

# On the theory of ideology

## (the politics of Althusser)

Jacques Rancière

*'Certainly it is an interesting event we are dealing with: the putrescence of the absolute spirit'*  
(Marx: German Ideology Part 1)

'All the mysteries which lead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the understanding of that practice'. For a long time the main mystery as far as we were concerned was this sentence itself. We gave it a not unmystical solution: like the young theologians of Tübingen seminary, scouring the undergrowth to discover new 'faculties', we would multiply 'practices', each endowed with specific laws. In the forefront of course lay theoretical practice, containing the principles of its own verification. This was how we interpreted the question - the more so as its own opponents could only counter it with a practice reduced to its own invocation in the name of 'praxis'.

In May 1968 things were thrown brutally into relief. When the class struggle broke out openly in the universities, the status of the Theoretical came to be challenged, no longer by the endless verbiage of praxis and the concrete, but by the reality of a mass ideological revolt. From this on, no 'Marxist' discourse could continue to get by on the mere affirmation of its own rigour. The class struggle, which put the bourgeois system of knowledge at issue, posed all of us the question of our ultimate political significance, of our revolutionary or counter-revolutionary character.

In this conjuncture, the political significance of Althusserianism was shown to be quite different from what we had thought. Not only did the Althusserian theoretical presuppositions prevent us from understanding the political meaning of the student revolt. But further, within a year we saw Althusserianism serving the hacks of revisionism in a theoretical justification for the 'anti-leftist' offensive and the defence of academic knowledge. What we had previously chosen to ignore thus became clear: the link between the Althusserian interpretation of Marx and revisionist politics was not simply a dubious coexistence, but an effective political and theoretical solidarity.

The following remarks seek to indicate the point in the Althusserian reading where this interdependence is established; namely, the theory of ideology.

## The analysis of ideology

The specificity of the Althusserian theory of ideology can be summarised in two basic theses:

- 1 In all societies - whether divided into classes or not - ideology has a common principal function: to ensure the cohesion of the social whole by regulating the relation of individuals to their tasks.

This article was originally published in Spanish in Saul Karz et al: *Lectura de Althusser* (Buenos Aires 1970). The afterword (printed on p10 below) and additional footnotes, were added for the French edition, published by *L'Homme et la Société* in 1973. A very slightly different version of the present translation, by Martin Jordin, was published by *Partisan* in 1973.

- 2 Ideology is the opposite of science.

The critical function of thesis 1 is clear: it is directed against ideologies of 'de-alienation' according to which the end of the capitalist alienation would be the end of the mystification of consciousness, the advent of a world where the relations of man to nature and of man to man would be perfectly transparent - in a certain sense, the Pauline transition from the indistinct perception in the mirror to direct perception. Against these ideologies of transparency, Althusser sets the necessary opacity of every social structure to its agents. Ideology is present in every social totality by virtue of the determination of this totality by its structure. To this there corresponds a general function: supplying the system of representations which allow the agents of the social totality to accomplish the tasks determined by this structure.

*In a society without classes, just as in a class society, ideology has the function of securing the bond between men in the ensemble of the forms of their existence, the relation of individuals to their tasks fixed by the social structure.*<sup>1</sup>

So the concept of ideology can be defined in its generality, before the concept of class struggle intervenes. To some extent, the class struggle will subsequently 'overdetermine'<sup>2</sup> the principal function of ideology.

We would like to examine how this thesis is established and how it is articulated with the second in a particularly explicit text:

*Ideology, in class societies, is a representation of the real, but a necessarily false one because it is necessarily aligned and tendentious - and it is tendentious because its goal is not to give men objective knowledge of the social system in which they live, but on the contrary to give them a mystified representation of this social system in order to keep them in their 'place' in the system of class exploitation. Of course, it is also necessary to pose the problem of ideology's function in a society without classes - and this would then be resolved by showing that the deformation of ideology is socially necessary as a function of the very nature of the social whole: more specifically, as a function of its determination by its structure which renders this social whole opaque to the individuals who occupy a place in it determined by this structure. The representation of the world indispensable to social cohesion is necessarily mythical, owing to the opacity of the social structure. In class societies, this principal function of ideology still exists, but is dominated by the additional social function imposed on it by the existence of class divisions. This additional function thus by far outweighs the first. If we want to be exhaustive, if we want to take these two principles of necessary deformation into account, we must say that in a class society ideology is necessarily distorting and mystifying, both because it is made distorting by the opacity of society's determination by the structure, and because it is made distorting by the existence of class divisions.*<sup>3</sup>

Our first problem is the nature of the concepts put forward to define the general function of ideology: the notion of 'social cohesion' echoes the formula used above - 'the bond between men in the ensemble of the forms of their existence'. Is this 'bond' or 'cohesion' of the 'social whole' really the province of Marxist analysis? How, after having proclaimed that the whole history of mankind is that of the class struggle, can it define

functions like : *securing social cohesion in general?* Isn't it precisely because Marxist theory has nothing to say on this subject, that we have shifted our ground and moved onto that of a Comtean or Durkheimian type sociology, which actually does concern itself with the systems of representation that secure or break up the cohesion of the social group? Isn't it this phantasm of 'the social group' which is outlined here in Althusser's analysis? We can see an index of this displacement in the status Althusser here accords religion:

*In primitive societies where classes do not exist, one can already verify the existence of this bond, and it is not accidental if it has been possible to see the reality of this bond in the first general form of ideology, religion (It is one of the possible etymologies of the word religion).<sup>4</sup>*

By inverting the analysis we can pose this question: when ideology is conceived in general, before conceiving the class struggle, it is not necessarily conceived on the model of the traditional analysis of relation - that of a sociology which has inherited the metaphysical discourse on society?<sup>4a</sup> The superimposition of two functions of ideology (maintenance of social cohesion in general; and exercise of class domination) could thus mean the coexistence of two heterogeneous conceptual systems: that of historical materialism and that of a bourgeois sociology of the Durkheimian type. The particular trick of Althusser is to transform this coexistence into an articulation, which implies a double subversion:

- 1 Ideology is first defined not on the terrain of Marxism but on that of a general sociology (theory of the social whole in general). Marxist theory is then superimposed on this *sociological* theory of ideology as a theory of an over-determination proper to class societies. The concepts defining the function of ideology in a class society will therefore depend on concepts from this general sociology.
- 2 But the level of this general sociology is itself claimed to be a level of the Marxist theory of ideology, despite the fact that Marxism has nothing to say about it. This reverses the process: the analysis of the alleged general function of ideology will be made on the basis of the concepts and analyses by which Marxist theory has thought the function of ideology in class societies. Marxist concepts defining class societies will be used to define society in general.

The mechanics of this subversion are clearly revealed when Althusser describes the double determination of ideology in class societies:

*In a class society, ideology is necessarily distorting and mystifying, both because it is made distorting by the opacity of society's determination by the structure, and because it is made distorting by the existence of class divisions. (p.31)*

What is this structure, the level of which is here distinguished from that of the class divisions? In Marxist terms, the determination of a social totality by its structure means its determination by the relations of production characterising a dominant mode of production. But by relations of production are meant the social forms of appropriation of the means of production, which are class forms of appropriation. Capitalist relations of production exhibit the class opposition between those who possess the means of production and those who sell their labour power. The distinction of the two levels disregards the fact that the level of the 'structure' is strictly the level of a class relation.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of fetishism demonstrates this point very clearly. It is not enough in fact to say that fetishism is the manifestation-dissimulation of the relations of production (as I did in *Lire le Capital*). What fetishism conceals in a specific manner is the antagonistic character of the relations of production: the opposition 'Capital/Labour' disappears in the juxtaposition of the sources of revenue. The structure is not simply concealed because, like Heraclitan nature, it likes to hide. It disguises its *contradictory* nature, and this contradiction is a class contradiction. So the manifestation/dissimulation of the structure does not imply an opacity of the 'social structure in general': it is the effectivity of the relations of production; that is, of the class opposition 'labourers/non-labourers' which characterise all societies. Extended beyond class societies, this effectivity of the structure becomes a completely undetermined concept - or alternatively, it is determined by standing in for a traditional figure of metaphysics: the evil genius or the cunning of reason.

## Ideology and struggle

The distinction made between two levels of ideological disguise is thus highly problematic. It clearly functions by *analogy* with the Marxist analysis of the two-fold nature of every production process (the labour-process in general, and the socially determined process of production). But the analogy is clearly illegitimate. By transferring the law of the last instance to the superstructures, by making the effects reproduce the law of the cause, it posits the social whole as a totality of levels each of which expresses the same law. It is easy to see the absurdity that would result from applying the same principle to the analysis of the political superstructure. The 'social totality in general' could be said to require the existence of a political superstructure and the general functions of a State be defined before the class struggle. This comparison of ours is more than a mere joke: ideology for Althusser is quite capable of possessing the same status as that conferred on the State by classical metaphysical thought. And his analysis is capable of reinstating the myth of an ideological state of nature - a myth whose theoretical and political meaning we must now make clear.

Firstly, it marks the irrevocable consequence of distinguishing two levels. Ideology is not seen from the start as the site of a struggle. It is not related to two antagonists but to a totality of which it forms a natural element:

*It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life.<sup>6</sup>*

To put the myths of origins (or ends) in the restrictive form of 'as if' is a standard act of philosophical modesty, perfected in Kant; and this is not the only time we shall come across Althusser's Kantianism. In the traditional 'as if', ideas of origin protect their political function of concealing division. Ideology will thus not be established as the site of a division, but as a totality unified by its relation to its referent (the social whole). At the same time, the analysis of the second level will not be that of the ideological forms of the class struggle, but that of the 'overdetermination of Ideology (in the singular) by the class divisions. One will speak of the ideology of a class society, not of class ideologies. Only at the end of the analysis is the division of ideology into 'tendencies'<sup>7</sup> admitted. But at this stage of the analysis, introducing the division is no longer any use: ideology, not having been initially posited as the field of a struggle, will in the meantime have surreptitiously

become one of the participants in the struggle. The class struggle in ideology, forgotten at the start, reappears in a chimerical, fetishised form as a class struggle between ideology (weapon of the ruling class) and science (weapon of the ruled class).

Before commenting on them in detail, let us indicate the stages in this logic of forgetfulness:

- 1 Ideology is a system of representations controlling, in all societies, the relation of individuals to the tasks fixed by the structure of the social whole.
- 1a This system of representations is thus not a system of knowledge. On the contrary, it is the system of illusions necessary to the historical subjects.
- 2 In a class society, ideology acquires a supplementary function of keeping individuals in the place determined by the class domination.
- 3 The principle which undermines this domination hence belongs to ideology's opposite, i.e. science.

The stratagem involved in this proof is that which articulates the function of ideology with the domination of a class.

*Ideology, in class societies, is a representation of the real, but a necessarily false one because it is necessarily aligned and tendentious - and it is tendentious because its goal is not to give men objective knowledge of the social system in which they live, but on the contrary, to give them a mystified representation of this social system in order to keep them in their 'place' in the system of class exploitation.<sup>8</sup>*

By articulating two theses (ideology as the opposite of knowledge; ideology in the service of a class) which were previously only juxtaposed, Althusser exposes the mechanism which, at a deeper level, ties them together: ideology is a false representation because it does not give knowledge. And it does not give knowledge because it is in the service of the ruling class. But what ideology is involved here? Would the ideology of the dominated class have the function of keeping the exploited 'in their place' in the system of class exploitation? What is defined here as a function of *Ideology*, is the function of the *dominant* ideology. To conceive of a general function of ideology, Althusser has to present the domination of an ideology as the domination of ideology. The trick has been played: the general function of ideology will be said to be exercised to the profit of a class domination, and the function of undermining this domination will be conferred on the Other of Ideology, that is, on Science. The initial suppression of the class struggle leads to a particularly interesting game of theoretical hide-and-seek. The 'Ideology/Science' couple proceeds to reintroduce the class struggle. But the latter also comes to the assistance of the 'Science/Ideology' opposition - ideology had at first only been posited as *other than science*; by being articulated with class domination, with the radical opposition 'ruling class/ruled class', this *other than science* has become the Other of Science. Difference has become contradiction.

What has taken place but the very process by which metaphysics was established and which it has consistently repeated throughout its history: the process which answers the old problem of the *Sophist* - how, in the figure of the Other, to conceive difference as contradiction?<sup>9</sup> That here Marxism serves to accomplish this necessary yet impossible task of philosophy, is something we will have to come back to. It is enough for the moment to point out the significance of the displacement which has taken place in the conception of ideology. Ideology is firstly an instance of the social whole. As such, it is articulated with other instances, not confronted with any opposite. It is within itself that the oppositions that concern it are determined:

above all that which opposes the ideology of one class to the ideology of another. Given this, how can the 'Ideology/Science' couple become the pertinent opposition with which to grasp ideology? By a process which detaches ideology from the system of instances, and erases the main division of the ideological field to create a space in Marxist theory which it then shares out between science and ideology. The functioning of the 'Science/Ideology' opposition depends on the re-establishment of a space homologous to that which the whole metaphysical tradition assumes by opposing Science to its Other; thus supposing the closure of a universe of discourse, divided into the realms of the true and the false, into the world of Science and that of its Other (opinion, error, illusion, etc.). If one fails to grasp that ideology is fundamentally the site of a struggle, of a class struggle, it immediately slips into this place determined by the history of metaphysics: the place of the Other of Science.

## Teachers and students

We have so far shown only the general form of this displacement. We will now specify its functioning, by showing how this 'Science/Ideology' couple works in a political analysis. To do this we will use two of Althusser's texts: the article 'Problèmes Etudiants'<sup>10</sup>, and the text 'Marxism and Humanism'<sup>11</sup>. Both in fact are devoted to deducing the political consequences of the theory of ideology.

The article 'Problèmes Etudiants' was an intervention in the conflict that had arisen between the French Communist Party's (PCF) theses on the university, and the theses then dominant in the National Union of French Students (UNEF). The latter aimed at opposing the simply 'quantitative' demands of the PCF (increase in the number of universities, of staff etc.) with a 'qualitative' questioning of the teaching situation, conceived, through the concept of alienation, as analogous to a class relation. Althusser's intervention was meant to draw the real lines of demarcation which should serve as the basis for the political and trade union action of the student movement. So what is involved is not so much an article rising out of the immediate struggle, as the strict consequences of the Althusserian theory of ideology - consequences that have since provided the framework, whether admitted or not, of the revisionist analysis of the university.

The principle of the article is to shift the line of class division from the teacher/student relation (where it had been drawn by the UNEF theorists) to the content of the knowledge taught. The dividing line does not cut across the transmission of knowledge between teacher and student; it lies in the very content of knowledge, between science and ideology. Althusser's argument involves a whole system of implications which we think it useful to state explicitly at this point.

Althusser bases himself on the distinction between the technical and social division of labour:

*What are the Marxist theoretical principles which should and can intervene in the scientific analysis of the University? ... Above all the Marxist concepts of the technical division and the social division of labour. Marx has applied these principles in the analysis of capitalist society. They are valid for the analysis of every human society (in the sense of a social formation based on a determinate mode of production). These principles are a fortiori valid for a particular social reality like the university, which, for various essential reasons, belongs to every modern society, whether capitalist, socialist or communist.<sup>12</sup>*

A first reading reveals the same mechanism that was at work in the analysis of ideology: suppression of the class struggle, and its replacement by the generality of a function necessary to the social

whole. But the concepts here require particular attention. Althusser says he is undertaking to apply the Marxist concepts of technical and social division of labour. But these concepts are in no way given as such in Marx's analysis. This analysis demonstrates the two-fold nature of every production process, depending on whether one considers it as the labour process in general, or as a socially defined process of production, reproducing the relations of production which determine it. While a distinction between 'technical division' and 'social division' of labour can be deduced from this analysis, it is not a real distinction but a mere formal distinction corresponding to two ways of conceptualising the same process. Technical division and social division are two aspects of a single division. The functions which ensure the technical reproduction of the process are the same as those which determine its social reproduction.

Now Althusser employs the distinction as a real distinction of places and functions which correspond respectively to one or other of the divisions. Thus 'the technical division of labor corresponds to all the "posts" of labour, whose existence is exclusively accounted for by the technical necessities defining a mode of production at a given moment of its development in a given society', while the social division 'has the function of ensuring that the labour process of this society continues in the same forms of the class divisions and of the domination of one class over the others'. (p.84).

## Technical and social division of labour

Formulated in this way the distinction is enigmatic: how is one to define exclusively technical necessities in a mode of production, which would be independent of its complete social character; independent, that is, of the reproduction of the social relations of production which determine this? And conversely, does not the 'technical' functioning of the process of production already imply the reproduction of the relations of production, and hence the reproduction of the forms of the class divisions and of class domination?

To resolve the enigma, we must once more reverse the argument. The technical division of labour is supposed to throw light on the function of the university. In fact, it is the status accorded the university which will enlighten us as to the function of the concept 'technical division of labour'. Althusser tells us that the university 'for various essential reasons, belongs to every modern society, whether capitalist, socialist or communist' (p83). So the technical division of labour, which at first seemed to correspond to the requirements of a determinate mode of production now corresponds to the technical necessities of a 'modern' society; i.e. in Marxist terms, of a society having reached a certain level of development of the productive forces. The distinction is thus defined in the following way: the technical division of labour corresponds to a specific, given level of development of the productive forces; the social division to the reproduction of the relations of production of a determinate mode of production.

It all works 'as if' a certain number of necessary places and functions of a modern society in general could be defined exclusively in terms of the level of development of the productive forces. A conclusion which will not fail to surprise the reader of Althusser. Hasn't he elsewhere devoted all his energy to freeing the Marxist theory of history from every ideology that views it in terms of evolution and linear development? Doesn't the 'modernity' he now proposes absolutely contradict such an attempt? To explain what this contradiction means, we must ask what is at stake here politically. The significance of Althusser's backsliding is clear: following in his steps, one is led to attribute to the technical division of labour - i.e. to the objective requirements of science or 'modern' rationality - that which belongs to the social forms of the

capitalist mode of production.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of the technical division of labour appears, then, to be merely the justification for revisionist slogans based on notions of 'the real needs of the nation', 'the real needs of the economy', 'modernisation', etc. We know that the PCF has replaced the Marxist dialectic with a type of eclecticism resembling Proudhon's which distinguishes the good and the bad side of things. The revolutionary necessity to destroy the bourgeois relations of production in order to free the productive forces, is reduced for the PCF to the job of suppressing the bad (the domination of the monopolies) to preserve and advance the good (the forms of the 'technical division of labour' corresponding to the requirements of every 'modern' society). But since Marx, we know that the 'real' needs of society always serve to mask the interests of a class; in this case, they mask the interests of the class which the PCF tends increasingly to represent: the labour aristocracy and the intellectual cadres.<sup>13a</sup> The functioning of the concept 'technical division of labour' succeeds in justifying revisionist ideology in its two complementary aspects: a theory of 'objective needs' and a defence of the hierarchy of 'skills'.

The backsliding and the contradictions noted in the passage are explained as follows: Althusser has simply moved from the terrain of Marxist theory to that of its opposite, the opportunist ideology of revisionism. This displacement of Marxist analysis onto the ground of an eclecticism of the good and bad side is not new to us: it describes the same movement as that which shifted the theory of ideology towards a second dual relationship - that established by metaphysics between Science and its Other. The core of Althusserianism undoubtedly lies in this articulation of the spontaneous discourse of metaphysics with revisionist ideology - an articulation that is perfectly demonstrated in the development of Althusser's argument: the distinction between the technical division and the social division is expressed in Universities as a distinction between science and ideology. In other words, the theory of ideology, the foundations of which seemed problematic, is now grounded on the theory of the double justification of labour. But since this last is nothing but the scholarly justification for revisionism, the theory of ideology here proclaims its political basis. Marxist theory at first acted as a solution to a problem within metaphysics; this problematic, in its turn, acts in the service of revisionist ideology - a movement that the analysis of knowledge will make explicit:

*It is in the knowledge taught in the university that the permanent dividing-line of the technical division and the social division of labour exists, the most reliable and profound line of class division. (p89)*

The strategem is made perfectly plain here: the science/ideology distinction is what allows the technical/social division to pass for a line of class division; which means that in Althusser's discourse, metaphysics arranges the promotion of revisionist ideology to the rank of Marxist theory. It is only through this arrangement that Althusser's thesis retains its 'obviousness'. In fact, it implies a double distortion: the first, already noted, concerns the status of ideology. The second bears on the effectivity of science, which is alleged to be automatically on the side of the revolution:

*It is not accidental if, in every matter, a reactionary or 'technocratic' bourgeois government prefers half-truths, and if, on the other hand, the revolutionary cause is always indissolubly linked to rigorous knowledge, that is, to science.<sup>14</sup>*

We in turn will suggest that it is not accidental.

if Althusser's thesis appears here in its inverted form. It is both necessary for Althusser's argument, and impossible, without revealing what underlies it, to state in its direct form the thesis according to which scientific knowledge is intrinsically subversive of bourgeois domination. Such a problematic thesis is only comprehensible through a process of extension which takes Marx's theses on scientific socialism and turns them to its own advantage outside their proper field. It is clear that the liberation of the proletariat is impossible without the theory of the conditions of this liberation; that is, without the Marxist science of social formation. The bond uniting the revolutionary cause and scientific knowledge is guaranteed in this case by their common object. But one has no right to then impute a revolutionary character to science in general. In any case, it is enough to apply this thesis to the reality of the teaching of science in order to see its inanity. The bulk of the courses given in medical schools or the big Colleges of Science undoubtedly have a perfectly valid scientific content. If this education has an obvious reactionary function, it is not simply because the sciences are taught there in a positivist way, but because of the very structure of this education: the type of institution; selection mechanisms; relations between students and staff, the latter being both the possessors of a certain knowledge and members of the social hierarchy (cf. the role of consultants in medicine). The dominance of the bourgeoisie and of its ideology is not expressed in the content of the knowledge but in the structure of the environment in which it is transmitted. The scientific nature of the knowledge in no way affects the class content of the education. Science does not stand confronted by ideology as its other; it resides within institutions and in those forms of transmission where the ideological dominance of the bourgeoisie is manifested.

'At least,' it will be said. 'the second element of the thesis is confirmed: ideology reinforces the power of the bourgeoisie - witness the role played by the "human sciences".' But the problem is badly posed. These disciplines owe their role to the fact that they constitute the place in the system of knowledge where the confrontations of the class struggle are most directly reflected. So the problem is not that of their more or less 'ideological' nature, but of the nature of the ideology which is transmitted in them. The psychology, sociology, law or political economy taught in higher education do not have a reactionary function because they, wholly or in part, lack scientificity, but because they spread the ideology of the bourgeoisie. The point is not whether they belong to 'ideology', but whether they belong to *bourgeois* ideology. The task of revolutionaries is not to confront them with the requirements of scientificity, nor to appeal from these pseudo-sciences to the ideal scientificity of mathematics or physics. It is to oppose bourgeois ideologies with the proletarian ideology of Marxism-Leninism.

The most elementary concrete analysis of the university institution reveals the metaphysical nature of Althusser's division. The 'Science/Ideology' couple is nowhere to be found in the analysis of the university, where we are concerned with the ideology of the ruling class, not with 'ideology'. And the ideology of the ruling class is not simply - let us even say, not essentially - expressed in such and such a content of knowledge, but in the very division of knowledge, the forms in which it is appropriated, the institution of the university as such. The existence of bourgeois ideology is not in the discourse of some ideologue, or in the system of the students' spontaneous notions, but in the division between disciplines, the examination system, the organisation of departments - everything which embodies the bourgeois hierarchy of knowledge. Ideology is not in fact a collection of discourses or a system of ideas. It is not what

Althusser, in a significant expression, calls an 'atmosphere'. The dominant ideology is a power organised in a number of institutions (the system of knowledge, the media system etc). Because Althusser thinks in the classical terms of metaphysics, those of a theory of the *imaginary* (conceived as a system of notions separating the subject from the truth), he completely misses this point. The result is a complete distortion of ideological struggle, which comes to have the function of putting science where ideology was before. This means opposing bourgeois academic discourse with a Marxist academic discourse; which in turn means opposing the 'spontaneous' and 'petty-bourgeois' ideology of the students with the scientific rigour of Marxism, incarnated in the wisdom of the Central Committee. The struggle of science against ideology is, in fact, a struggle in the service of bourgeois ideology, a struggle which reinforces two crucial bastions: the system of knowledge and revisionist ideology.

There is no ideology in the University which could be the Other of science. Nor is there a science which could be the Other of ideology. The University does not teach 'science' in the mythical purity of its essence, but a selection of scientific knowledges articulated into *objects of knowledge*. The transmission of scientific knowledges does not proceed from the concept of science. It forms part of the *forms of appropriation* of scientific knowledge and these are *class* forms of appropriation. Scientific theories are transmitted through a system of discourse, traditions and institutions which constitute the very existence of bourgeois ideology. In other words, the relation of science to ideology is not one of rupture but of articulation. The dominant ideology is not the shadowy Other of the pure light of Science, it is the very space in which scientific knowledges are inscribed, and in which they are articulated as elements of a social formation's knowledge. It is in the forms of the dominant ideology that a scientific theory becomes an object of knowledge.<sup>14a</sup>

The concept of knowledge, in fact, is not that of a content which can be either science or ideology. Knowledge is a system in which the 'contents' cannot be conceived outside their forms of appropriation (acquisition, transmission, control, utilisation). The system is that of the ideological dominance of a class. It is not 'science' or 'ideology'. In it are articulated the class appropriation of science and the ideology of the ruling class. There is no more a class division in knowledge than there is in the State. Knowledge has no institutional existence other than as an instrument of class rule. It is not characterised by an interior division reproducing that which exists between the classes - on the contrary, its characteristics are determined by the dominance of a class. So the system of knowledge is, like State power, the stake in a class struggle, and, like State power, must be destroyed. The University is not the site of a class division, but the objective of a proletarian struggle. To transform this objective into the neutral site of a division, is quite simply to conceal the class struggle. Having finally managed to grasp that there is not a bourgeois science and a proletarian science, it is thought possible to infer that science is intrinsically proletarian, or, at the very least, that it is an area of peaceful co-existence. But if science itself, at the level of its proof, cannot be bourgeois or proletarian, the constitution of scientific knowledge as objects of knowledge, and the mode of their social appropriation, certainly can be. There is not a bourgeois science and a proletarian science. There is a bourgeois knowledge and a proletarian knowledge.

## The function of teaching

The heart of Marxism is concrete analysis of a concrete situation. Now it is clear that the 'Science/Ideology' opposition is unfit for such an

analysis, class providing no more than a repetition of the classic dichotomy of metaphysics. It draws an imaginary line of class divisions for no other reason than to ignore class struggle as it really exists.<sup>15</sup> Althusser's misconception of the function of knowledge, and of the struggle which takes it as an objective, rests on this primary suppression. The position of the political having been misunderstood, it can only reappear in the wrong place; hidden in the alleged neutrality of the technical division of labour, or shifted into the hypothetical revolutionary function of science. We have already seen what the 'technical division of labour' represented. It remains to look more closely at what the concept of science represents, what gives it the specific function of concealing the class struggle. To do this we must examine the second central thesis in Althusser's argument, the thesis defining the function of teaching:

*The function of teaching is to transmit a determinate knowledge to subjects who do not possess this knowledge. The teaching situation thus rests on the absolute condition of an inequality between a knowledge and a non-knowledge.* (p90)

One can see the logic which articulates this thesis with the previous one. The first indicated the real line of class division: science/ideology. The present thesis exposes the false dividing line: teaching/taught. The teaching relation has the function of transmitting knowledge to those who do not possess it. It is hence based exclusively on the technical division of labour. The two theses complement each other, but absolutely contradict each other as well. For the first presents knowledge as determined by the difference between science and ideology, whereas the second suppresses every determination other than the opposition of knowledge to non-knowledge, of the full to the empty. The dividing line had been drawn solely between the concepts 'science' and 'ideology'. It is obliterated as soon as the reality of the teaching function comes into play. Althusser declares that students 'very often risk alienating the good will of their teachers who are unjustly held in suspicion over the validity of their knowledge which is considered superfluous' (p94). But didn't the science/ideology distinction precisely imply the deepest and most justifiable suspicion towards the knowledge of the teachers? To remove that suspicion, it is necessary to give knowledge the status of science. This means making the relation of science to non-science intervene a second time, not now in the shape of error (science/ideology) but in that of ignorance (knowledge/non-knowledge). The concept of science now appears in its true light: the science/ideology distinction ultimately had no other function than to justify the pure being of knowledge - more accurately, to justify the eminent dignity of the possessors of knowledge. To understand this reversal of quality into quantity, we must here again recognise the voice of the revisionist prompter: what is required is an education 'of quality', 'of a high cultural level'. As far as the teachers are concerned, in their double role of scholars and wage-earners they are objective allies of the working class. So in whose interest would it be to criticise them, if not that of provocateurs in the pay of the bourgeoisie? It is not accidental if etc etc ...

But it would be wrong to see Althusser's discourse as a simple piece of hack-work in the service of revisionism. On the contrary, its interest lies in the fact that it reproduces the spontaneous discourse of metaphysics, the traditional position of philosophy with respect to knowledge. A position that Althusser indicates, while at the same time concealing it; when he defines philosophy as follows:

*Philosophy represents politics in the domain of theory, or to be more precise: with the sciences - and vice-versa, philosophy represents scientificity in politics, with the classes engaged in the class struggle.*<sup>16</sup>

Althusser's thesis fails to recognise that this double representation - of the scientific with the political, and of the political with the scientific - already exists precisely in knowledge. Knowledge constitutes the system of appropriation of scientific conceptions to the profit of a class. Now it is a notable fact that philosophy has been established and developed in a definite relation to knowledge, but without ever recognising its class nature. So when Plato attacks the Sophists, or Descartes scholasticism, their criticism functions largely as a criticism of knowledge: that is, not simply as criticism of an erroneous discourse, but of a certain social and political power. But even when they grasp the properly political dimensions of this knowledge (Plato), they cannot attain to the level of the cause; that is to say, to the articulation of knowledge with the rule of a class. Unable to see knowledge as the system of the ideological dominance of a class, they are reduced to criticising the effects of this system. Philosophy thus develops as a criticism of false knowledge in the name of true knowledge (Science), or of the empirical diversity of knowledge in the name of the unity of science. The criticism of knowledge, failing to recognise its class function, is made in the name of an Ideal of Science, in a discourse which separates the realm of science from that of false knowledge (opinion, illusion etc). The opposition of Science and its Other has the function of misconceiving the class nature of knowledge. And the discourse of metaphysics propagates this misconception inasmuch as it presents itself as a discourse on science; i.e. as a discourse asking the question: what constitutes the scientificity of science? The act of modesty characteristic of the 'epistemological' tradition to which Althusser returns, consists in believing that this question is produced at the very request of science. Thus for Althusser, a new science (Greek mathematics, Galilean physics etc) would call for a discourse defining the forms of its scientificity (Plato, Descartes etc). Isn't this to play the question at its own game? In fact, the question can only actually exist in order not to pose the question: what is the basis of knowledge? So it is not produced at the demand of Science (even if, in fact, it voices this demand) but by knowledge's concealment of itself.<sup>17</sup>

Philosophy thus traditionally practices a critique of knowledge which is simultaneously a denegation<sup>18</sup> of knowledge (i.e. of the class struggle). Its position can be described as an irony towards knowledge, which it puts in question without ever touching its foundations. The questioning of knowledge in philosophy always ends in its restoration: a movement the great philosophers consistently expose in each other. Thus Hegel criticises Cartesian doubt, which only results in re-establishing the authority of everything it pretended to reject. Feuerbach isolates the same pretence in the Hegelian 'path of despair'. 'The non-knowledge of the idea was only an ironic non-knowledge'. And this is what we rediscover in Althusser: the line of division is scarcely drawn before it is erased. Doubt about knowledge only existed the better to establish the authority of a knowledge elevated finally to the rank of science.

In repeating this manoeuvre, Althusser reveals its political significance, clearly showing what is at issue: the status of the possessors of knowledge. Any serious doubt about the content of knowledge vanishes the moment the question of its subject is raised, the moment that the very existence of a group possessing knowledge is at stake. Here again, there is an evident homology with that classic philosophical figure, of which the Cartesian *cogito* provides a model illustration: the challenging of the object of knowledge aims at confirming its subject. Doubt about the object is only the obverse of the certainty of the subject. It is precisely this contradiction which gives philosophy its status: philosophy is constructed against the power of the false possessors of knowledge, or more accurately, of the possessors of false knowledge (sophists, theologians etc). But it cannot go so far as to put at issue the very existence of know-

ledge as the instrument of a class. So against the object of false knowledge, it invokes the subject of true knowledge; which means, in the final analysis, strengthening the grounds for dominance of those possessing (true) knowledge, and hence justifying class domination. This passage from the object of false knowledge to the subject of true knowledge would consequently correspond to the political demand of a class excluded from power, lending this demand the form of universality. (The Cartesian 'good sense'.) This movement has ultimately no other end than reinforcing the privileged position of the possessors of knowledge - a form of class rule.<sup>17b</sup>

The Althusserian theory of ideology describes this same movement, and we now see how the spontaneous discourse of metaphysics comes to be articulated with revisionist ideology. Only one more mediation is required for this: Althusser's *academic ideology*. In it, the spontaneous discourse of metaphysics assumes the function of justifying the teachers, the possessors and purveyors of bourgeois knowledge (knowledge which includes academic Marxism). Speaking in their name, defending their authority, Althusser quite naturally adopts the class position expressed in revisionist ideology - that of the labour aristocracy and the cadres. The spontaneous discourse of metaphysics is thus the necessary mediation enabling Althusser to recognise his own class position in that expressed by revisionism. This convergence is located in the question of knowledge and the defence of academic authority. At this point, the Althusserian theory of ideology functions as the theory of an imaginary class struggle to the profit of a real class collaboration, that of revisionism. The transformation of Marxism into opportunism is complete.

## The analysis of humanist ideology

This concealment of the class struggle reveals its most profound effects in the analysis of humanist ideology<sup>18</sup>; an analysis produced to answer the question: what is the function of the humanist ideology currently proclaimed in the USSR? To answer this question; that is to say, in fact, *not to pose it*. For the only way of posing it would be to enquire as to its class meaning - instead of which we find it subsumed under another, more general question, and one whose answer is already laid out beforehand: since the USSR is a classless society, all we have to do is to apply the theory of ideology minus that which deals with the exercise of class rule. We know all too well what is left: namely, that ideology is not science, and that it enables men to live their relation to their conditions of existence. Socialist humanism thus designates a collection of new problems without giving a strict knowledge of them. And what are these problems? Precisely those of a classless society:

*In fact, the themes of socialist humanism designate the existence of real problems: new historical, economic, political, and ideological problems that the Stalinist period kept in the shade, but still produced while producing socialism - problems in the forms of economic, political and cultural organisation that correspond to the level of development attained by socialism's productive forces; problems of the new form of individual development for a new period of history in which the State will no longer take charge, coercively, of the leadership or control of the destiny of each individual, in which from now on each man will objectively have the choice, that is, the difficult task, of becoming by himself what he is. The themes of socialist humanism (free development of the individual, respect for socialist legality, dignity of the person etc), are the way the Soviets and other socialists are living the relation between themselves and these problems,<sup>19</sup> that is, the conditions in which they are posed.*

We have three elements in this text: firstly, a series of very general remarks about the transition

from a class society to a classless society; namely, that this transition poses a certain number of economic, political, ideological problems etc. Secondly, some generalities concerning the function of ideology with which we are by now quite familiar. And finally, in the hide-and-seek played by these two generalities, the absent object which was going to be analysed - the reality of the Soviet Union. But the absence of this reality is due to the solid presence of its image. What in fact is this 'new' reality which Althusser believes must explain the new recourse to an old ideology? Nothing but the image which Soviet society presents of itself; or to be more precise, which the governing class presents of it: 'a new period of history in which the State will no longer take charge, *coercively*, of the leadership or control the destiny of each individual...', 'a world without economic exploitation, without violence, without discrimination...' etc. The 'explanation' of the Soviet humanist ideology is really only its reduplication. The whole chicanery of the theory of ideology ends in this naivety which destroys any analysis of ideology before it has begun: an ideological discourse is taken to be the adequate expression of what it purports to express; the discourse which claims to be that of a classless society is taken at its word. It is clear that this reduplication is not a superfluous act, since it strengthens the effect this discourse inevitably has: that of concealing the class struggle in the assertion that it has been superceded.

The circularity of the analysis also closes the circle of the Althusserian theory of ideology, which returns here to its starting point. This return must be understood in two senses. On the one hand, the 'concrete' analysis of ideology in a classless society brings us back to the generalities dealing with the function of ideology in general. The theory offers its own repetition as the analysis of its object. But on the other hand, the political significance of the theory is shown up in its encounter with the object which it is its precise function not to think. Revisionism is not simply the object that the Althusserian discourse conceals or hesitates to think; it is strictly its *unthought*, the political condition of its theoretical functioning. While Althusser claims to be explaining soviet ideology, it would seem to be much more revisionism which explains and founds the Althusserian theory of ideology. A theory which posits, even before the existence of classes, the necessity of a function for ideology - is it not the expression, the interpretation, of a politics which claims to have got beyond classes?

If the Althusserian theory of ideology ends with this theoretical suicide, it is precisely on account of the prohibition which prevents it from thinking of ideological discourses as discourses of the class struggle, and only allow it to relate them to their 'social function' and their non-scientificity. So the critique of humanism leaves its object intact, since it cannot conceive it other than by reference to the scientificity from which it is excluded. The concept of man is that of a false subject of history, a new form of the idealist subject (spirit, consciousness, *cogito*, or absolute knowledge). Such a critique leaves aside the main problem: what does humanism represent politically? What does the concept man designate? Experience enables us to reply that humanist theory has always had the goal of protecting, under the disguise of universality, the privileges of a specific set of men. Man is always the Prince or the Bourgeoisie. It can as easily be the cadre - the Party leadership. But it can also - according to a necessary law of ideology - be the concept in which those who rebel against their power make their protest and assert their will. Humanism always functions as the discourse of a class in struggle. And such must be the case for the various forms which humanist ideology has taken in the USSR. Stalin can put us on the right track here: isn't the famous formula 'Man, the most valuable capital' the other side of the slogan which proclaims that 'the cadres decide everything'? And can one conceive of the



present 'humanism of the individual person' other than by reference to the process of the restoration of capitalism? Is it not the equivalent in ideology of the 'State of all the people' in the political sphere? The recent history of the USSR and the people's democracies shows us how it can act both as the discourse of the new ruling class, which denies that classes exist in these societies, and as the expression of the rebellion of classes or peoples oppressed by revisionism. Now it is noticeable that Althusser does not relate the ideological forms of humanism to the reality of a struggle or a division, but to the unity of a problem which exists for the unity of a group:

*What need do the Soviets have for an idea of man, that is, an idea of themselves, to help them live their history?*<sup>20</sup>

The answer to this question is given by the relationship between the tasks to be accomplished (those of the transition to communism) and the conditions in which they have to be accomplished ('difficulties due to the period of the "cult of personality" but also ... the more distant difficulties characteristic of the "construction of socialism in one country", and in addition in a country economically and culturally backward to start with'). Problems that men have to resolve, objective conditions, backwardness, exceptional phenomena - these are the ingredients of Althusser's recipe. There is one thing he absolutely refuses to understand, and that is contradiction. As a result he moves completely off the terrain of Marxism onto that of bourgeois sociology. We indicated the form of this shift at the beginning - we now know its political function.

A theoretical platitude to complement a political naivety: this is how every theory of ideology must inevitably end if it fails to make the class struggle its starting point.

## Ideology and class struggle

In order to understand this original omission, we must come back to the goal pursued by Althusser's theory: a critique of theories of transparency and de-alienation. To resist them, it was necessary to show that the world is never transparent to consciousness, that even in classless societies there is 'ideology'. At this point we began to suspect that the argument might actually have a quite different aim, and that the choice of enemy might have been made to suit its purposes. But, to be fair, the relation was two-sided. If Althusser's discourse on ideology is governed by the concern to justify revisionism, it could just as well be said that it is because Althusser remains prisoner of a classic philosophical problematic that he remains in the camp of revisionist ideology. In fact, by struggling against ideologies of alienation, caught in the dilemma of transparency (idealist) or opacity (materialist), Althusser is led to fight on the ground of his opponent. The characteristic of the para-Marxist theories he criticises (Lukacsian, existentialist, and the rest) is to identify the Marxist theory of ideologies with a theory of the subject. Now Althusser does not sever this knot which ties Marxist theory to the idealist philosophical tradition. He only attacks one particular aspect of it: the interpretation of Marxist theory in terms of a theory of consciousness. His criticism fixes the status of ideology according to two basic determinations. On the one hand, the theory of ideology is a theory of the illusion of consciousness; on the other, ideology is not just 'false consciousness' but must be granted an objective status - it is a system of representations (images, signs, cultural objects) which extends beyond the sphere of consciousness and has an objective social reality. But this double correction leaves out what was specific about the Marxist theory of ideologies: the 'ideological forms' which the *Preface to the Contribution to a Critique*

of *Political Economy* talks of are not merely social forms of representation, but the forms in which a struggle is fought out.<sup>21</sup> The realm of ideology is not that of subjective illusion in general, of the necessarily inadequate representations men form of their practice. Ideologies can only be given an objective status by considering them in terms of the class struggle. This means that ideology does not just exist in discourses, not just in systems of images, signs etc. The analysis of the University has shown us that the ideology of a class exists, first and foremost, in institutions - in what we can call *ideological apparatuses*, in the sense in which Marxist theory talks about the State apparatus. Because of the point from which he starts, Althusser can only give ideological forms the spectral objectivity of systems of 'signs', 'cultural objects', etc. In other words, a metaphysical theory of the subject (in the form of a theory of illusion) is linked with a sociology of 'systems of representations'. We have seen how the two are articulated within a conception of ideology which is wholly metaphysical, in the strict sense that it cannot understand contradiction: and only the ability to understand contradiction would allow it to quit the metaphysical ground on which its opponent stands.

The consequence of this is that the political problem designated by the 'end of ideologies' problematic, is conjured out of existence. 'Only an ideological world-outlook,' says Althusser, 'could have imagined societies without ideology and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not just one of its historical forms) would disappear without trace, to be replaced by science.'<sup>22</sup> The problem is here posed entirely in the terms of the ideologies being criticised: the end of ideologies is identified with the reign of science, that is, with the disappearance of subjective illusion in general. On this basis, it is easy to show that the world of transparency cannot exist, and that classless societies can never do without ideology, so defined. We have seen how, in practice, this critique of utopia was revealed as the most fatuous naivety - not surprisingly, for to pose the problem in this way meant concealing precisely what had to be thought: the pursuit and the end of the class struggle in the realm of ideology. It is impossible to understand this problem - and consequently impossible to produce any concrete analysis - if ideology is conceived as illusion, however much the 'social' necessity of this illusion is stressed. To understand it, ideologies must be conceived as systems representing class interests and the development of the class struggle. The end of ideologies is then not presented as an eschatological concept, but in the same terms as the withering away of the State - that is, as a function of the end of the class struggle. An end we now know to be still a long way off even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established. The experience of the cultural revolution has taught us a little about this. It showed us what the forms were in which ideology was claimed to exist in a classless society: forms, in fact, in which the class struggle is relentlessly pursued within a socialist society. The rejection of the 'ideological' theme of the end of ideologies stops one from considering the essential problem of the forms of class struggle in socialist societies. The Chinese experience has shown us the crucial importance of the ideological forms taken by this struggle. The socialist revolution involves the struggle against the various forms of bourgeois ideology which continue to exist after the seizure of political power: traditional ideologies of individualism or obedience, or modern ideologies of skills and technicality. All these problems concern the ideological effects of class divisions. They have nothing to do with the question of the disappearance of subjective illusion. Not that this problem should remain unposed; but it does not belong to the problematic of the Marxist theory of ideologies, which is no more than a theory of the subject, than a theory of science or a theory of 'society'.



Althusser tries to attack the anthropological ideologies which make the theory of society into a theory of the subject; but his discourse has no more subversive effect than reestablishing a theory of science, as the mediation governing the relation between these two terms.

This theory of science rests on the same ground as the ideologies it claims to resist; which is to say that it reflects, in its own particular way, the class position of the petty-bourgeois intellectual - a position oscillating between two camps.<sup>22a</sup> On the one hand, the camp of the bourgeoisie, with which the petty-bourgeois intellectual is associated not only through class situation, but through the very sphere in which he works, through his theoretical problematic which itself reflects his function within the bourgeois ideological apparatus. And on the other hand, the camp of the proletariat which he would like to join, but the interests of which he can only adopt by assimilating them to the objectivity and universality of 'science'. This means that insofar as he remains a petty-bourgeois intellectual - insofar, that is, as he does not participate materially in the proletarian struggle - he can only unite with the interests of the proletariat in a mythical fashion, by making the revolutionary objective coincide with that ideal point, in striving towards which he justifies his own practice as a petty-bourgeois intellectual: the Ideal of Science. In other words, he adopts the 'positions of the proletariat' at the level of the denegation of his own class practice. To join the proletarian struggle at the level of this denegation, means joining the camp of bourgeois politics disguised as proletarian politics - the camp of revisionism. An ideal convergence which in a country like France corresponds to a precise reality. For the petty-bourgeois intellectual, access to the working class is doubly guarded: by his own integration into the system of the ideological dominance of the bourgeoisie; but also because between him and the proletariat stands the revisionist apparatus, as the 'representative' of the working class. So on both sides, the 'Marxist' petty-bourgeois intellectual sees himself excluded from participation in the proletarian struggle; from participation in that which, in the last instance, can alone guarantee the Marxist rigour of his discourse.<sup>22b</sup> The operation which transforms Marxist theory into a discourse on science reflects this double limitation: a general limitation coming from the position of an intellectual divorced from the masses, and integrated into the bourgeois ideological system; and a particular limitation stemming from the revisionist encirclement of the proletarian struggle. The 'scientific' rigour of this discourse is thus only the obverse of the impossibility of its functioning as rigorous Marxist theory; in other words, of its being revolutionary. This 'scientific' rigour does not enable it to escape its double set of limits; quite the opposite - only by virtue of its own lack of coherence can a petty-bourgeois ideology acquire, in given circumstances, a progressive function. Once its basic rigour is attained, it is shown up for what it is - a bourgeois rigour. This is why the Marxist discourse on science ultimately dissolves into the two-fold justification for academic knowledge and the authority of the Central Committee. 'Science' becomes the watchword of the ideological counter-revolution.<sup>23</sup>

Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement. We said it till we were sick of it, hoping in this way to set our minds at ease. It is time now we learnt the lesson that the cultural revolution and the ideological revolt of the students has taught us: divorced from revolutionary practice, all revolutionary theory is transformed into its opposite.

Jacques Rancière  
July 1969

## Afterword from the French edition

*We must get rid of this habit of only criticising  
after the event*  
- Mao Tse-Tung

The following text makes its appearance in France after a delay of four years. It was drafted in 1969 for an anthology on Althusser published in Argentina. I did not at that time think it worth publishing in France: for those who witnessed and took part in May 1968, the practical demonstrations of the mass movement seemed to me proof enough that the question of Althusserianism could be considered historically settled. And while it was useful as a means of clarifying my own ideas, as far as the anti-revisionist education of the masses went, this kind of theoretical refutation seemed laughable compared with the lessons of the struggle. When at every stop, the autonomous initiative of the masses was finding itself policed by revisionism, it would have seemed anachronistic to settle accounts with a theoretical police whose headquarters May has sent up in flames.

Subsequent events have shown the idealism involved in such a position. It is true that refutation is of little weight compared with the transformations produced in people's minds by mass-movements. But so long as the apparatus of bourgeois domination remains in place, the base survives for the reproduction of ideologies which the movement of the masses appeared to have utterly destroyed. And given that the university machine was working again, it was necessary that its role of keeping order - its police-role - should be restored to life, and that it should re-erect the scholarly, theoretical scaffolding designed to shore up the tottering maxim: 'it's always wrong to rebel'. Of course, this reconstruction is not exactly the same as the original, since it is produced in conditions modified by the effect of the movement. Thus the *experimental* forms of the post-May university (of the Vincennes type) tried to transfer the university's police-role from the authority of the teacher to the authority of the knowledge; to transform the professorial despotism into an egalitarian republic of petty mandarins - precisely the problematic set out in Althusserianism. In the immediate post-May period, moreover, Althusser's discourse recedes into the background, while at the same time his theses are appropriated by the combined forces of young bucks of revisionism and the petty mandarins of the re-modelled university. This appropriation is perfectly illustrated by that literature student at Vincennes, a young PCF member, who was delighted that his teacher, by beginning a course on Racine with a posing of Althusser's problematic of reading, should enable students of an insufficient standard to be eliminated from the start.

So the very difference in formation between the ideas of revolt, produced by mass movements, and the ruling ideas, constantly reproduced by the ideological apparatuses of the bourgeoisie, determines the position of this type of ideological struggle which fights on its opponent's ground. A position strictly subordinate to the ideological transformations produced by the struggle, but nevertheless now impossible to abandon. Limited as the usefulness of this text would have been in 1969, it was wrong to restrict knowledge of it to those who could, in some private and roundabout way, get hold of it in the Spanish or Portuguese version.

All the same, its present publication in a different context of ideological struggle, poses new problems and necessitates certain rectifications.

Firstly, the passage of time will undoubtedly make my criticism seem one-sided. To which I shall reply that it was aimed at a specific target: the appropriation of Althusserianism after May 68 in the interests of the revisionist and mandarin reaction. Hence, it concentrates on a specific articulation of the Althusserian discourse: that which, in the theory

of ideology, expresses the class position of 'Marxist scholars' confronted with the 'ideological' voice of revolt. With regard to this fundamental dividing line, my criticism was correctly - and remains so - one-sided. But it is self-evident that a complete history, that is, a 'fair' evaluation of Althusserianism would have to take account of its other modes of political appropriation, and indicate the points in the Althusserian text at which one can anchor a left Althusserianism which should lead a certain number of intellectuals to Maoism. If I have concentrated on the effect of the right, it is because its dominant character was established by the mass-movement itself. And the attitude of the UJCM (Marxist-Leninist Union of Communist Youth) towards the student revolt at the beginning of May 68 is enough to demonstrate its hold even over 'left Althusserianism'.

Objection will also be raised against the early date (1964) of the texts criticised, and much will no doubt be made of the self-criticism by which Althusser, beginning with 'Lenin and Philosophy', is said to have broken with his previous 'theoreticism' in favour of a philosophy conceived as political intervention. Unfortunately for this idyllic vision, it is just these 'theoreticist' texts and problematic of the 1964 period which are found to have produced political effects, of the left as well as of the right. And if the 'new practice of philosophy' promised by 'Lenin and Philosophy' has paradoxically produced no noticeable effect in the field of class struggle, it is precisely because it turned its back on the political problems in which the Althusserian theoreticisms had been laid bare. So that this alleged politicisation of philosophy was really more of a denegation of the foundations and the political effects of Althusserianism, which left philosophy as a field of political intervention, with the scarcely burning question of the reality of the object of knowledge.

I feel then, that the concepts at issue here really do constitute a 'rational kernel' which has given Althusserianism the systematic character of an ideology independent of Althusser's personal history. His later contributions to the question of ideology are in my view of two kinds:

- 1 The texts of 1968 ('Lenin and Philosophy', *Cours de Philosophie pour les Scientifiques*) crystallise the science/ideology relation into a conceptual multiplicity (sciences, ideologies, the spontaneous philosophy of scientists, conceptions of the world...) in which the theoretical scheme of Althusserianism is retrieved unaltered. Thus the correct ideas which the researcher draws from his scientific practice are, by a complex mechanism, interfered with by different systems of representation (a conception of the world, spontaneous philosophy, etc) produced elsewhere. But the complexity of this mechanism conceals the question of this practice itself, of its forms of social existence and of the class struggle which puts it at stake. The class struggle is thus relegated to the level of the representation of a practice, in the traditional figure of the dislocation between the production of an object and the production of the consciousness of it.
- 2 The 1970 text 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' introduces some ideas and a problematic produced by the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the anti-authoritarian revolt of May. But the Althusserian system cannot be 'set back on its feet' by these conceptions, which, if taken to their logical conclusion, could only smash it. So Althusser introduces them only in isolation from their mode of production; presenting as the surprising and paradoxical discovery of research ('I believe I am justified in advancing the following thesis ... This thesis may seem paradoxical ....') this truth about the dominant character of the educational ideological apparatus, which was produced in such a profoundly unambiguous manner by the mass-movement. In this

way, Althusser can bracket together in the same text analyses produced by two conflicting problematics (a problematic of subjective illusion and a problematic of State Apparatuses); can casually mention in a Party publication that political parties and Trades Unions are State apparatuses; and can without danger - if not without malice - discuss the class function of education in a periodical devoted to the glorification of universal science and the state school. Nothing can be built on this ironic discourse, where what is stated, and the very statement of it, is constantly given the lie by the mode in which it is stated. Althusser can always adopt such or such a new notion, draw such or such a lesson from practice, but cannot set Althusserianism back on its feet - the complete and autonomous model of revisionist reason.

This text will have a negative effect, if it is to play a part in the game of building-up and knocking-down monuments to great men. Yet it can still prove useful if, by depersonalising the criticism, it allows the accent to be put on the ideological mechanisms of power which constrain the discourse of intellectuals in our societies. So the criticism I make of the Althusserian analysis of 'socialist humanism' in *For Marx* will lose its point if it should be thought, by a scorn that is all too easy with the benefit of hindsight, to attribute to the blindness or guile of an individual a type of relation to power firmly anchored in the practice of intellectuals; if it should be thought to exorcise in the shape of the Althusserian devil, the temptation provided by this practice to transform the chains of power into the interconnexions of theory. What was it that was always involved in the Althusserian seminars, and that is still involved in many a seminar even now? The interrogation of concepts, demanding their authorisation, questioning their identity, restraining those which without a passport wandered out of their proper province, etc... Proofs of identity, preventive detention... the vast network of philosophy's police mentality for which Althusser is no more responsible than the capitalist is, according to Marx, 'for the relations of production of which he is the support. The apprentices of bourgeois knowledge are trained in a universe of discourse where words, argument, ways of questioning, deduction are prescribed by the discursive forms - forms which are those of the repressive practices of power. And what is ultimately at issue here is the effect of this system of constraints that I will call police-reason, on a particular philosophical discourse. And ultimately there is no paradox if the strength and relevance of this discourse ends up revealing on its surface the subterranean network of constraints in which the half-wits of academic philosophy romp, free from all problems.

It is also necessary to refer to the conjuncture and the aim of this text to avoid the lapse of time distorting the use it makes of the couple 'bourgeois ideology/proletarian ideology'. In opposition to Althusserianism, it was important to affirm at a theoretical level the capacity of subordinate classes to forge the ideological weapons of their fight, and hence to establish their right to rebel regardless of whether it suits the politico-syndical apparatuses 'of the working class'. This was particularly vital at a time when, from all quarters, the die-hards, drawing the 'lessons of May' after their own fashion, were entering into a war against 'spontaneism', i.e. against the revolt of the masses which they pretended to criticise in order to supply it with what, according to them, had been missing in May: a vanguard, party, science, proletarian discipline, or a consciousness imported from the outside. The voice of the masses or the discourse of the scribes? The alternatives required that, faced with those peddlars of vanguards, the 'bourgeois ideology/proletarian ideology' opposition should be clearly put forward, without any hair-splitting, insofar as it signified the right of the masses to autonomous speech and

action. But at the same time, the opposition was employed in a traditional form which concealed its fundamental originality. It does not refer to two homogeneous realities distinguished by a plus or minus sign, but to two *modes of production* of ideology which are profoundly heterogeneous. Bourgeois ideology is a system of power relations daily reproduced by the ideological apparatuses of the bourgeois state. Proletarian ideology is a system of power relations established by the struggle of the proletariat and other subordinate classes against all the forms of bourgeois exploitation and domination; forms of resistance to the ideological effects materially produced by the bourgeois division of labour, forms of systematisation of anti-capitalist struggles, forms of control over the superstructure by the masses. It is a system of power relations that is always fragmentary because it defines a certain number of conquests always provisional because it is not produced by apparatuses but by the development of struggle. Proletarian ideology is neither the summary of the representations or positive values of the workers, nor the body of 'proletarian' doctrines. It is a stopped assembly-line, an authority mocked, a system of divisions between particular jobs of work abolished, a mass fight-back against 'scientific' innovations in exploitation, and it is the 'bare-foot doctor' or the entry of the working class into the Chinese university. Mass practices produced by the anti-capitalist struggle whose uniqueness is missed as soon as one tries to set a proletarian philosophy, justice or morality against the philosophy, justice or morality of the bourgeoisie.

Now this heterogeneity is habitually concealed by traditional discourses on proletarian ideology, which only establish its reality at the cost of an ambiguous oscillation which continually relates the positivity of texts (the ideology of the proletariat is Marxism-Leninism) to the positivity of the characteristics which belong to members of a class (proletarian ideology is the discipline of the factory-worker as against petty bourgeois anarchism, or the solidarity of the shop-floor in contrast to bourgeois individualism etc.) In this gross theoretical deviation the justification has traditionally been found for all the practical deviations of every kind of revisionism. Either it is the scientificity of proletarian theory that has the job of marshalling the 'spontaneity' of the workers' wild reactions; or else the proletarian characteristics (order, labour, discipline....) serve to recall the anarchism of 'petty-bourgeois' rebellions to order. Twin incarnations of law-and-order which lead us back to the source of this binary representation of proletarian ideology. A creation of neither working class consciousness, nor Marxist theory, but of the Stalinist State machine, this representation is supported on the power relations which define the functioning of the revisionist 'workers' parties and states. As science, proletarian ideology is the symbol of this power: as the sum of proletarian characteristics, it defines, for the workers, so many reasons for obeying 'their' power: "a spiritual point of honour" with the concrete reality of the 'workers' militia opening fire on the workers of Gdansk.

Every critique of the 'science/ideology' couple which relies on the shifting meanings assembled beneath the concept of proletarian ideology, thus stays sunk in ambiguity. And this ambiguity doubtless does no more than translate the inability which revolutionary organisations still find of ridding themselves of the politico-organisational forms and the ideological effects bequeathed to us by the revisionist and Stalinist State machineries. Here again, it is for the practical criticism of the movement of the masses to sweep away the 'proletarian' phantasms invoked by the sorcerer's apprentices of the State apparatuses.

Many other points in this text I feel to be subjects for discussion. But one does not correct the texts of the ideological struggle when the conditions of the struggle change: one writes new ones. So I

have altered nothing in the original text; I have simply added this afterword and some additional notes to emphasise the conditions in which it was drawn up, and to forestall deformations in its reading which its delayed publication might produce.

Jacques Rancière  
February 1973

## Notes

- 1 *Théorie, Pratique Théorique et Formation Théorique: Idéologie et Lutte Idéologique*, p29
- 2 Poulantzas: *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*, p223
- 3 *Théorie, Pratique Théorique*, etc, pp30-31
- 4 *Ibid.*, p26

4a The vague use of the 'metaphysical discourse' subsequently inherited by sociology (social cohesion, the bond between men, etc...) loses the specificity of the concepts involved here, the fact that they belong to a historically determined political problematic. It is this problematic which, in the second half of the 19th century, gives sociology its status and position in the ensemble of practices employed by the bourgeoisie during this period to mould the men necessary to the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production: the period following the establishment of those relations and the reaction of the proletariat, when the bourgeoisie has twice been confronted with the possibility of its extinction. More astute than the 'Marxist' scholars who prate endlessly about the 'spontaneously bourgeois' ideology of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie recognised in 1848 and 1871 that, even if they used the same words (order, republic, ownership, labour...), the workers were thinking differently. Hence the necessity for the bourgeoisie to strengthen the ideological weapons of its dictatorship. This political threat gives the new human sciences their place among the techniques for moulding the 'normal' man necessary to the system; a moulding which encompasses the detection of criminals or the prevention of suicides, as well as the selection of the cadres or parliamentary education of the masses (i.e. the parliamentary and electoral repression of the autonomous political practice of the masses). It also gives them their problematic: a science of the phenomena which consolidate or break up social cohesion - what principles strengthen the cohesion of a group, what criteria allow the most suitable ones to be chosen for such and such a position? or, more crudely still, how can one identify in the physiognomy of a crowd or in the dimensions of a man's skull the danger that they represent for the social order? It is not difficult to spot behind the elaboration of the 'sociological method' the pre-occupations of the detective Bertillon, author of anthropometry, or of the military doctor Lebon, theoretician of crowds and their 'ring-leaders'.

The important thing here is that Althusser separates these concepts of the bourgeoisie's 'police-reason' from the political dangers and manoeuvrings of power which underly them, in order to relate them to a function of the social whole in general. This is naturally complemented by a conception of science above and beyond classes, which reproduces precisely the 'scientific' ideology that crowns the edifice of 'police-reason'. If a direct line leads from this abstract conception of ideology to the validation of Kautsky's thesis of 'the importation of Marxism into the working class', it is perhaps because this line reproduces in theory the historical collusion of social-democracy in the bourgeois

attempt to domesticate the working class, to wipe out its cultural identity. The pitiful bankruptcy of social-democracy must indeed have something to do with this 'importation of consciousness' which has come to mean in practice: the containment of the working class by electoral parties which, while spreading parliamentary illusions, repress the political practices and pervert the organisational forms of the proletariat; the propagation of a 'science' and a scientific ideology which help to wipe out the traditions of autonomous popular expression, etc... Conversely, the assertion that it is necessary to bring consciousness to a working class involuntarily trapped within bourgeois ideology, may really indicate the part played by social-democracy in the attempt to integrate the working class into bourgeois political life. If the working masses have been able to find the means to resist this kind of 'Marxism' in their practice, the intellectuals generally discover in it the form and substance of their 'Marxist' theoretical discourse. (Note added February 1973)

- 5 Naturally this class relation has to be carefully distinguished from the forms (political, economic, ideological) in which the class struggle is fought, which are its effects. It nonetheless remains that the relations of production can only be understood as class relations, unless they are transformed into a new 'backstage-world'. It is just such a transformation which results from the distinction made by Poulantzas (in *Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales*) between the relations of production and 'social relations'. Starting from the correct idea that the relations of production are not 'human relations', Poulantzas falls into the dilemma indicated above: transparency or opacity. As a result, the relations of production appear withdrawn into that exteriority represented by the 'structure'. The analysis of Althusser and Poulantzas ultimately results in a truism: the structure is defined by no more than its own opacity, manifested in its effects. In a word, it is the opacity of the structure which renders the structure opaque.

This (quasi-Heideggerian) withdrawal of the structure could in no way be politically innocent. The French Communist Party is happy to argue thus: the struggle of the students only concerns the effects of capitalist exploitation; the grass-roots struggles in the factories against the hierarchy, automation, victimisations, also deal only with effects. It is necessary to come to grips with the very cause of exploitation, the capitalist relations of production. But to this dimension of the problem, only Science has access, i.e. the wisdom of the Central Committee. The withdrawal of the structure thus becomes a *focus imaginarius* in the Kantian manner, an inverted image, reduced to a point, of a future without limit: France's peaceful road to socialism.

- 6 For Marx, p232
- 7 Théorie, etc, p32
- 8 Ibid, p30
- 9 A substitute conception for the contradiction which is based, of course, on the misunderstanding of the real contradiction.
- 10 Nouvelle Critique, No.152, January 1964, pp80-111
- 11 In For Marx, pp219-247
- 12 p83
- 13 Thus it is, that in the same article, Althusser deduces the 'technical' necessity for the whole industrial hierarchy. As for the 'essential reasons' which necessitate the existence of the

university in a socialist society, their discussion will have to be left for some other occasion.

- 13a These brief remarks will lead one astray, should they be thought to trace revisionist ideology back to the interests of the intermediary strata. What this ideology represents is basically the ideology of a power structure which already contains the prefiguration of a social order to come. The reaction of the PCF and the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) to the corpse of Overney, expresses less the cadres' terror or the condemnation by members of the professions, than how it appeared to the occupants of an alternative State apparatus, who, moreover, already participated as such in the bourgeois State apparatus. At Renault, the cadres of the Party and the CGT do not defend the interests of an intermediary class, but their participation in the power of the employers. By taking up the position it did, the PCF was not representing the interests of its electoral following, but its own interests as an apparatus sharing in the management of capitalist power in the factory. (Note added February 1973)

- 14 It is not uninteresting to note the agreement, at the very level of rhetoric, between the metaphysical formulation of 'as if' and the classic rhetorical figure employed in the PCF: 'It is not accidental if ...' Popular common-sense is not mistaken when it says that chance does many things.

- 14a The formulation of the problem seems to me to have erred, through having somewhat diplomatically restricted the question of 'class science' to what is clearly the safest ground - that of the teaching of scientific knowledges - in order to avoid getting bogged down in the shifting sands of proletarian geometry or genetics. A laudable restraint which nonetheless has the drawback of failing to deal with precisely what was in question: the place of a scientific practice which would only be affected by the class struggle at the level of the transmission of its results. It would be advisable therefore to look more closely at what is involved in this representation of a 'pure' scientific practice.

What is the 'rational kernel' in the idea of the universality of scientific practice? It is that propositions exist whose modes of verification seem valid for all existing classes and social systems. Let us note in passing that this universality of the modes of verification does not, for all that, place the practice which produces these propositions above classes (such developments in arithmetic as took place in the 19th century can be universally acknowledged without for all that destroying the political problematic of order which supports them). But above all, let us note that, except in the treatises of philosophers, no science is ever reduced solely to the ordering of universally verifiable propositions, nor any scientific practice solely to the process of their production. In no sense is there any 'pure' scientific practice; such a practice having its forms of existence in a system of social relations of which propositions, formal proofs, experiments (on the basis of which the ideal of science is established) are only elements. The class struggle can manifest itself at different levels: present even in propositions, proofs, a field of application, the methods and occasion of their elaboration etc. One can see from this that scientific propositions and theories can, at one and the same time, keep their power of verifiability and yet belong to bourgeois science. The Chinese mathematicians who underwent self-criticism during the Cultural Revolution, were not accused of having produced false theorems, but of having practised in their ivory towers an academic's science, looking only for personal prestige. And similarly, they did

not replace their 'bourgeois' theorems with 'proletarian' ones, but altered the relationship to the masses which had been implied in their practice. This is because the social nature of a science essentially depends on the two-fold question; *who* practices science and *for whom*? To conceal this double question is to vindicate, under cover of the universality of the modes of scientific verification, the universality of the bourgeois division of labour.

What is the basic flaw in the arguments about 'proletarian science' and 'bourgeois science' before the Cultural Revolution? Precisely that they neglected the question: *who* practices science? Not by accident, but because these arguments were based on a system of the division of labour which, keeping science out of the hands of the masses, entrusted the responsibility for judging its bourgeois or proletarian character to the functionaries of power and the experts on knowledge. Proletarian science will certainly never be created by a patent from the Academy of Proletarian Science and, as long as proletarian biology is the concern of Messieurs Besse, Garaudy etc, this science above classes will be in clover. As the Cultural Revolution has shown, proletarian science means essentially - and this can only be the work of a lengthy struggle by the masses - the suppression of a science which is the business of specialists beyond the reach of the masses. A proletarian science which distinguishes itself from the other not only by producing different propositions, but by virtue of the overthrow of the masses' age-old relation to knowledge and power.

(Note added February 1973)

- 15 The characteristic of a metaphysical conception is that it tries to draw a line of class division in realities (institution, social groups) which it views in a static way. Thus the revisionists list social groups in terms of whether they are revolutionary or not. The dialectic teaches that, on the contrary, there is knowable unity and division only in struggle. One cannot draw a line of class division in the university, but only in the struggle which puts it at stake.
- 16 *Lenin and Philosophy*, p65
- 17 In his *Cours de Philosophie pour les Scientifiques* (a course run at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1967-68), Althusser develops the idea that philosophy is not concerned with Science - an ideological concept - but with *the sciences*. Balibar, in *L'Humanité* of 14-2-'69, mocks those who talk about science as if it were a 'Speculative Holy Spirit' which is incarnated in the different sciences. But one might well ask what this strange concept of *the sciences* is. Can one say anything about it which does not pass through the mediation of the concept *Science*? The nature of a concept is not changed by putting it in the plural. It can be all the more hidden - and this is just what is involved: to replace science by the sciences, is to conceal the proper object of philosophy (*Science*) as produced by the denegation of knowledge. The proclaimed anti-speculative act of Althusser and Balibar has the sole effect of strengthening the philosophical denegation of knowledge.
- 17a Denegation is a word used by Freud to designate an unconscious denial masked by a conscious acceptance, or *vice-versa*. It is used here in the sense of an ostensible criticism concealing a strengthened affirmation. The affirmation is 'misrecognised' as criticism. (Translator's note)
- 17b This bird's-eye view of the history of philosophy will no doubt seem insubstantial. Let me briefly state:  
(1) that it restricts itself to challenging, within its own terms of reference, the Althusser-

ian interpretation of this history, which is even more off-hand.

(2) that nevertheless, I have no more intention of reproaching Althusser for his casualness than of excusing myself to the punctilious historians of philosophy. The day that these historians are as scrupulous in making the voice of the masses heard, as they are in establishing the sense of a line in Plato, it will be time to see, in their respect for the great philosophers, something other than simple respect for the Great. As far as I am concerned, Althusser's casual treatment of Plato or Descartes seems quite pardonable compared to the nonchalance with which he endorses the official history of the labour movement (by social-democracy and revisionism), a history which adds the weight of its falsifications to the firing-squads and prison-sentences of the bourgeoisie.

(Note added February 1973)

- 18 'Marxism and Humanism', in *For Marx*.
- 19 *Ibid*, pp238-9
- 20 *Ibid*, p238
- 21 *Preface to the Contribution ... etc.* Marx-Engels *Selected Works* (in one volume) p182
- 22 *For Marx*, p232
- 22a We will have made some progress in the analysis of class struggles and their ideological components, the day we turf out these mechanical conceptions of the 'oscillation' of the petty-bourgeoisie, which are based on heaven-knows what 'oscillatory property' of its intermediary position. Generally speaking, all the concepts which revolve around the notion of a petty-bourgeoisie have become, for numerous 'Marxist' intellectuals, the refuge of blissful ignorance: what has not been explained by the oscillation of the petty-bourgeoisie? Gaullism, fascism, leftism - everything under the sun, and a few others as well... Thanks to this, one can dispense with analysing the particular factors which produce the adherence or partial resistance to bourgeois ideology of a particular, non-proletarian stratum. The closeness or distance from manual labour, existence or absence of traditions of collective struggle, social future, relation to State power, position in the relationships of authority, etc - all the determinations are obliterated in this 'oscillation' which, in a single movement, alters the position of the student and the small shopkeeper, the ruined peasant and the consultant engineer, the teacher and the shop-girl in Prissunic. 'Petty-bourgeoisie' is thus the *flatus vocis* which hides - badly - the inability to articulate the contradictions proper to each class or class-fraction.  
The concept of petty-bourgeoisie has doubtless always had a certain power of camouflage. It is already visible in Marx where it serves, in particular, to conceal the contradictions within the proletariat, thought of as a contamination of the budding modern proletariat by the artisanal dreams or the peasant frenzies of the bankrupted small proprietors. But on this point, as on many others, the academic reading of Marx has been powerfully supported by the practice of the 'workers' State apparatuses - primarily by the practice of the Stalinist apparatus, where the struggle against the 'petty-bourgeoisie', while concealing the inability to recognise and resolve contradictions among the people, serves simultaneously as the 'proletarian' justification for establishing a new bourgeoisie of planners, inspectors, prosecutors etc.  
A deliberate failure to recognise contradictions among the people, the concealment of new class contradictions: the concept of petty-bourgeoisie must be numbered among those which have helped a

State power conceal what it doesn't want to know - a 'theoretical' laboratory which has been found to be well-equipped for this universal function of non-thought, the effects of which can be spotted as much in the discourse of Marxist scholars as in that of professional revolutionaries.  
(Note added February 1973)

22b To go into this in any depth, it would be necessary to demonstrate the interrelation between this theory of ideology and the police-revisionist conspiracy theory. The theory states that workers do not have the capacity to produce an anti-capitalist ideology, and hence as *autonomous* anti-capitalist practice. So if this worker claims to speak and act for himself, he immediately reveals himself to be a false worker, and thus a real police-agent.  
(Note added February 1973)

23 Let us specifically state, should it still be necessary, that what is in question here is not Althusser's personal position in a particular set of circumstances, but the political line implied by his theory of ideology. Rarely has a theory been more rapidly appropriated by those who have an interest in it. In the name of science, the workers' struggles against wage-scales are resisted - don't they misunderstand the scientific law which says that each is paid according to the value of his labour-power? In the same way, the anti-hierarchical struggles in the university fail to understand that 'the ultimate nature of the staff-student relation corresponds to the advance of human knowledge, of which it is the very foundation'. (J. Pesenti: 'Problèmes de méthode et questions théoriques liées à la refonte des carrières', July 1969). One could not admit in a more ingenuous manner what constitutes the 'foundation' of the theory of science to which one lays claim.

The impasse in which Althusser finds himself is demonstrated in a recent article in *La Pensée* 'A propos de l'article de Michel Verret sur Mai étudiant' (June 1969). In it, Althusser affirms the basically progressive character of the May student movement, and denounces the reactionary interpretation of this movement by an over-zealous defender of 'Science'. But he cannot - or will not - see it in the simple justification of a reactionary politics. He only sees the mark of an *inadequacy*: the Party 'has not been able to' analyse the student movement, to keep in touch with student youth, to explain the forms of working class struggle to it, etc. The conclusion of the article shows that he is thus still limited to the twin recourse to science and the Party apparatus. It is on the latter that he relies 'to furnish all the *scientific* explanations which will allow everyone, including the young, to understand the events they have lived through, and, if they wish, to grasp on a correct basis where they stand in the class struggle, by revealing the correct perspectives to them, by giving them the political and ideological means for correct action.'



## Common sense

### G Nowell Smith

Correct ideas, says Mao Tse-tung, do not fall from the sky: they are formed by social practice. What is true of correct ideas holds also for ideas in general. No ideas fall from the sky. They are all rooted in given historical situations. They all represent, or reflect, certain forms of past or present practice. But the relationship is often a complex or confused one, and rarely as simple as the case pin-pointed by Mao Tse-tung as the ideal: correct ideas in a correct social practice.

Marxists have often seen the ideological struggle in terms of a wrestling match. On the left, in the red corner, dialectical materialism; and on the right ... This is a fallacious and dangerous image. The enemy of a theory or a doctrine is never a rival or competing theory but is the world of social practice in which that theory is rooted. The battle of ideas can be engaged at a refined level, one theory against another. But this is only a minute aspect of the struggle. For in general the enemy camp is composed not of one theory but of several. Furthermore these are not so much theories as such but ways of thought formed from a mixture of different elements which serve to connect these theories to a day-to-day practice.

Marx himself was well aware of the complexity of the situation. His critique of religion in a case in point. Marx saw religion not as an arbitrary, metaphysic dreamed up by some armchair philosopher, nor as an ingenious deception exercised by the ruling class on the masses, but as a form of thought which had deep roots in the spontaneous experience of the mass of the people. The combination of elements which go to make up religious thought has its origins ultimately in the real world. Religion is one of the ways in which people live in an illusory relationship with reality, the illusory 'spiritual aroma' of a contradictory world.

The religious aroma has for the most part (Festival of Light notwithstanding) been deodorised by advanced industrial capitalism. The struggle against religion is no longer the necessary starting point of cultural revolution. Platitude, not mystery, is the present enemy of critical and scientific thinking, and of a revolutionary practice. Religion has been replaced by common sense.

But the lesson of Marx's critique of religion should not be overlooked. Nor should the connection between religion and common sense as it was implied by Marx and more explicitly developed by the Italian marxist, Antonio Gramsci. Common sense is so often invoked as being the ultimate no-nonsense conception of things, alien to all forms of religious and metaphysical speculation, that the association may at first sight appear surprising. But in fact not only does religious thinking have its origins in the common sense of a particular world, but it has in turn acted on common sense, so that our present everyday conceptions contain all sorts of elements which are in fact speculative and mystical rather than realistic and scientific.

*Common sense is fundamentally reactionary. The key to common sense is that the ideas that it embodies are not so much incorrect as uncorrected and taken for granted. Common sense consists of all those ideas which can be tagged onto existing knowledge without challenging it. It offers no criterion for determining how things are in capitalist society, but only a criterion of how things fit with the ways of looking at the world that the present phase of class society has inherited from the preceding one.*

Reprinted from *7 Days*, 3 November 1971, with permission