On the theory of ideology (the politics of Althusser)
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"Certainly it is an interesting event we are dealing with: the outwearing 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.

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.

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' 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, due 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.

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? Now, 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 of sociology, which does concern itself with the systems of representation that secure or break up the cohesion of the social group? Isn't 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)."

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? 2 The superimposition of two functions of ideology (maintenance of social cohesion in general, and exercising ideological disguise on the level of class domination) could thus mean the coexistence of two heterogeneous conceptual systems: that of ideological disguise (a superstructure, a political superstructure). 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 thus 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 we mean the social forms of appropriation of the means of production, which are class forms of appropriation. Capitalisation processes 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 regards the fact that the level of the 'structure' is strictly the level of a class relation. 3

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 Line 1 (Capital)). What I have here in mind is the specific character of the relations of production: the opposition 'Capital/Labour' disappears in the juxtaposition of the sources of revenue. The state is here inappropriately said to be the result of its economic sources because, like Heraclean nature, it likes to hide. It disguises its contradictory nature, and this contradiction is a class contradiction. So the manifestation/dissimulation of the relations of production does not imply an opacity of the 'social structure in general': it is the effectiveness of the relations of production that is, of the class opposition 'labourers/non-labourers' which characterise all societies. Extended beyond class societies, this effectiveness 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.

I. Ideology and struggle

The distinction made between two levels of ideological disguise - one highly concrete, the other highly abstract. 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), these social ideologies. Human societies create ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. 4

To put the myths of origins (or axis) 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 ideology as a class society, not of class ideologies. Only at the end of the analysis is the division of ideology into 'tendencies' admitted. But at this stage of the analysis, introducing the division of a total 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.

2. 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.

3. In a class society, ideology acquires a supplementary function of keeping individuals in the place determined by the class domination.

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 meaningful 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.

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 presentation because it does not give knowledge. What is defined here as a function of ideology in the service of the ruling class is not something we will have to describe, but a scientific process which answers the old problem of 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' opposition, articulated in a political analysis. To do this we will use two of Althusser's texts: the article 'Problèmes Etudiants' and the text 'Marxism and humanism'.

Both in fact are devoted to deducing 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 in 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 démarcation which should serve as the basis for the political and trade union action of the student movement.

A first reading reveals the same mechanism that was at work in the analysis of ideological expression 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 producing reproducing the relations of production which determine it. While a distinction between 'technical division' and 'social division' of labour can be deduced from this, it is not the analysis of the technical division 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 functioning of a production 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 labour corresponds to all the production 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 functioning 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 a revolution 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.13

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 dialectic 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 side of 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 side (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.14 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 by the following: Althusser has simply moved from the terrain of Marxist theory to that of its opposite, the opportunism 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 strategy 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 contradiction: the former, 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' bourgeoisie government we are witnessing. On the other hand, the revolutionary cause is always indissolubly linked to rigorous knowledge, that is, to science.15

We in turn will suggest that it is not accidental
if Althusser's thesis appears here in its inverted form. It is 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 subjective of the bourgeoisie. 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 the structure of this education — the type of institution; selection mechanisms; relations between students and staff, the latter being both the embodiment 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 of property taught in the University 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 that 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 of 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 even simply 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 discovery of some ideology, 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 'Science/Ideology' couple is nowhere to be found in the organisation of 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 subjective-other, of the superimposition of notions separating the subject from the truth), he completely misses this point. The result is a complete distortion of ideological struggle, which consists in trying to pin down 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 knowledge articulated into objects of knowledge. The transmission of scientific knowledge does not proceed from the concept of science. It forms part of the forms of appropriation where these are class forms of appropriation. Scientific theories are transmitted through a system of discourse, traditions and institutions which constitute the very existence of ideological dominance. In other words, the relation of science to ideology is not one of rupture but of articulation. The dominant ideology is not the shadow 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.  

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 separation between a class division and the state. Knowledge has no institutional existence other than as an instrument of class rule. It is not characterised by an inferior 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 state in a class struggle, and, like State power, 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
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 this conception itself has been developed in a definite relation to knowledge, but without ever recognising its class nature. So when Plato attacks the Sophists, or Descartes, or scholasticism, a 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 knowledge (Plato), they cannot attain to the level of the question: that is to say, to the articulation of knowledge with the rule of a class. Unable to see knowledge as the system of the 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 concealing the class nature of knowledge. And the discourse of metaphysics propagates this misconception, not as itself a discourse on science; i.e. as a discourse asking the question: what is the 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. 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.

Philosophy thus traditionally practices a critique of knowledge which is simultaneously a denunciation 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 critique of knowledge is absolute: philosophy always ends in its restoration: a movement the great philosophers consistently expose in each other. Thus Hegel criticises Cartesian doubt, which only later turns into an affirmation of knowledge, by pretending to reject it. Feuerbach isolates the same pretense 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 to better 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 a question of 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.
The analysis of humanist ideology

This concealment of the class struggle reveals its most subtle effects in the analysis of humanist ideology: an analysis produced to answer the question: what is the function of the humanist ideology currently proclaimed in the USSR? To answer this question we must first turn to its object: a society which is no longer a class society, all we have to do is to apply the theory of ideology minutely; but since the USSR is a classless society, all we have to do is to apply the theory of ideology minutely which deals with the exercise of class power. We know all too well what is left: namely, the ideology is not science and that it enables men to live in relation to their conditions of existence. Socialist humanism then designates a whole set of 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 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 be the guarantor 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.) in the way they elucidate, the new mean, the new rules are living the relation between themselves and these problems: 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, social, political, ideological problems etc. Generally 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, we recognize the absent object to which true knowledge would correspondally explain the new recourse to possessors and purveyors of bourgeois knowledge duplication. To the whole chicanery of the theory of possessing (true) knowledge, and hence justifying with which we are by now quite familiar. And finally, quite naturally adopts the class position expressed in the discourse is taken to be the adequate expression of knowledge - a form of class rule. Society presents of itself; or to be more precise, 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 false knowledge to the subject of true knowledge would the absent object which was going to be analysed - object of false knowledge, it invokes the subject of that this transition poses a certain number of economic authority. At this point, the Althusserian superceded.

For the only way of posing it would be to enquire as currently proclaimed in the USSR.

The analysis of humanist ideology

To answer this question it is necessary to mediate enabling Althusser to recognize his own class position in that exercise of class rule 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 subtle effects in the analysis of humanist ideology: an analysis produced to answer the question: what is the function of the humanist ideology currently proclaimed in the USSR? To answer this question we must first turn to its object: a society which is no longer a class society, all we have to do is to apply the theory of ideology minutely; but since the USSR is a classless society, all we have to do is to apply the theory of ideology minutely which deals with the exercise of class power. We know all too well what is left: namely, the ideology is not science and that it enables men to live in relation to their conditions of existence. Socialist humanism then designates a whole set of 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 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 be the guarantor 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.) in the way they elucidate, the new mean, the new rules are living the relation between themselves and these problems: 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, social, political, ideological problems etc. Generally 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, we recognize the absent object to which true knowledge would correspondally explain the new recourse to possessors and purveyors of bourgeois knowledge duplication. To the whole chicanery of the theory of possessing (true) knowledge, and hence justifying with which we are by now quite familiar. And finally, quite naturally adopts the class position expressed in the discourse is taken to be the adequate expression of knowledge - a form of class rule. Society presents of itself; or to be more precise, 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 false knowledge to the subject of true knowledge would the absent object which was going to be analysed - object of false knowledge, it invokes the subject of that this transition poses a certain number of economic authority. At this point, the Althusserian superceded.

For the only way of posing it would be to enquire as currently proclaimed in the USSR.

The analysis of humanist ideology

To answer this question it is necessary to mediate enabling Althusser to recognize his own class position in that exercise of class rule to the profit of a real class collaboration, that of revisionism. The transformation of Marxism into opportunism is complete.
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 excuse for the rebellion of oppressed people, which is suppressed 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 sense 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?20

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 ('differences due to period of the "cult of personality"') and also ... the more distant difficulties characteristic of the "construction of socialism in one country", and in addition in a country economically and culturally backward. Problems that men have to solve, 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 then, 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 well be said that it is on that basis — 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 eara-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 Althusser to the ideologist 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, ideologies are 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. The 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.21 The realm of ideology is not that of subjective illusion in general, of the illusory representation of the individuals in 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 distinct forms, but in images, signs etc. The analysis of the University has shown us that the ideology of a class exists, and is not necessarily an illusion of the period of the restoration of 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 confounded out of existence. '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) disappears without trace, to be replaced by science.'22 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 fatalist 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 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 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 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 this double bond leads us a little 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 subversive effect that 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 reflects, in its own particular way, the class position of the petty-bourgeois intellectual - a position oscillating between two camps. 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: 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 sphere in which he works, through his theoretical ideologies which the movement of the masses appeared as the apparatus of bourgeois domination remains in place, the base survives for the reproduction of ideologies which the movement of the masses went, this kind of theoretical refutation seemed laughable compared with the lessons of the struggle. When at every step it is shown up for what it is - a bourgeois ideology acquire, in given circumstances, by virtue of its own lack of coherence can a 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. 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 Althusser is thus 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 limits: quite the contrary, by virtue of its 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.

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.

Afterword from the French edition

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 step it is shown up for what it is - a bourgeois ideology acquire, in given circumstances, by virtue of its own lack of coherence can 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 sphere in which he works, through his theoretical ideologies which the movement of the masses appeared as the apparatus of bourgeois domination remains in place, the base survives for the reproduction of ideologies which the movement of the masses went, this kind of theoretical refutation seemed laughable compared with the lessons of the struggle. When at every step it is shown up for what it is - a bourgeois ideology acquire, in given circumstances, by virtue of its own lack of coherence can a 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. 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 Althusser is thus 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 limits: quite the contrary, by virtue of its 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.

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

We must get rid of this habit of only criticising after the event
- Mao Tse-Tung
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 of intervention 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 has been established by the mass-movement itself. And the attitude of the UCML (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 such 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 'theorici­sm' 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 polemic effects, of the best kind. 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 is turned to the political problems in which the Althusserian theoreticians had been laid bare. So that this alleged politicisation of philosophy was really more of a denunciation 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. 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 node of production; presenting as the surprising and paradoxical discovery of research ('... 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 a re­verse in which 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 to in 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 list as well as the right.

For instance, that this alleged politicisation of philosophy was really more of a denunciation 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. 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 node of production; presenting as the surprising and paradoxical discovery of research ('... 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 a re­verse in which 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 to in 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.

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duced by the ideological apparatuses of the bourgeois doctrines. It is a stopped assembly-line, an author
relations established by the struggle of the prole-
produced by the bourgeois division of labour, forms
forms of systematisation of anti-capitalist struggles, forms
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 pro-
duced 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 author-
ity 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
different 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 charac-
teristics which belong to members of a class (prole-
tarian 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 de-
vention 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 insti-
tutions 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 necessarily nor Marxist theory, but of the Stalin-
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 our
worker
where
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 doubt-
less does no more than translate the inability which
revolutionary organisations still find of ridding
themselves of the politico-organisational forms and
the ideological effects begheated to us by the
revisionist and Stalinist State machineries. Here
again, it is for the practical criticism of the
movement of the masses to show the fallacy of
the 'proletarian' phantasms invoked by the sorcerer's apprentices of the State apparatuses.

Another point in this text I feel to be sub-jeets 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 afterward and some additional
notes to emphasise the conditions in which it was
drawn up, and to forestall a devaluation of its
reading which its delayed publication might
produce.

Jacques Rancière
February 1973

Notes
1 Théorie, Pratique Théorique et Formation Théorique: l'Ideologie et lutte Ideologique, 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 cohe-
resion, 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 one rise to set a proletarian ideology, justice or morality against

The important thing here is that Althusser
separates these concepts of the bourgeoisie's
'police-reason' from the political dangers and
manoeuvres 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
Kant'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 bourgeoisie
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 scientistic 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 'Marxist' political life. If the working masses have been able to find the means to resist this kind of control 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 Pouliantzas (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', Pouliantzas 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 Pouliantzas 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 struggle of the students, 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.
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 definition, 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.

(Nota added February 1973)

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.

Lenin and Philosophy, p65

In his Cours de Philosophie pour les Scientifiques (a course run at the Ecole normale superieure in 1967-68), Althusser develops the idea that philosophy is not concerned with science - an ideologi­cal concept - but with the sciences. Balibar, in L'Humanite and the Cultural Revolution, says: '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 character of Althusser and Balibar has the sole effect of strengthening the philosophical denegation of knowledge.

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 an strengthened affirmation. The affirmation is 'misrecognized' as criticism. (Translator's note)

This bird's-eye view of the history of philosophy will no doubt seem insubstantial. Let me briefly state:

(i) that it restricts itself to challenging, within its own terms of reference, the Althusser-

lman 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)
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)

21 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-cuts 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-hegemonic 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 work in student 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 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. The enemy is the world of non-thought, the effects of which can be seen in the discourse of Marxist scholars as much as in the discourse of the Party's discourse. The combination of elements which go to make up religious thought has its origins in the spontaneous experience of the masses, but as a form of thought which has deep roots in the spontaneous experience of the mass of the people. The combination of elements which give rise to a religious idea is the result of the mass of the people's life. 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 connection 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.

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