2002: 5); thus, as we say, his view is consonant with our own. See fn. 3.

up to the subject as less intelligible, less sensical—or might even be unintelligible, nonsensical, or simply elude perceptual attention at all. Thus, the more intelligible features, those that make more sense within the subject's frame, will be more prone to rise to the level of attention or show up as salient. By contrast, and this is less often noted by its theorists, ideology might also make certain features of the world hyper-salient, if the hermeneutical resources that constitute it make these features particularly conspicuous. (Note for instance just how salient gendered characteristics of individuals are under patriarchy.) Thus, in full generality, if ideology operates at the transcendental level, it can affect what of the world is apparent to the subject and what is not.

Moreover, our view can accommodate the fact that in ideology, "*description and evaluation intermingle*", such that "ideology is always already both an understanding and an evaluation" and ideology critique is inevitably "normatively significant" (Jaeggi 2009: 71–72; Leist 1986 cited in Jaeggi 2009: 66). This 'intermingling' of the descriptive and the evaluative derives from the fact that ideology shapes the boundaries of the modal: ideologies "stake out the field of possible actions"; they "determin[e], and limit . . . possibilities" (Jaeggi 2009: 72); they "distort . . . what is possible, . . . what is natural or decreed by God" (Haslanger 2021: 48). This proceeds through mechanisms such as "naturalization—something socially 'made' is imagined to be something naturally or irreducibly 'given'" (Jaeggi 2009: 65), or again "by creating the illusion that . . . relations (or their causes), which are actually the product of historically contingent human action or convention, are 'natural' and, thus, ineradicable, unavoidable, and unalterable" (Shelby 2003: 177). Our view of ideology as operating at the level of the a priori explains how it might do exactly this: by giving rise to what is thinkable for the subject, it produces the form of the subject's space of possibility. And in producing what it is possible for the subject *to do*, as well as what is possible *to think,* ideology inevitably has normative consequences. As Hacking claims, if the a priori "represents what is held to be thinkable, to be possible", then relativizing it entails that "what may be deemed possible at one time may not be held to be so at another" (1997: 170).

Thus an agent in the grip of a particular ideology may see things as necessarily related, or be able to conceive of no alternative to a situation. This partly explains how ideology has a restricting power on subjects: it renders contingent situations as more necessary, or loosely related facts as tightly fastened. Hence the liberatory potential of emancipation from ideology, where "the given becomes the contingent" (MacKinnon 1989: 243). It should not be forgotten, however, that if ideology has the power to redraw modal boundaries, this is not restricted to making contingent facts appear necessary: it also makes necessary facts appear merely contingent. For instance, the systematic exhaustion of workers is not as contingent a feature of each of their lives as capitalist ideology would have it, but indeed can be recognized from a critical perspective to be a much more necessary consequence of their shared situation.

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The importance of appreciating that many features of social life are not the mere result of myriad 'personal' factors undergirds the famous feminist slogan that 'the personal is political'. And it undergirds their commitment to consciousness-raising: making ideology available to conscious awareness as such.

This brings us to a further feature of ideology that our account illuminates, one that we have already begun to discuss in §I: that ideologies are located in the "background" of or "deep" into the agent's consciousness (Shelby 2014: 67; Jaeggi 2009: 65). This indicates two things in the first instance. Firstly, an ideology is "often held without full conscious awareness", such that a subject will not be "aware that he is in [its] grip" (Shelby 2003: 161); secondly, ideologies are "deeply entrenched" (Shelby 2003: 179), they are "central to the agents [in the] sense [that] the agents won't easily give them up" (Geuss 1981: 10). These two features—an ideology's frequent situation beyond the reach of conscious awareness, and the typical robustness of subjects' commitment to it—are well-explained by the transcendental picture. For if ideologies are what make beliefs about the world possible, the beliefs thereby produced are more liable to be the subject of explicit formulation—and thus revision—than the a priori itself.

But ideologies are not unconscious merely in virtue of their seemingly remote location within the subject's consciousness. For since, on the transcendental picture, ideology organizes experience, thereby already imbuing it with given meanings, the experiences that a subject in the grip of an ideology is liable to have will not stand in significant tension with it. It follows that it will be difficult for the subject to be aware of the presence of the specific ideology at hand. Kuhn makes a similar point about scientists working within a particular paradigm: when in too flagrant a contradiction with the paradigm, anomalous features of scientific experience are sometimes hardly visible or apparent, tend to be assimilated into the paradigm as either a local, or an inconsequential anomaly, or might not even be noticeable as such.[19] It is only with the formulation of the new paradigm that the full significance of the anomalies comes into view, since indeed, "something like a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself. What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see" (Kuhn 1962: 113). This begins to reveal that ideology has a *self-confirmatory* aspect.[20]

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[19] These incongruent experiences might be accommodated to some extent, but as Bright (forth) shows, they will often have pathological manifestations. He argues, for instance, that the tension between *de jure* race equality ideology and the material fact of pervasive racism leads white people to an overwhelming sense of guilt in some cases, or to a tendency to downplay racism in others.

[20] We have discussed three features of ideology that, we have argued, the picture of ideology as relativized a priori can illuminate. We should note that defendants of the propositional picture might also attempt to accommodate them. For instance, they might accommodate the not-quite-falsity of ideological claims by taking them to be improperly individuated; or by appealing to pragmatic or moral

Yet, unlike the paradigms of natural science and in virtue of their social character, ideologies are not just self-confirmatory because they are prior to the experiences they frame, but also because they materially *produce* their own truth. The subject thus genuinely does get corroboration of their ideology as they go along in the world, thereby explaining why it is so entrenched. But it is not readily apparent how the relativized transcendental picture we've presented so far can make sense of *this* way in which ideology is self-confirmatory. So, the relationship of consciousness to the material world is more complex in the context of social theory than, for instance, in that of natural science: it is not merely one of 'world-to-mind' but also one of 'mind-to-world'.[21] In §III and §IV, we move to the question of this relation.

## III.

In the previous section, we moved from a view on which the a priori is fixed to one on which it is relativized. In this section, we take a further step in *materializing* the a priori—we describe the way in which it is conditioned by material reality, and the way it conditions it in turn.

Thus we examine the materialism of Marx and Engels mentioned in the previous section, or, as MacKinnon puts it, the way in which "mind and world [are] interpenetrated" (MacKinnon 1989: 98). There is, we show, a loop between the two. On the one hand, ideology produces its own material truth: ideology does not just shape *experience,* but also shapes *the world.* And on the other hand, the material world produces ideological forms of thought; it does not simply supply the content of experience, but also shapes its structure. Unlike the organisms, molecules, and other objects of the natural sciences, which often do not react to the ways in which their activity is described, the fact that human subjects are *self-conscious* creates a looping effect between the social understanding of their material circumstances and their behavior (Hacking 1996).

Let us begin with the first step of this loop: the fact that ideology *makes itself true*, or in the words of Haslanger, that it "makes real what it purports simply to describe" (2017a: 6). The

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encroachment (Stanley 2005, Moss 2018), to forms of "unconscious bias" (Shelby 2014: 67), or violation of Gricean maxims (Grice 1975): e.g., that ideological beliefs might be true and/or evidentially justified, but pragmatically misleading, or biased, or ethically wrong. Or, they could accommodate an agent's taking a particular feature to be salient by ascribing to them a belief in the proposition that this feature is important. And so on. What we hope will transpire from our discussion in this section is that the transcendental picture can accommodate these features of ideology in a more elegant and systematic way.

[21] Though this distinction will be complicated in §IV.

idea is that ideology "structure[s] the material relations in which all people are forced to participate and therefore cannot be dismissed as simply false" (Hartsock 1999: 107; compare 1983: 285), that it has "*constitutive* effects, bringing into existence new things or making things true" (Srinivasan 2019: 145). Let us illustrate this with what might be called *family ideology*, on which the proper location of care and reproductive labor is the private nuclear family (Weeks 2011; O'Brien 2020, 2023; Lewis 2019, 2022).[22] Thinking in the terms of family ideology—that the conditions for subsistence and flourishing are to be found within the confines of the private nuclear household—leads one, as a matter of course, to organize one's personal life so as to bring about the existence of a family that could serve this function. Moreover, the more individuals think in this way and act accordingly, the more care and reproductive work will indeed be confined to the private nuclear family. Thus, the more widespread family ideology becomes, the more entrenched the family is as *the* way in which care is organized, and the truer family ideology becomes.

This brings us to the second step of the loop. The more care is organized around the institution of the private nuclear family, the more intimately subjects come to cognitively associate care with the nuclear family. Thus the way that subjects cognize care and social reproduction becomes shaped in the form of the family, according to ideas of (heterosexual, monogamous, cohabiting, lifelong, procreation-oriented) "romantic" and (unconditional, property-conferring) "filial" love; of care as "duty" to the members of one's own family and as very much not one to others; of "home" as not simply housing, but the place to which one "belongs"; of the line between safety and danger as the line around the family ("stranger danger"); and more. This way of making sense of social reproduction focuses the subject's attention on caring for and sharing resources with their parents, spouse and children, refracting away from other possible recipients of care. Thus, the couple or the nuclear form comes to appear in the mind as the primary, and often *only,* possible site for sustenance. The more family-shaped the material social world is, the more family-shaped the structure of cognition becomes.

This second step of the loop is the main epistemological insight of the *German Ideology*. There, Marx and Engels propose to "explain the formation of ideas from material practice", to "show that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (5:54). As we indicated in §II, they oppose what they call *idealism*, where consciousness is "inherent . . . 'pure'", that is, has an "independent existence"; and argue instead for *materialism*, the view

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[22] The critics of the private nuclear family and its associated ideology argue that such an arrangement of care and social reproduction serves to reproduce the current (capitalist, cisheteropatriarchal, racist) world order, in ways that preclude the communizing of wealth, make care scarce, hinder the flourishing of subjects, and give rise to various forms of harm. The reader is welcome to substitute another example of ideology if that makes parsing our epistemological claims easier.

that "from the start the 'mind [*Geist*]' is . . . 'burdened' with matter" (5:54). There, we established that the a priori can no longer be conceived, as Kant held, to be given necessarily to consciousness, but must be (in some sense) responsive to the world. We can now precisify this point, by turning to its specifically *material* dimension. How, precisely, does a subject's consciousness depend on the material conditions of their existence?

As we saw in §II, our view of ideology as operating at the level of the a priori entails that we should interpret the materialist thesis as stating not only that the *content* of thought is partly determined by the material world, but, more radically, that its *structure* is too. Thus, what depends on a subject's material conditions is not simply the choice of which option to believe in a series of well-formed alternatives—of incompatible, already expressed judgments about the world, such as 'there is a duty to care for one's children' versus 'there is no such duty'—but the very way in which those alternatives are formed in the consciousness of the subject (i.e. the conceptualization of meeting others' need for care as an individualized 'duty'). In the terms we have been employing, materiality conditions not simply which beliefs an agent adopts, but which propositions are even candidates for belief: it conditions the subject's a priori. This is the way, we propose, in which "material life *structures* understanding" (Hartsock 1983: 287, emphasis added): the a priori, relativized in the way we understand it, is not constructed by the subject in separation from the world; but instead, it is, at least partly, shaped directly by the material conditions of their existence.

This entails a particular way to interpret the criticism Marx and Engels direct to the Young Hegelians in the *German Ideology*. The Young Hegelians, they write, "attribute an independent existence" to "conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness" (5:30).[23] This can be explained, Marx and Engels write, by the fact that the Young Hegelians have failed to "inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings" (5:30). But doing this—adopting what Marx and Engels call the "materialist method"—reveals that, contrary to what the Young Hegelians think, ideology has its source in the material world, not in pure consciousness. Marx and Engels extend this criticism to Kant's universal and necessary a priori concepts: they claim that in invoking them, Kant fails to notice that the "theoretical

[23] The Young Hegelians, for Marx and Engels, refer principally to Ludwig Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner. Thus, Feuerbach argues that the idea of God is an effect of individuals' alienation from an ahistorical, immutable 'human essence'; Bauer criticizes the atomization of individuals in the contemporary Prussian state, proposing as a solution that it should be secularized and religion eliminated; Stirner advances a solipsistic view on which the only thing that exists is me and my own interests, such that nothing outside of the self has any value. For further discussion of their views, see Whyman (2022). Marx and Engel's grouping of these thinkers, and the aptness of their criticism, is not one we necessarily endorse. But regardless of whether their point applies to Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner in particular, it is a point we want to take on.

ideas of the bourgeoisie ha[ve] as their basis material interests" and are "conditioned and determined by the material relations of production" (5:195). But once this idealist position is rejected, "ideology and [its] corresponding forms of consciousness . . . no longer retain the semblance of independence" (5:37).

Instead, consciousness and material reality are "interwoven" (Marx and Engels 5:36). Ideology is self-confirmatory; given its role in social practice and human behavior, it leads to a looping effect: on the one hand, ideology produces its own material truth; on the other hand, material reality produces ideological consciousness. As MacKinnon puts it, "the more [patriarchal ideology] is pervasive, the more it is simply 'there.' And the more real it looks, the more it looks like the truth" (1989: 101). For the "belief and expectation that women are submissive can *make* women submissive" (Srinivasan 2019: 145, referencing Langton 2009), and in this way, patriarchal ideology "extends beneath the representation of reality to its construction: it makes women (as it were) and so verifies (makes true) who women 'are' in its view, simultaneously confirming its way of being and its vision of truth" (MacKinnon 1982: 539). Thus, ideology "is a myth that makes itself true" (542).[24]

The materialization of the relativized a priori allows us to add another dimension to our understanding of three features of ideology first introduced above: the fact that they are *entrenched,* that they are *both true and false*, and that they are *unconscious*. And crucially, it has important implications for the question of social change.

To begin, it explains how ideologies become so *entrenched*. Subjects in the social world find themselves needing to act in accordance with these ideologies, which then shape the social world in turn, in such a way that their own cognition—as responsive to the world they live in—comes to accord with the ideology, and so on in turn. This explains their persistence and apparent inexorability.

It also allows us to make deeper sense than we could in §II of the way in which ideology is *both true and false*, or neither quite one nor the other. MacKinnon, as we have already seen, describes ideology as a "myth" (1982: 542); but later she also writes that it is "hardly a myth" (1989: 100). Jaeggi calls this a "paradox": "How can an ideology be at once true and false? . . . If ideologies are supposed to be *simultaneously* true and false, might one not claim just as convincingly (or even more so) that they are *neither* true nor false?" (2009: 67). The quasi-truth and quasi-falsity of ideology, she responds, are not independent, but are instead "interpenetrati[ng]" (2009: 67) or "entangle[d]", such that ideology "is as much a separation from the full truth as from the mere lie" (Adorno 1954: 465).

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[24] This may be what Žižek means when he writes that ideology is "more real than reality itself" (1994: 30).

This can be gleaned from the example we raised above. On the one hand, under present conditions, it is true that many individuals would do better (in some sense) to enter into nuclear-familial relations than to abstain from them: seeking out monogamous partners with whom to have children at least offers the promise of ensuring important forms of material and emotional care into the end of their lives. In such conditions, participating in the nuclear family is clearly in their individual self-interest, and can therefore present itself as a form of the good. Yet, on the other hand, critics have argued that the nuclear family, because of its function of privatizing these forms of care, is very often a site of intense stress and scarcity, thereby making it especially unlikely to fulfill even its self-interested promise; for many less likely indeed, they argue, than forms of social organization where such care is communized. Moreover, since the pervasiveness of the family form functionally hinders the availability of such material and emotional care outside of it, it is clear that this form of social organization cannot be in the general interest. In this sense, then, family ideology's pretense to the good is false (Weeks 2011; O'Brien 2020, 2023; Lewis 2022). And the truth and falsity of family ideology are not separate but *interwoven*. For the more entrenched the family (and therefore the truer the associated ideology) is, the more scarcity-ridden and exclusionary it (the more false the associated ideology) becomes. And the more stress and scarcity people find themselves under—the more false it is—the more prone they will be to seeking it out for themselves: the more true it becomes.

Finally, a materialist theory of ideology allows us to make sense of a deeper way in which ideologies are *unconscious*. We saw that if ideology is located at the level of the a priori, it will be seemingly remotely located in the subject's cognition (§I), and it will be self-confirmatory in a way that makes it hard to discern (§II). But theorists of ideology speak of it as unconscious in a way that goes beyond these two points: Geuss describes ideology as the "unconscious determinant of [subjects'] consciousness" (1981: 70), MacKinnon as "thought that is socially determined without being conscious of its determinations" (1989: 108), Lukács as "a class-conditioned unconsciousness of one's own socio-historical and economic condition" (1923: 52), and Althusser as "unconscious of the real problems it is a response (or non-response) to" (1965: 69). This way of conceiving the unconsciousness of ideology can be traced back to Engels: "The real motive forces impelling [the subject in the grip of ideology] remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process" (Engels 1893: 766). For according to him, "the so-called thinker [in the grip of ideology] works with mere thought material . . . and does not investigate further for *a more remote source independent of thought*" (ibid). Subjects are thus unconscious of ideology in a further respect than what we discussed so far: they are unconscious of the fact that their way of organizing experience is conditioned by the material world—unconscious, that is, of the relation between world and thought. This creates the illusion that their thought is the product of their own

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reason, the result of their "'pure' consciousness" (Marx and Engels GI, 5:43). The content of their thought thus appears to be generalizable and universalizable rather than particular and historical: ideological forms of consciousness have the "form of universality", and wrongly appear to be "the only rational, universally valid ones" (5:60).

Having examined the materialist conception of ideology, we can see why materialists hold that resisting ideology cannot be merely a matter of changing one's form of consciousness, but must be a matter of changing its material instantiation. The Young Hegelians' diagnosis of the problem of ideology as "wrong ideas . . . about what [men] are and what they ought to be" leads them to the view that social change comes about by "teach[ing] men to exchange the[ir] imaginations for [better] thoughts; . . . to take up a critical attitude to them; . . . to knock them out of their heads; and—existing reality will collapse" (5:23).[25] This encodes a conception of the relationship between consciousness and material reality where subjects have the capacity to alter their consciousness independently and apply these changes to a reliably pliant and responsive material world—that is, the capacity to "arrange their relationships according to their ideas of God, of normal man, etc." or not (5:23). Hence their strategy for social change: to improve their consciousness, so as to improve the reality that it produces. Or as Marx and Engels put it: "since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doings, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for [better] consciousness" (5:30).

But the materialist recognizes that such a strategy for social change is unpromising. The first, rather obvious point that Marx and Engels make about the Young Hegelians' project is that a change of consciousness is far from sufficient for social transformation. They insist that "it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means" (5:38): "'liberation' is . . . not a mental act" (5:38); or, in the words of Angela Davis: "enlightenment does not result in *real* freedom" (1998: 58).[26] For instance, we live in a world where the architecture of private housing, tax and inheritance law, and more make it materially advantageous to organize one's care life in a family shape. Provisions for elderly and childcare, the resources required for emotional and mental flourishing, and material sustenance are not easily available outside of the family. Houses are built to nuclear family dimensions: one kitchen, one dining room, a couple-sized master bedroom with child-sized smaller bedrooms. Financial arrangements outside of government-sanctioned family ties (marriage, partnerhood,

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[25] Each of these views correspond to the positions advanced by Feuerbach, Bauer, and Stirner, respectively. See fn. 23.

[26] This point is a staple of broadly Marxist politics. It is defended in the contemporary literature; for some rich and insightful analyses, see i.e. Dotson and Sertler (2021), from whom we have taken the Davis quote, as well as Táíwò (2018) and Bright (forthcoming).

parenthood) are significantly more costly. And the predominance of the nuclear family strengthens the bonds of dependence between its members, making it harder to establish relations of care outside of its confines. "Taki[ng] a critical attitude" alone (GI, 5:23) cannot suffice to change this state of affairs.

Of course the Young Hegelians do not aim to "recognize the world by means of another interpretation" for its own sake (5:30); but because they hold that a better way of understanding the material world will, in and of itself, lead to more effective change. But the *German Ideology* reveals the limits of such a strategy, which presupposes that it's possible to conjure an ideal way of organizing social life, a [social] blueprint that can then be straightforwardly implemented thereafter. But, if materialism holds, the material places important constraints on what is possible for subjects to cognize. It follows that subjects cannot simply think their way out of social problems from the outset. Instead, interpretation and practice must go hand-in-hand, since changing the social world will in turn affect the capacity to imagine it otherwise. It follows that the strategy for which the Young Hegelians advocate—of effecting material change from within their consciousness—is ineffectual: this makes them, damningly, "the staunchest conservatives" (5:30).

We have argued in this section that ideology, qua relativized a priori, is not merely the product of the subject's mind: it is materially conditioned. Yet we have also begun to suggest that this relation is not one of straightforward *determination* of world on mind. Thus, this raises the question of the precise nature of this relation: of the way and extent to which the relativized a priori is shaped materially. We turn to this question in §IV.

### IV.

In the previous section, we argued that the a priori is *materially* conditioned. In this section, we examine the nature of the 'material': we return to Marx and Engels' contention that material determination is determination not by material *things* (as, we claim, others in the ideology critique literature can be construed as suggesting), but by material *life.* Thus, we arrive at a conception of materialism, as the activity of social practice, continuous, as we will see, with the activity of cognition, allowing for the exercise of *agency*.

The material determination of ideology is sometimes understood in terms of determination by 'structures', 'facts', 'institutions', or the 'material *world*'. For instance, it has been claimed that ideologies are determined by "the causal structure of the social phenomena" (Sankaran 2020: 1456), by "coercive social institutions" (Geuss 1981: 70), by "the material structure of society as a whole" (Eagleton 1991: 30), and by "the material world" (Haslanger 2012: 467).

These passages could be read as parsing material determinants as things or facts: it is *how the world is* that determines consciousness. In fact, we have sometimes used similar terminology. However, the terms that Marx and Engels regularly invoke in the *German Ideology* suggest a different sense of material determination. They write that consciousness is conditioned or determined by the "life-process" and "material behavior" and "material activity" and "practical activity" of men (5:36, 5:45, 5:37).[27] So, to say that consciousness is materially conditioned is to say that it is conditioned by *practice;* not by *how things are* but by *what people do* (Hartsock 1983; Táíwò 2018; Stahl 2013, forth).

Moreover, this practice is not individual but *social*. Thus Marx and Engels write that consciousness results from "the mode of production of material life" (Marx CCPE, 29:263), from the "development of . . . productive forces and of the engagement [*Verkehr*] corresponding to these" (GI, 5:36). And "the production of life", they write, is "a social relation", one that involves "the cooperation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end" (5:43). Thus they conclude that consciousness "arises from the historical life-process" (5:36); or, as Marx writes later, "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life" (CCPE, 29:263).

But questions remain about how consciousness can 'arise from' social practice in the way Marx and Engels describe. In places in the *German Ideology*, they describe thought as the "reflexes and echoes of [the subject's] life-process", "the direct efflux of their material behavior", "phantoms" and "sublimates formed in the human brain", akin to the "inversion of objects on the retina" (5:36). In these phrases, ideological consciousness is described, on the one hand, as a merely epiphenomenal byproduct of material processes, as if thoughts were not real or concrete but merely arise out of that which is (they are 'phantoms', 'sublimates', 'echoes'). On the other, it is couched in physiological terms, as if thoughts were caught in and exhausted by the all-encompassing deterministic web of cause and effect ('reflexes', 'efflux', 'objects on the retina', 'on the human brain'). These two sets of images stand in tension with one another in some sense, but both contribute to a picture of ideological thought as non-agential, as if all that is effectual is so merely causally or mechanistically. Taken together, these passages thus suggest that the material conditioning of consciousness occurs as a *deterministic derivation from* material practice.

This view, in a characterization we will return to, is what Engels himself later terms "mechanical materialism" (LF, 26:370), and indeed the Marxian tradition has long opposed

[27] In what follows, we rely principally on the works of the early Marx and Engels of the 1840s; indeed, Marx and Engels cease to refer almost entirely to ideology in their later works. For discussion as to their possible reasons for abandoning the concept, see Balibar (1994: 8, 42-3, 55) and Althusser (1965: 34-5).

Marx and Engels' own initial formulations of the conditioning thesis, primarily contesting the first sense there given to ideology as imaginary or epiphenomenal consciousness. As Williams argues, "the language of 'reflexes,' 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates' is simplistic, and has in repetition been disastrous" (1977: 59). Thus Althusser famously renounces "the notion that [ideology] consists simply of a collection of distorting representations of reality and empirically false propositions" (Eagleton 1991: 18): he opposes the image of ideology presented in the *German Ideology* as the "imaginary dream . . . cobbled together once the eyes had closed, from the residues of the only full and positive reality" (1970: 121), arguing instead that a subject's "ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus"—such as the church, the state, or the school—"from which derive the ideas of that subject" (1970: 127). The subject is "constituted" by these "material ideological apparatuses" and indoctrinated into ideological "rituals" (128–9). In this way, Althusser "invert[s] the notional schema of ideology", endorsing the following 'script', as it were, as an example of the ideological process: "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe" (1965: 127). That is, he displaces the locus of the ideology theorist's interest from the consciousness of the individual to the social phenomena which give rise to them.

An important strategy in the ensuing Marxian tradition has been to place "the emphasis on [the] social phenomena"—primarily language ("signifying chains", "symbol-systems", the "semiotic domain . . . of meaning and representation") and shared action ("the rituals and practices of social action and behavior")—in which "ideas appear, where mental events register or are realized" (Giddens 1979: 194; Hall 1985: 99). Thus, ideology as a mental event is construed as *itself* a shared practice, such that ideology is situated within the "material social process of signification itself" (Williams 1977: 70).

In a similar vein, Haslanger insists that "ideology [is] not simply located within individual minds" (2017a: 7), and instead, exhorts her reader to attend to "social practices" (ibid), which she calls "ideological formations" (2017a: 16) as well as "cultural software" (2017b: 158, 162, citing Balkin 1998: 23). Practices, she writes, are "partly constituted" by "concepts, rules, norms, stereotypes, scripts, and the like", which supply something like their ideological content (2017a: 18). She commonly cashes out these components in terms of "schemas" (2012: 174; 2017a: 13, 14; 2021: 62–67; 2022: 5–7), which, she states, "encode knowledge and also provide scripts that frame our interaction with each other and our environment; such scripts can guide group members through collective events or even organize a life" (2012: 174). These schemas come to exist because of "our need to organize information and coordinate action, thought, and affect" (2021: 63); thus these "signals" are "learned through socialization" (2017a: 7). In this way, Haslanger understands herself to be following Althusser (2019: 2, 5; 2021: 29-36; 2022: 10-11).

It has even been argued that ideology is wholly attributable to the role schemata and scripts play in the social sciences (Sankaran 2020). According to the work relied on to support this way of thinking about ideology, these schemas are "prescriptive sequences" that "people automatically engage in" (Bicchieri 2017: 132). They "are like theatrical 'scripts': once we know which role we are playing, we just follow the script, acting in ways appropriate to our roles, without really thinking much about it" (Brennan et. al 2013: 172–3). For instance, the fact that "when people go into a restaurant, they know what is likely to happen and hence they know how to behave appropriately" is explained by appealing to "different but relatively similar restaurant scripts stored in each of us", akin to how "the software that is installed on a computer . . . allows a computer to process information" (Balkin 1998: 192, 195, 4).[28]

But there is a risk, in insisting on the primacy of practice, of falling into the very trap one was attempting to avoid. For in one's efforts to reject the first sense of ideology as imaginary, epiphenomenal, or unreal (suggested by the terms 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates'—terms Williams deems a "deliberately degrading vocabulary"), one risks excising consciousness altogether, and ending up reproducing ideology in the second sense of its being programmed, predetermined, or the result of a physiological process (1977: 59). Where for Marx and Engels, consciousness is the mere 'reflux', 'efflux,' inscription 'on the human brain' or 'on the retina' of material processes, such a position reduces ideology to merely 'habitual responses', 'cultural software', and 'automatic', 'prescriptive sequences'. In so doing, it reproduces Marx and Engels' figuration of the subject undergoing ideology as a mere automaton incapable of agential engagement with the world. Williams contends that this stark picture, pitting the ideal against the real, amounts to a "naive dualism", "in which the idealist separation of 'ideas' and 'material reality' ha[s] been repeated, but with its priorities reversed" (1977: 59): it risks facilely suggesting that ideas and values can simply be read off of material processes.

The ensuing tradition of ideology theory has had to contend with a way out of this seeming opposition. As Tommie Shelby claims, "ideologies cannot have their peculiar and profound social impact without being received into the consciousness of human beings" (2003: 157). So, Stuart Hall notes that "the problem for a materialist or nonidealist theory is how to deal with ideas, which are mental events, and therefore, as Marx says, can only occur 'in thought, in the head' (where else?), in a nonidealist, nonvulgar materialist manner" (1985: 99). Ideology must be conceived in a non-reductionist fashion, such that agents are not demoted to "actors who can only recite preexisting scripts" (Sewell 2005: 136) or to the status of a mere "receptive organ" (Lukács 1923: 130). But how to make sense of this?

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[28] Haslanger draws from Balkin's conception of software in 2017a: 7, 15; 2018: 238, 241; 2021: 25-26; 2022: 6; and elsewhere.

For the reasons discussed above, we do not think it promising to understand the conscious embeddedness of ideology in terms of rituals or conventions, schemas or scripts. Instead, we advance an account that reproduces neither the dualist nor the reductionist frameworks we have considered so far. We can find the schematic outlines of such an alternative within Marx and Engels' own writings. Engels rejects prior conceptions of materialism, as we mentioned above, as 'mechanical', akin to the reductionist mechanical views of early modern natural science—a stage in which "plant and animal organisms had been only crudely examined and were explained as the result of purely mechanical causes" (LF, 26:370). He claims that this conception of nature as a collection of objects whose movements are entirely governed by deterministic laws, explanations of which are limited to brute causality, was extrapolated to human cognition: "What the animal was to Descartes, man was to the materialists of the eighteenth century—a machine" (26:370). On such a picture, thoughts would be understood as mental objects, 'activated' by external stimuli. But Marx and Engels exhort us to understand the material conditioning of consciousness not in terms of mechanical, deterministic processes, but in the organic terms of "*life*-processes" [*Lebensprozeß*], of the "production of life",[29] of the "practical" and "material *activity*" [*Tätigkeit*] and of the "engagement" [*Verkehr*] of men (GI, 5:36, 5:93, 5:43, 5:53-5, 5:37, 5:45, emphases added). Yet even though they generally refer to the determination of cognition by *life* processes or *life* production or forms of *activity* rather than to material processes as such, their usage has been eclipsed in the literature.

Here, as Marx had made explicit two years prior, the domain of 'life' is itself continuous with the domain of consciousness: if "labor" is "life-activity, productive life itself", the human subject also "has *conscious* life-activity" (1884 3:276, emphasis added). Thus, a more sophisticated materialism does not grasp consciousness in the "mechanical" terms of behaviors and practices (Engels LF, 26:370), but as a *dynamic* process: a kind of *activity*.[30] This understanding of materialism allows us to overcome the dualism between ideas and material reality that has plagued the tradition of ideology theory. For the notion of activity can encompass consciousness; not understood as a substance in a remote realm, but as an action continuous and intertwined with other actions. On the resulting picture, what was previously thought of as two separate *things*—the conscious and the material—is now understood as a single kind, not of thing but of process: as *activity*. Moreover, this activity, just like the

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[29] Indeed, Engels relates his more sophisticated conception of materialism to the supersession of Cartesian mechanism by Darwin's conception of organic life as a dynamic process of selection (LF, 26:372, 26:385, 26:517), a paradigm shift which has also been understood as a transition from one relativized a priori to another (see §II).

[30] However, the argument in Engels' text seems self-contradictory in places; these citations express the key claim we take away from it. We do not intend to conflate, as a historical matter, Engels' position in LF (1886) with Marx's view in 1844 (see also the following note).

material activity with which it is intertwined, is a *social* activity. Thus, Marx and Engels claim that "men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, *along with this* their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking" (GI, 5:37, emphasis added); or again, that "the *production* of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first *directly interwoven* with the material *activity* and the material *engagement* of men, the language of real *life*" (5:36, emphases added).

In *Theses on Feuerbach,* this conception of consciousness as active is applied not just to understanding, but to the senses (Bremner forth). There, Marx criticizes mechanical materialism,[31] whose "chief defect", he declares, "is that the thing, reality, sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*], is grasped only in the form of the object or of intuition [*Anschauung*], but not as sensing human activity [*sinnlich menschliche Tätigkeit*], on the side of the subject" (TF I, 5:6). He praises those not "satisfied with abstract thoughts" [*abstrakten Denken*], who move instead to "intuition" [*Anschauung*], but criticizes them for not understanding sensibility "as practical human-sensing activity" [*praktische menschlich-sinnliche Tätigkeit*] (TF V, 5:7). Sensibility is active in one sense which has been recognized—that social objects of cognition are not merely given as brute affections on human receptivity, but are collective *creations*: they are collectively *made* by human agents, and thus, can be unmade (Giddens 1979: 151, Eagleton 1994: 83, Balibar 1994: 13). But, Marx's use of the Kantian term *Anschauung* also reveals that he thinks of consciousness not as a collection of "objects" ('thoughts', or beliefs), but as the "activity" of *sensibility* (Marx and Engels GI 5:40-1)[32] understood in terms of interpretive mediation—or of what we have called the 'a priori': the mediation of the mind in presenting experience, much as, for Kant, sensibility gives an a priori form to experience as given in space and time.

We are now in a position to tie two threads of this paper. Throughout, we have insisted on the transcendental structure of consciousness. And we now see that consciousness must be recognized, not as a mysterious substance or receptacle (as is sometimes suggested by language like 'the mind'), but as an activity, continuous with other practical activities. It follows that the a priori must be thought of as a kind of *action*: as the activity of structuring both sensing and understanding, of framing experience as something intelligible, of systematizing and integrating these interpretations. The a priori is to be understood as the *act* of structuring disparate meaningless elements from a mere aggregate into a meaningful unity. Against a conception of materialism as mechanical, we have therefore arrived at a conception of materialism consistent with positing *transcendental* features of the mind.

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[31] Marx does not use the term 'mechanical materialism' in this context, but his criticism has generally been interpreted in this manner (Hall 1985: 100, Williams 1977: 59; Lukács 1967: xxv; for discussion, see Bremner forth). The expression is actually due to Engels (LF, 26:370).

[32] See discussion in Labica (1987: 29-32).

This realization brings us back to Kant's own characterization of the cognitive faculties which produce or construct a priori knowledge; indeed, Kant's characterization of cognition as *active* is one that has influenced a different strand of the critical theory tradition. Thus, in commenting on ideology, Horkheimer takes the history of philosophy to "have been able to confirm the insight that the world of perception is not merely a copy nor something fixed and substantial, but, to an equal measure a product of *human activity*" (1937: 158, emphasis added), while Lukács extends the Kantian thesis that "the object of cognition can be known by us for the reason that, and to the degree in which, it has been *created* by our own selves" (1923: 112, emphasis added).

Thus, while in the course of this paper we have departed from Kant in first *relativizing,* and then *materializing,* the a priori, we can now see why important insights within Kant's original conception should be newly reintegrated even in the wake of the alterations to it that we have introduced. As Horkheimer elaborates, recognizing that "the subject no longer knows unconditionally and universally, as still in Kant, but [that] his entire cognitive apparatus with all its categories and forms of perception is now contingent upon historical and sociological conditions" (1930: 141) need not entail dispensing with the core features of the way in which Kant takes cognition to function. Kant elaborates a conception on which cognition is a *capacity* [*Vermögen*, usually translated as 'faculty', which means literally to 'be able to'; Longuenesse 2001: 7] or a *power* [*Kraft*], not a set of isolated items as objects in a mental receptacle. Thus, Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the Categories claims that "we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves," and that this "combination", or "synthesis", "is an act of the spontaneity of the power of representation . . . one that is not given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself, since it is an act of its self-activity" (B130). Kemp Smith notes that Kant thus advances a view on which "the understanding, by creative synthetic *activities*, *generates* from the given manifold the complex objects of sense experience", by which "the experienced order . . . is *transformed* into a comprehended order" (1918: xlv, emphases added). It follows that some of our earlier claims can now be qualified: when we have talked of the a priori in terms of 'interpretations' or 'frames' or 'structures', we can now see that the full meaning of these terms can be couched in terms of *activity*—the a priori as the *activity of* interpreting, or framing, or structuring. Thus we have shown how, as Williams claims, "consciousness is seen from the beginning as part of the *human material social process*, and its products in 'ideas' are then as much a part of this process as material products themselves" (1977: 59–60, our emphasis added).

We can now loop back to the question of social change. An important problem has plagued theories of ideology regarding the possibility of critique. For if consciousness, and therefore

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ideology, is a mere deterministic product of material processes, then subjects can exert no agency over their consciousness, such that it begins to seem as though the *only* way to overcome bad ideology is with a change in the material processes that give rise to it. This is how the last Thesis on Feuerbach is often understood; as a claim that ideology critique is futile: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." But if the material processes are interpreted along the lines of mechanical materialism, we have seen that subjects' capacity for exerting agency over these material processes also disappears. It thus follows that on such a conception, the possibility of social change lies entirely outside of the purview of human agency.

This detestable conclusion can be avoided on the picture that we have drawn. Firstly, if practice is thought of, not in the deterministic-mechanical terms of cause and effect, but in the dynamical terms of activity, the principled worries about the possibility of agency cease to arise. This of course does not amount to a full account of how agency is possible if the material and the conscious are thought in terms of activity; nevertheless, it warrants notice that the agency-related problems that plague mechanical materialism bear no relevance to our account. And secondly, if consciousness is thought of, not as a substance or object separate from the material, but as an activity too, the possibility of agency extends to it as well. Just as (collective) agency, even if constrained, is possible over social material processes, (collective) agency, even if constrained, is possible over social cognitive processes.[33]

Thus, thinking about consciousness as activity opens up the possibility for a particular kind of agency: agency over consciousness, over the a priori, that is, *critique*. This account mirrors Marx's claim that "the [mechanical] materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing . . . forgets that it is men who change circumstances" (TF III, 5:6). It helps make sense of his approving reference to "practical-critical activity", which he calls "revolutionary activity" (TF I, 5:6), and of his claim that "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [*Selbstveränderung*] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice" (TF III, 5:6). The 'coincidence' of 'the changing of circumstances' and of 'self-change' which constitutes revolutionary practice consists in the exercise of agency over one's activities—including over the activities of one's consciousness, that is, over one's a priori.

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[33] We cannot give an account of social agency in this paper, but we are sympathetic to accounts such as that contained in the work of Weeks (1998).

# V.

We began from the doxastic view of ideology, and modified it in four respects: we *transcendentalized* (§I), *relativized* (§II), *materialized* (§III), and *agentialized* (§IV) consciousness. We end up with a view on which ideologies are activities—continuous with other social activities—of interpreting and systematizing experience into a general worldview. Although this activity is one that is conditioned and constrained by material social practice, it is also one over which subjects can in principle come to exert agency, thus opening up the possibility of *ideology critique*.

Perhaps surprisingly, Kant's work already contains the seeds of an account of ideology critique—of the exertion of agency in changing one's a priori. As we saw in §I, Kant argues that the transcendental ideas of reason (God, soul, and world) inevitably give rise to a priori 'illusions', or cognitive distortions, which bear interesting resemblance to what the Marxian tradition terms 'ideology'. In the face of these illusions, Kant claims that we can *reorient* our reason in order to make sense of experience in a new way. This notion of the reorientation of reason, we will see, can help us make sense of agency over one's a priori—of ideology critique.

In order to reorient our reason in response to the illusions produced by the ideas, Kant claims that we should employ these ideas not *constitutively*, as constituting objects of knowledge, but merely *regulatively*, as a normative heuristic to guide our pursuit of knowledge in general. Kant claims that these employments correspond to two procedures of reason: on the first, particulars are subsumed under universals that are already "certain and given"; on the second, the particular is given, but the universal, "which is a mere idea", "is still a problem" (A646/B674). The regulative use of reason thereby treats the idea as a concept that can *never* be fully given rather than as a determinate universal (A646-7/B674-5). This idea is thus essentially "unbounded", calling on us to stretch "our imagination in all its boundlessness", which nevertheless "pal[es] into insignificance beside the ideas of reason if it is supposed to provide a presentation adequate to them" (5:257). The ideas, while prone to perpetual illusion, nevertheless point to something *more* than what can be contained within the limitations or boundaries of our cognition, as what "*exceeds*" or "*outstrips*" what our finite cognitive powers can represent (5:378, 5:403). Ultimately, these ideas include not merely God, soul, and world, but come to encompass freedom, justice, and an intelligible world beyond the world of sense.[34]

In "ascending from the particular . . . to the universal" in order to meet the ideas that cannot be fully assimilated within the given transcendental structure, cognition exhibits a

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[34] For discussion, see [redacted].

self-endowed "autonomy" which reflexively prescribes epistemic principles "to itself" (5:180, 5:186). In so doing, experience is arranged into a "system", an activity in which cognition proceeds "not merely *mechanically*, like an instrument, but *creatively*" (20:214). The imagination thereby is "very powerful in creating, as it were, another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it", "transforming" it into "that which steps beyond nature" (5:314).

While we lack the space to elaborate the account fully within the confines of this paper, we suggest, by way of concluding, that this Kantian idea can be extended to a fuller account of critique, understood in terms of epistemic agency.[35] Kant took the reorientation of reason to be limited to the prescription to employ the ideas of God, soul, and world first regulatively, and again practically, instead of constitutively. But in light of our claim that the a priori is materially and historically conditioned, we suggest broadening Kant's call for a regulative employment from the individual ideas of reason to the entire a priori.[36] By first *relativizing* the a priori, then conceiving it as not just a framework but as an ongoing *activity* of the mind, we can make sense of a *self-revising* a priori, one which reorients the general coherence of disparate parts of experience and their ordering into a whole. The a priori, or the "idea" of the "form of the whole of cognition" (A645/B673), can thus be seen to be *perpetually* subject to reorientation: if a salient particular fails to conform to the conception we have of the intelligibility of our experience as a whole, then we can choose to either reject the recalcitrant particular, or to alter our general grid of intelligibility (or more precisely, our general activity of imbuing intelligibility) in order to accommodate it. In this way, the now self-revising a priori can be taken to reorient, in open-ended fashion, its own idea of the structure of the whole, or its idea of the *system*, making the world show up as intelligible or salient in new ways. With it, possibility is opened for agency over one's consciousness, over one's a priori, that is, for *critique*.

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[35] Our goal here is of course not to give an account of the precise nature of which activity or agency is requisite for ideology critique—we hold that it can take many forms—but simply to point out that thinking in those terms (however one precisifies them) permits the overcoming of the dualism that has plagued the ideology-theoretical tradition.

[36] This suggestion is interestingly prefigured in Cassirer (1921); see discussion in Ryckman (2005): ch. 2.

York: International Publishers, 1975–1996), and accord with the following abbreviation scheme: 1844 = *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*; GI = *German Ideology*; TF = *Theses on Feuerbach*; C = *Capital*; LF = *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.

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