THE THEORY OF IDEOLOGY IN CAPITAL
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"There must be some way out of here"  
Said the joker to the thief  
"I can't get no relief"  
(Dylan)

Where do incorrect ideas come from?

In What is to be Done? Lenin argues that "the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology". (1) It is the necessity of going beyond the spontaneous development of the movement that is the basis of his argument for a three-fold struggle, theoretical, political and economic. It is in the same context that he makes the famous statement that "without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement". (2) What are the epistemological bases of these interconnected necessities, the spontaneous dominance of bourgeois ideology and the need for theory? Standing behind such analyses there must be a theory of the conditions for the production of knowledge and of effective practice and also a theory of the production of mystification. In What is to be Done?, which is not intended as a work on the theory of knowledge, Lenin only offers a passing remark about the origins of mystification. "But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology?" For the single reason that bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, that it is more fully developed, and that it has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination. (3)

Now I think that this statement is, not surprisingly given its context, incomplete, and is open to misinterpretation. It may suggest a view that is very common but which is, in my opinion, fundamentally mistaken. This view, which is an ideology of ideology, is that the dominance of bourgeois ideology has its basis in the dominance of the bourgeoisie as a class only in the sense that this dominance as a class allows the bourgeoisie to have a monopoly on the production and dissemination of ideas. Thus, from the point of view of the workers ideas have their origin in the means of the dissemination of ideas produced originally elsewhere. Ideas are transmitted, via cultural and educational institutions, public communications systems and so on, into the otherwise empty minds of the working class. It could be that conditions in mid-twentieth century bourgeois society are such as to spontaneously suggest this view. There is no doubt that mid-twentieth century capitalism does generate a formidable semic pollution to a degree and of kinds quite unimaginable one hundred or even fifty years ago. The very forms and modern technological means of the production and dissemination of ideas (the advertising industry), the "public" television and radio systems, political campaigns designed around the production of "images" of politicians etc.etc. do seem to suggest a social division between the producers of ideas (advertising copy writers, press agents, speech writers etc.) and the consumers of ideas ("the public"). (4) And some writers who have attempted to diagnose our contemporary condition ("one-dimensional man") do, perhaps because of this, stumble sometimes into the error of misconstruing the source of mystification in the way defined above. Marcuse, for example; in his essay "Repressive Tolerance" tends to identify the conditions under which people live and think, and which thereby determine what they think, with the "prevailing indoctrination" by the "media", advertisements and so on to which they are exposed. He says "The people exposed to this impartiality are no tabulae rasa, they are indoctrinated by the conditions under which they live and think and which they do not transcend. To enable them to become autonomous, to find by themselves what is true and what is false for man in the existing society, they would have to be freed from the prevailing indoctrination ... ".(5) And different opinions and 'philosophies' can no longer compete peacefully for adherence and persuasion on equal grounds: the 'marketplace of ideas' is organised and delimited by those who determine the national and the individual interest." (5) Perhaps if it were only Marcuse who made this mistake it would not deserve so much emphasis here. I believe, however, that it is a mistake very commonly made by, for example, the students at Oxford or Cambridge that I teach, and it is perhaps what Marx would call a "natural and spontaneous mode of thought" in contemporary capitalist society. If this is so then this view is self-refuting because it would itself be ideology which has its origins in something other than the indoctrination which it identifies as the origins of ideology.

In what follows I do not, of course, intend to deny for one moment that the bourgeoisie do control the means for the dissemination of ideas in Lenin's sense, nor that they do use this control as a powerful weapon in the defence of their class-interests. But my view is that the bourgeois class is the producer of ideas only in the sense that sleep is the producer of dreams. To say that the bourgeoisie produces ideas is to ignore the conditions that make this possible, to ignore that which determines which ideas are thus produced, and to conceal the real nature and origins of ideology. It is not the bourgeoisie class that produces ideas but bourgeois society. And the effective dissemination of ideas is only possible because, or to the extent that, the ideas thus disseminated are ideas which, for quite different reasons, do have a sufficient degree of effectiveness both in rendering social reality intelligible and in guiding practice within it for them to be apparently acceptable. It is the relation between ideology and reality that is the key to its dominance. To show this one would have to explore the relation between the "representations in mens' brains" and the reality of which these are representations both as a cognitive and as a practical relation. In what follows I will for the most part be concerned with the cognitive aspect of this relation.

The Theory of Ideology in The German Ideology

The obvious place to begin is with those passages in The German Ideology in which Marx discusses the epistemology of mystification. But my claim will be that, in fact, Marx has not, in such early works on which discussions of ideology are usually based, achieved a clear theoretical position on the origin of ideology, and that the metaphors in terms of which he discusses the reproduction of ideas tend to be practically modified in the light of what he says in his later works. I claim that on this epistemological question of the origin of incorrect ideas Capital is a great advance on The German Ideology.

In familiar and typical passages from The German Ideology Marx says. (6)

"If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical

(1) Lenin What is to be Done? (Moscow 1969) p41
(2) ibid p25
(3) ibid p42
(4) For some exhilarating analyses, based on structuralist linguistics, of some of these semiological phenomena see Roland Barthes Mythologies (Cape 1972)
(5) Herbert Marcuse "Repressive Tolerance" in A Critique of Pure Tolerance by Marcuse et.al. (Beacon Press 1965) pp98, 110
(6) German Ideology: given for example in ed. Lewis Feuer Marx and Engels. Basic writings on Politics and Philosophy p49
life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process...we set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises..."

Now this is not a clear statement. Marx is here struggling to discover an adequate language and the result is a series of metaphors which are the symptoms of his failure (not that metaphors as such are a symptom of failure in philosophy. Here it is the profusion of them which suggests that none of them alone satisfies the author - camera obscura, reflexes, echoes, phantoms, sublimates...). Also the passage is open to many different interpretations. Perhaps most unfortunately the words 'empirically verifiable' and 'material premises' taken together with the word "phantom" suggest a positivist interpretation. This arises that ideas from ideology tend to be taken in by phantoms in such a way that the victim simply overlooks or is distracted from 'empirically verifiable facts' that would otherwise be obvious and clear.

As a way of focusing later on the model of relations involved in the production of ideology which I will extract from Capital it will be useful at this point to make explicit some of the features involved in the use of the camera obscura metaphor. This metaphor involves the following representations of the relations between reality and ideas.

A
B
C

Reality
Physical Life
Process

Idea

men and their
circumstances

Historical Life
Process

Examples: exploitation
domination
class struggle
"Abolition of the
wages system"

Legal equality
Freedom
National interest
"A fair day's wage
for a fair day's work"

This metaphor suggests that in the production of ideology there are the following aspects:

(i) three independent entities; the real object A, the representation C, and the mediating entity (light) B which effects the production of the latter from the former. Each idea is the distorted representation of some one "thing" in reality to which it corresponds in a one-to-one manner.

(ii) the relation between A and C is one of inversion. The transformation A to C preserves all internal relations.

(iii) the metaphor not only suggests the independence of the entity reflected, A, (it doesn't need C in order to exist) and denies the independence of C (ideas are not themselves among the conditions for the production of ideas), but also suggests that representations are in some sense "mere illusions" (an epistemological thesis) or "phantoms" (an ontological thesis). It seems to follow that they (the representations) can therefore have no element of either truth or practical effectiveness. This suggests a whole new mode of materialism with which Marx certainly disagreed. Why then is Marx so fascinated with this metaphor which is so freighted throughout his work and which has lead to gross misinterpretations of his views?

The Structure of Ideology and its Relation to Reality

I shall now state three theses concerning the structure of ideology and its relation to reality. These theses are stated in such a way as to make it clear that they are different from views on ideology mentioned. I shall in the following sections show how these theses amount to a part of a theory of ideology that is implicit in Capital.

Thesis 1 Ideology is structured discourse. It is, directly or indirectly, based on or generated by a set of mutually interdependent categories. The view that ideology is made up of ideas is itself misleading to the extent that this has been taken in philosophy to suggest that the units of which ideology is composed, or out of which it is constructed, are independent of one another, and that they can be traced back to atonic ideas which are derived from reality "one at a time", or on a one-to-one basis (as for example in the camera obscura metaphor). We cannot understand ideological concepts or ideological propositions as standing in some such one-to-one relation with material fact or actual or factual or scientific concepts, propositions or facts. The translation of ideology (or manifest text) into the true, underlying (latent) text can neither be a word or proposition to proposition basis. The "true text" is reconstructed not by a process of piecemeal decoding but by the identification of the generic set of ideational categories and its replacement by a different set. This different set will be differently constituted in its internal relations. And we must discover the transformational mechanism whereby the ideological system is constructed: the historical life process, substituted for the undistinguishable.

Thesis 2 The relation between reality and ideology (which produces "inversion") is the cognitive relation. That is to say that mystification has its basis in the perception of the apparently intelligible order of social reality by a process of "misrecognition". An implication of this second thesis is that ideology does not derive fundamentally from the intention to deceive others, from self-deception, or in the perversion of cognition by its being infected with values for example the value of self- or class-interests. Nor does ideology derive fundamentally from the cognitive function being overwhelmed by the pure affects as emotions, feelings or passions. I am not denying that ideology does have the effect of, or does constitute mystification or deception, and that it does function as a defence of interests, and does have the result that what appears to be objective, positive, scientific discourse is not in fact "value-free".

I'll try to clarify this second thesis and its implications by reference to some analogies. This will also help to locate this discussion in a broader context. I am thinking of the problem of ideology in relation to the general questions "What are the conditions for the production of knowledge and what are the conditions for the production of various systems of mystificatory belief?". These questions have been raised not only in relation to ideology but also, for example, in relation to the history of science and to the problem of myth in anthropology. (7) As one aspect (but only one; there are many others) of such enquiries progress has been achieved think by the rediscovery, paradoxical as it may seem, of the cognitive basis of some systems of mystificatory belief. The history of science makes great strides to the extent that it rejects the view that "prescientific" systems of belief and practice such as alchemy or natural magic are a result of a simple lack of interest in the empirical facts, or from ignorance of the importance of empirical study, or from simple empirical mistakes or oversights; and also rejects the view that such systems were essentially the result of enterprises that were overwhelmed entirely by non-cognitive subjective forces (eg, greed or 'hysterion'). One might claim that fact that such systems were possible by virtue of the fact that they were too firmly established on the basis of the 'immediately perceptible' or 'empirical' reality (such as for example the occurrence of the transformation of apparently elemental substances, systems of perceptible relations of analogy, sympathy and antipathy and so on). Similarly anthropological studies of myth has progressed to the extent that it has refused the ethnocentric prejudice that myth is pure "superstition" satisfying only affective demands or that it is infantile proto-science which paid insufficient attention to detailed empirical facts. This is clearly one of the main themes of Levi-Strauss in La Pensée Sauvage. Elsewhere Levi-Strauss identifies the main mistake in the work of Levy-Bruhl by saying that "he denied to 'primitive mentality' the cognitive character which he had initially conceded to it, and cast it back entirely into the realm of affectivity." (9)

Thesis 3 Ideology arises from the opacity of reality, where the concept of reality is formed in the way that reality "presents itself" to men, or the forms of its appearance, conceal those real relations which themselves produce the appearances. This thesis involves the introduction of the concepts phenomenal form, real relation and opacity. It is stated explicitly by Marx, for example in Vol I chapter 19 which is called "The Transformation of the Value of Labour-Power into 'Wages', Value of Labour-Power is the name of this real relation, and 'Wages' (or the wage-form) is a phenomenal form. The selling of the commodity labour-power is the real relation of exchange which is transformed, in experience, into the

(7) One might have added here "also in relation to the problem of madness" with reference to the work of Foucault Histoire de la Folie.

(8) cf. M. Foucault The Order of Things chapter 2 "The Prose of the World".

(9) C. Levi-Strauss The Scope of Anthropology (Cape Editions 1967) p41
mystifying phenomenal form Wages or wage-contract, thus disguising the real nature (of the social relations involved in transactions between capitalist and labourer in bourgeois society. In political economy the mystified form “value of labour power” is identified with wages. (10)

Hence, we may understand the decisive importance of the transformation of value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. This phenomenal form, which makes the essential relation invisible and indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist. All the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists. (540)

This third thesis involves an important aspect of Marx’s epistemology, namely his distinction between “phenomenal forms” (or appearances) and “real relations” as developed in Capital in the course of the categories of political economy. Marx himself thought his most fundamental theoretical breakthrough the discovery of the true concept of surplus value which enabled him to penetrate in a rigorous way to the secret and hidden realities of capitalism. It is this theoretical advance that also allows Marx to make a decisive move beyond the ambiguities of his earlier remarks on ideology. Marx’s claim is then that it is the importance of the phenomenal forms that they render invisible real relations and hence give rise to bourgeois ideology. Here is another example of Marx’s use of these concepts:

“...in respect to the phenomenal form, ‘value and price of labour’, or ‘wages’, as contrasted with the essential relation manifested therein, viz., the value and price of labour-power, the same difference is in respect to all phenomena and their hidden substratum. The former appear directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought; the latter must first be recognized. Classical Political Economy nearly touches the true relation of things, without, however, consciously formulating it. This it cannot do, so far as it sticks in its bourgeois skin.” (542) (Emphases mine)

Notice that here Marx is making a general point (“the same difference holds in respect to all phenomena and their hidden substratum”), and is not limiting his remarks to this particular categorial transformation and mystification. And secondly it should be noted that Marx is here providing us with an answer to the question with which we started “Why does the spontaneous movement lead to the domination of bourgeois ideology?”, namely that phenomenal forms appear “directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought”.

These three theses stated in this section can be summed up in a remark by Henri Lefebvre, (11)

“Social reality, i.e., interacting human individuals and groups, produces appearances which are something more and other than mere illusions. Such appearances are the modes in which human activities manifest themselves within the whole they constitute at any given moment - call them modalities of consciousness. They have far greater consistency, let alone coherence, than mere illusions or ordinary facts. Phenomenal forms have reality, and reality involves appearances.”

I think that, if true these theses necessitate drastic and illuminating modifications to the camera obscura metaphor in ways which I will explain later.

Phenomenal Forms and Real Relations

Before going on to give a detailed account of Marx’s use of this distinction in relation to his analysis of the categories of political economy I think this section will provide some useful further clarification and elaboration of Marx’s general thesis. The distinction is referred to in Capital by a variety of interchangeable terms. Phenomenal forms are called semblances, appearances, estranged outward appearances, illusions, forms, forms of manifestation. Real relations are called essential relations, actual relations, or hidden substratum, content, inner connections. And the distinction is a systematic one in Marx’s later writings. That is to say it is not invoked in an ad hoc fashion nor is it appealed to only infrequently. It is involved systematically at each point where the problem of mystification arises, and this in connection with the discussion of many different categories (not only the forms of exchange of commodities). Norman Geras has listed some of its occurrences. (12) His examples, and those given elsewhere in this paper mostly relate to a discussion of economic formations but it is important to notice that the distinction is also used in relation, for example, to the theory of the State and of the class struggle. (13) (14)

...the different states of the different civilised countries, in spite of their manifold diversity of form, are in reality so structured in common, that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one more or less capitalistically developed. They have, therefore, also a common feature, all the stratifications of which for its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the Communist Manifesto says, "in form"! (Emphases mine)

And note that in such cases as these Marx is also, as in the cases I’ll be analysing later, discussing the origin or basis of ideology (the ideology of the independence of the state and society in the first case, and that of nationalism in the second).

This distinction between phenomenal form and real relation is applied both to the relation to the origin of language and thought (“phenomenal forms appear as modes of thought”). Wages, for example, are an aspect of social reality, namely the category of the social relation of ‘wages’ or ‘price of labour’ is a conceptual category. We think about and talk about social relations in these terms because these categories have the same form that reality has, because this is the form in which reality "is presented to us". ‘Value of labour-power’ is both a real relation, the exchange relation between the worker and the capitalist, and it is a scientific category in terms of which we understand that real relation. This means that the distinction is not a superficial one, a simple wording of some such commonsense distinctions as those between ‘superficial’ or "clear" and "clean". It is a distinction that contains a substantial epistemological theory about the relation between thought and reality and about the origins of illusions about reality. This theory is that the origin of ideological illusions is in the phenomenal forms of reality itself.

This theory is also presented by Marx using the concepts ‘imperceptibility’, ‘invisibility’ and related notions. In these terms the theory says that it is a feature of social life, and in particular the life of social production, that it is so structured as to render that social reality sometimes opaque to its participants. The invisibility of real relations derives from the visibility of outward appearances or forms. The apparent immediacy of these forms obscures their mystificatory character. For example of the commodity-form and of the systematic illusion of individual freedom Marx says:

"It is, however, just this ultimate money-form of the world of commodities that actually conceals, instead of disclosing, the social character of private labour, and the social relations between individual producers.” (76) (Emphases mine)

"A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.” (72) (Emphases mine)

"The Roman slave was held by fetters; the wage-labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads. The appearance of independence is kept up by means of a constant change of employers, and by the fictitious juris of a contract.” (574) (Emphases mine)

In Gera’s words then Marx is providing us with an analysis of “the mechanisms by which capitalist society...” (12) Norman Geras “Essence and Appearance; Aspects of Fetishism in Marx’s Capital” New Left Review 65 Jan-Feb 1971 p69

(13) Critique of the Gotha Programme in Marx and Engels Selected Works (Moscow 1962) volume 2 p32

(14) Critique of the Gotha Programme p27

(10) All quotes from Capital are from volume 1 of the Moore and Aveling translation, Moscow 1961, and the page references are given in the text after each quote.

(11) Henri Lefebvre The Sociology of Marx (Allen Lane the Penguin Press 1968) p62

(12) Norman Geras “Essence and Appearance; Aspects of Fetishism in Marx’s Capital” New Left Review 65 Jan-Feb 1971 p69

(13) Critique of the Gotha Programme in Marx and Engels Selected Works (Moscow 1962) volume 2 p32

(14) Critique of the Gotha Programme p27
necessarily appears to its agents as something other than it really is. It is because there exists, at the interior of capitalist society, a kind of internal rupture between the social relations which obtain and the manner in which they are experienced." (15) The function of ideology is to keep hidden the real relations. But the possibility of performing this function is not given in the possibility of some individual wishing to perform this function, or deliberately designing a language, or using a discourse in which it may be performed. Ideological language does not just distract attention away from real social relations, nor does it explain them away, nor even does it directly deny them. It structurally excludes them from thought. And this is because the phenomenal forms of social life constitute not merely a realm of appearances of particulars, but appearances articulated and endowed free from every field of value. It is in domain of meanings with which men "spontaneously" think their relations to other men and to nature. It is therefore not accurately captured in the idealist notion of a "world-view". (16) Social life is structured like a language; or rather the conditions that make it possible for social life to be of a particular kind (a particular mode of production) are also conditions for the possibility of thought. These conditions are material conditions and are the social practices which constitute a particular mode of production. The 'natural self-understood' meanings encountered in social life form a text which we need to decipher to discover its true meaning.

"The characters that stamp products as commodities, and whose establishment is a necessary preliminary to the circulation of commodities, have already acquired the stability of natural, self-understood forms of social life before man seeks to decipher... their meaning." (75)

I think that the theory of ideology which I’ve been presenting can only be clear if it is examined in its application in detailed analyses. One point here means that I’ll only be able to present sketches of Marx’s analyses. I’ll give four sketches using each as a way of making a general point. I’ll delve into the wage-form and the money-form but it’s important to note that Marx’s treatment follows exactly the same lines in relation to all the categories (commodity-form, value-form etc). I use mainly the wage-form partly for ease of exposition and partly because of its clear and direct connection with the problem of the dominance of bourgeois ideology in Trades Union practice.

The Mystification of the Wage-Form

The wage payment seems to involve a fair exchange of equivalents.

"If history took a long time to get to the bottom of the mystery of wages, nothing, on the other hand, is more easy to understand than the necessity, the raison d’etre, of this phenomenon. The exchange between capital and labour at first presents itself to the mind in the same guise as the buying and selling of all other commodities. The buyer gives a certain sum of money, the seller an article of a nature different from money." (540).

Marx’s argument here depends on his distinction between labour and labour-power. That which is sold by the worker is his labour-power; the capitalist buys the worker’s capacity to work for a certain period of time. The labour performed in that period creates value. It creates as much value as is paid back to the worker as his wage, and it creates surplus-value which is retained by the capitalist. (18) Labour itself does not have value.

"Labour is the substance and the immanent measure of value, but has itself no value. In the expression "value of labour", the idea of value is not completely obliterated, but actually reversed. It is an expression as imaginary as the value of the earth. These imaginary expressions, alike, however, from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the phenomenal forms of essential relations." (537)

Imaginary expressions have their home in the ordinary language of everyday life. "Classical Political Economy treats the category 'price of labour' without further criticism..." (537)

For Marx the fact that people speak of the value of labour that this is a 'spare more naturally' for lack of surer expression, classical political economy, shows that "ordinary language", far from being something to which we should appeal in theoretical discussion, is something which we have good grounds for suspecting of distortion. Ordinary language is the repository of category mistakes. Theoretical discourse corrects ordinary language, telling us what we shouldn’t say. Ordinary language only uses a philosophy which makes a fetish of it, has Marx says, things standing on their heads.

The fact that the wage-form has the form of an exchange of equivalents, then, disguises the reality which is that wage-labour contains unpaid labour and is the source of surplus-value. One may begin by considering the working day as divided into that period in which the labourer works to create value equivalent to his own needs of means of subsistence, and another period in which he works for a certain period to create surplus-value for the capitalist. One of Marx’s criticisms of the Gotha Programme was that it had fallen back into the modes of thought of bourgeois ideology on this point and he restates, in his Critique his analysis of the real relations involved. (19)

"...wages are not what they appear to be, namely, the value, or price, of labour, but only a masked form for the value, or price, of labour-power... it was made clear that the wage-earner has permission to work for his own subsistence, that is, to live, only in so far as he works for a certain time gratis for the capitalist... the system of wage-labour is a system of slavery...whether the worker receives better or worse payment." (Marx’s emphasis)

It is for this reason that the notion of a "fair wage", another of the imaginary expressions of everyday life, is an absurd one. The very meaning of wages which is now deciphered is the extraction of unpaid labour. Therefore wages are unfair as such. (20)

(18) This presentation of the concept of surplus-value is certainly fetisish in as much as it says of various things (labour-power, commodities) that they have value. The relation between labour and value cannot be presented here more naturally for lack of surer expression - it would involve noting at least two movements of totalisation (a) the labour of the individual does not in itself have a relation to value or surplus-value, but only as a component of the aggregate of social labour (b) the value of the products of labour is correctly only in relation to the multiple appearance both as products and as commodities, and hence their location in the spheres both of production and consumption and of reproduction (see note 17) is invaluable in its discussion of the semantic and logical problems involved here. A fuller presentation of these relations would be too complex given the space not only in this book but also in the text. Marx himself often appeals, in passing, to such oversimplified examples for ease of presentation.

(19) Critique of the Gotha Programme, Selected Works volume 2 p299

(20) Marx points out that wages take a variety of forms "a fact not explainable in the binary economic treatises which, exclusively interested in the material side of the question, neglect every difference of form" (543). Marx, being interested also in the practical and cognitive (and hence ideological, political etc) sides of capitalism, systematically considers forms as well as contents throughout Capital. In chapters
This particular mystification illustrates a general point, namely that the transformations from real-relations to phenomenal forms is a transformation in which a complex relation (or a relation of relations, as in the complex wages - money - value - commodities etc.) is presented as a simple relation or is presented as a thing or the property of a thing. (21) Thus here an apparent relation of exchange of equivalents is in reality a compound of an exchange of equivalents plus an extraction of surplus value. This process is both self-reproducing and is itself ultimately analyzable into a complex set of relations between relations. (22) Also what appears as a fair and free exchange (a contract) is in reality a relation of exploitation and domination.

At this point we can begin (but only begin) to see the connection between ideological categories and ideology in the broader sense, that whole range of discourse and practices structured by these categories. In this familiar case we can see some of the connections between ideological form and ideological concept of a fair wage. On the basis of complex comparisons the workers, or the organisations which defend their interests on their own terms, and this contradicts itself is fundamentally analyzable into a complex set of relations between relations. Now all of this is necessary. It is no good ever losing sight of the fact that this historically elaborated complex of institutions and practices is a mystification because it systematically excludes an understanding of real social relations.

Now if it is necessary for the working class to conduct an economic, trades-union struggle in self defence, and if the same kind of language in which this struggle is conducted is structured by the wage-form and other "natural, self-understood" bourgeois categories, and if these categories and their embodiments in practice completely exclude the categories of real relations, then what is the point of saying that the workers ought not to be "exclusively absorbed in this struggle"? (24)

The workers "ought not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights [against the tendency to decrease real wages, to reduce the working day etc] incessantly springing up from the never-ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes on them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economic reconstruction of society. Instead of setting the primitive motto of a fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword Abolition of the wages system! (Marx's emphases)

If this is not to be a purely idealist moral exhortation there must be some sense in which it is possible to conduct the struggle on the three fronts mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the theoretical, the political and the economic, (25) for it is this that is involved in this passage from Marx. With the issue involved here being long detour was taken here concerning the question of making it clear that the Marx's theory of ideological categories does not contradict the demand for a three-fold struggle and in fact may actually help to reverse its theoretical basis. How are we to understand the double thesis of Lenin: "the spontaneous struggle is dominated by bourgeois ideology" and "the working class is not inherently a mass of 'natural revolutionaries'"? (26) And how is it possible in practice to both conduct the necessary defence of workers economic interests and simultaneously struggle against an "economic reconstruction of society"? These problems have been the central theoretical and practical problems for the workers' movement from the debates on reformism in the SPD to the current debates on the alleged reformism of the continental communist parties.

There are two points which would need to be taken into account in this debate which spring directly from Marx's theory of ideology, first, the workers' categories and their self-understanding are constructed and reproduced in capitalist society which systematically tend to sacrifice their interests. But it is also true that this historically elaborated complex of institutions and practices is a mystification because it systematically excludes an understanding of real social relations.

It is worth noting the particular forms of concealment involved here because they illustrate another general point that I want to make explicit, namely that the various appearance-forms are not independent. They support each other. Each form can appear as an element in the composition of any other form; and each element is itself a form constructed out of other elements. It is this that defines the categories as a structure of appearances.

In this case we have the following particular combinations. How is it that the wage is obscured? It is because it is paid in the form of money. But this money is merely the transmuted form of the product of his labour. While he is converting a portion of the means of production into products, a portion of his product is being turned into money. It is the result of his work, or of last year, that pays for his labour-power this week or this year. This illusion begotten by the inter-business is the result of Morris's idea of human nature. Its putative theory of inclusion and identity, is, instead of taking a single capitalist and a single labourer, we take the class of capitalists and the class of labourers as a whole. The capitalist class is constantly giving to the labouring class order-notes, (27)

See above, first section of this paper, and the quotes from Engels given in Lenin What is to be Done? p 28 (my emphases)

...the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides - the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic in a systemic way, in harmony and in its interconnections, and in a systemic way..."

What is to be Done? p 42

"Abolition of the wages system!" (Marx's emphases)
This example illustrates the point that whichever category one starts with in the immediate problem (in this case Marx is discussing the simple reproduction of capital) this inevitably leads to an analysis which all use central categories are employed. Their systematic relations in reality are reproduced in their systematic relations in thought. Thus the analysis of the simple reproduction of capital involves the recognition that the capitalist pays his labourer but at a rate of wage that is always a lower portion of that which is produced by him. This is obscured by the intervention of money, which makes it seem as if the capitalist has some other source of wealth than the expropriation of unpaid labour. And this intervention of money is an aspect of the commodity form of production. And the commodity form of production is that form in which use-values are produced for exchange, and are exchanged in relation to their values. Thus, as Marx says, "the transaction is veiled by the commodity-form of the product and the commodity is veiled by the commodity-form of the product and the money-form of the commodity." (568) (my emphasis) And the commodity form of production is that form in which use-values are produced for exchange, and are exchanged in relation to their values. The conditions for the production of ideology are the conditions for the production of a language, and can only be understood by reference to the structure of this forms of social practices which systematically enter into the production of particular concepts and propositions in that language. Ideology is not a collection of discrete falsehoods but a matrix of thought firmly grounded in the forms of our social life and organised within a set of interdependent categories. We are not aware of these systematically generative interconnections because our awareness is organised through them.

The arbitrariness of the money-substance (like that of the sign-substance in linguistics) i.e., the fact that there is no necessary or natural connection between the physical properties and the monetary properties of a coin, has given rise to the mistaken notion that money is a mere symbol.

"In this sense every commodity is a symbol, since, in so far as it is value, it is only the material envelope of the human labor spent upon it. But if it be declared that the social characters assumed by objects, or the material forms assumed by the social qualities of labour under the regime of a definite mode of production, are mere symbols, it is in the same breath also declared that these characteristics are arbitrary fictions sanctioned by the so-called universal conquest of the mode of explanation in favour during the 18th century. Unable to account for the origin of the pulsing forms assumed by social life, man, people sought to denude them of their strange appearance by ascribing to them a conventional origin." (91)
The parallels between philosophical theories of meaning and economic theories of value should be no surprise because the structural feature that the phenomena have in common is the dislocation between the invisibility of social life which makes them possible and the visibility of the individual acts in which they enter into social practice.

I'd recapitulate some of the points that I've been making by returning to the camera obscura metaphor. The relation between reality and the representation of reality in men's brains is not a relation involving three independent entities (two aspects of a mediation between them) as is suggested by the camera obscura and the mirror image metaphors. Marx's metaphor of "inversion" is notoriously difficult to understand and has suggested many different interpretations. The metaphor continues to occur throughout his later works. It is worth remembering that this very same metaphor of inversion, plus that of reflection, mixed with that of the dialectic was the mystified form of the dialectic and was (Hegelian form) it would be worth trying to think beyond them again and again to this metaphor. (32) Althusser's...analysis of thought and its nondistorted equivalent. But the multitude of interpretations of this passage, and its obvious inadequacy as a theoretical statement (how does one conceive of turning something "right side up again" in order to discover "the rational kernel within the mystical shell"? has led to an ambitious attempt by Louis Althusser to analyse the specific problem that Marx was struggling with and which led him back again and again to this metaphor. (32) Althusser's analysis focuses particularly on the problem of thought's dialectical method. I think that since the metaphors in question are not a relation involving three independent entities (two aspects of a mediation between them) as is suggested by the camera obscura and the mirror image metaphors. Marx's metaphor of "inversion" is notoriously difficult to understand and has suggested many different interpretations. The metaphor continues to occur throughout his later works. It is worth remembering that this very same metaphor of inversion, plus that of reflection, mixed with that of the dialectic was the mystified form of the dialectic and was (Hegelian form) it would be worth trying to think beyond them here also.

The difference between Marxian categories and the ideological categories of, for example, political economy, is that where the latter designate things and their properties, the former designate relations and their transformations; and where the latter designate relations between things the former designate relations between relations. (35) This is the most general form of what Marx calls "Fetishism." For example, "when are the illusions of the monetary system? Do it gold and silver, when serving as money, did not represent a social relation between producer, but mere natural objects with strange social properties. And modern economy, which looks down with such disdain on the monetary system, does not its superstition come out as clear as noonday, whenever it treats of capital? How long is it since economy discarded the phlegmatization, that rent grows out of the soil and not out of society" (82)

Similarly I think the difference between Marx's theory of ideology and the ideology of ideology is that whereas the latter thinks of it in terms of two elements and a relation between them (A, B, and its properties) the Hegelian theory of ideology is a theory of totality. Both the nature of the components and that of the relations between them are thus drastically different. It can be represented as below although it should be remembered that this is presented as merely a helpful graphical device and should not be taken too seriously especially in as much as it can give no account of the relations within the totality.

(d) D

The properties of this system are complex. I can only make a few comments here by way of highlighting some of its differences from the model here. It should not be suggested that this model differs from the earlier one both in the nature of its components (A,B,C etc) and in the relations between them. In both these respects we can only understand the model by reference to some concept of a structured totality. As Balibar points out (34) the notion of the structural complexity of a totality was first suggested by Althusser in order to clarify the relations within the totality base-superstructure i.e., the social structure as a whole, as an articulation of several relatively autonomous levels. But it is also clear that each of these "levels" is itself a structured totality. I have given some indication of this above in discussing the interdependence of ideological categories, and below I note briefly a similar feature in relation to the level D, discourse and practice. It is equally true that "real relation" names (eg. social-labour, capital, interest, surplus-value profit) or discursive tendencies (eg. creating another element, an idea) Marx's theory is dialectical. It is a theory of totality. Both the nature of the components and that of the relations between them are thus drastically different.
The massive, powerful presence of mystification secreted by man in the course of his social production and consumption, in its extremely diverse visual, linguistic and institutional forms is ultimately most effectively contained in the penultimate instance by?) the spontaneous categories of the forms of representation of social life. But clearly many mediations and many local specificities would have to be taken into account in any convoluted analysis of some of the more elaborate or bizarre forms of ideological discourse (religions, moralities, philosophical systems etc). Also we would have to know in any particular case what the spontaneous face to face level (the level of instincts and the inarticulate) is like, or the role of any other possible form that may be interacting with the spontaneous face to face level, etc. This is why a more precise and more complete analysis of ideology is a prerequisite for any adequate analysis of social life. (Lenin What is to be Done? p 27)

...quoted in Lenin What is to be Done? p 27

It would not be possible to account further for the nature of the relationship between the subject and the reality that she describes without the application of the full resources of philosophy. The level of ideological discourse (religions, moralities, philosophical systems etc) must be entirely set aside in order to begin to account for the nature of the relationship between the subject and the reality that she describes. This is why an analysis of ideology is necessary for any adequate analysis of social life.


(38) E.P. Thompson art. cit. p345.


Might jeopardize gains accumulated at such cost. Each assertion of working-class influence within the bourgeois-democratic state machinery, simultaneously involved the ideologues (members of the ideologues) in the running of the machine,...


(38) quoted in Lenin What is to be Done? p 27


Conclusion

It would not be possible to account further for the nature of the relationship between the subject and the reality that she describes without the application of the full resources of philosophy. The level of ideological discourse (religions, moralities, philosophical systems etc) must be entirely set aside in order to begin to account for the nature of the relationship between the subject and the reality that she describes. This is why an analysis of ideology is necessary for any adequate analysis of social life.