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Institutions, Ideology, and Non-Ideal Social Ontology

ABSTRACT

Analytic social ontology is dominated by approaches that understand institutions in terms of notions like collective acceptance or as equilibrium solutions, i.e., a form of modelling where at least the implicit tendency is to paint institutions as relatively harmonious and mutually beneficial. At the same time, in the tradition of critical theory, one tends to find a quite different (and darker) picture of society, its institutions, and the role of ideology. This paper seeks to steer a middle path by developing a thin and relatively non-ideal theory of institutions, which neither assumes that institutions are beneficial or oppressive, and where ideology is understood as a structuring and stabilizing factor that helps maintain specific distributions of rights and duties by conferring perceived legitimacy onto them. It is also argued that even though this is a non-evaluative notion of ideology, it still enables a particular form of ideology critique