

## A MARXIST CONCEPTION OF IDEOLOGY

### I

There are myriads of conceptions of ideology and it is perhaps fair enough to say that the concept of ideology is essentially contested.<sup>1</sup> Even within Marxism, and indeed within Marx's own usage, there are distinct characterizations of ideology such that it makes it misleading to speak of the concept of ideology.<sup>2</sup> I shall not be concerned with the history of this "concept" or with textual exegesis of Marx or the Marxist tradition. My aim shall be to state, explicate, and critically examine what I take to be a tolerably Marxist conception of ideology, which I shall argue is a key one in understanding society and in engaging in systematic social critique. I shall be far less concerned with the legitimacy of its Marxist pedigree than with its adequacy as a conceptualization of ideology.

An ideology, I shall contend, is a system of ideas, theories, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and social practices that (a) is characteristic of a class society or of a class or other primary social group in a class society and that (b) serves principally the interests of a class, typically a class in that society, or other primary social group while typically at least, putting itself forward as answering to the interests of the whole of the society. (I add "primary social group" to capture phenomena like that of the racist Afrikaner ideology.) The people who have been socialized into a particular ideology, in certain important ways, see their own position within their social environment in terms of this system (cluster) of ideas, beliefs, and values and they explain, evaluate, and justify the way they live their lives in terms of this system. Sometimes socialization into a particular ideology embraces the vast majority of the people comprising the various classes within the society. At other times, when class conflict is overt, widespread, and it is perceived on all sides that there are antagonistic class interests, socialization into an ideology will be principally the distinctive socialization of members of a particular class into the ideology of that class.

It is typically, and perhaps always, the case that an ideology serves principally the interests of a particular class. But it is not

always the case that an ideology is mystificatory or in any way illegitimate.<sup>3</sup> However, it is generally the case, where the ideology is effective, that for people socialized into the ideology it mystifies, or at least distorts, their understanding of their society and indeed their understanding of the world they live in; people are so constituted by ideologies that an ideology, usually, but not invariably, distorts, for people socialized into the ideology, their self-images and conceptions of how they ought to live and relate to each other. It isn't that people first have their own self-images and then ideology distorts them but that in their very socialization they are in considerable measure constituted by an ideology. That is, the way they act, react, and view themselves is strongly conditioned by the ideology. The ideology, however, does this in ways that tend to serve the interests of a given class. It is this feature of ideology that licenses the move from "It's an ideology," or "It's ideological," to "It's in some way illegitimate," just as in the nineteenth century "He is a Swede" would have licensed "Then he must be a Lutheran." (Remember in this context that an ideology is something the other chap has.)

There are ideological beliefs, ideas, concepts, categories, propositions, forms of consciousness, theories, systems, attitudes, norms, and practices. It has been asked "What is the mark of the mental? " Similarly, hoping not to fall into essentialist errors, I shall ask "What is the mark of the ideological? " The answer, it seems to me, is that what is ideological serves class interests and has a distinctive role to play in class struggle. (I don't claim, however, that this is a sufficient condition for something's being ideological. Indeed, I think the search here, as in many other places, for necessary and sufficient conditions is a strategic error.)

I shall first contrast this Marxist conception of ideology with some non-Marxist conceptions. I shall exhibit central aspects of each, and in doing this it will become evident that the non-Marxist conceptions are contained within the Marxist one. What is distinctive about the Marxist conception is in what it adds, though this does mean that what is denoted by "ideology" is narrower in the Marxist conception. This, I shall argue, is to its advantage. With that contrast before us, I shall then raise a series of questions about the Marxist characterization of ideology.

## II

There is a latitudinarian or, as some have called it, a global employment of "ideology" in which an ideology is said to be any "set of closely related beliefs or ideas, or even attitudes characteristic of a group or community," or any "cluster of closely interconnected ideas, beliefs, and attitudes which function both to interpret experience and as guides to action."<sup>4</sup> This is what some social anthropologists would call a belief-system, and so characterized it has none of the pejorative or polemical force of the more typical employments of many Marxist conceptions of "ideology."

I shall look at two ways in which this general latitudinarian conception of ideology can be fleshed out. The first stresses that in articulating an ideology we are setting out a general outlook which incorporates certain conceptions about what society is like, certain conceptions about how to live and how to order society, and certain conceptions about how to see one's life in society. So, on such a conception, we, in having an ideology, have a general outlook that incorporates certain values and aims at either an alteration of human life and society or at a sanctification and justification of the established order in such a way as to promote or at least protect group solidarity.<sup>5</sup> A second way of fleshing out this general conception of ideology is given by Bernard Williams. Williams remarks:

In its broadest sense, I take the term "ideology" to stand for a system of political and social beliefs that does two things. First, it embodies some set of values or ideals, and, consequently, some principles of action: though such principles will be of necessity very general, and in some cases mainly negative, being concerned more with limitations on political action, for instance, rather than with an overall aim of it. Secondly, an ideology connects with its values and principles of action some set of very general theoretical beliefs which give the values and principles some sort of backing or justification. The generality of these beliefs must, moreover, be of a special kind, if we are to speak of "an ideology:" they must, I think, be general beliefs about man, society, and the state, and not merely about some aspect of man in society. For instance, a belief in Free Trade or federalism, even though supported by general economic or political reasons, could not by itself constitute an ideology. The distin-

guishing mark of an ideology is that its general beliefs concern man and society as such, and hence concern things that are presupposed in any political or social situation whatsoever.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most evident things is that Williams' formulation of the latitudinarian view of the mark of the ideological is different from my view. I am claiming that for something to be an ideology it must serve class interests or primary social-group interests while for Williams it must contain general beliefs concerning man and society as such. (I expect that both of us have necessary conditions or at least quasi-necessary conditions but that neither has a sufficient condition.)

The term "ideology" unlike the term "term" is a term of art so that we can hardly speak of a correct or incorrect definition or of some set of necessary and sufficient conditions for something being ideological or an ideology. We can, of course, stipulate something here, but the stipulations would have to be judged according to some pragmatic terms and it is not by any means clear what in such a context the proper "pragmatic considerations" would come to. I expect that my characterization of the mark of the ideological will strike many people as too narrow while Williams' will strike others as too broad. It by stipulation makes an "ideological world-view" pleonastic and a "non-ideological world-view" a contradiction. This can be harmless enough, though still rather unhelpful, if the normal pejorative force of "ideological" and "ideology" is consciously blocked and not implicitly carried over into the subsequent analysis of ideology. But the Williams way does miss what is very central in Marxist critiques of ideologies, namely how they are verbal weapons in class conflict, how they are polemical notions which serve class interests.<sup>7</sup> When we speak of "the ideological spokesman of the petty bourgeoisie" or when we speak, as Marx did, of the "official representatives of French democracy as being steeped in republican ideology" we are employing "ideological" and "ideology" as critical, polemical concepts pointing to distinctive interests and to distinctive class positions. One is not, in some class-neutral manner, referring simply to a world-view. Similarly, in criticizing the historical idealism of the Young Hegelians in The German Ideology, Marx and Engels sought to establish that in spite of their critical intentions they were the staunchest conservatives in an oblique way reinforcing the status quo.

Class dominance is reinforced in many ways, sometimes in ways which are very obvious indeed, and sometimes in ways which are hidden and require probing ideological unmasking. Marx had the greatest admiration for Ricardo. He regarded him, in a way he did not regard Malthus, as a genuine man of science, but he also stressed that he, even in his strictest scientific work, produced ideology serving bourgeois class interests by making it appear that certain economic relations had a permanently valid character.<sup>8</sup> What is important here is not what Ricardo's intentions were but the message that his work, genuinely scientific work, conveyed. Critique of ideology reveals intellectual structures and social practices playing key roles in class struggles.

It is indeed true that even if there were to be a society not divided into classes or with pronounced stratification, there would still be in that society a world-view incorporating certain values. It is a mark of something being a culture or a society that it has certain distinguishing general beliefs concerning man and society. An ideology will have these features too, but it might be that a society could come into being in which there were no intellectual structures or social practices which served the interests of a particular class or group. This may well be because there would be no classes or stratified social groups. That is to say, it would be a classless society. But we also have a perfectly good term, namely "the world-view of that society" that we can employ instead while saving "ideology" for intellectual structures and perhaps, as well, for social practices and institutions which serve class interests. It would seem that it would be better to follow the latter course and preserve the employment of "ideology" for something distinct, capturing a phenomenon much in need of capturing, and giving us conceptual space for the very possibility of a non-ideological world-view or Weltanschauung that did not distort our understanding of social reality. We are not forced, if we take this path, to say with Althusser that ideology is eternal.<sup>9</sup> It may be, but we have not made it true by a conventionalist sulk.

### III

I want to lay out rather more explicitly the similarities and differences between those non-Marxist conceptions and my Marxist

conception of ideology. I think the following "mapping device" catches the century similarities and differences.

#### A Latitudinarian Conception of Ideology

##### An ideology

1. embodies a set (cluster) of norms, values, or ideals characteristic of a community or communities or of a distinct sub-culture of a community or of several communities;
2. contains principles of action;
3. contains general theoretical beliefs about man and society that function to interpret experience and that play a legitimating role for those principles of action;
4. aims at either an alteration of human life and society or at a sanctification and justification of the established order in such a way as to promote or at least protect group solidarity;
5. links these norms to questions concerning the distribution of power in society.

#### A Marxist Conception of Ideology

##### An ideology

- 1\* embodies a set (cluster) of norms, values, or ideas characteristic of a community or communities that reflects a certain class or primary social-group perspective and that (principally) serves the interests of the class or primary social group;
- 2\* contains principles of action that reflect a certain class or primary social-group perspective and that serve (principally) the interests of that class or primary social group;
- 3\* contains general theoretical beliefs about man and society that play a legitimating role for those principles of action and for the public self-images extant in that society;<sup>10</sup>
- 4\* aims at, in the interest of a contending class or primary social group, an alteration of human life and of society or at a sanctification and justification, in the interests of the dominant class, classes, or primary social group, of those parts of the established order that are at least perceived to embody the interests of the dominant class, classes, or primary social group;

- 5\* frequently mystifies (distorts) the social outlook of the dominated class, and not infrequently of the dominating class as well, by falsely representing itself as answering to the interests of the whole of the society;<sup>11</sup>
- 6\* typically (but not invariably) distorts, for the people socialized into the ideology, their self-understanding and their understanding of the world they live in in a way which serves the interests of a determinate class or primary social group;
- 7\* preserves group solidarity in accordance with dominant-class outlooks by socializing the members of the dominated class into that outlook in such a way that they (typically, mistakenly) see that general outlook and the associated set of norms and social practices of that outlook as answering to the interests of the whole society;
- 8\* functions so that sometimes the socialization into an outlook will be either class specific or, at other times, it will be society-wide so that there will be across the whole of the society a tolerably common outlook;
- 9\* will be generally, but still mistakenly, perceived, where there is an extensive dominant-class hegemony, to be morally legitimate and as generally answering to the interests of the society as a whole (It is a legitimating device in the society);<sup>12</sup>
- 10\* typically, but not invariably, is morally illegitimate and is only rationally justifiable in accordance with the interests of the class, classes, or primary social group whose interests it serves;
- 11\* has a distinctive role in class struggle.<sup>13</sup>

It should be apparent from the above that the Marxist need not deny anything given in the above non-Marxist conception of ideology (conceptions taken from Plamenatz, Gellner, and Williams). The difference is in what is stressed and in what the Marxist adds. He would stress the importance of conceiving of ideology in more determinate terms, and he would also stress the standard distorting nature of ideological conceptions. The Marxist adds reference to class: class conflict, class interests, class perspective, class mystification, class hegemony, class society and the like.<sup>14</sup> It is essential for his analysis that class, class interests, and conceptions of mystification and distorted social outlook be brought into the picture. There is a

contrast drawn between class interests and a mystified sense of the interests of society as a whole. It is essential to the Marxist not only to be able to talk of world-views with distinctive conceptions of man and society functioning sometimes to preserve group solidarity and sometimes to promote an alteration, even a radical alteration, of social life, but also to speak of distorted world-views that obscure social relations and do not answer adequately to the needs of human beings. Ideologies are not only world-views, but typically distorted world-views in class society, and they are for the most part world-views which either serve the interests of a determinate class or rather more rarely of several classes or of some primary social group.

There are plainly a number of questions that could and should be raised about such a Marxist conception. It assumes the reality of classes and some form of class analysis, and there are people who would consider that problematic. What exactly classes are and what Marx meant by "classes" is not altogether clear. As is well known, Marx never completed the chapter devoted to class in Capital. It is also anything but clear whether the class divisions of our time are not in some non-trivial senses different from the class divisions of Marx's time, though this is perfectly compatible with the persistence of classes in the fundamental sense in which Marx spoke, namely, of primary social groups which differ fundamentally in their relationship to the means of production and by means of whose conflict society changes in accordance with developments in the forces of production.<sup>15</sup> "Society," as Allen Wood has put it, "is a structure, made up of roles or positions which differ determinately in the kind and degree of control their occupants have over the process of social production, the kinds of claims they have on social labour or its fruits, or the kinds of claims other members of society have on them."<sup>16</sup> The relations of production of society--the totality of which is the economic structure of society--divide people into economic roles and out of these economic roles social classes emerge. Masses of people come to exist whose roles leave them in a common situation with common interests, which stand opposed to other masses of people in other situations with other common interests. In our society this is instantiated by the fact that there are workers who must sell their labour power and capitalists who buy it and, directly or indirectly, control it and use it in production. In this way deep and irreconcilable class antagonisms between capitalists and the proletariat arise and are sustained.



All this, of course, can be and has been challenged. I am inclined to think that something like this is approximately true, but this is not the occasion to argue that point. If you think that the reality of classes, class conflict, or antagonistic class interests has not been established, emulate Husserl, bracket them for the nonce, and consider the coherence and utility of this Marxist model of ideology on the assumption that there are such antagonistic classes. Treat it counterfactually. We can argue about the reality of class and class conflict on some other occasion.

However, I would add that if one uses stratification analyses rather than class analyses very similar claims could be made, though, of course, in a different vocabulary, to the ones made in the Marxist model. Even if one were so misguided as to be a methodological individualist similar points could be made about ideology though in a more baroque language.<sup>17</sup>

#### IV

Another pronounced and distinctive feature of this Marxist conception of ideology and indeed of most Marxist conceptions is that there is a stress on how ideologies typically mystify and distort our understanding of our social situation. (See 5\*, 6\*, 7\*, 9\*.)

It is important to see how this distortion works. Where it is most beguiling it does not characteristically work by making false statements let alone by dishing out lies. Ideologists, of course, sometimes provide us with outright lies as happens with some manufactured ideological claims, e.g., Hitler's claim that Polish soldiers crossed the German border and attacked Germany, or the American claim that Duarte is a force standing against the right in El Salvador. But what is pervasive and harder to detect, and perhaps more pernicious and typical, is how ideology works by presenting and inculcating a false or slanted perspective that arranges the facts in a misleading way, or fails to mention certain facts, or places them in an inconspicuous context.<sup>18</sup>

Both the arrangement and the omissions function to further the interests of the class or primary social group whose ideology it is. In a capitalist ideology the facts are arranged in such a way that capitalist interests are furthered or at least protected and proletarian interests are harmed. Facts, plain facts, are, for example, pointed to about inflation, and workers are told they must moderate their

wage demands to help whip inflation. Moderating their demands is in the public interest. It is for the good of everyone alike. What is not drawn to their attention is that this moderation on their part, while it may help slow inflation, will also, and more certainly, come to a transfer of some wealth from worker to capitalist, negating, or partially negating, gains made by workers in earlier struggles with capitalists under more favourable conditions. It is also not noted how such a "keeping of the social contract," as Callaghan used to call it, helps stabilize capitalism. No attention at all is paid to whether such a stabilization is in the interests of workers or indeed of the vast majority of the people in the society. About things like moderating wage demands in periods of inflation or accepting price and wage controls one cluster of facts is trotted out for ideological consumption and arranged in such a way as to protect the established order. Inconvenient facts are kept well out of sight.

A perhaps more interesting but somewhat more tendentious illustration of how the distorting mirror of ideology works by the arrangement of the facts and by the strategic omission of facts can be illustrated from the current (1981) interplay of American foreign policy and economic policy.<sup>19</sup> The Reagan administration is intensifying the cold war. Facts about Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, Soviet troop levels in Europe, Soviet military capability, and instability in Poland are appealed to. There may be in this some exaggeration and lying, but it is also the case that facts are invoked. Renewed and vigorous defense spending is stressed to protect "the free world" and pressure is directed to reluctant allies to start spending too. This is all allegedly for our mutual defense. But little careful attention is paid as to whether a dispassionate and comprehensive examination would reveal whether we really are so threatened. And in the mass-media--the television networks, the standard newspapers throughout North America, and the large circulation tabloids--the connection between this and the domestic economy is not stressed. Reagan's pseudo-libertarian talk to the contrary notwithstanding, there is a call for a big increase, through defense spending, in the state sector of the economy. The rich in a capitalist-state society need to be coaxed into investing in American industry. But it is here where military spending is useful, for it will provide a guaranteed market for high technology production--but only in an atmosphere of war hysteria will such waste production not provoke domestic discontent. But that production is deemed necessary, so the cold

war with its war hysteria needs to be cranked up again. However, stress on this military production will increasingly weaken the United States position in world trade, particularly vis-à-vis western Europe and Japan. To offset that, the Americans must pressure western Europe and Japan into developing a military industry and into cutting their flourishing non-waste production. This requires, economically requires, increased international tension and arms production, and this in turn requires, in the domestic populations, hawkish cold-war attitudes and a fear of communist encroachment.

A simple ideological view of the matter is that the breakdown in detente, or the partial breakdown in detente, is due to Soviet aggression in Afghanistan and elsewhere. A less ideological view of the matter does not deny that the Soviet Union has so and so many troops in Afghanistan, but views this fact in a wider network of facts, together with less simplistic theories of political sociology, to come up with a less ideological understanding of the situation. It is important here, using coherence models of justification, to get a wider perspective with a more thorough sifting of the facts.

The crucial thing to see is that the mystification or distortion does not come principally, or sometimes even at all, through lies but through the inculcation of a perspective--through the arrangement and highlighting of certain propositions and through the omission or placement of others, and generally through the logical tone of voice in which things are discussed.

It isn't just a question of a comprehensive perspective--there can be total ideologies. What ideologies do is give false perspectives. In this respect they function analogously to the manner of functioning of a paranoid's account of why everyone is out to get him. His account could be false even though most, if not all, of the first-order statements made by the paranoid about this situation were true. A did cut in front of him as he was turning; B was very angry with him; C does avoid him; G was curt to him; and so on. It is the way he arranges these facts and the interpretation that he puts on them that produces the falseness, i.e., a radically skewed perspective. The person under the sway of an ideology has come to accept a certain arrangement and a certain reading of the facts and has been led to focus too narrowly on a certain set of facts while not relating, even what sometimes are quite plain and uncontroversial facts, to a wider set of background matters.

Evaluations--judgments of significance and consequent normative commitments--go with the acceptance of an ideology. With a more comprehensive and less ideological viewing of the matter a very different understanding and appreciation, and a consequent weighing of the significance of the facts would occur. It is not a question of reading the values off the facts, but it is a question of considered convictions shifting with the way the pattern of facts are grasped and with related judgments concerning the plausibility of various interpretations and with judgments about how well these interpretations match with more comprehensive and nuanced interpretations ordered in a comprehensive overview.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to recognize that views, including world-pictures, can be more or less ideological; representations can be more or less perspicuous and more or less falsifying. Perspectives are not like statements which are either true or false sans phrase. What has been misleadingly called "ideological consciousness" is in reality the ideological mystification that people experience when they have a too-narrow and a too-skewed selection of the facts placed in a distorting perspective.

I think that to make clear exactly what is involved could best be exhibited by working in detail with some real examples of ideological thinking. That can hardly be done here, although I gestured in that direction with my two examples. But it is quite possible that some will think they were (particularly the second one) more ideological themselves than revelatory of how ideology works. Their parti pris nature reveals that the would-be unmasker has a mask blocking his own vision. I do not think for a moment that that is so, but if I am, as I hope I am not, self-deceived here, and if I am wearing ideological blinkers myself, my examples will still, just as well, illustrate my point, for they will show how, with them, I am unwittingly engaged in ideological thinking myself by selectively placing facts in a distorting perspective and by seeking to further my case by a tendentious and overly emotive series of representations.

## V

An ideology, as I have remarked, is typically something the other chap has. On the latitudinarian conception one could very properly speak of one's own ideology, but where the ideology is a mystifying device mystifying class interests as universal moral truths,

it is not something, in most circumstances, that one would wittingly accept. To be aware that one's thinking is ideological would be to take steps to try to correct it.

It is also the case that for both the latitudinarian and my Marxist conception of ideology, an ideology has a legitimating role in society. The latitudinarian either records it and makes no normative comment on the legitimacy of this legitimizing role or argues that in some instances the legitimizing role is genuine and there can be justified rationally and morally acceptable ideologies. There is conceptual space in such a conception for justified ideologies. I allow, as well, conceptual space for legitimate legitimizing ideologies. I do not rule out their possibility a priori by conceptual fiat.<sup>21</sup> But the space is very circumscribed. Generally I argue that ideologies distort and present *ersatz* rationally and morally legitimizing claims. Viewed from the moral point of view with any reasonable objectivity, ideologies are almost always both morally and rationally illegitimate. They would not be accepted by people under conditions of undistorted communication.<sup>22</sup> The ideology in question is not benignly distorting but morally illegitimate (a) where there is, as in the Fascist Italy that Gramsci wrote about or in our present capitalist societies, an extensive dominant-class hegemony, intruding, by way of the consciousness industry, into almost every area of our lives and (b) where the vast majority of the people are duped (socialized if you will) into believing that the institutional arrangements they live under generally answer to the interests of everyone alike as well as any possible alternative arrangements could in their historical circumstances, when in reality they answer principally to the interests of the dominant class.<sup>23</sup> That, I think, is our own condition. But whether I am right or not in this judgment, it is plain how an ideology could, and typically would, be morally illegitimate.

More simply still--unless, like Plato and the Grand Inquisitor, we believe in the moral necessity or moral efficacy of the "noble lie"--that something distorts or mystifies is a prima facie reason for rejecting it and not accepting the norms dependent on it. Similarly, that something serves the interest of a small dominant class and is harmful to the interests of the vast majority of people is also a good reason for rejecting it. A system of ideas which engenders mistaken self-images and a distorted understanding of our condition is, at least, prima facie illegitimate: it is incapable of being defended morally.

It surely will be responded that to put it this way is very un-Marxist because for Marx morality is ideology.<sup>24</sup> There could be nothing called "the moral point of view" which could, in a Marxist conception of things, be legitimately appealed to in declaring a social order morally illegitimate. There are in reality only moral ideologies mystifying our consciousness and making us believe that there is something other than individual or class interests that we can rationally appeal to in deciding to do one thing rather than another.

It is true that both Marx and Engels frequently speak contemptuously of morality and moralizing and have flatly said that morality is ideology.<sup>25</sup> I think they should be taken not to be making what some would now call a meta-ethical conceptual remark, or a nihilistic critique of the very idea of an objective ethic, or any sort of semantical claim about what morality must be, or any epistemological claim about how we could know what is right or wrong. Instead, they should be taken as making a claim in the sociology of morals about how morality (moralizing) typically functions (what its social function is) in class societies.<sup>26</sup> They are making a remark about the social role or function of morality and not a philosophical (conceptual) comment about what morality essentially is. They are not engaged in Hume's, Kant's, Moore's, Hagerstrom's or Mackie's task of trying to say what moral ideas really are but are trying to show what social function they have in various class societies. And there, Marx and Engels say, with considerable plausibility, that morality (that is, particular moralities), like law and like religion, does ideological work. In the class struggle, morality typically has a mystifying role. In one way or another, it works to get people to accept the established order or, where it is a revolutionary ideology, to accept a new postulated revolutionary social order.<sup>27</sup> It typically serves ruling class interests although sometimes it can also be an ideological weapon of a rising class in its struggle with the dominant class. But this should be understood as a remark in the sociology of morals and not as a remark about the nature of morals.

It is very tempting for a moral philosopher to read into Marx some kind of philosophical moral doctrine--a claim about the epistemology or ontology of morals. Perhaps, we are inclined to think, he has an error theory like Westermarck's or Mackie's, or perhaps he really is assuming some kind of non-cognitivism, nihilism, or naturalism.<sup>28</sup> But there is no good warrant for that in Marx's text, or for that matter in Engels's either. Marx and Engels, as would befit their

interests, show the ideological work moral notions typically do, but they also quite unabashedly make moral judgments of a diverse kind in their theoretical work, their polemical work, and in private correspondence. They do this, in all these domains, without the slightest hesitation, or embarrassment, or sense that they themselves are saying something ideological or subjective or in any way questionable. But even if they had--even if they did think that all morality must be ideological twaddle--there is no good reason for others, including Marxists, to follow them here.<sup>29</sup>

## VI

It is tempting to say that if all talk about man and society must be ideological then nothing can be ideological, for if there cannot in any sense be a science, or theory, or account of society which is non-ideological, if we cannot even conceptualize what would count as non-ideological social thought, then we cannot even identify any system of social thought as ideological, and "ideological" could not qualify thought or, at least, thought about society.<sup>30</sup>

Either the adequacy of non-vacuous contrast arguments or the present application of such an argument might be questioned. Theories or images of conceptual imprisonment or of conceptual relativism, often linked with cultural pessimism, abound in a variety of forms in our society.<sup>31</sup> There are all sorts of powerful intellectual strands--Wittgenstein, Winch, and Rorty, on the one hand, a sociology-of-knowledge tradition, and a hermeneutical tradition, on the other--which tend to push us in that direction. There are respectable intellectual reasons for taking some such arguments very seriously indeed, but it is also true that they afford us a natural ideology, in some instances even a consoling ideology, for world-weary intellectuals during the period of the decline of capitalism.

Wittgenstein once said that talk of reason is not infrequently talk which is used as a club to beat down people who see the world in very different ways than do the "guardians of reason." Talk of ideology may have a similar function. If we operate within one conceptual system (one categorial framework) we can call something ideological with a certain determinateness, but, "outside of a categorial framework" or across such frameworks, there is no Archimedean point, there is no wide, reflective, equilibrium point, where, bursting out of the hermeneutical circle, we can say that something is

ideological sans phrase. The contrast between the ideological and non-ideological is always systems-relative.<sup>32</sup> There is no objective way of saying of a whole system of thought or of a whole social system or way of life, that it is ideological, or, indeed, if we think about what we are saying, non-ideological. The appellation "ideological" or "non-ideological" has no proper application here. Indeed, the very conception of what is objective and what is not is conceptualized in a way which is internal to the framework. There is no, it might not unnaturally be claimed, framework-independent and indeed domain-of-discourse-independent conception of objectivity.<sup>33</sup> If we claim that a whole system of thought is ideological because it is not objective, we are using "objective" polemically (ideologically?) as Wittgenstein says people often use talk of reason. We can, so the objection goes, take Marx's system and then, in terms of it, characterize something as ideological. But we cannot, without vicious circularity, test it for ideologicity itself.<sup>34</sup>

I think there is a myriad of uncontrolled metaphors and a questionable meshing together of disparate elements in the above remarks that together have the effect of making the whole situation seem worse than it is. In trying to sort some of this out, let me return to my non-vacuous contrast. If some social thought, Marx's or someone else's, could not count as being non-ideological or ideology-free, or relatively ideology-free, then the very term "ideological" becomes a Holmesless Watson. "Ideological" in such a circumstance could not qualify "social thought."

It is no use saying that the contrast could only come with natural science which is non-ideological while anything dealing with the human sciences or society is ideological. Such a contrast would not provide the relevant comparison. To get the relevant contrast, we need some social thought which is non-ideological, say historical materialism, to contrast, as Marx does in The German Ideology, with some other social thought, say historical idealism, which is ideological.<sup>35</sup>

We might, returning to the point that things could be more or less ideological, put the non-vacuous contrast point in a weaker way which some might think is closer to how things actually are. All theories, and indeed even all thinking, some might say, about man and society have some ideological elements, but some thinking and some theories are more ideological or ideology-prone than others. Perhaps Althusser is right and ideology is eternal--man, as he said,



being an ideological animal.<sup>36</sup> But some systems and some thinking are more ideological than others. Indeed, the differences can be quite striking and that is where we get our valid contrast. We do not, if this stress is right, need to look for the realm--at best an empty class--of the non-ideological. We do not need to draw a sharp line between ideology and science. Instead we need to recognize that there is a continuum.<sup>37</sup> Science--genuine science--can have ideological elements, occasionally rather extensive ideological elements (Smith and Ricardo), though sometimes the ideological distortion is so deep and the theories are of such a character that they hardly have a scientific character at all (Malthus or Spencer). And sometimes something thoroughly scientific (say the labour theory of value) can also be ideological--can serve the interests of a particular class--with very little or perhaps no distortion of social reality. (Recall that being distortive or mystificatory was not taken as a defining property of ideology.) So, without claiming that any social theory, including Marxism, is utterly ideologie-frei, we can contrast ideologies with less class serving, less distorting, more objective, more extensively truth-bearing systems of thought. These systems can in turn be used in identifying and criticizing ideology so that all thought is not viewed as so relative or conceptually imprisoning that the very idea of an ideology drops out or, what comes to the same thing, everything becomes ideological. The claim is that this last bit of talk doesn't even make sense. If all talk about man and society is ideological, nothing can be.

## VII

This variant on responses to the liar paradox is one way out of such a critique of ideological critique. However, there is another response that I want briefly to explore. The Marxist conception of ideology I sought to characterize has as leitmotiv the notion that an ideology serves class interests, is an intellectual weapon in the class struggle, and typically, but not invariably, distorts our understanding of our social situation in such a way that the interests of the class whose ideology it is are served. In any extended defense of such an account an appeal would have to be made to the concept of interests and some tolerably objective characterization of what human interests are would have to be given. It would also have to be the case that there would be given some objective and ramified characteri-

zation of classes and, in the doing of that, of historical materialism, forces of production, relations of production, and how the classes interrelate in the modes of production. Explicating that would in turn require a characterization of the relations of production and superstructures, and a specification of just what superstructures are and the roles they play in our lives.<sup>38</sup> This gives us the structure of a holistic social theory, a theory riddled with difficulties and destined to be replaced in time by a more adequate social theory, but still a social theory far more adequate in explanatory power than historical idealism. If we will but look and see and carefully think, stand in a position in which all theories are on a par and in which it is just a matter of which language-games happen to be played or what lebensformen are taken as given. There is perhaps no non-circular proof of that, but if we do work from the inside with different social theories and set them in comparison with each other we will come to recognize that not all systems stand on equal footing and that not all are equally distorting.<sup>39</sup> They may all distort, but they do not all equally distort. We can specify something of what human interests are and what are the interests of people within a determinate class. Talk of class and class-interests has explanatory power. Since these things are true, we should be very cautious about concluding that a Marxist account of ideology gives us no basis, or only a very relativistic basis, for a specification of ideology. With that specification, we have a foundation to appeal to in proceeding to the critique of ideology. To be justified in taking those notions to be themselves ideological and relativistic, we need a rationale much stronger than the bare recognition that there are in the world different forms-of-life with different and often incommensurable language-games with their own conceptions of adequacy and their own conceptions of where justification must come to an end. Some such systems could still encompass others and enable us to understand and assess others. That none will satisfy the craving for certainty should only remind us of what we have known for a long time--since at least Peirce's assault on Cartesianism--namely, that fallibilism is the name of the game. But fallibilism is not relativism, conceptual or otherwise, a relativism forcing us into saying that we can only pit one ideology against another and can never criticize ideology by appealing to a theory which can make a justified claim to being a reasonable approximation truth.<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Arne Naess, Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 1956); and Hans Barth, Truth and Ideology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Concerning the conception "essentially contested" see W. B. Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), ch. 8; Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts," Ethics 84/1, (October, 1973); and William Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse (London: D. C. Heath, 1974), ch. 1.
- 2 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 55-7; and Allen Wood, Karl Marx (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 117-20.
- 3 Joe McCarney, The Real World of Ideology (Sussex, England: Harvester Press, 1980). McCarney cogently argues this point and also gives us good grounds for believing that not only Lenin, Lukacs, and Gramsci believe this, but, more surprisingly, Marx and Engels as well.
- 4 John Plamenatz, Ideology (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), 5. Joe McCarney shows how very inadequate Plamenatz's treatment is as a general introduction to the topic. See McCarney, Real World, 153. Similar things are pointed out about Popper's work here. Ibid., p. 158. R. G. Peffer makes similar distinctions to the distinctions I am making here. See R. G. Peffer, "Morality and the Marxist Concept of Ideology," Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Vol. 7 (1981).
- 5 Ernest Gellner, The Devil in Modern Philosophy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 113-50.
- 6 Bernard Williams, "Democracy and Ideology" in M. Rejai ed., Democracy: The Contemporary Theories (New York, Atherton Press, 1967), 162-63.
- 7 McCarney clearly explicates this crucial element in Marx's work and in the Marxist tradition. There is a way in which Bernard Williams could invert the claim I am making here. The latitudinarian conception of ideology could find room for the Marxist conception as a sub-class of ideology which promotes class interests but also, as a sub-class, it has all the features of the latitudinarian conception as well. The latitudinarian could then claim that his is the more general characterization: the claim that captures what it is for something to be an ideology. The part about which conception captures what essentially an ideology is aside, it is true that such an inversion could be made. In one way, perhaps, everything can be said just as perspicuously in either terminology.

While there is force in that remark, it still seems to me that my way of putting it is preferable for at least the following reasons: it clearly does not broaden the conception of ideology so extensively that almost everything--almost all of the human sciences or social thought--becomes ideological by implicit definition; it points out clearly how an ideology, while still remaining a general outlook, is a tool in class struggles and reflects class interests; it locates our conception of ideology clearly in the actual practice of ideology-critique of Marxists and Anarchists. With my conceptualization, we have a distinct role for ideology while with the latitudinarian conception it becomes practically equivalent to "world-view" or "belief-system." (R. X. Ware made me see the need for this footnote.)

- 8 What is important to recognize is that it does not follow that if something is science it cannot also be ideology. There is (or can be) science which isn't ideological, there is science which is also ideological (Smith, Ricardo): there is ersatz science which is ideological (Malthus?, Spencer?): and there is ideology which is non-scientific, i.e., doesn't even purport to be scientific. For explications and defenses of these notions see Joe McCarney, Real World; and John Stevenson, "Marx's Theory of Ideology," Radical Philosopher's News Journal 9 (Fall, 1977), 14-34.
- 9 L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in his Lenin and Philosophy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971). See also Jacques Ranciere, "On the Theory of Ideology," Radical Philosophy 1 (Spring, 1974). Joe McCarney devastatingly criticizes Althusser's account. See McCarney, Real World, chs. 3, 4. Althusser, to his credit, has abandoned his earlier, still very influential views. See L. Althusser, Essays in Self-Criticism (London: NLB, 1973), 119-25.
- 10 John McMurtry, The Structure of Marx's World View (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 123-56.
- 11 Bertell Ollman, Alienation (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1971). See his chapter on ideology.
- 12 Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); and his "What Does a Crisis Mean Today? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism," Social Research 40 (1973). See also Thomas McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1978), ch. 5.
- 13 Joe McCarney, Real World.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 G. A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978).
- 16 Allen Wood, Karl Marx (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 84. See also G. A. Cohen, "Being, Consciousness and Roles: On the Foundations of Historical Materialism," in C. Abramsky ed., Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), 82-97.
- 17 For the reasons why one should not be a methodological individualist see Steven Lukes, Essays in Social Theory (London:

- Macmillan, 1977), 177-86; Richard Miller, "Methodological Individualism and Social Explanation," Philosophy of Science 45 (1978), 387-414; and especially Alan Garfinkel's brilliant Forms of Explanation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).
- 18 That a good bit of outright fabrication takes place is documented in Noam Chomsky's and Edward S. Harman's impressive The Political Economy of Human Rights, 1 and 2 (Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1979). For a more theoretical underpinning relating ideology to politics and the human sciences see Noam Chomsky, Language and Responsibility (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), Part I.
  - 19 Noam Chomsky, "The Cold War is a Device By Which Superpowers Control Their Own Domains," Manchester Guardian Weekly 124/25 (June 21, 1981), 8-9 and Lester Thurow, "How Reagan Can Wreck the Economy," The New York Review of Books, 27/8 (May 14, 1981), 3-8.
  - 20 Andrew Collier, "Scientific Socialism and the Question of Socialist Values," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Vol. 7 (1981).
  - 21 Joe McCarney makes a good case for that in his The Real World of Ideology.
  - 22 Jurgen Habermas, Communications and the Evaluation of Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) and Thomas McCarthy, Critical Theory, ch. 4.
  - 23 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Raids and Reconstructions: Essays in Politics, Crime and Culture (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 7-53.
  - 24 Anthony Skillen, "Marxism and Morality," Radical Philosophy 8 (Summer, 1974); Andrew Collier; "Truth and Practice," Radical Philosophy 5 (Summer, 1973), and "On the Production of Moral Ideology," Radical Philosophy 9 (Winter, 1974). See as well Anthony Skillen, Ruling Illusions: Philosophy and the Social Order, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977).
  - 25 Allen Wood, Marx, 141-56.
  - 26 William Shaw, "Marxism and Moral Objectivity," Canadian Journal of Philosophy Supplementary Vol.7 (1981).
  - 27 Kai Nielsen, "Morality, Marxism and the Ideological Functions of Morality," The Occasional Review 8/9 (Autumn, 1978). See also the citations in note 24.
  - 28 For a succinct statement of this account see John Mackie's, "A Refutation of Morals," Australian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy 24 (1946). Mackie has elaborated his views and related them to Hume's in his Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (London: Penguin, 1971); and in his Hume's Moral Theory (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).
  - 29 See William Shaw, "Marxism and Moral Objectivity," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, Supplementary Vol. 7 (1981).

- 30 See the discussion of "ideological explanations" by J. L. Mackie, Renford Bambrough, and Martin Hollis in Stephan Korner, ed., Explanation (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 185-216.
- 31 What is involved here is concisely expressed by Martin Hollis in Korner, Explanation, 205-214.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., and my "Rationality and Relativism," Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 4/4 (December, 1974); "Rationality and Universality," The Monist 59/3, (July, 1976); and my "Conceptual Relativism," Grazer Philosophische Studien 3 (1977).
- 34 Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1969); and again in his Against the Self Images of the Age (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1971).
- 35 Allen Wood, Marx, 117-19.
- 36 See citations in note 9 as well as Alex Callinicos, Althusser's Marxism (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 55-88, and Gregor McLennon, Victor Molina, and Roy Peters, "Althusser's Theory of Ideology," On Ideology, Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 77-105.
- 37 See the citations in note 8.
- 38 This work is beginning to be done in a rigorously analytical manner. See Geoffrey Hellman, "Historical Materialism" in John Mephan and David-Hillel-Rubin (eds.), Issues in Marxist Philosophy, Vol. 2 (Sussex, England: The Harvester Press, 1979), 143-66; William Shaw, Marx's Theory of History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978); G. A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); and Allen Wood, Marx. Some of the necessary corrections occur in Henry Laycock, "Critical Notice of G. A. Cohen and William H. Shaw's Marx's Theory of History," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 10/2 (June, 1980), 335-56; and in Richard Miller's "Productive Forces and the Forces of Change," The Philosophical Review, 90/1 (January, 1981), 91-117.
- 39 For the underlying methodology see John Rawls, "The Independence of Moral Theory," Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 47 (1974/75); Norman Daniels, "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics," The Journal of Philosophy, 76/5 (May, 1979); Norman Daniels, "Reflective Equilibrium and Archimedean Points," Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 10/1 (March, 1980); Jane English "Ethics and Science," Proceedings of the XVI Congress of Philosophy; and William Shaw, "Intuition and Moral Philosophy," American Philosophical Quarterly 17/2 (April, 1980); Kai Nielsen, "Considered Judgements Again," Human Studies, 5 (1982); and Kai Nielsen, "On Needing a Moral theory: Rationality, Considered Judgements and the boundary of Morality," Metaphilosophy 13/2 (April, 1982).

- 40 I would like to thank Elisabeth Nielsen and R. X. Ware for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay and Rodger Beehler and Jonathan Bordo for conversations about the underlying conception of ideology articulated here.