In his essay, "Science and Ideology via Development," Messay Kebede argues that the concept of ideology, if viewed as a form of ethical voluntarism, could serve as the needed motivational catalyst for economic development. Kebede writes: "Understood in terms of knowledge, ideology turns into deception, whereas connected with ethics, it reveals itself, as the framework of self-commandment" (p. 491). The basis for this positive interpretation, according to Kebede, is that ideological beliefs ought to be viewed as forms of self-motivating mythmaking instead of as species of false beliefs — the views espoused by Marxists (p. 489).

The role that Kebede ascribes to ideology in the form of mythmaking is of being the solution to the problem of modernizing cultural change. The solution offered by diffusion and acculturation has been ineffective, since "the persistence of underdevelopment invalidates this approach: however close and enduring the influence of Western values on indigenous cultures, it is not enough to elicit the expected change" (p. 492).

I argue in this reply that Kebede errs in his epistemological evaluation of the concept of ideology and its role in the theory of development. First, I take issue with his assumption that primary or basic beliefs are neither true nor false. Regardless of his belief that the purpose of knowledge is to serve life (is this proposition neither true nor false?), some basic beliefs must be construed as true (incontrovertibly supportable by the evidence) or false. For example, it is "true" that "New York is not in Ethiopia" and that "all parents are at least as old as their offspring." The epistemological problem concerning the concept of truth is that unresolved agnosticism or skepticism, even if apparently courting the idea of an infinite regress, must itself be founded on an epistemologically secure basic statement: "There are no true or false beliefs."

This cursory analysis of the problem of knowledge brings us to the question of ideology. Whatever their sociological function, ideological beliefs can be analyzed in terms of their cognitive content. This would mean that ideology...
in the form of myth could be epistemologically analyzed regardless of its role in the development process.

Consider the fact that the economic development of the Western world (United States and Western Europe) was founded on the enslavement and peonage of Africans in the Americas and Africa. But this subjugation of Africans was viewed as justifiable from an ideological viewpoint—a form of Eurocentric mythmaking. The dominant ideology at the time was that Africans deserved to be enslaved because they were regarded as inferior human beings. The statements of European luminaries, such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel, in this regard could be viewed as ideological. Certainly Kebede would reject the ideological belief that justified colonialism and the accompanying exploitation of Africans on account of their supposed biological inferiority. Let us recall that the apartheid social structure of South Africa was ideologically justified by a set of religious myths and pseudo-scientific claims. That South Africa is somewhat developed from an industrial viewpoint would not justify, I presume, the causative myths previously engendered in this regard.

Given that development entails the absorption of modern technology, must it necessarily entail diffusion and acculturation? Kebede does not reject the idea of modernism by way of diffusion, but he makes the claim that cultural renaissance in the form of autonomous mythmaking is a necessary condition for development. Accordingly, the goal of development would require a role for poets, priests, intellectuals, and artists.

Kebede’s suggestion here is justifiable, but we should recognize that cultural autonomy, though necessary for development and an important bulwark against excessive acculturation, is not sufficient. What is also required is the infusion or creation of capital (both human and physical) and the adaptation of new forms of technology. Under such circumstances we have no need for ideology in the form of myth. The role of the intellectual under such circumstances would be to avoid mythmaking as a strategy for development, and instead to describe social phenomena as they appear to the populace. Such reportings would be founded on the idea of human worth and the challenge of development.

With adequate investments in human capital and the infusion of capital for the purpose of creation of technological bases, the need for mythmaking would be superfluous. On the contrary, the existence and fostering of empirically ungrounded myths and ideology encourages ethnic conflicts and the maintenance of beliefs that are cognitively unsupportable.

Modernism does require the infusion of ideas especially germane to the issue of technology, yet this need not be accompanied by excessive acculturation. What has helped promote underdevelopment are the myths engendered by uncontrolled acculturation. These myths are founded on the principle that