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'On Genealogy and Ideology Criticism'

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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'ON GENEALOGY AND IDEOLOGY CRITICISM'

SUMMARY

This thesis identifies and explains a fundamental philosophical problem of self-implication in Marxian ideology criticism that has led to its misuse and rejection in social theory and political philosophy. I argue that Friedrich Nietzsche's development of genealogy as a method of social criticism complements ideology criticism in a way that overcomes this problem, by addressing it explicitly, rather than trying to avoid it. In making this argument, I hope to bridge a widely perceived gap between Nietzsche's and Michel Foucault's genealogical approaches to social criticism, on the one hand, and Marxian ideology criticism on the other. The conflict between these approaches has been exaggerated in contemporary academic literature, to the loss of invaluable contributions Nietzsche and Foucault make to the theory and practice of ideology criticism.

I begin by defining ideology in way that, I demonstrate, takes into account the use of the notion by Karl Marx and the early Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. I identify two central components of ideology, namely, an epistemic aspect, regarding illusion, and a functional aspect, which links ideology to its role in maintaining oppression. I also defend the notion of ideology against major objections to each of these aspects. In Chapter 4, I introduce the problem of self-implication that, I take it, poses the greatest challenge to the coherence of ideology criticism. The remainder of the thesis examines two alternative ways of dealing with this problem, namely immanent and transcendent criticism. I explain the weaknesses with each approach and, in doing so, show why Marx and Adorno each succumb to the problem of ideological self-implication. In the final chapter I argue that Nietzsche's method of genealogy is compatible with ideology criticism and can complement such criticism, to overcome the problems that have been examined.

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Chapter 1: Defining Ideology

The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself. Hence the importance of Nietzsche.¹

The central aim of this chapter is to provide a working definition of “ideology”. The requirements for such a definition are two-fold: (i) it should account for the interpretations of central thinkers who have contributed to the historical and theoretical development of the basic meanings by which the term is usually understood; (ii) it should try to remedy problems identified with these previous interpretations without compromising the significance of the term that has been established over time. Having established an initial definition of the term, the chapter will attempt to explain how it accords with various historical uses that have helped to establish its central meaning. In the process, I show how the development of the concept through agonistic contestation over its significance raises a fundamental problem for ideology criticism within the theory of ideology: the diagnosis tends to implicate itself as a symptom of the underlying illness.

Part I: A Provisional Account

Ideology is *a shared set of interrelated ideas, values, norms, beliefs, desires and so forth belonging to a particular group of people, which supports relations of domination* by suggesting particular interpretations of social reality which *mask, obscure or disguise aspects of it*.

Relations of domination are social relations of power, which, as Susan Marks claims, are ‘structured in ways that entail differential levels of access to collective resources such as opportunities and goods’.² Domination can also be understood to involve the illegitimate frustration of a given set of preferences.³ Raymond Geuss calls this “surplus repression”,⁴ since a greater number of preferences are frustrated through it than are necessary for society to reproduce itself. This is slightly ambiguous. Phenomena such as slave labour can become institutionalised to the extent that they become necessary in order for a particular society to reproduce itself as such. The attribution “domination” involves a normative evaluation of relations of power with respect to issues of legitimacy.

Domination as “surplus repression” is the illegitimate repression of a given set of preferences to the benefit of one group, and at the expense of another. How it may be said to be illegitimate, is a matter for more careful discussion later on. “Power” is to be understood here in terms of social relations that, firstly, affect the capacity of individuals to make decisions, pursue ends or realise interests, and secondly, can be indexed to class, sex, ethnicity, geography and other such categories of social stratification.⁵

Note that the account of ideology I propose deploys the term in a pejorative sense, for ideology is said to perpetuate domination. This is the sense in play in the notion of ideology criticism. The meaning of “domination” in the definition is not restricted to class-divisions, though the importance of class-based interpretations of domination is acknowledged. However, constraining the theory of ideology to *economic* aspects of domination is unnecessarily limited given the aptness of the term for contexts which transcend class relations, such as gender, ethnicity, nationalism, etc. I argue later that the neutral conception of ideology as a world-view or perspective should be dismissed, but for now a basic explanation will suffice, namely that the use of the term to “ideology criticism” entails the pejorative sense of “ideology”. Note, lastly, that while this definition includes the sense of ideology as *illusion*, this does not imply deliberate or intentional deceit. For example, underlying aspects of social reality may be mystified by their appearance, personal interests may be taken for the general interest, and transient historical and social restrictions or frustrations may be thought natural or inevitable. Deceptive appearances need not be intentional even though they benefit particular groups of people.

Part II: A Brief History of Ideology

An Idealistic Science of Ideas (de Tracy and Napoleon)

Proposed by Destutt de Tracy in 1796 as a science of ideas to follow the methods of the natural sciences, the term “ideology” was initially proposed as a category of biology.⁶ Elements of conscious life such as perception, memory, judgment and will, were to be systematically analysed as

sensations much like any empirical phenomena studied by natural scientists. Ideology as a science was intended to secure a stable foundation for the moral and political sciences which de Tracy hoped to use to defend a liberal political and economic philosophy stressing the need for private property, individual rights and limited state interference in the economy.⁷ De Tracy believed an objective scientific grasp of ideas would facilitate the regulation of society in a way which was free from prejudice. Impartial, objective knowledge gained by a sound scientific grasp of reality could be used to regulate society rationally in accordance with everyone's aims and needs, and thereby emancipate the public economic and political order from private ambitions and partial interests.

De Tracy and his colleagues formed a society of "ideologists" at the National Institute in Paris to study ideas, but their vocal support for republicanism soon lost them favour with Napoleon who turned de Tracy's coinage of "ideology" into a term of abuse. Feeling that de Tracy's republicanism threatened his political ambitions, Napoleon ridiculed ideology as a naive and abstract science divorced from political reality, and derided de Tracy and his colleagues at the Institute as "ideologues"⁸ who were so focussed on metaphysical speculation about how political life ought to be that they had lost touch with the realities of political behaviour. The term "ideology" thus came to refer not only to the science of ideas studied by de Tracy and his society of ideologists, but to the very ideas they held. In its pejorative sense, ideology came to mean 'a body of ideas alleged to be erroneous and divorced from the practical realities of everyday life'.⁹

Idealism and Objectification (Marx)

Though later Marxists such as Lenin, Lukács and Gramsci drew on Marx's references to ideology to elaborate descriptive and even positive conceptions of the term (as class consciousness), Marx first uses the term in *The German Ideology* in a polemical or pejorative sense. Following Napoleon's ridicule of de Tracy for studying ideas in abstraction from their historical and political determination, Marx borrows this use of the term to mock Young Hegelians idealists, such as Feuerbach and Stirner, for overestimating the role of ideas and neglecting material conditions of thought.¹⁰ The Young

Hegelians, writes Marx, 'fight phrases with phrases' and 'neglect the real chains of men'¹¹ - as if by changing our ideas about the world, we can change the world itself. They oppose ideas with mere ideas and leave the real world unchanged. Inherited from German Idealism, this emphasis on the analysis of ideas independently from empirical reality is what Marx refers to as the German Ideology.

Marx's materialist position holds that life is not determined by consciousness, but life determines consciousness. Ideas, he writes, are 'the direct efflux of material behaviour'. Politics, law, morality and religion, for example, are determined by the productive forces of society.¹² Marx argues this by tying his critique of the German Idealism to an historical materialist analysis of how it emerges from the division of mental and physical labour. He states that working in isolation from the economic sites of production fosters illusions regarding the autonomy of ideas.¹³ While criticism of ideas 'apart from real history has no value whatsoever',¹⁴ Marx believes his own historical materialist criticism overcomes this as it is rooted in awareness of the economic determinations of consciousness. Marx argues that "civil law", for example, 'develops simultaneously with private property' and is instituted by the State, which 'is the form in which individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests'.¹⁵ As we shall see, a major problem with this theory is that it entails a functionalist argument whereby the dominant *ideas* in society develop in accordance with their role in stabilising social relations which reinforce the *economic* base.¹⁶ This seems to involve at least two inconsistent premises: (1) base *determines* superstructure; (2) base depends on superstructure.

Marx adds a further dimension to Napoleon's pejorative sense of ideology which is consistent with the materialist position that thinking is determined by productive activity. He claims to uncover a set of beliefs, desires or dispositions of a particular group of people that perpetuate domination.¹⁷ More specifically, he argues that the dominant ideas of society support the practical interests of the ruling class and thereby help to maintain the latter's domination of society. He contends that the ruling class owns the material means by which opinion and public consciousness are constructed. Control over means of production, he claims, allows for control over mental production. The ideas produced

by the ruling class in accordance with their interests and standpoint thus give rise to the dominant ideas of society: 'the ideas of the ruling class are thus in every epoch the ruling ideas, that is, the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force'.¹⁸

Rosen argues, in his influential interpretation of the passages, that Marx's solution to the problem of "voluntary servitude", to why 'the many accept the rule of the few even when it is against their interests to do so', is (the notion of) ideology.¹⁹

The question is, why would oppressed peoples adopt such self-defeating ideas?²⁰ To explain provisionally, Marx answers that the ruling ideas are expressed 'as eternal law' under the form of universality. 'Each new class... is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest.'²¹ Ideology leads people to mistake partial interests for the general good. To illustrate and defend this critical position on ideology as well as explain the underlying mechanism, Marx presents an historical materialist account of how the dominant liberal ideas of the ruling capitalist bourgeois class come to be represented as rational and universally valid. This representation is not illusory at first. At the outset of revolution the interest of the bourgeoisie really is shared with all others oppressed by the prior dominating class. The interests of the bourgeoisie in overthrowing this class can thus stand as representative for the interests of all members of society. 'Every new class, therefore, achieves its hegemony only on a broader base than that of the class ruling previously'.²² Once the ascendant class position is stabilised, the collective interest is no longer unified.

Universal interests are abstracted from particular interests that give rise to them, but such general abstractions obscure underlying inequalities. 'What is called the general interest has always been produced by private interests' and then conceived of in ideal terms.²³ Liberal political economy and the idea of meritocracy, for example, foster the illusion of unity, equality and a level playing field. According to Marx, the dominant ideology internalised by the proletariat concurs with the interests of the ruling class by representing class relations in an illusory form which covers over class divisions.

The standpoint of the working class is distorted by their internalisation and acceptance of the dominant ideology, so that they act within institutions and practices that militate against their interests and fail to resist their exploitation under the *status quo*. Just as we do not judge a person by their own opinion of themselves, Marx does not take dominant ideas at face value but rather explains them with reference to the economic conditions of production.²⁴ He believes his historical materialist analysis of the origin and function of ideology allows for an unmasking.

John Thompson argues that there is a third conception of ideology in *The German Ideology*, in Marx's account of traditional values and symbols. These are said to sustain existing social relations by orienting individuals towards the past and present at the expense of the potential for future change and our agency to affect it. Tradition and conservatism in the face of uncertainty can help to sustain existing relations of domination and exploitation, preventing people from realising their collective interests by reinforcing the inevitability of the *status quo* in their minds.²⁵ Existing social relations are naturalised by traditional values and symbols and come to appear obvious and self-evident - that it is better to adapt to than resist. Ideology, in this sense, is not strictly illusory with respect to the representation of class interests and actual socio-economic conditions. Rather, it is the perception sustained by these symbols and narratives, that existing social conditions are inevitable, which is misleading.

We see that ideology may also take the form of a set of ideas, values, and so on, which affects our perception of social and historical processes such that we perceive these as natural, inevitable and given, rather than as a consequence of collective human endeavour. The identification of naturalizing assumptions encouraged by traditional values and symbols, together with the materialist reference to universal form expressed as "eternal law", point to a further explanation for self-defeating behaviour that may be found in *The German Ideology*, but which is developed with greater empirical specificity in *Capital* with respect to various forms of objectifying, reifying or fetishising errors. The explanation is that underlying socially-determined processes appear on the

surface to be determined objectively and to be beyond contestation. Though Marx does not explicitly characterise commodity fetishism as ideological, the process of de-contestation which it instantiates bears similarities to, and goes some way towards explaining the success of, the above processes of universalization and naturalization.

“Commodity fetishism” is a term used in *Capital* to explain how the exchange value attached to commodities fosters the illusion that its value naturally inheres in the object itself, thus masking the process by which human activity determines the use-value and labour power realised in processes of production which the exchange value of a commodity in fact represents.²⁶ Much as human powers and values – ‘the productions of the human brain’ – ‘in the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world’ are transferred to a religious fetish in which they are perceived to inhere ‘as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race’,²⁷ so the commodity form and the process of exchange masks human activity and social relations which appear fixed, objective and natural characteristics of the commodity itself. The social character of labour is seen as a set of relationships between things. As Rosen explains, under commodity fetishism a material object is invested with non-material labour power as a result of human agency operated on it. This non-material property really is in the object but perceivers are deluded in their failure to recognise the human agency that is the source of this non-material property.²⁸ The social labour time which determines the value of a commodity is concealed under capitalist relations of production and exchange. Thus, relations constituted by human labour to satisfy our collective wants and needs come to appear as relations between things. By disguising human agency, commodity fetishism diminishes awareness of our ability to effect change.

Processes of objectification and naturalization, with which commodity fetishism engages us, are ideological to the extent that they perpetuate existing relations of domination by presenting unique, particular, artificial and contingent states of affairs as inevitable and unchangeable, transcending human agency.

Economists forget the source of the value of commodities – and describe the world as if coats or boots trade with linen independently of human agency. They fail to see that capitalist production treats goods in this way and thus mystifies real social relations.²⁹

Such ideological processes not only occur with commodity fetishism but also with theoretical categories, such as those of bourgeois political economy and law. ‘The categories of bourgeois economy consist of such like forms... expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production’. Thus, the laws of political economy are presented as natural and immutable, not constructed and historically contingent. ‘[T]he formulae of political economy appear to the bourgeois intellect to be as much a self-evident necessity imposed by Nature as productive labour itself’.³⁰

Just as particular interests take on the appearance of universal interests in abstraction from their material origins, so the categories of political economy appear natural and beyond contestation in abstraction from transitory underlying historical processes. The process of naturalisation helps to explain why the dominant liberal ideology appears inevitable, unchangeable and ordained by nature, rather than by the particular interests of the bourgeois class. Although we eventually realise how use-value determines exchange value, this ‘by no means dissipates the mist through which the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves’.³¹ Unless the objective historical conditions that give rise to these illusions persist, it is ineffective merely to ‘fight phrases with phrases’.

“Descriptive” Senses: *World-View* or Class Consciousness (Mannheim, Lukács)

In the final part of the section on commodity fetishism, Marx argues,

The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.³²

That social agents are engaged in mutual productive relations to satisfy wants is no longer disguised under communism since they supposedly regulate their exchanges consciously. The ideas of

communism can be seen in this regard as a counter-ideology. Following Marx, a neutral sense of ideology as class consciousness or world-view emerges, as well as a positive sense, of the revolutionary class consciousness of the proletariat. In fact, Lenin assumes that there can be no classless ideology in a class society and uses the term to refer to the respective ideas which express and promote the interests of any particular class. He argues, on this basis, that it is incumbent on the intellectual vanguard of the proletariat (who are detached from day-to-day struggles and have a broader view of developmental trends and the goals of the working class) to elaborate a systematised body of thought appropriate to the interests of the proletariat with which to combat bourgeois ideology.³³ In the neutral or descriptive sense, to the extent that it represents class interests, Marx's work too may be thought of as ideological.

Geuss defines ideology in the broad, non-evaluative, purely descriptive sense of "ideology" as the socio-cultural features of a group, including beliefs, concepts, attitudes, psychological dispositions, motives, desires, values, art, etc. This is the anthropological sense of the word, in which every group may be said to have a broadly cohesive ideology, although various different aspects of ideology may be acknowledged within and across different groups.³⁴ Such a broad definition, however, does not address the issue of how ideology groups together different social elements in a uniform sense.

Different elements of ideological forms of consciousness come together as a cohesive set in numerous ways for different people at different historical moments, and yet all somehow qualify as ideology. The descriptive sense of the term may be qualified more precisely as a "world-view" that is widely shared by its members, systematically interconnected, central to its members' conceptual scheme (in that they will not easily relinquish it), with a deep influence on their behaviour and their lives.³⁵ Ideology in the descriptive sense is just such a framework of orientation.

Karl Mannheim assumes this much for his own scientific standard, arguing further that all social knowledge meets the conditions for ideology posited by ideology critics since all social knowledge is grounded in historical social conditions. He does not dismiss the possibility that there are distorted

(e.g. cognitively deficient) ideologies but claims this is only a partial conception of the term. A total conception by contrast includes all world-views.³⁶ The scientific interpretive methods of the sociology of knowledge allow social scientists to describe these views without taking an evaluative stance toward them. Mannheim's descriptive use of the term therefore renounces the evaluative character of ideology posed by the pejorative sense, recalling a certain extent to the original use of the term by Destutt de Tracy. The problem with this, however, is made explicit by Georg Lukács' use of the descriptive sense to shed doubt on the non-evaluative character of scientific discourse. Maintaining the descriptivist claim that knowledge, including his own historical materialist position, is a product of historical social conditions, Lukács rejects Marx's and Mannheim's distinction between ideology and science. Lukács claims modern science is a product of bourgeois consciousness and that scientific knowledge is not exempt from the evaluative commitments that arise from various historical social conditions.

Lukács, however, marks out a privileged position for his own standpoint which he claims represents the objective ideology of the proletariat. Like Marx, he asserts that all ideology reflects particular socially conditioned human practical interests, that proletarian interests reflect mankind's objective interest in emancipation from present relations of domination, and that his own position reflects this objectivity. However, Lukács runs into a problem of self-implication here. The fourth chapter will explain why the problem of self-implication is the central, defining problem for ideology criticism, but to prefigure this briefly with respect to Lukács if proletarian class consciousness is contaminated by the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie, why should his interpretation of objective working class consciousness be regarded as objective and free from the distorting effects of ideology? If the theory of ideology claims that objective conditions determine the form of consciousness, then ideology theorists must acknowledge that their own standpoint is similarly affected. The problem is that owning up does not alter the fact.

The problem of self-implication facing the descriptive sense of ideology in accounting for domination is that the attempt to evade the problem posed by the pejorative sense - that the theory of ideology implicates one's account as ideology - does not override the possibility that one's own account is constrained by relations of power and socio-historical conditions of domination. To claim that one's own position excludes the struggle for domination is, in the absence of any further explanation of its privileged status with respect to material conditions of belief-formation, just another ideological manoeuvre which all too frequently masks the actual relations of power informing a particular standpoint. These problems, compounded historically by the rise of fascism and consumer society over the first half of the 20th Century, were taken up and addressed extensively by members of the "Frankfurt School". By the end of the Second World War, they recognised working class consciousness was increasingly integrated into the dominant ideology. 'Integration,' writes Max Horkheimer 'is the price that individuals must pay in order to flourish under capitalism'.³⁷ With great disillusionment, Theodor Adorno continues, 'Membership of the élite seems attainable to everyone. One only waits to be co-opted.... Sociologists, however, ponder the grimly comic riddle: "Where is the proletariat?"'³⁸

Disillusioned Ideology, Disillusioned Critics (Adorno and the Frankfurt School)

The rise of fascism in Germany, Italy and Spain, and the repressive authoritarian turn taken by the USSR, demonstrated to the theorists of the Frankfurt School the potential for revolutionary forces to be subverted to reactionary ends. It became increasingly apparent that a proletarian revolution was no guarantee of emancipation from conditions of domination. Similarly, in the USA and Allied European states, the growth of consumer capitalism and the commodification of culture had effectively incorporated working class consciousness into mainstream bourgeois ideology in a less overtly repressive manner. In their critique of the 'Culture Industry' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno show how individuals in developed capitalist economies adapt and adjust to the existing social order to satisfy their desire for objects produced by it.

For Adorno, artistic producers of cultural artefacts are so caught up with economic demands that they fail to challenge existing norms in their work and present these artefacts as a direct reflection of reality, thereby normalising the *status quo*.³⁹ By presenting conditions of existence as the norm, individuals are induced to identify with these norms and continue with things as they are. Adorno's model of "liberal ideology" follows Marx's epistemic models of ideology while his notion of "positivist ideology" and his accounts of consumerism follow the models of reification, objectification and commodity fetishism. Unlike liberal ideologies, the ideology of the culture industry no longer claims independence from social reality but is presented as part of social reality. Cultural objects are presented purely for exchange and enjoyment, denying individuals the space for critical reflection and independent thought, and binding them to the existing social order.⁴⁰ Adorno thus juxtaposes classic liberal ideology against a more contemporary positivist form.

In both authoritarian and democratic countries, the socialist theorist interested in the emancipation of society from domination becomes increasingly isolated from the proletarian social forces that are supposed to bring about transformation. This causes problems for a number of ideology critics that will be dealt with in later chapters on the task of ideology criticism. It also raises questions about the function of ideology (outlined only briefly here but to be explained and dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 3). Adorno claims that ideology is not simply reducible to the partial interests of the dominant social classes, but 'also meets slave needs'.⁴¹ I take this to mean that ideology is not simply some error of judgment made by the masses, duped by a political order that fails to represent their interests. Rather, ideology addresses real conditions, experiences and contradictions in ordinary lives, and reinterprets them in a generalising way that reinforces existing social relations (by means of a conservative ethos, for example, which appeals to traditional family values). Ideology does not coerce, but rather harnesses the interests of the workers, inducing them to participate in social relations, which perpetuate their own domination, as it were, behind their back, with even greater eagerness than the dominant class. 'The deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are... [T]hey insist on the ideology which enslaves them'.⁴²

The optimistic belief that anyone can make it if they work hard enough masks the asymmetrical social relations that favour privileged members of the dominant class. Yet, though the image of the self-made man shifts responsibility from structural conditions of domination to the individual, it can at the same time give hope to the underprivileged to help cope with already difficult circumstances.⁴³ Where the objective interests of the working class are *misrepresented* by the dominant ideology, Adorno argues that the contradictions between the objective idea and its pretension may be criticised in a form of immanent criticism. I examine this proposal in detail in Chapters 6 and 7. In the absence of genuine emancipatory class consciousness, Adorno argues, ideology may still be unmasked. Where bourgeois liberal ideology stakes its claims on freedom in universal terms, ideology criticism aims to reveal the gap between bourgeois ideology and actual conditions of domination.

However, a problem with such unmasking of ideals arises if it merely undermines these ideals and leads to cynical resignation instead of transformation.⁴⁴ Another theme that figures significantly in later chapters is put forward by Adorno's claim that contemporary forms of ideology do not so much fail to match up with reality, but rather objectify transient social and historical conditions as inevitable and unchangeable. The trouble with the traditional empiricist bent of disillusioning social scientific criticism, especially since mass culture in late capitalist society induces preferences for commodities produced under existing social relations, is that it does not misrepresent the *status quo*, it simply describes the world as it is. Disinterested and objective social science covers over relations of domination by abstracting from tacit valuations which inform social descriptions, portraying contingent and particular conditions as objective and determined - a form of reification of social processes which Adorno argues leads to 'resignation before the facts of life'.⁴⁵ 'Bourgeois social science,' such as Mannheim's descriptive account of total ideology as a world-view, 'has plundered the notion of ideology, diluting it to universal relativism'.⁴⁶ If knowledge, belief and values are determined by dominant socio-economic conditions, where is the space for criticism and resistance?

There is no leverage to be gained where ideology and objective reality are one. With the renunciation of “interference” by artists, cultural critics and social scientists, and processes of objectification which describe social phenomena as natural, culture and social science lose their critical significance and become ideological by giving the impression that existing social phenomena are beyond our control and cannot be transcended. According to Adorno, ideology in late capitalist society is no longer an illusion but ‘an open secret’.⁴⁷ As with Marx’s account of commodity fetishism, the effect is to give an impression of false naturalness or false objectivity. Thus Adorno claims ideology may operate transparently, presenting existing states of affairs accurately, although an element of mystification or illusion remains to the extent that such description of appearances stops short of addressing underlying conditions and possibilities, so that present social relations seem natural or inevitable.

Ideology in the pejorative sense was originally conceived against idealism - as a set of ideas, values and beliefs which misrepresented forms of consciousness in isolation from their material condition in human praxis - and could be understood objectively by virtue of sound scientific method. Now, Adorno claims, ideology ‘drones, as it were, from the gears of an irresistible *praxis*’.⁴⁸

In the open air prison which the world is becoming... there are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness... The materialistic transparency of culture has not made it more honest, only more vulgar... To call it to account before a responsibility which it denies is only to affirm cultural pomposity... its heritage has become... trash. And the hucksters of mass culture can point to it with a grin for they treat it as such.⁴⁹

Liberal ideology’s false legitimization of existing states of affairs can be at least confronted immanently with its own claims to truth. Positivist or objectivist ideology no longer says anything more than that things are the way they are, implying things could not be other than they are. Positivist ideology, as opposed to liberal ideology, serves no longer as a vindication of the existing states of affairs but rather as a legitimating inevitability.⁵⁰

Though Horkheimer and Adorno believe we can still base ideology criticism on traces of transcendent normative ideals (that the shape of freedom can be grasped in 'scattered traces of a different colour')⁵¹ the situation just described makes it exceedingly difficult to identify these fragments of potentially emancipatory rationality. Later Frankfurt School theorists, such as Habermas, argue this leaves no standpoint outside of ideology from which to criticise domination, leading Horkheimer and Adorno to a "performative contradiction" whereby they undermine their own foundation for critique.⁵² Though Adorno claims that bourgeois social science has diluted the concept of ideology to universal relativism, Habermas argues that Adorno's conception of ideology is itself totalizing. Adorno defines ideology as a socially necessary illusion - which can be understood in the pejorative sense as an illusion which helps to perpetuate domination. Yet he goes on to claim that all conceptual judgments are socially necessary illusions,⁵³ that 'all rational thought is an expression of power and domination over nature'.⁵⁴ In which case Adorno's own work is implicated in his definition and it becomes impossible to conceptualise what would be non-ideological.

The End of Ideology

Habermas claims that the advent of modern procedural democracy has led to the historical demise of ideologies. Whereas the belief-forming mechanisms of previous social orders were based on tradition, hierarchy and myth, modern beliefs are increasingly open to the challenge of discursive scrutiny and thus ideology is no longer feasible.⁵⁵ At least in this respect he agrees with many liberal Twentieth Century social theorists - such as Shill, Bell, Lipset and Fukuyama - that ideology in the pejorative sense of systematic mass deception has come to an end. With the demise of fascism, the loss of credibility of Soviet communism, and broader political participation in the public sphere with the triumph of liberal democracy, totalising ideologies are said to have been replaced by a pragmatic consensus-building approach to politics which allows for incremental social change through discussion and debate.⁵⁶ Theorists such as Fukuyama maintain that ideology simply fell away along with the Berlin Wall. Habermas argues that thin context-transcending validity claims to truth and moral rightfulness are immanent to ordinary practices of communication, such that the pragmatic

presuppositions of existing communicative practices offer criteria of legitimation.⁵⁷ Such criteria may be used to challenge discourses of domination. On the political left, theorists such as Foucault, Baudrillard and Bourdieu, are suspicious of the notion of ideology for positing access to a privileged position outside of domination which may thereby support domination and mask vested interests.⁵⁸

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall – the apparent heyday of secular liberal democracy - liberal political-economic doctrines which argue for the privatisation of state-run services and non-interference by governments in economic affairs has become dominant, although this view is beginning to encounter some resistance, especially since the collapse of major global investment banks in 2008.⁵⁹ With the long-term crisis this event poses and the resurgence of religious discourse in political affairs, the pronouncement that ideology is dead now looks premature. The liberal economic consensus led to mass-scale economic deregulation and cuts in public finance orchestrated globally, mostly in “third world” client states at first, but soon spreading from the periphery to the hegemonic core. This has generally accompanied increased class division and social instability, sometimes triggering backlashes of fundamentalism. A mere twenty years after the demise of the USSR, the optimistic proclamation of the end of ideology appears at least naïve, if not typically ideological.

Part III: Problems with The Theory of ideology

Though the ascendance of liberal political economy and the resurgence of religious influence in politics are increasingly understood in terms of a resurgence of ideology, the question remains whether the term is still useful for critical social theory given the extent of the philosophical problems it faces, particularly with respect to the tendency of ideology criticism to undermine itself. In this section, I return to the definition given in the opening section of this chapter to show how it addresses the different conceptions identified in the intellectual history of the term outlined in Part II. I also identify certain theoretical problems facing these previous conceptions to be dealt with in subsequent chapters. In the final section, two distinct interpretations of this definition will be identified, each of which suggests an alternative method of dealing with these problems in ideology

criticism. I describe these briefly at the close and examine them in greater detail in the following chapters.

Ideology, to recall, is *a shared set of interrelated ideas, values, norms beliefs, desires and so forth belonging to a particular group of people, which supports relations of domination* by suggesting particular interpretations of social reality which *mask, obscure or disguise aspects of it*.

Let us see how this addresses the different conceptions distinguished in the previous section.

Immediately it is apparent that de Tracy's and Napoleon's conceptions of ideology are not captured by this definition. First, the definition is essentially pejorative, so de Tracy's conception of ideology as a science of ideas is ruled out, although his intent to study ideas in empirical terms to avoid bias and superstition still informs the general sense of the term. Second, while the idea that ideology obscures practical interests or material reality accords with Napoleon's pejorative conception, this is still too broad for emancipatory criticism. Since Marx's association of the pejorative sense of ideology with domination has become so firmly established, it seems fairly reasonable to restrict our use of the pejorative sense of ideology to denote the masking of relations of domination in some suitable sense of domination that remains to be specified.

The definition I have given accords with Marx's various conceptions of ideology and includes both an epistemic and functional aspect. The epistemic aspect (which I explore further in Chapter 2) addresses the cognitive deficiency of ideas considered in abstraction from the material reality of relations of domination. The definition also addresses a functional aspect of Marx's account of ideology which asserts that the dominant ideas in society reinforce the social relations in which they are embedded (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth account). The definition also accords with the claim in *The German Ideology* that dominant ideas reflect the practical interests of the ruling class. Finally, the definition is compatible with Marx's account of commodity fetishism, which addresses error that arises from a focus on objective qualities as at the expense of subjective agency and ideas, leading to failure to account for contingent, historical and socially determined aspects of social reality. I explain

in Chapter 3, that the epistemic aspect provides an explanatory mechanism for why the illusions generated by ideology are accepted in the face of oppression, making ideology functional for oppression. Marx's attention to objectification errors in his study of commodity fetishism in *Capital* helps caution against determinist interpretations of historical materialism by showing that not just idealism and superstition, but also objectification and positivism, can obscure oppression. Marx both argues and demonstrates that ideology criticism is valuable only if it is both materially *and* historically informed.

A significant problem with the functional aspect of ideology is that, if agents are deluded about certain features of the world by ideology, it is difficult to say why this does not lead to practical failures in our dealings with the world like other false beliefs.⁶⁰ How could such a self-undermining set of ideas, values and practices be accepted by the majority of people?⁶¹ These questions points to possibly high-handed, elitist or paternalistic attitudes implicit in the claim that those who are deluded by ideology are cultural dupes. This in turn raises the questions, by what right does the ideology critic know my interests better than I do, and how is she exempt from ideology? Whilst it is not unreasonable to maintain that people often mistake their needs and interests – a number of people of mixed race supported the apartheid government in South Africa for example - the notion of systematic mass delusion nevertheless posits an uncharitable attitude towards the rationality of the subject of criticism⁶² and tends to undermine the credibility of the ideology critic, whose work effectively depends on the potential of the subject of criticism to engage with and respond rationally to her arguments. Furthermore, the charge of systematic mass delusion overlooks the fact that 'the poor often do have a sense of injustice,' and it is puzzling why this is so if they are systematically deluded by ideology.⁶³

The epistemic aspect of the theory of ideology may help to address some of these problems with the functional account, as I will argue in Chapter 3. To explain provisionally, the claim that ideology includes an aspect of cognitive deficiency is used to show how ideology represents social reality in a

way that obscures underlying oppressive social conditions. This goes some way towards explaining why oppressed groups hold onto such ideas in the face of their practical experience, if it is practical experience that determines our ideas. Marx's account of commodity fetishism shows how reality may remain opaque even after its inner workings have been understood. We can extend the scope of ideology beyond class: for example, patriarchal forms of organisation tend to generate illusions about the special qualities of men, such as courage and reason; special qualities such as rationality appeared to inhere in Whites as a result of functions under the structure of colonialism;⁶⁴ greed was associated with Jews more or less forced into usury and otherwise excluded; stinginess with poor Scots; and so on. I explain in detail in the next chapter that the epistemic account of ideology raises a problem of self-implication that leads Marxist social theorists (such as Joe McCarney) to dismiss this aspect of ideology and post-structuralist critics of Marxism (such as Michel Foucault) to reject the notion altogether. Briefly and also provisionally, the problem with the epistemic aspect of the theory of ideology is that it problematises conditions for the ideas, beliefs, values, and so forth, subjected to criticism, but this destabilises ideology criticism, which suspiciously ends up resembling the very form it seeks to criticise.

Adorno's positivist model of ideology and Marx's objectification model both support the omission of the neutral conception of ideology as world-view from the definition. To recall, Adorno's problem with Mannheim's descriptive account of ideology is that ideology covers over tacit valuations which undercut claims to impartiality, objectivity and a non-evaluative stance. Objective scientific knowledge entails tacit valuations and its contexts of emergence, as Foucault argues, are connected to social relations which are subject, in turn, to relations of power. If we take seriously Adorno's complaint that 'bourgeois social science has plundered the notion of ideology, diluting it to universal relativism' (that the descriptive or scientific account of ideology makes all knowledge ideological and neglects the problem of domination) then, as Habermas agrees, disregarding the interests behind knowledge 'succumbs to unacknowledged external conditions and becomes ideological'.⁶⁵ Since the theory of ideology presupposes that theory is always pursued for some purpose, to claim

otherwise is ideologically suspicious. Marx's accounts of objectification errors show how objective appearances can in fact obscure underlying social and historical factors, and Adorno shows how an objective description of reality can reinforce existing social relations by making them look as if they are inevitable and unchangeable.

On the scientific, objective or neutral account of ideology, then, either we presuppose a space for criticism apart from historical and social conditions, or all knowledge is ideological and relativist to the extent that knowledge claims are seen to be conditioned by the particular context of the knower. This leaves little space for criticism and resistance to the relations of domination. The problem for the theorist of ideology, who argues social scientific knowledge of society is ideological to the extent that it claims exemption from the beliefs and concepts which express the interests of the dominant social group, is that she in turn depends upon a privileged perspective to exempt her own position from ideology. Such privileged exemption from distorting social factors is precisely what categorises the ideological position of social science. For these reasons, the descriptive account of ideology is deeply problematic. Adorno's conception of ideology as an objectification error supports my proposed definition by showing why the neutral conception is both inconsistent and ideologically suspect.

Adorno's explanation for why subordinated groups remain in thrall to the dominant ideology in the face of practical experience is that ideology is not simply reducible to the partial interests of the dominant social classes but 'is equally near the centre in all its pieces'.⁶⁶ Ideology gains apparent legitimacy by incorporating certain interests, of those subject to relations of domination, which do not threaten the *status quo*. Propaganda posters and advertising campaigns from the early Twentieth Century, for example, appear comical and naive to the more sophisticated, ironic and cynical audiences of the modern age of mass communication and consumerism. The problem is not that we are unaware of the way politicians and the media attempt to manipulate us, but rather that we feel ever more implicated in structures of domination and ever more disempowered and unable

to resist. We know, for example, about the exploitation of those who manufacture our clothes, and the violence and environmental degradation inflicted in the drive to secure oil resources, but feel powerless to affect change. The Western consumer feels ever more implicated and responsible for her own domination, and the domination of others, but ever more unable to resist. Though there may be elements of ideology which do in fact fail to correspond to social reality, ideology is not entirely irrational or false. Instead, it tends to mask tacit valuations and social factors, thereby undermining our sense of agency and thus, our actual agency.

The problem Adorno's notion of positivist ideology raises for the descriptive account is also a problem for the epistemic aspect of cognitive deficiency, or illusion, that I hope to use to explain the functional aspect of ideology later on. I address the problem of self-implication with the epistemic aspect further in Chapter 2 and in even more detail in Chapter 4. But briefly and provisionally: if the theory of ideology problematises the relationship between belief and present socio-economic conditions, then it becomes difficult to see why the critic's standpoint should be thought exempt from this relationship. The main problem with the theory of ideology, as we have seen, is that the problems it exposes tend to rebound on the critic who raises them. For example, to interpret the reassertion of fundamentalist religions as ideology, implicates other religious beliefs and normative frameworks of orientation.

Criticism of ideology puts the critic's beliefs into question, since they are influenced by the political, social and cultural conditions that she claims generate ideological forms of consciousness. But if others' views are deluded due to political, social or cultural conditions, by what right can it be presumed that one's own view escapes this? By casting doubt on the possibility of forming objective beliefs, one's own beliefs can begin to appear prejudiced, and ideology is reduced to a matter of choosing sides. The question, 'who is right?' becomes 'who do you support?' Ideology is no longer false consciousness or delusion, but merely a category used to differentiate one point of view from another. Ideology raises a problem for the normative foundations of criticism since, more often than

not, its ascription almost inevitably ends up undercutting the critic's position by association. Once in the air, it becomes difficult not to breathe it. As such, critics of ideology, as opposed to ideology critics, have argued we should avoid using the concept, and that ideology criticism is no longer feasible or useful as ideology entails its own demise.

Remember that de Tracy originally coined the word ideology to refer to a study of ideas to be grounded in the methods of the empirical sciences. Such a programme entails the presupposition that, firstly, our ideas are determined by social and historical actuality and, secondly, that some ideas distort our understanding of the empirical conditions of thought. Napoleon's and Marx's polemical appropriations of the term show how these premises make the concept a cursed weapon. Once it gains a foothold, it tends to expand to encompass all reality and undermines the critical standpoint of ideology criticism by positing conditions which are difficult to avoid. If ideas generated by social conditions perpetuate illusions, on what basis do we gain true or reliable knowledge of our social situation? Once we accept that ideas are caught up with the distorting effects of class consciousness, it is by no means certain that scientific historical materialism enables us to see through such illusory phenomena. The claim that neo-classical economics is ideological, but Marxist political economy is scientific, is problematic. A strict division between ideology and science is difficult to defend.⁶⁷

Part IV: Alternative Pejorative Aspects of Ideology

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to emphasise that the definition outlined above supports two alternative interpretations, both turning on the significance of the "illusory" aspect of ideology. An epistemic account focused on aspects of cognitive deficiency emphasises the role of illusions that constitute the *false consciousness* of ideology; on a strictly functional account, however, ideology may be said to include *true beliefs* that are somehow functionally integrated in socio-economic relations of domination. This distinction between epistemic and functional aspects of ideology has important implications for the practice of ideology criticism, particularly with respect

to the question of how normative criteria may be identified for the critic to gain insight into what happens *behind* ideology. If ideology is understood as a primarily epistemic matter of cognitive deficiency, ideology criticism may simply involve demonstrating that ideology is empirically false. An idealistic legitimating façade may be criticised by pointing to oppressive conditions behind it. However, Adorno claims ideology need not involve such idealistic mystification. As we have seen, he argues that, in late capitalist society, ideology functions in a positivistic, objectivist mode. As such, classic “disillusioning” ideology criticism may be implicated in positivist ideology since it further integrates subjects into the resigned, pragmatic processes of adaptation to domination that pervade late capitalist society.

It may be ironic that the *suspicion* of classic ideology criticism we find in Adorno’s critique of positivist ideology is in some way correlative with the very objectivism it decries. A further factor that militates against the epistemic account of ideology as cognitive deficiency - in favour of a more functionally oriented, objective approach - may be said to be motivated by a perceived need to shift Marxist social critique away from epistemic considerations and towards more practical concerns. One discerns amongst social scientists a temptation to interpret the term “ideological illusion” as a conception used by Marx in a younger, more speculative phase that inherits, and remains philosophically indebted to, residual idealist presuppositions of the Hegelian tradition from which his work developed. Marx is perhaps thought to have followed through on the implications of his historical materialist critique of left-Hegelian “idol-bashing” by later shifting his attention from philosophical problems to a more scientific study of socio-economic conditions, to apply his theoretical insights and explain actual *practical* concerns behind hypostatized legitimating self-conceptions. His later work is, arguably, scientifically and empirically grounded in the real conditions that determine social relations and ideals, and thus amounts to more than a simply theoretical rejection of idealistic wrong-headedness.

On this account, it is argued that the mature Marx does not attribute the cause of self-defeating behaviour to people's *false beliefs*; rather, he explains such phenomena empirically, with reference to the commodity, for example, whose illusory character is empirically determined. Ideology criticism without materialist explanation easily reverts to ideology, which points to a broader issue of self-implication to which ideology criticism is vulnerable: on one hand, "*disillusioning*" criticism of false ideals implicates itself in two ways: (i) criticism of idealistic first-principles, from first principles, is immediately contradictory. (ii) "*disillusioning*" ideology criticism undermines normative criteria for ideology criticism, by debunking the ideals needed to criticise dominant socio-economic conditions. On the other hand, *functional* criticism of objective illusions is also self-undermining: (i) if ideas are determined by empirical conditions, then why is the critic's standpoint not included? (ii) if ideas are historically determined, how is knowing this supposed to change anything?

In sum, the account I offer accommodates two distinctive interpretations of ideology, involving a cognitive and a functional aspect. Each aspect produces an equally distinctive response to ideology criticism. Although I acknowledge the problem of self-implication, or self-exemption, for criticism, that is posed by the *epistemic* account of ideology (in Chapter 2), I contend it is equally important to recognise that the *functional* account faces a similar problem (in Chapter 3). Ultimately, I hope to show how a genealogical approach to ideology criticism accommodates both aspects of the concept of ideology identified here, and addresses the problem of self-implication. First, however, we must look at the two central aspects of "ideology" in the classical pejorative sense.

¹ Foucault, 1980: 133.

² Marks, S. 2000: 11.

³ Geuss, R. 1981: 16-17.

⁴ Marcuse develops this term in his account of "sick society" in 'Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Society', first published in 1967 (printed in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Beacon Press, Boston: 1968).

⁵ Thompson, J. 1990: 59.

⁶ This is particularly ironic in light of the term's subsequent pejorative usurpation and philological mutation which includes even a positivist interpretation. As we shall see, the contagious deflationary irony of "ideology", which often attaches to theory of ideology and ideology criticism too, is also its undoing.

⁷ Thompson, J. 1990: 28-30.

⁸ Thompson, J. 1990: 31.

⁹ Thompson, J. 1990: 32.

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- ¹⁰ Marx, K. 1970: 37.
 - ¹¹ Marx, K. 1970: 46.
 - ¹² Marx, K. 1970: 47.
 - ¹³ Marx, K. 1970: 51.
 - ¹⁴ Marx, K. 1970: 48.
 - ¹⁵ Marx, K. 1970: 80.
 - ¹⁶ Rosen, M. 1996: 185, and Fluxman, A. 2005: 4.
 - ¹⁷ Geuss, R. 1981: 12.
 - ¹⁸ Marx, K. 1970: 64.
 - ¹⁹ Rosen, M. 1996: 1.
 - ²⁰ Rosen, M. 1996: 182-183.
 - ²¹ Marx, K. 1970: 65.
 - ²² Marx, K. 1970: 66.
 - ²³ Marx, K. 1976: 248.
 - ²⁴ Marx, K. 1970: 67.
 - ²⁵ Thompson, J. 1990: 41-43.
 - ²⁶ Marx, K. 1975: 335.
 - ²⁷ Marx, K. 1975: 336.
 - ²⁸ Rosen, M. 1996: 230. (much as the conditions that give certain vegetables an “organic” quality are not visible in the product)
 - ²⁹ Marx, K. 2000: 439.
 - ³⁰ Marx, K. 1975: 342.
 - ³¹ Marx, K. 1975: 342.
 - ³² Marx, K. 1975: 342.
 - ³³ Marks, S. 2000: 10, and Geuss, R. 1981: 23.
 - ³⁴ Guess, R. 1981: 5.
 - ³⁵ Geuss, R. 1981: 10.
 - ³⁶ Thompson, J. 1990: 48, and Eagleton, T. 1994: 194.
 - ³⁷ Horkheimer, M in Dubiel, H. 1985: 70.
 - ³⁸ Adorno, T. 1974: 194.
 - ³⁹ Thompson, J. 1990: 99-101.
 - ⁴⁰ Thompson, J. 1990: 104.
 - ⁴¹ Adorno, T. 1967: 31.
 - ⁴² Horkheimer, M and Adorno, T. 1991: 133-134.
 - ⁴³ Terry Eagleton elaborates on this, arguing that dominant ideologies are not mere disguises but contain antagonistic forces within them. The ideology of the working class is not ‘an inert passive by-product of social contradictions’ but an attempt to cope with real problems containing ‘the confused glimmer of a solution’ (Eagleton, T. 1994: 210).
 - ⁴⁴ The *sour grapes* phenomenon.
 - ⁴⁵ Adorno, T. 1967: 23
 - ⁴⁶ Adorno, T. 1967: 30.
 - ⁴⁷ Adorno, T. 1967: 29.
 - ⁴⁸ Adorno, T. 1967: 29.
 - ⁴⁹ Adorno, T. 1967: 34.
 - ⁵⁰ Cook, D. 2001: 11-12.
 - ⁵¹ Adorno, T. *Negative Dialectics*, 1973: 370.
 - ⁵² Finlayson, JG. 2003: 176.
 - ⁵³ Finlayson, JG. 2003: 175.
 - ⁵⁴ Adorno, T in Finlayson, JG, 2003: 176.
 - ⁵⁵ Finlayson, JG. 2003: 180.
 - ⁵⁶ Marks, S. 2000: 15.
 - ⁵⁷ Finlayson, JG. 2003: 184.
 - ⁵⁸ Foucault, M. 2002: 119. Baudrillard, J in Marks, S. 2000: 17. Bourdieu, P. 1994: 266.
 - ⁵⁹ The “non-ideological” doctrine of “non-interference” with market mechanisms is a subterfuge.
 - ⁶⁰ Finlayson, JG. 2003:177.
 - ⁶¹ Rosen, M. 1996: 183.

⁶² Heath, J. 2001: 167.

⁶³ Barrett, M. 1991: 21.

⁶⁴ Fluxman, A. 2005: 12.

⁶⁵ Habermas, J. 1987(a): 314.

⁶⁶ Adorno, T. 1967: 31.

⁶⁷ Cf. Rancière, J in Barrett, M, 1991: 39. "Scientific theories are transmitted through a system of discourses, traditions and institutions which constitute the very existence of bourgeois ideology. 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."

Chapter 2: The Truth in False Consciousness

Raymond Geuss, in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, claims there are three ways that forms of consciousness may be thought of as ideological in the pejorative sense: in virtue of epistemic, functional or genetic properties.¹ This chapter focuses on the first of these three, the epistemic property of ideology. On Geuss's account, the types of epistemic error that can be characterised as ideological involve either mistaking the epistemic status of a belief (e.g. treating theological beliefs as empirically grounded), making objectification errors (e.g. treating historically contingent economic principles as universal and natural), generalising particular interests as universal, or mistaking self-validating beliefs for beliefs which are not self-validating (e.g. systematically refusing members of a particular racial group access to education on the grounds that they are ignorant).² These types of epistemic error may be understood to involve cognitive deficiency, or error, in the belief-forming mechanism that gives rise to ideology. As I emphasise in the following section, the common feature amongst these various instances is that some outcome serves to obscure underlying processes on which it depends. Ideology is therefore a surface appearance which overshadows its underlying origins, which can be conceived as the interests, causes, mechanisms, factors, processes and structures which produce it.

Many theorists working within, or reacting to, the Marxist tradition (such as McCarney, Foucault, Rosen, Bordieu and Eagleton, among others³) have identified the element of cognitive deficiency as the weakest, or most vulnerable and problematic, aspect of the theory of ideology. McCarney, for instance, defends the practical and conceptual viability and coherence of Marx's notion of ideology in part by dismissing the epistemic account of ideology altogether and focusing instead on its functional role in class struggle. Foucault rejects the notion of ideology because, as "false consciousness", ideology is said to involve a privileged epistemic standpoint for the ideology critic which Foucault finds suspicious. He believes that ideology criticism arrogates to the social critic an unbiased grasp of the truth she denies to others and assumes exemption from the relations of

power that are said to govern ideology. His objection raises important questions about how to identify legitimate normative criteria for ideology criticism (which will be considered further, later on). Here, I aim to establish that the cognitive aspect of ideology only makes sense in conjunction with the functional role it serves in relations of power and domination. In fact, Foucault's own observations and theories regarding the close relationship between power and knowledge are closer to the historical materialist presuppositions underlying Marx's criticism of ideology than he thinks.

To better understand the epistemic nature of ideology, we need to investigate three issues. First, we need to explain precisely what cognitive deficiency, as an aspect of ideology, involves. Second, we need to defend the coherence of an account of ideology which includes this cognitive aspect. And third, we need to demonstrate how ideology criticism as an emancipatory practice might employ the notion of cognitive deficiency effectively. The main complaint that McCarney (Part I below) and Foucault (Part II) share is that focussing on the cognitive or epistemic aspect of ideology tends to get in the way of the purported emancipatory task of ideology criticism, which is to help overcome particular relations of domination by explaining how they function. The epistemic account complicates and distracts from the functional aspect of ideology, which they both think is a more urgent concern for emancipatory social criticism. Since statements, regardless of their social origins, either correspond, or fail to correspond, to the facts, the attempt to establish and employ principles with which to distinguish true from false beliefs in ideology criticism (i.e. to focus on the aspect of cognitive deficiency) obscures the deeper question concerning social origins in structures and relations of domination. It is this latter aspect of social origins which ideology criticism ought to address. In fact, criticism which focuses simply on picking out false beliefs, and replacing them with true ones, can obscure its own social conditions and so perpetuate that which it seeks to criticise, thus reverting from ideology criticism to ideology.

In my view, this line of argument fails to acknowledge that the illusory aspect of ideology is not straightforwardly a matter of false beliefs and of failing to correspond to reality or the facts. Rather,

the cognitive deficiency lies in the role that systematically misleading beliefs play in perpetuating relations of power. Beliefs which obscure the context of domination can support domination and, in turn, symbiotically thrive under such conditions. The outcome may appear legitimate - these beliefs may even be true in their own right - but this obscures the underlying context of their formation. Or, to switch metaphors, the apparent simplicity of a good performance hides the conflicts, complexities, struggles and compromises that went into it. The illusion that a good performance is effortless, or a product of innate talent, distracts from the sweat and toil that produced it. Contra McCarney's argument that the category of cognitive error plays no part in Marx's account of ideology, I argue that it is essential to the interpretation of ideology in Marx's writings as discussed in the previous chapter and that it is consistent with his general aim to uncover material determinations of consciousness obscured by appearances.

Part I: McCarney's Objections to "False Consciousness"

McCarney states categorically at the beginning of a chapter which deals specifically with the epistemic account of ideology, 'For Marx, Ideology is not an epistemological category.' According to McCarney, the functional 'role of ideas in the class struggle constitutes the substance of Marx's conception of ideology,' and Marx 'is indifferent to the cognitive status of ideological forms of consciousness'. Ideology 'has no necessary connection with what is cognitively suspect or deficient... [ideology] is not the result of cognitive deficiency'.⁴ McCarney provides a persuasive exegesis of texts written between 1844 and 1859, notably *The Class Struggles in France* and *The German Ideology*, to show that contrary to conventional wisdom, Marx 'does not conceive of ideology as necessarily connected with cognitive deficiency'.⁵ My aim in this section is to show that, on the contrary, this aspect of ideology is central to Marx's use of the term, and provides a useful mechanism to help explain why those who are dominated by or because of ideology continue to hold onto such ideas.

Before considering the details of McCarney's argument in light of the cognitive account of ideology, it is worth considering why exactly he thinks it is important to relieve the term of what he deems its epistemological 'burden'. McCarney's main concern is that ideology should not be reduced to an exclusively epistemological category, which denotes error or illusion, at the expense of what he considers its essential critical function of covering over domination in the struggle between economic and social classes.⁶ In the second part of this chapter, I argue that ideology cannot be understood in *exclusively* epistemological terms, but that the aim of ideology criticism that McCarney wants to emphasize depends on its ability to attribute cognitive deficiency to ideology. Ideological illusion takes the form of a specific context of domination which underlies a set of beliefs, being obscured by those beliefs. My account of ideology need not be at odds with McCarney's overall motivation in this respect, since illusions can support domination and unveiling an illusion can draw attention towards, rather than away from, domination.

A further concern of McCarney's is that the neutral or positive characterisation of ideology - as a form of class-consciousness - stands in tension with the pejorative epistemic conception of ideology as an illusion.⁷ If ideology in this sense is to serve a purpose as proletarian class consciousness in the struggle for universal emancipation, then to confine the meaning of the term to illusion, or error, is clearly at odds with this task. But if our focus is on the role played by ideology in social and political criticism, and our use of the term is limited to its pejorative sense, then McCarney's second motivation for rejecting the cognitive deficiency aspect of the term is no longer an issue. In the previous chapter, I argued that the neutral sense of ideology tends to mask the relations of power which inform a particular viewpoint but, even if this is wrong, an epistemic category confined to the critical or pejorative sense (such as cognitive deficiency) need not conflict with the notion of ideology as class consciousness as long as the pejorative, positive and neutral senses of the term are clearly distinguished from one another.

This same argument applies to a third concern of McCarney's that an exclusively epistemological account of ideology reifies conceptual categories at the expense of empirical considerations of the actual, lived, class-based inequalities which inform these categories. Apart from the context of domination, the cognitive model of ideology as "false consciousness" thus risks reducing ideology to a category of epistemology.⁸ That is to say, to ignore the functional role of ideology in class conflict is to do precisely what Marx accuses the Young Hegelian idealists of doing, namely, to overlook the historical and material determinations of consciousness. This I believe to be the most important consideration to take into account in the following section, which looks at the conceptual and pragmatic viability of an exclusively cognitive account of ideology. In this current section, however, discussion will be confined to McCarney's *outright* rejection of the category of cognitive deficiency in Marx.

If we put aside for now McCarney's worries about the status of ideology as an exclusively epistemological category, what could be the motivation to dismiss the epistemic aspect of ideology *altogether*? The reasons McCarney gives are twofold. The first relates specifically to Marx's account of ideology. Quite simply, he believes Marx neither intends nor in fact uses the term ideology to refer in any way to cognitive deficiency. It is this claim I now wish to pursue. The second reason, which I will discuss subsequently, is more general and pragmatic, and applies to any epistemic account of ideology, Marxist or otherwise. McCarney argues that ideology cannot feature strongly in society if it does not allow for a more or less reliable orientation toward reality. In other words, 'its success in its social role is indeed inexplicable if it is thought of as pure illusion'.⁹

Although McCarney considers examples of Marx's references to ideology in the *Preface to Critique of Political Economy* of 1859, as well as in the *Class Struggles in France* of 1849-1850, the core of his argument can be said to rest on his analysis of *The German Ideology* of 1845. McCarney's first claim is that this work is not intended as a general theoretical account of ideology but is rather 'a chapter of cultural history' directed specifically at dispelling certain illusions Marx and Engels believed to

prevail in the idealist philosophy of the Young Hegelians.¹⁰ McCarney's view does not conflict with the conclusions I reached the previous chapter, namely, that Marx uses the term "ideology" in this work, firstly, to refer to the idealist treatment of ideas in isolation from their material determining factors, and, secondly, to raise the criticism that such abstractions reflect and perpetuate the interests of the ruling class.¹¹ In fact, he draws on this latter aspect of ideology to demonstrate that it is the functional role in class struggle and domination that is crucial to Marx's use of the term.

Although McCarney acknowledges Marx's use of terms such as "deception" or "distortion", "illusion", "mystification" and "ideologue", to describe German ideology, he claims these terms can be misleading for at least two reasons. For one, their use in this work does not reflect Marx's general stance towards ideology. Rather, they occur so frequently in this work because Marx is engaged in *criticism*, of a specific form of ideology, German Idealism, in these passages. However, this pejorative sense of the word need not apply to other forms of ideology. Marx just happens, on this occasion, to be engaged specifically with particular forms of ideology that have perpetuated illusions. Secondly, McCarney claims such phrases equally constitute a problem for the epistemological account of ideology as cognitive defect, since if "ideology" simply denotes "error", then the phrase "ideological delusion/illusion" is uncharacteristically tautological for Marx. The word "ideology" in such a phrase would simply be redundant.¹²

In response to the claim that Marx does not intend a comprehensive account of ideology in this work, I would argue that he never actually *defines* the term ideology, he simply puts it to work, mostly in criticism. As such, it is only from his actual use of the term that we are able to derive certain characteristic traits. Marx uses the term in a non-pejorative sense very occasionally, as McCarney admits,¹³ but even so, one might put aside such instances to ask what is meant by the term when he uses it in the pejorative, critical sense as he did more frequently. We should consider the historical origin of the word which Marx develops, as well as other instances in his work in which the term is used critically. McCarney claims the pejorative sense of his criticism of Hegelian idealism

is confined to its role or function in structures of domination. But, as I shall explain, another key feature these instances share is that of an opaque surface appearance which obscures underlying conditions.

While McCarney is correct in claiming that ideology is not reducible to straightforward error, it is worth recalling from the historical discussion in the first chapter that Marx borrowed the term from Napoleon's ironic inversion of de Tracy's category of the science of ideas (Napoleon ridiculed de Tracy's naive failure to reflect on social, political and economic factors underlying ideas). This sense is at least consistent with Marx's use of the term to criticise the Young Hegelians' idealist presuppositions from his own nascent historical materialist standpoint. Given the shift in meaning from de Tracy to Napoleon, it is not entirely unlikely that Marx may have dropped this illusory aspect elsewhere, confining its use to the functional sense. But why, one must ask, would Marx have chosen a word which carried specific connotations of naive illusions about the conditions of ideas (which was fundamental to Napoleon's critical subversion of the term) for similar aims with respect to Hegelian Idealism, only to then simply drop this sense when he uses the term elsewhere? The adjective "ideological" in the phrase "ideological error" need not be thought of as tautological but may instead serve to qualify the kind of error Marx wishes to identify here – namely a naive illusion about the self-sufficiency of ideas which leads one to neglect the formation of these ideas.

By calling the Young Hegelian idealists "ideologues", Marx does more than simply identify the role played by this way of thinking in the class struggle; he offers an explanation as to how this particular philosophical approach has come to serve this function. The explanation given is that by diverting our attention away from underlying material conditions, class conflict is obscured.¹⁴

This illusory aspect of ideology is not confined to Marx's criticism of Hegelian idealism. Marx identifies the same characteristic in bourgeois economic categories, which he criticises for neglecting, and thereby covering over, contingent material and historical determining factors. In fact, McCarney explicitly cites Marx's criticisms of Ricardo as instances of ideology criticism,¹⁵ since

both Ricardo's political economy and Hegelian idealism serve to perpetuate class-based domination. Yet McCarney fails to identify the illusory cognitive dimension these two instances share. If the fetishized commodity form and the naturalized categories of bourgeois political economy can be grouped together as specifically "ideological" forms of consciousness, then – quite aside from their role in class struggle – what they also have in common is an aspect of cognitive deficiency, whereby a certain surface appearance obscures underlying factors that determine this appearance. The idea is that people perpetuate the conditions of their own oppression in a self-defeating manner because they overlook these important factors. Thus illusion supports function. Hence, I believe it is an essential component of the notion of "ideology" and should not be overlooked.

McCarney dismisses this illusory aspect of Marx's criticism of bourgeois political economy. He acknowledges a tendency in ideology criticism (considered in the following section) to posit a problematic distinction with true, privileged and 'scientific' interpretations of proletarian class consciousness, on the one hand, and ideological false consciousness, on the other. But he goes to considerable lengths to show how a more nuanced understanding of the relation between theory and historical praxis in Marx can overcome this. One reason he gives for arguing that Marx does not rely on this distinction is that Marx praises the scientific character of Ricardo's political economy whilst simultaneously criticising its ideological character. How, asks McCarney, could Ricardo's work be both true/scientific *and* ideological, if ideology signifies cognitive error?¹⁶

Yet, this question can be answered by clarifying the nature of cognitive deficiency in ideology. The ideological error involved here is not a straightforward misapprehension of appearances but, rather, as I have already characterised it, a superficial focus on appearance which neglects underlying factors. Ricardo's principles of political economy can be empirically accurate regarding the mechanical operation of market forces without acknowledging their underlying origin in class conflict – just like a stockbroker may make a fortune using her knowledge of the market to buy and

sell parcels of debt without fully understanding the extent to which their value is ultimately predicated on house prices inflated through easy availability of credit.

As discussed in the previous chapter, though the term “ideology” does not feature in Marx’s account of commodity fetishism in *Capital Vol. I*, the two sorts of illusions he distinguishes in this work share the same “appearance-reality” characteristic of cognitive deficiency as both Hegelian idealism and bourgeois political economy. Firstly, it appears that commodities exchange at the rate they do because they possess value intrinsically, but in fact their value is derived from the different amounts of socially necessary labour congealed in them. Secondly, it appears that market exchanges determine the usefulness of different types of labour, but in fact a prior social division of labour, directed by the motive of profit maximisation, determines the kind of exchanges made possible in the marketplace.¹⁷ In both cases, the surface appearance of social reality obscures the inner workings which give rise to this appearance, giving phenomena a self-evident, natural, and objective appearance, whereas in fact they are historically contingent, socially determined and rooted in practical, subjective human activity. A similar insight informs Marx’s criticism of German idealism, where the true order of priority of consciousness and material reality is reversed.

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.¹⁸

This passage is often cited as evidence that Marx uses “ideology” to refer generally to a mode of cognition that is defective in some way. McCarney dismisses this common interpretation of the passage on the grounds that such error is not straightforward, but rather a mistaken reversal of priority of the order of practical historical circumstances over ideas. It is not my contention that ideological error is straightforward but it does seem that in addition to their functional role in domination, these instances all involve some aspect of cognitive deficiency, in the shape of a gap between appearance and reality not unlike the phenomenon of the fetish-illusion in *Capital*.

McCarney's final argument against the characterisation of ideology as cognitive deficiency is that it is derived from a mistaken understanding of ideology as "false consciousness". Marx never attributes the term "false consciousness" to ideology and Engels only uses the term once in a letter to Mehring:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motives.¹⁹

McCarney claims this characterisation of ideology as blindness of individuals to motivations – as false consciousness – has lifted a cognitive sense out of context from the centrality of these particular motives, which are themselves grounded in the existence of social classes, to justify the attribution of all other forms of self-deception and bad faith to ideology; but that this is not characteristic of Marx's use of the term.²⁰ I do not wish to argue here that the context of class struggle is not central to ideology, but rather to note that the element of blindness to underlying motives is consistent with what I take to be an important characteristic of ideology, namely, the cognitively deficient abstraction of surface phenomena from underlying determinations. Such continuity puts into question McCarney's assertion that Engels' association of false consciousness with ideology has been taken out of context. It may be mistaken to call any form of self-deception ideological when considered outside of the context of domination, but if materially determined motives arising from struggles and divisions between social classes are obscured in some way by surface appearances in Engels' use of the term "false consciousness", then I do not see why it would be unreasonable to call this ideology, given its continuity with Marx's use of the term in this same sense.

In all of the above instances of ideology described by Marx, I have shown that some aspect of cognitive deficiency helps to explain the functional role played by ideology in class conflict. Those who are dominated under existing class structures fail to resist domination, in part, because the material social factors which determine their ideas are obscured by ideological forms of consciousness. McCarney maintains that ideology could not feature as strongly in society as Marx

claims, if it prevented a more or less reliable orientation toward reality. 'Its success in its social role,' McCarney writes, 'is indeed inexplicable if it is thought of as pure illusion'.²¹ However, the characterisation of ideology in terms of cognitive deficiency does not take the form of straightforward empirical error or 'pure illusion'. Rather, I have argued that it may be possible to obtain an accurate account of how things are in the world (the appearance) without fully understanding underlying social mechanisms (such as class conflict or domination in a broader or more detailed sense). Furthermore, as I have argued previously, though I acknowledge that Marx does in fact restrict the use of the term to refer to class conflict in particular, there is no reason why the term could not be expanded to include other categories of social stratification marked by conflict and domination.

The cognitive aspect of ideology is important because it provides a crucial way of explaining why agents fail to grasp, and resist, domination. Far from the success of ideology in its social role being inexplicable if it is said to involve cognitive deficiency, I would argue that such success is in fact more difficult to explain if ideology does not involve cognitive deficiency. Class-based domination, as well as many other forms of oppression (such as racism and sexism) share an aspect of cognitive deficiency to the extent that they are partly maintained by the illusions they generate about some underlying process.²² For example, the characteristics of those who control the circulation of resources appear to inhere in them by nature, rather than following from power relations constitutive of hierarchical authority.²³ Such appearances involve an aspect of cognitive deficiency to the extent that socially generated characteristics are taken for granted as natural and inevitable, while underlying social factors are overlooked in the focus on their effects.

Part II: Foucault's Objections to The Theory of ideology

I have argued that McCarney's complete rejection of the role of cognitive error in Marxian ideology goes too far. My aim now is to show that the aspect of cognitive deficiency in ideology derives from its function in relations of domination. Furthermore, to characterise ideology exclusively in terms of

cognitive error, without referring to the role it plays in such struggles, is a reversion to ideology. If the aim of ideology criticism is to emancipate social agents from conditions of domination, claiming to assume a standpoint of criticism which transcends the distorting social conditions and forces which have given rise to relations of domination, can serve to conceal domination. At the very least, a critical standpoint which exempts itself from social forces liable to relations of domination lapses into the condition of idealism that Marx identifies in the position of the Young Hegelians. I make this argument in response to what may be called Foucault's "truth objection" to ideology, which is made on the grounds that the very notion of ideology presupposes a discrete space of criticism isolated from the distorting effects of power that govern discursive formations.

Foucault on Ideology

Foucault's most well-known objection to ideology is raised during an interview in 1977, in which he clarifies his interpretation of the relation between power and knowledge. Here he affirms the interviewer's suggestion that his work is critical of the notion of ideology for involving 'a kind of nostalgia for a quasi-transparent form of knowledge, free from all error and illusion', and he criticises the notion of repression for involving 'a longing for a form of power innocent of all coercion, discipline and normalisation'.²⁴ Foucault may be said to be critical of the notions "ideology" and "repression" for assuming that some forms of social knowledge, and characterisations of subjectivity, are immune to strategic manipulation. Foucault characterises ideology as discourse which is motivated by conflicting strategic interests considered to be opposed to the standpoint identified by ideology critics, whose aim is to emancipate agents from domination. His objection is essentially three-fold.

(i) His first objection is that the concept presupposes a critical standpoint which is supposed to be exempt from the effects of the struggles it identifies.

Foucault clarifies his position in the interview as follows:

The notion of ideology appears to me to be difficult to make use of... Like it or not, it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as the truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scienticity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which are themselves neither true nor false.²⁵

The above comments amount to a criticism of the epistemic account of “ideology” as “false consciousness”. Foucault finds it problematic to treat discourses affected by historically contingent relations of power in terms of error and distortion, since the epistemic question of truth and falsity distracts from more important considerations for emancipatory social science about how human knowledge has been complicit in relations of domination. For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault shows historically how scientific ways of classifying and understanding insanity have, in specific circumstances, given rise to norms which help perpetuate domination. Social scientific hypotheses are produced through socially structured processes which help to establish and sustain them, and which they in turn can help to sustain. These processes can serve to perpetuate domination in societies which are structured predominantly by asymmetrical relations of power.²⁶

(ii) The second major concern driving Foucault’s objection to the theory of ideology is one shared by McCarney and discussed in the first half of this chapter. To focus on distinctions between true and false beliefs diverts attention from the more important problem of how domination functions, and – more specifically for Foucault – how discourse supports domination.

One might object that the way knowledge is used has no bearing on its truth content and, thus, Foucault is wrong to object to the appeal to truth in ideology criticism. Knowledge acquires its status, perhaps as justified true belief, not through the uses to which it is put but through its correspondence, or correlation, with the facts. However, even if we distinguish truth conditions from relations of power, the underlying problem Foucault raises remains. In numerous historical contexts, the epistemological status of certain discourses as true and disinterested, or impartial, has

benefitted particular interests in ongoing structures of domination by drawing attention away from interests served by way of the impartial status, or “diplomatic immunity”, of truth. Furthermore, the processes and institutional structures by and through which, dominant discourses are accepted as true are often aligned with dominant social, political and economic ends. Even if true statements ideally correspond with the way the world really is, regardless of social, political and economic conditions, such conditions have in many circumstances affected which statements are commonly accepted as true, and this acceptance has often supported certain structures of domination.

In fact, a major criticism directed against Foucault is that his own work suffers from similar epistemological weaknesses. Foucault makes statements which he believes are true and which he wants his reader or audience to believe to be true. His writing is often presented as unmasking certain illusions about ourselves and our social practices. Yet, his model of power/knowledge relations is often taken to imply that he thinks knowledge is just an offshoot of domination, which raises obvious reflexive problems for his own critique of domination. But Foucault’s claim that truth and science are not necessarily opposed to, or independent of power, should not be understood as a rejection of truth. Regardless of whether they are true or false, discourses can still be more or less distorting or ideological. Foucault closes the interview quoted above by claiming that, in contrast to what he sees as a Marxist approach to domination, ‘It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power... but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time’²⁷. Foucault’s main concern is with the mechanisms and techniques by which dominant discourses help to establish asymmetrical relations of power, and with the way such power relations in turn serve to sustain dominant discourses. Though he thinks it a mistake to separate the domain of truth from the domain of power at the level of social, political and historical empirical analysis, this should not be confused with a reduction of truth to power, or understood as an epistemological theory.

(iii) The third problem associated with the epistemic aspect of ideology is that criticism is more vulnerable to ideological integration if it is exempted from the suspicion it casts on other ideas. In other words, what we accept to be true often serves relations of domination better than falsehoods. As such, he rejects what he sees to be a simplistic correspondence, in the theory of ideology, between falsehood and domination, on one hand, and truth and emancipation, on the other. He claims instead that truth (or discourse which is generally accepted to be true) and power are often mutually reinforcing. Foucault is primarily interested in the processes by which effects of power are maintained by dominant discourse which has come to be accepted as true. He is not interested in what truth is, but in what we do with true statements. He cautions against the abstraction of these statements from relations of power – something he believes the theory of ideology does with respect to its own standpoint of criticism.

According to Foucault, true discourse is particularly susceptible to strategic manipulation. The status of certain discourses as true aids the purpose of domination since they are less liable to invite resistance: one feels there is little one can do to resist what appears to be the case. For example, if it is true that the health of the global economy depends on the privatization of public services, then it is self-defeating to argue otherwise. Since true discourse is susceptible to domination, if one aims to resist domination, one's emphasis should be on showing how specific discourses and practices have been co-opted by, and even produced in accordance, with struggles for domination. Even emancipatory social criticism can serve this function. The important issue for purposes of emancipation in social criticism is not what the truth is or is not, but how dominant discourses accepted as true are aligned with asymmetrical relations of power. What is important politically, with respect to dominant forms of discourse, is not what is distinctively cognitive, but what is functional.

Foucault thinks an important reason for the complicity of ideology criticism in relations of domination is that ideology critics, and social scientists more broadly, have tended to exempt their

own claims from critical scrutiny by appealing to the truth. The truth status accorded to ideology criticism, or social science, is partly to blame for the way social scientific theories, such as Reich's repression hypothesis,²⁸ have been co-opted in struggles for domination. Liberation of one's "repressed", "true" "inner self" is mediated by socially constructed categories which affect how one's "self" is interpreted. Attempting to draw a distinction between true ideology criticism and false ideology is thus counter-productive for emancipatory social criticism.

On my view, ideology is cognitively deficient to the extent that it obscures aspects of social reality or vested interests. Ideology criticism looks underneath the surface appearance of aspects of social reality to reveal the truth that has been obscured, with the aim of emancipating agents from structures of domination which are supported by the mystifying effects of ideology. Foucault, as I understand him, does not advocate a rejection of truth. Rather, he argues that we should divert our attention as social critics away from the issue of whether dominant discourses are true or false (with emancipatory critique always on the side of truth) and instead focus on the role these discourses play in relations and structures of domination.

No matter what truth is, Foucault argues that the act of unveiling the truth is often deceptive (in other senses too). For example, if Reich's repression hypothesis is correct, and we desire emancipation from social control, then we must seek the repressed inner truth about our sexuality. But, in *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, Foucault points out that whatever we discover will always be mediated by cultural and social conditions which, in an oppressive society, can all too easily dominate rather than liberate us.²⁹ Politicians, public relations officers and advertising executives, for example, have long harnessed the findings of psychoanalysis to their advantage. On Foucault's model of power/knowledge, the question of whether we should regard elements of psychoanalytic theory as true in a representationalist, or a deflationary sense, is not what is at issue; the real problem is what happens when discourse and criticism are exempted from suspicion about the role it might play in relations of domination.

To sum up, Foucault's truth objection poses three distinct problems for the cognitive aspect of ideology criticism, each of which I address further in the following section. First, he shares McCarney's concern (discussed in the previous section) that the focus in emancipatory social criticism on identifying error and illusion detracts from more important considerations about how domination functions. Second, it would seem that criticism of ideology on the cognitive model holds only the false, or illusory, aspect of discourse responsible for domination. But Foucault essentially rejects the presumption that truth is exempt from complicity in relations of domination, or that illusions are needed in order for discourse to support domination. He argues that all discourse – true or false – can stabilise, foster and support relations of domination, and in fact shows how generally accepted discourse has often disempowered those who accept it. The final problem is that Foucault shows it is not only true discourse, but emancipatory social criticism, that can help to perpetuate relations of domination. Although this objection implicates his own standpoint, the problem with ideology criticism is it makes collusion easier by marking out a standpoint for criticism which is supposed to be exempt from the conflict it identifies. Such a standpoint can thus function as a Trojan horse, smuggling in hidden forces of domination precisely by purporting to do the very opposite.

Response to Foucault

The cognitive aspect of ideology distracts from the problem of domination

The first issue raised by Foucault's truth objection to the theory of ideology recalls the problem McCarney refers to as 'epistemological reification', which motivates him (in my view, incorrectly) to reject the cognitive account outright. To recall, one of McCarney's central concerns in eliminating what he calls 'the epistemological burden' of the cognitive aspect of ideology is that he sees the influence of the notion of ideology in social theory, and the primarily epistemological influence of the notion in philosophy, as leading to a 'structural divorce of Marxism from political practice or *praxis*'; to a de-contextualised 'fetishization of ideology' as a category of epistemology which raises unwieldy theoretical burdens.³⁰ McCarney claims the cognitive issue of truth or falsity diverts

ideology criticism from its primary purpose which is to subject dominant discourse to critical scrutiny by looking at the ways and means by which it helps to perpetuate oppressive social conditions. Both McCarney and Foucault think the question of illusion distracts from the techniques and mechanisms by which the discourse we accept as true, accords with relations of domination. An epistemological focus on a distinction between true and false statements, combined with an attempt to put true discourse on the side of emancipation, diverts emancipatory social science from the more important analysis (for emancipatory social criticism) of the function of dominant discourse in society.

In response, it is worth noting that Foucault's objection - that ideas, including social criticism, are conditioned by an historical background of social practices, traditions and institutions pervaded by relations of power – is remarkably similar to Marx's development of the term "ideology" to criticise the historical idealism of the Young Hegelians. As discussed earlier, Marx ridicules the left-Hegelian idealists, just as Napoleon ridiculed de Tracy, for treating ideas in isolation from material determining factors such as social and economic institutions and practices. In fact, Foucault's objection to ideology mirrors Marx's dismissal of philosophical criticism of products of consciousness on their own terms (since consciousness is also a product). Marx and Foucault share the assumption that criticism is ineffective when confined to the pure realm of thought. Marx criticises Hegelian Idealists for constraining criticism of oppression to the realm of ideas and consequently neglecting to address the origins of oppression in actual material conditions. He criticises bourgeois political economy for failing to address the issue of class struggle at its foundation. Foucault dismisses the notion of ideology for similar reasons when he claims that discourse is shaped by material practices aligned with structures of domination.

Though there are differences between Marx's and Foucault's respective approaches to normative criteria for emancipatory criticism (which I shall address in the final section), it is a mistake to assume that the issue of the cognitive deficiency of ideological beliefs must distract from the problem of how domination functions. *Restricting* the focus of ideology criticism to epistemological

problems may lead critics to overlook the crucial practical aspect of ideology, namely its functional role in supporting domination. However, an appeal to the notion of cognitive deficiency in ideology criticism need not get wound up in epistemological problems about how to distinguish true from false discourse. The cognitive or epistemic aspect of illusion, mystification or distortion that characterises ideology refers to the manner in which the self-subsistent appearance of certain beliefs or phenomena obscures their origins in underlying social conflicts. Ideology is cognitively deficient to the extent that those who buy into it fail to recognise aspects of domination, and so perpetuate them. The cognitive failure is a failure to recognise domination. This does not distract our attention from domination. Quite the reverse. To abstract from the function these appearances play in domination is simply to stop doing ideology criticism in any sense in which Marx uses this term.

True discourse and not just illusions serve domination

Foucault's truth objection to ideology highlights the problems of self-contradiction that arise in ideology criticism if the aspect of cognitive deficiency is not specifically linked to a functional account of the role discourse plays in structures and processes which are subject to domination. The true status of discourse distracts from the problem of domination and can help to perpetuate it in the process. Again, Foucault overlooks the fact that his complaint echoes Marx's original use of the term "ideology" to criticise the Young Hegelians for neglecting the material determinations of consciousness in class conflict. For Marx, antagonistic social relations arising from material inequalities give rise to ideas which help to perpetuate these conditions by obscuring these origins. If we focus on the question of the truth or falsehood of these ideas in abstraction from material inequalities, then we neglect the very conflicts of interest embedded in these conditions. The point of Marxist ideology criticism is to link ideas to the material conflicts that give rise to them. In different ways, both theorists demonstrate that a focus on the illusions of consciousness is insufficient for emancipatory social critique if the functional aspect of dominant discourse is overlooked.

However, in Marx's writings, terms relating to ideology such as "illusion", "mystification", "distortion" and neo-Marxist references to "false consciousness" do not so much refer to false beliefs *per se*, but to failures to recognise domination. Furthermore, as we saw with Adorno's notion of "positivist ideology", cognitive deficiency in ideology need not involve the false belief that oppressive social relations are just. Ideological cognitive deficiency is a failure to reflect on the relation between a set of beliefs, or practices, and oppressive social relations. The task of making this connection is not at odds with Foucault's work. Chandra Kumar argues as much when he claims that the problematic conception of ideology which Foucault dismisses - namely, 'how does a particular form of discourse falsify our understanding and thereby help to sustain domination?' - can be posed alternatively as: 'whose truth, which rationality, or whose interests are implicitly supported by research into a particular domain of inquiry?'³¹

If, however, we keep in mind that false consciousness is not reducible to false beliefs, but that ideological cognitive deficiency involves a failure to reflect on the links between beliefs, practices and relations of domination, then Foucault's work can be interpreted as a form of ideology criticism. Foucault pays particular attention to the functional role of discourse in society and shows how domination often functions better when agents fail to recognise relations of "power/knowledge". The basis of his objection to the theory of ideology is that true discourses, not just illusions, help to stabilise relations of domination. This shakes up a certain philosophically sedimented approach to ideology criticism, which reverts precisely to what Marx identified as ideological in German Idealism, and which had become standardized, and taken for granted, in certain academic Marxist circles around the time of Foucault's writing. Under an academic division of labour, Marxist political theory has often been confined to the task of weeding out false beliefs from true beliefs. It has neglected to attend to the functional role of discourse whose truth content is not the issue at stake. Beliefs can be true and ideological. For example, the belief that African-American men are more likely to be criminals than people with a different race or gender can, in certain historically contingent

circumstances, be both true and ideological if one consequently overlooks the racist prejudice, oppressive social structures and historical injustices which give rise to this state of affairs.

Taking an example closer to Foucault's work, his criticism of the sovereign, or repressive, model of power (as opposed to productive power) may well be interpreted as a form of ideology criticism if the cognitive aspect of ideology is predicated on its function. A model of power as repression (which Foucault claims to be most explicitly articulated in psychoanalytic theory by Wilhelm Reich, and which he attacks directly in his *History of Sexuality Vol. I*) depicts power as something external to the subject. This rests on the assumption that power undermines a presupposed truth, or liberty, which belongs to the subject prior to power relations. The trouble with this presupposition is that norms regarding an underlying truth, or underlying human nature, are themselves embedded in practices and discursive structures subject to strategic manipulation in struggles for domination.³² Foucault shows how processes of emancipation based on a repressive model of power can serve to obscure the techniques and effects of conflict. In contrast to the "sovereign" model of repressive power – power as something exerted over and against agents – he posits a model of productive power, whereby agents' individual liberties are harnessed to their own domination.

Foucault argues that the repression hypothesis and the sovereign, model of repressive power deceive us into thinking we should liberate an underlying truth about ourselves, or our authentic inner nature, whereas the processes of emancipation in which we wilfully engage in fact serve to perpetuate our domination because of how they are determined.

This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of the greatest inventions of bourgeois society.... impossible to describe in the terminology of the theory of sovereignty from which it differs so radically. But, in reality, the theory of sovereignty has continued not only to exist as an ideology of right... The theory of sovereignty, and the organisation of a legal code centred upon it, have allowed a system of right to be superimposed upon the mechanism of discipline so as to conceal its actual procedures, the element of domination inherent in its techniques.³³

Foucault aims to reorient our understanding of power so that we are better able to understand and resist the insidious productive mechanisms of domination. If we recognise our own agency in our domination, instead of seeing power as something exerted from without, then we are in a better position to direct our efforts in ways we may deem valuable, and so harness this power consciously to our benefit. The alternative is being harnessed by it in a misguided effort at a final emancipation from power.

This account of sovereign power describes how a dominant conception of power has obscured productive disciplinary aspects which function not by means of force overcoming resistance, but by individuals' unwitting collusion with practices and structures which stabilise, and perpetuate, their own oppression. This is precisely the kind of illusion that Marxist ideology criticism addresses through the aspect of cognitive deficiency. Foucault's truth objection to ideology criticism should serve as a warning to those who think that the task of separating true from false statements is what counts in the struggle for emancipation. As he sees it, ideology - as false consciousness - is the target of criticism by the ideology critic who assigns "truth" to her own discourse, and falsity to the object of her criticism.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I address a final problem arising from Foucault's truth objection to ideology which marks a crucial distinction between his own method and the Marxist approach: its implications for the standpoint of criticism.

Cognitive ideology criticism is implicated in domination

It is worth remembering that Foucault was writing in the context of the patent failure of Marxist emancipatory politics, in the USSR, to liberate those in whose name the revolution had supposedly been fought. The emancipatory promises of the French Communist Party seemed increasingly unlikely to bear fruit. Hence, Foucault's genealogical criticism of discipline and sexuality take pains to show how the promise of liberation and emancipation may be used as a tool of oppression. The final issue that arises from his objections is that a standpoint of criticism is more likely to serve such a

purpose if it presumes self-exemption from the suspicion and scrutiny it pays to other discourses. Foucault sees deep flaws in the attempt to discover, create, identify or preserve a privileged space from which to distinguish: the true and the false, or domination and emancipation; or a standpoint exempt from the conflicts of interest and relations of domination the critic identifies and describes, to free us from the corrupt influence of power and conflict. His objection to ideology is directed at the distinction between ideologically distorted and non-ideologically distorted discourse. The idea is that ideology criticism undermines its emancipatory aims if it depends on a privileged standpoint of criticism which is supposed to be bound intrinsically to liberation or universal interests. One may object that Marxist Communism was not intrinsically oppressive, or doomed, but was corrupted by contingent power struggles. But this is to miss Foucault's point that exempting the standpoint of criticism aids such corruption.

Foucault's "truth objection" to ideology reminds us that to lose sight of the forms of power that shape one's modes of discourse in theoretical debate, can make those involved in such debate unwitting accomplices to the very structures of domination they believe they are fighting against. Even ideology criticism can fall prey to the circumstances it sets out to investigate or become embroiled in the structures of domination it intends to put into question if it exempts itself from these conditions. Even if true and false beliefs are not what is at stake in the notion of ideological cognitive deficiency, it is the presumption associated with the cognitive aspect of the theory of ideology (to set the standpoint of criticism aside from the corrupting conditions of conflict which give rise to false consciousness) that has led a number of theorists to reject the notion altogether.

What these theorists seem to overlook, however, is that the standpoint of criticism in Marx's account of ideological cognitive deficiency is firmly rooted in the material conditions of conflict and contradiction he identifies (this is what some have called "immanent criticism", though this is a problematic term which will be explored in greater detail later on). Both Foucault and Marx stress the need to root criticism firmly in the circumstances of actual material conflicts. Both theorists

show how even emancipatory forms of social criticism, which neglect certain material political conditions of thought, can come to function in such a way as to perpetuate relations of domination. Where ideology criticism appeals to the truth *simpliciter*, without taking into account Marx's and Foucault's reminder that forms of consciousness are affected by material circumstances characterised by relations of conflict and social division, it too falls prey to the grasp of its own subject matter. If ideology criticism is to avoid reverting to a form of ideology in its own right, the cognitive aspect of ideology must be a functional element which emphasises the way discourse can become implicated in struggle and conflict. Ideology gets under the radar by obscuring relations of power in an appeal to universality, neutrality, impartiality and/or the status of truth. The process of unveiling illusions is insufficient if it neglects the functional aspect of ideology. Moreover, demarcating a space for social criticism, presumed to be exempt from the ongoing potential for discourse to be drawn into processes of political coercion, is ideological in its own right.

For Marx, ideology criticism is practised from a standpoint firmly rooted in the underlying, and conflicting, material conditions of consciousness. This, I have argued, is not at odds with Foucault's own practice. Though Foucault is not averse to unveiling certain illusions which have obscured the operations of power, this is always accompanied by detailed and exhaustive historical and material analysis with a primary emphasis on power struggles (akin to Marx's own work). However, whereas, for Marx, social conflict is rooted in material divisions of class and production, Foucault not only widens conflicting social relations to include various other stratifications, but also leaves no critical standpoint untouched, including his own. For Foucault, even objective descriptions of class divisions are in danger of being co-opted in power struggles. Further, to mark out any such standpoint is to plant the seeds of ideological cognitive deficiency, as I have characterised it, by putting in place that which can help to obscure relations of domination.

In the effort to engage with this problem of self-implication, many have argued that Foucault creates too many problems for his own standpoint of criticism by leaving no space for his own normative

grounds of criticism. If criticism is no longer based in material class divisions arising from ownership of the means of production but rather, political conflicts of interest run all the way through social criticism, this raises the question as to whether any standpoint for criticism remains at all. It would seem ideology criticism, on the cognitive model, needs to secure a standpoint which is not cognitively deficient. But Foucault's truth objection to the notion of ideology implies not only that both true and false discourse can support domination, but that ideology criticism can serve an ideological function even if the idea of cognitive deficiency is put in the service of a functional account of domination which addresses the conditions of conflict within which both true and false beliefs must circulate.

Undoubtedly, there is a certain contradictory irony in Foucault's attempt to liberate us by criticising the notion of liberation, just as his criticism of truth seems to undermine the true status he would wish to accord this. The normative grounds of this type of criticism are put into question by their very nature, apparently begging the question and eliciting the much discussed objection that is often directed at Foucault's work, namely, that he leaves no space for his own criticism, or that he embroils himself in a "performative contradiction".³⁴ Marx considers his descriptions of empirical conditions under capitalism to hold independent of the distorting factors for ideological forms of consciousness. These conditions are as he describes them, regardless of the influence of power on one's viewpoint, and these empirical descriptions are supposed to serve as a vehicle for emancipatory social criticism that overcomes the distortions that may arise from conflicts of interpretation. For example, Marx leaves open the possibility for criticism on the basis of a distinct philosophical anthropology (which Foucault emphatically dismisses with his proclamation of the "death of the subject"), or for criticism from the standpoint of the proletariat as the agent of universal emancipation, or on the basis of the scientific character of his historical materialist method. Foucault, by contrast, bites the bullet and totalises the space, which Marx dismissed as ideology to include his own perspective, arguing that resistance comes not from outside but from within networks of power.

I return to the problem of self-implication in the normative criteria for ideology criticism in Chapter 4. The next chapter, however, addresses the functional relationship between ideology and power. I have argued here that the cognitive aspect of ideology is central to Marx's use of the term, and that it is justified where it accompanies a functional aspect. But it remains to be shown what this functional aspect involves.

¹ Geuss, R. 1981: 13.

² Geuss, R. 1981: 13-14.

³ Bordieu, P and Eagleton, T. 1994: 271-272. McCarney, J. 1980: 116, 133. Rosen, M. 1996: 200 – 207. Foucault, M. 1994: 15, and 1980: 118.

⁴ McCarney, J. 1980: 80-81

⁵ McCarney, J. 1980: 85

⁶ McCarney, J. 1980: 129

⁷ McCarney, J. 1980: 138

⁸ McCarney, J. 1980: 134 – it is important to note that Marx himself does not use the term “false consciousness” but I will argue later in this section that this term, first coined by Engels, accords with Marx's references to ideology.

⁹ McCarney, J. 1980: 108.

¹⁰ McCarney, J. 1980: 82.

¹¹ McCarney, J. 1980: 83.

¹² McCarney, J. 1980: 84.

¹³ McCarney, J. 1980: 110. McCarney claims here that Marx was principally engaged in criticism and left it to successors to spell out a more comprehensive, positive and programmatic account of proletarian or communist ideology to be used in the class struggle. Be that as it may, I believe there is a level of ambiguity, firstly, as to what precisely Marx would have intended for his successors and, secondly, as regards speculation on why Marx rarely spoke of ideology in the positive or neutral sense. It may be that he realised, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, that a neutral use of the term is inconsistent with the meaning of the term.

¹⁴ For example, in *The German Ideology*, 1970: 41, Chris Arthur translates Marx's term “ideologues” as “ideologists”, who ‘declare they are only fighting against phrases’ and ‘forget... that they are in no way combating the real existing world.’ Later, on p. 51, the division of mental and physical labour is obscured by the illusions of ‘self-sufficiency perpetuated by the first ideologists (the priests).’

¹⁵ McCarney, J. 1980: 90.

¹⁶ McCarney, J. 1980: 36.

¹⁷ Marx, K. 1975: 337-340.

¹⁸ Marx, K. 1975: 37.

¹⁹ Engels, F in McCarney, J. 1980: 95.

²⁰ McCarney, J. 1980: 95-96.

²¹ McCarney, J. 1980: 108.

²² Fluxman, A. 2005: 11.

²³ Fluxman, A. 2005: 12.

²⁴ Foucault, M. 1980: 117

²⁵ Foucault, M. 1980: 118.

²⁶ Foucault, M. 1980: 131.

²⁷ Foucault, M. 1980: 133. As Foucault says elsewhere, in “Truth and Juridical Forms” (1994: 14), he derives from Nietzsche the belief that knowledge is always ‘partial, oblique and perspectival. The perspectival character of knowledge derives not from human nature but always from the polemical and strategic character of knowledge’.

²⁸ Foucault, M. 1990: 3-13.

²⁹ Homosexuality, for example, is accepted and fashioned in contemporary culture as a consumer identity. Discourses and theories of identity can be emancipatory but also interpellated by marketing demographics.

³⁰ McCarney, J. 1980: 129 – 133.

³¹ Kumar, C. 2005: 65.

³² Foucault, M. 1980: 98.

³³ Foucault, M. 1980: 106.

³⁴ Habermas, J. 1987(b): xv, and Fraser, N. “Michel Foucault: A ‘Young Conservative’?” in *Ethics* 96 (1): 165-184.

Chapter 3: The Function of False Consciousness

Having examined the cognitive aspect of ideology in Chapter 2, I now turn to the functional mechanism by which ideology helps to legitimate, and perpetuate, structures and relations of domination. To Reich's question, 'Why do the many accept the rule of the few when it is against their interests to do so?' the theory of ideology offers the answer that they do so because they act in accordance with beliefs, values and social norms that emerge from, and favour, social conditions of domination.¹ Ideology leads even oppressed individuals to accept the legitimacy of oppressive regimes. Thus, the function of ideological forms of consciousness is that they lead most people to act against their interests. But if ideology is said to shore up relations of domination, then the critic must be able to explain *how* it does so. It is conceded that ideology need not include *false beliefs*, but I maintain that the function of ideology cannot be explained without attributing some aspect of *illusion* to it. To explain how ideology functions to mislead agents without empirical error, I argue that a normative distinction may be drawn between real and apparent interests, such that ideology is said to draw individuals' attention towards induced, apparently immediate interests, that are in fact adapted to suit conditions at present but which operate at the expense of rational, long-term, ulterior interests that are thereby obscured.

I begin with Michael Rosen's objection, in *On Voluntary Servitude*, that Marx's various accounts of ideology fail to provide a satisfactory answer to Reich's question, in particular because they lack an adequate explanation for how and why those who are disadvantaged by ideology adopt, and hold onto, these ideas, especially once it becomes apparent that they are functionally integrated with oppressive social conditions. To find a plausible explanation for this phenomenon which is compatible with Marx's own writings on ideology, I examine an example in Adorno that best reflects Rosen's problem of the missing functional explanation. Adorno claims that unlike liberal, bourgeois ideology, whose deceptive partiality may be exposed and criticised for failing to equate with empirical social conditions, the positivist form of ideology that prevails in contemporary society does

not require false beliefs or naïve illusions about the empirical social, political and economic factors that influence dominant ideas in society. Why would oppressed people hold on to ideological beliefs and norms they know are shaped by oppressive circumstances? I propose that even what Adorno calls “positivist ideology” remains indebted to an aspect of illusion which may be identified by distinguishing between real and apparent interests.

Part I: The Missing Function of Truth

Rosen’s Objection: No Explanation

In *On Voluntary Servitude*, Michael Rosen sets out what he sees as the main problem that the theory of ideology addresses. This is framed by Wilhelm Reich as follows:

What has to be explained is not the fact that the man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry *don’t* steal and why the majority of those who are exploited *don’t* strike.²

According to Rosen, the response of the theory of ideology is that the hungry do not steal and the exploited do not strike, even when it seems to be plainly in their interests to do so, is because ‘societies are systems that produce the kind of consciousness that prevents the members of a society from behaving as their interests would otherwise dictate’.³

Rosen interprets the term “necessary false consciousness”, which Adorno sometimes uses to refer to ideology, to mean that societies characterised by pervasive oppression produce ideologies that in turn shore up these conditions.⁴ To elaborate, Rosen is claiming here that ideology – or “false consciousness” – is said to be “necessary”, firstly, because it arises as a direct consequence of conditions of domination, and, secondly, because such conditions of domination, at least in part, depend on this functional mechanism. Rosen argues that the claim that ideology is “necessary” presupposes (a) that society is a self-maintaining system which reproduces itself, and (b) that ideology is a necessary condition of this self-reproduction. Roughly speaking, Rosen objects to this theory on the grounds that, ‘We are not justified in supposing that unequal societies maintain

themselves because societies in general have the power to produce “false consciousness” in their citizens’.⁵

Before examining Rosen’s objections further, it is important to consider the account of ideology with which he is working. Although he considers that ideology can involve an aspect of cognitive deficiency, Rosen raises the point (already established in the previous chapter) that empirically false beliefs cannot be central to the notion of ideology, since false beliefs are less likely to be maintained if they repeatedly frustrate agents’ navigation of, and practical engagement, with their environment. Moreover, a belief can be both true and ideological, as long as it functions to shore up relations of domination.⁶ Rosen gives an example of a primitive tribe of people who believe the earth goes around the sun because they associate the sun with a god around whom the planets move as servants, just as they obey the wishes of their leader.⁷ His point is that belief need not be empirically inadequate to function ideologically, as long as it helps perpetuate relations of domination.⁸ This interpretation accords with the account presented so far.

Rosen concludes that consciousness is ideological if, (a) it is formed for reasons that are social in origin; (b) it benefits some social entity or structure, (c) it works against the interests of the individual who holds it; (d) it is not capable of being justified; and (e) it comes about and persists because it benefits the entity or structure in question, i.e. (i) It is *functional for* the social order, and (ii) it is *functionally explained by* its relation to that order.⁹ These conditions appear to assume an impossible reverse causal relationship which takes ideology to give rise to the very conditions that are supposed to cause it. However, the relationship between ideology and oppression is better understood to involve mutual determination, just as sexism may support economic relations that support sexism. If, for example, women are presumed to be incapable leaders, then they are less likely to be trusted as leaders, which may in turn help to support the original assumption. Ideology is self-fulfilling in this sense.¹⁰ It may not be cognitively deficient, or false, but it is always functionally integrated with oppression.¹¹ Rosen’s main objection to the claim - that societies produce forms of

consciousness which lead their members to perpetuate conditions it is in their interests to change – is that it implies a background belief that societies are “self-maintaining systems”.¹² His discussion of various models of ideology in Marx’s writings helps explain why he thinks this is a problem.

Rosen argues that Marx did not have a theory of ideology in the full sense of an empirically well-specified account that sets out a plausible explanation for how social conditions of domination lead people to form ideological forms of consciousness which are functional for such self-same conditions.¹³ Although Rosen identifies at least five discrete models of ideology in Marx, I hope to show how the problems he identifies with each stem from their isolation from one another in his account, and may be overcome by their possible combination. I shall look at them in turn before considering how they might be combined.

(i) The first model of ideology in Marx is found in *The German Ideology*, where the pejorative sense of the term is borrowed from Napoleon’s use of it to dismiss de Tracy’s science of ideas as naive and idealistic. Marx broadly associates Left Hegelian idealism with this pejorative sense of the term, but he specifically identifies Feuerbach’s critique of religion as the true starting point for criticism of ideology. Feuerbach’s critique asserts that humans fail to recognise their own agency in the social structures they create for themselves, and instead ascribe their own powers to the magical divine properties of fictive beings.¹⁴ Though Rosen distinguishes critique of religion from Marx’s later writings on ideology, there is some continuity between this argument and his later criticism of fetish illusions, where human powers are associated with things.

(ii) The second model Rosen identifies in *The German Ideology* he calls the “reflection model”. Ideology is said to reflect and invert material social relations, just as images are reflected and inverted in a *camera obscura*.¹⁵ As I argued earlier, just as religious ideals reflect their material origins in such a way that the effect is taken for the cause, so Marx claims Hegelian idealists place theory in an inverted relation to its material causes, fighting ideas with mere ideas in order to put right material social problems. Rosen argues that if ideology consistently inverts material reality then

we should see through it immediately, just as the eye inverts images of the world which our mind subsequently puts the right way up.¹⁶ Furthermore, he argues the reflection model reduces ideology to an epiphenomenal effect unable to perform the role Marx claims for it, which is to perpetuate oppressive social forms. As we shall soon see, however, this simple reflection model goes some way towards explaining the kind of illusion involved in Marx's later work on commodity fetishism. To demonstrate this though, further explanation of the functional effect of ideology, identified by Rosen in the interests-model and the correspondence model, is required.

(iii) The "interests-model" of ideology, identified by Rosen in *The German Ideology*, stems from Marx's claim that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas'.¹⁷ In other words, the ruling ideas of each epoch are likely to correspond to the interests of those who occupy dominant material positions in society. Note that this idea is not at odds with the claim in the reflection model that ideology reflects material social causes, but it adds the explanation that ideas tend to reflect dominant practical interests. Rosen acknowledges that Marx goes some way toward explaining why the interests of *dominant* classes are reflected in the dominant ideas in society by observing that the dissemination of information in society tends to be controlled by those who own the means of production. The division of labour, and ownership of the means of production, means the ruling class has a greater capacity to develop, and disseminate, ideas. Therefore, ideas tend to dominate which favour these interests. To return to Reich's question however, Rosen objects that Marx fails to explain why the *subordinate* classes take these ideas on board against their own interests, *especially* if our ideas, on this model, are supposed to reflect practical interests.¹⁸

(iv) Whereas with the previous two models, the illusory aspect failed to account for the functional role played by ideology, here the opposite problem is encountered: the role of ideology is abstracted from any illusion. But if we keep in mind the previous examples, we see that we often mistakenly grant ideas the status of independent priority rather than granting this status to the practical circumstances that give rise to them. We can thus begin to see how dominant *ideas* come to *appear*

independent from their determining material social conditions. Marx explains elsewhere that the division of mental and manual labour means that the ideas of the ruling class are often conceived in abstraction from physical conditions.¹⁹ Taking these conditions for granted generates illusions about the independence of ideas. While the critique of religion and the *camera obscura* example help to explain this phenomenon, Rosen fails to recognise these links between the models of ideology which he isolates. Links between material interests and ideas are rarely straightforwardly conspiratorial. In the media, for example, relations of interest between Murdoch and other elites do not always *transparently* shape the Sun's editorials. Obscure complexity may help explain why oppressed individuals buy into ideas which do not serve their interest (though they may serve short-term immediate interests).

(v) A more serious problem raised by Rosen concerns the "functional correspondence model" of ideology elaborated by G.A. Cohen with reference to Marx's scientific materialist theory of history. This associates ideology with the superstructure of ideas corresponding to the economic base. The problem here concerns the functionalist explanation in part (e) of Rosen's account of the theory of ideology above: ideology comes about, and persists, *because* it benefits the entity or structure in question – i.e. (i) it is *functional for* the social order, and (ii) it is *functionally explained by* its relation to that order.²⁰ Cohen explains the relation between base and superstructure in terms of a functional explanation: the existing relations of production arise as they do *because* they are suitable for the forces of production.²¹ Similarly, Marx is said to argue that the dominant ideas of society develop as they do to serve a function in stabilizing relations of class domination.²² For example, in capitalist society, freedom of exchange is prized. But the appearance of free exchange often obscures different parties' participation via *different* means, opportunities and roles in production such that the appearance of free exchange distracts from socio-economic asymmetries (such as control of resources) and labour conditions established prior to market transactions.²³

Rosen objects that whereas functional explanations are fine for biological phenomena because biological organisms are self-maintaining, the theory of ideology cannot have recourse to a functional explanation about society, since it cannot justify the background ontological assumption that societies are self-maintaining systems.²⁴ So natural selection can explain why giraffe's necks are long, because this favoured the survival of longer-necked giraffe prototypes over shorter-necked ones. But Rosen argues we cannot make an analogous claim that religion exists because society needs it to maintain itself.²⁵ He claims it is not clear that societies produce consciousness required for their preservation, and that the theory of ideology lacks an elaborating mechanism, such as natural selection for species. The theory of ideology not only lacks an explanatory mechanism for this functionalist claim, but we do not even know what one would look like, claims Rosen. One might respond that it would look a lot like natural selection, and point to incest and cannibalism taboos, as well as hygiene codes, to illustrate the point. Societies which lack such practices tend not to stick around.

Rosen accepts this analogy in a later article in which he acknowledges that under the evolutionary analogy, we can see how ideas that favour survival and adaptation tend to outlast those that do not. In his *Constellations* article, written four years after *On Voluntary Servitude*, Rosen accepts the explanation I have just given, namely, that rulers may tend to form ideas in their interests, and that since they tend to control the flow of information, their ideas may consequently dominate and this helps to protect their domain.²⁶ Such explanations are in fact commonly accepted in social science. For example, economists ascribe the survival of certain firms on account of practices that enhance profit maximisation, while stronger economies can be shown to support military superiority.²⁷ To extend this directly to the theory of ideology, we could show that beneficial ideas are selected, since those who gain power have more opportunity to develop ideas that suit their interests than do those in subordinate roles.

Useful ideas which support current dominant interests are selected more often than others because they better suit the interests of those who have greater influence over the flow of information. By combining the functional model and the interests-model, one might argue that those with greater resources will be those with the greatest means to develop and disseminate ideas favourable to their continued dominance, or less directly, ideas favourable to the sound functioning of existing economic conditions, skewed as they are towards the interests of those on top (e.g. banks must be bailed out to keep the existing economic system functioning). These ideas are accepted as realistic responses to a complex economic system where underlying transactions remain opaque.

A problem remains to be addressed, however, with respect to Rosen's main objection to the theory of ideology. The evolutionary analogy for society may be granted, assuming various details can be ironed out, and Rosen admits, on principle, that accounts of social selection may be found to explain why certain ideas become dominant. Ideas which favour survival, and adaptation to existing circumstances, tend to be selected. Thus dominant ideas in oppressive societies tend not to challenge the *status quo* in any radical sense as long as their functional integration with relations of domination remains obscure. But a mystery from Rosen's challenge still remains: why do the disadvantaged majority select ideas which lead them to act against their own interests if they *know* these ideas are functionally integrated with the social relations of domination under which they are oppressed? I have explained how such ideas might come about, and how they might even come to dominate. We may grant that rulers would accept such ideas, on the combined interests-and-function model of ideology I have presented. We may even grant that if the relationship between these ideas and interests is often obscure, oppressed people may accept such ideas too. But if dominant ideas are known to serve dominant interests, then an explanation is lacking as to why those who lose out accept them.²⁸

Alternative explanations exist for such phenomena which do not rely on the theory of ideology, such as the problem of coordinating collective resistance, combined with the convenience of sharing

widely accepted social norms and common beliefs as opposed to untested possibilities, even when we know these norms are not quite right.²⁹ Such explanations for why people act consciously against their interest do not need to appeal to the claim that agents are deluded, although, as we have seen, neither does the theory of ideology. Nevertheless, there are alternative explanations, and Rosen's objection is a problem for the theory of ideology to the extent that he allows no role for illusion in promoting the functional context between ideology and domination. In such instances it has yet to be explained why agents would accept such ideas. To start to show how such cases of ideology arise, in the following section, I consider a worst-case scenario for the theory of ideology from Adorno, which best supports Rosen's objection about a missing explanatory mechanism. Ideas are thought to be openly shaped by interests, but then an explanation seems to be lacking for why oppressed agents would select ideas that favour conditions they know to be oppressive even when they recognise this functional relationship.

Adorno's Account of Positivist Ideology

Adorno's use of the term "positivism" is ambiguous, and is applied to such diverse contexts that one may be tempted to interpret it as a catch-all pejorative term for anything broadly related to science of which he disapproves. I do not wish to stipulate any precise meaning of the term "positivism" here, but rather to explain Adorno's distinction between modern, contemporary "positivist ideology", and an older, bourgeois, liberal form he believes is being replaced amid an increasingly "administered society". Adorno's notion of positivist ideology is the most problematic for the theory of ideology with respect to Rosen's objection about the missing functional explanation. And if Adorno is right about its role in contemporary society, then it presents increased complications for ideology criticism. This section therefore explores the distinction between liberal ideology and contemporary positivist ideology, before examining Adorno's discussion of consumer culture to suggest a potential response to Rosen in the second part of the chapter.

The theme of Adorno's distinction between liberal and positivist ideology runs throughout his later work from the 1940s onwards, although considerations of a shift in society and Western culture, from bourgeois liberal idealism to contemporary positivist objectivism, is often only in the background. In *Minima Moralia*, however, Adorno explicitly states that in the Twentieth Century,

Critics confronted bourgeois society not only economically, but morally, with its own norms. This left the ruling stratum, in so far as it was unwilling simply to lapse into apologetic and impotent lying... with no other defence than to reject the very principle by which society was judged, its own morality.³⁰

It is such circumstances that provide the setting for the emergence of positivist ideology. Adorno goes on to describe how the propaganda and advertising of the culture industry drown out the voice of the critic, inducing people to want what the existing economic system already provides. It is akin in this respect to Fascism, which goes so far as to openly proclaim the relations of domination 'that are elsewhere concealed' under a 'threadbare veneer of residual liberal bourgeois apologetics'.³¹

According to Deborah Cook, Adorno is claiming here that some ideas, such as the liberal concept of freedom, may refer indirectly to an unrealized potential in the objects which never fully instantiates them. The idea of freedom, for instance, is never fully instantiated by the limited experience of freedom of real historical individuals. Individuals' embodiment of freedom is always both more and less than what is attributed to them under the concept "freedom" (the concept does not exhaust individuals' particularity and no one has yet fulfilled the potentialities intimated in the concept).³²

Liberal ideology, although it can obscure reality, also serves to some extent as an index of truth for the ideology critic who can appeal to its inadequate realization as grounds for social criticism. Liberal ideology can thus serve as a basis for criticism of the very social conditions it can also serve to obscure. It 'contains an historically conditioned moment of truth against which the pathetic rationality of existing conditions can be judged... [and] ascribes to objects properties they could only acquire under improved conditions and therefore tacitly denounces existing conditions'.³³

In contrast to liberal “idealist” ideology, however, positivistic “realist” ideology simply points to the way things already are. It ‘legitimizes existing conditions by identifying its concepts with them’,³⁴ objectively seeking to establish merely what the world is like already. Whereas liberal ideology’s false legitimization of existing states of affairs at least could be confronted with the truth about its own ideals, positivism merely reports the facts and, in doing so, falls back on the argument against the critic that this is how things are.³⁵ Positivist ideology no longer offers a vindication, but, rather, points to the inevitability of existing social circumstances. This shift in the form taken by ideology accounts for Adorno’s claim in ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, that whereas ideology criticism used to be conceived against idealism, pointing, for example, to the gap between the bourgeois ideal of universal emancipation and the empirical reality of concrete unfreedom, today it confronts a different form of consciousness that has dispensed with all thought which does not conform to experience.³⁶

The argument here is that when confronted by social criticism with a contradiction between a set of espoused ideals and actual lived social existence, society simply abandoned these ideals. Idealism worked because it was something to aspire to, that would be achieved in the “secular hereafter”. By eliminating these ideals, we also eliminate a counterpoint against which to measure shortcomings. As such, we come to accept domination because it seems inevitable. Eliminating the gap between ideals and reality, and simply describing what is, we begin to stop striving for a different dispensation. Whether or not this is an inevitable consequence of the rejection of idealism,³⁷ Adorno thinks it is an historical development that emerged under late capitalism. He also suggests a reason for this development that helps account for the missing functional explanation that Rosen objects to in the theory of ideology. Although he thinks we are compelled by positivist ideology to accept oppressive social conditions, Adorno thinks the modern culture industry provides a compensatory illusion of freedom, disguised as consumer choice, which takes the existence of freedom for granted.³⁸

Adorno claims that apparently free choices made in totally administered society are in fact functionally integrated into existing processes of production. The contemporary culture industry ineluctably draws people to desire and consume commodities provided for by the economic system:

Just as the customers of mass society have to be in on the scene at once, they cannot leave anything out... barbarism has now reached a point... where it cannot stuff itself full enough... The abundance of commodities indiscriminately consumed is becoming calamitous. It makes it impossible to find one's way.³⁹

Adorno's idea is that domination under consumer society occurs less by way of direct repression, than by the manipulation of needs which are stimulated by marketing, and satisfied by products. Freedom of choice becomes an instrument of domination that leads people to identify with an imposed form of existence.⁴⁰ The culture industry no longer claims critical independence from social reality but is part of it, presenting cultural objects purely for exchange and enjoyment, thereby binding individuals to the social order.⁴¹

Positivist science and contemporary culture present a direct reflection of reality, portraying conditions of existence as the norm. This induces individuals to adapt, and adjust, to the existing social order through their desire for objects produced by it, and the ersatz pleasure gained from consuming.⁴² Under such circumstances, the ideology critic finds no gap between what people claim to pursue (the ideology) and what they actually do (the reality). Everyone knows rewards and opportunities are unevenly distributed, but instead of resisting this and attempting to overcome it, most energy is spent adapting to the way things are as best as possible, for example, by attempting to gain a place at the top, by simple acquiescence or by escapist self-indulgence. 'Our desires are shaped in such a way that we want more of existing current social and political reality as it is.'⁴³ This blocks our path to emancipation by harnessing all the energy that could make things different, and functionally integrating all self-interested behaviour into an increasingly administered social and economic system that aims simply to increase productive forces for its own sake.⁴⁴

To recall discussion of Adorno's notion of "positivist ideology", discussed in Chapter 1, ideology 'is no longer simply reducible to *partial* interest'.⁴⁵ Thus, the ideology critic cannot simply appeal to interests of a revolutionary class to defeat positivist ideology, since these interests are already incorporated under the culture industry. Rather than undermining this phenomenon, ideology criticism merely confirms what positivist ideology already admits. Thus, 'ideology critique must help things to be expressed in terms that are not only operational'.⁴⁶ By pointing to the links between material interests and the ideas which serve them, mere 'cultural criticism' fails to appreciate what it is up against, and 'clings ever more closely to the material base it claims to transcend',⁴⁷ leading to 'resignation before the facts of life'.⁴⁸ The facts - how things really are - simply affirm what positivist ideology openly proclaims: everyone has a stake in the existing system.

Irony used to say: such it claims to be, but such it is: today, however, the world, even in its most radical lie, falls back on the argument that things are like this, a simple finding which coincides, for it, with the good. There is not a crevice in the cliff of the established order into which the ironist might hook a fingernail... The gesture of the unthinking "That's-how-it-is" is the exact means by which the world dispatches each of its victims...⁴⁹

Marx thought capitalism would sweep away traditional and religious interpretations, which justified the *status quo*, by unveiling transparent social relations and real conditions of life, thus allowing for a clear understanding of social relations by the subordinate class. We now see however, that such objectivistic disenchantment works alongside consumer culture to engender acceptance of such conditions. Now, 'in the open-air prison the world is becoming',⁵⁰ the links between current social interests and ideology do not expose anything positivist ideology does not already make clear.⁵¹

Joe McCarney observes that whereas traditional Marxist ideology critique 'presupposes a gap between what thought projects and what is actually performed', for Adorno and the Frankfurt School, 'thought has now become a reflex of the established order and projects nothing beyond it: ideology in the original sense has evaporated'.⁵² McCarney, like many critics of first generation

Frankfurt School theorists, believes this line of thought leaves these theorists without any basis for criticism of ideology, or any resources to replace it.⁵³

Adorno's account of positivist ideology is especially vulnerable to Rosen's objection since no illusion is put forward about the partial interests, and relations of domination, that shape it. Marx thought ideology criticism could dissolve idealistic bourgeois illusions by pointing to objective social relations. We now see that, at least, 'in their attempt to resolve a conflict between collective and individual interest, even [these] hopeless rationalizations contained a ring of truth, which today we too cheerfully deny'.⁵⁴ Liberal ideology at least falsely claims independence from its social ground, and thereby extends beyond it to something better. Positivist ideology however is a matter of 'blind faith in the descriptive'.⁵⁵ The link between ideology and the oppressive material conditions which ideology criticism once deployed against the pretensions of bourgeois ideology, is already affirmed under positivist ideology which encourages objective decision-making and "hard choices", over idealist speculation. Objective truths about material interests merely perpetuate positivist ideology. On Rosen's account, however, this functional relationship between ideas and oppressive social conditions remains mysterious and unsatisfactory. We can understand why someone might act against their interests if they are coerced or misled, but why would they do so *willingly*?

We see, then, that positivist ideology, for Adorno, involves three characteristics that are problematic with respect to Rosen's objection about the missing functional explanation: positivist ideology involves (i) no false beliefs, (ii) no illusions about pervasive oppression under dominant socio-economic conditions, and (iii) no illusions about the functional relationship between such conditions, and the dominant ideas and social norms in society. Positivist ideology appears to fit squarely into Reich's question: 'Why do the many accept the rule of the few when it is against their interests to do so?' More so than its liberal formulation, positivist ideology must explain why, if people believe ideas are tied to interests and ideology is an "open secret", and if ideology thwarts the interests of holders of beliefs, resulting in unsuccessful practical interventions in the world, those who are oppressed

under such conditions would cling to such self-defeating ideas?⁵⁶ It is not clear why we should think that individuals in consumer society are bound uncritically to the *status quo* through positivist ideology and the commodification of culture, or why resistance to oppression cannot develop under commodified mass culture. If the persistence of ideology results from its socio-economic function in relations of domination, how can one explain why oppressed agents who recognise these links, continue to hold such beliefs? Adorno's suggestion about manufactured needs and induced preferences is promising, but more explanation is needed to account for why the satisfaction of these qualifies as domination.

Part II: The Functional Explanation for Ideology

Numerous recent attempts to rehabilitate the concept of ideology, in response to various problems discussed in the previous chapter, have dropped the aspect of cognitive deficiency, or illusion. The aspect of error, or illusion, is dismissed as unworkable, and the meaning of the term is restricted to its functional sense with respect to the way in which ideas, or meaning more generally, sustain domination.⁵⁷ My aim in the second half of this chapter is to show why this is ill-advised. My contention is that the theory of ideology cannot get by without some reference to the notion of illusion, since this helps explain the mechanism by which ideology performs its function. By making a distinction between real and apparent interests, I hope to show that an explanation may be given for the function of ideology that both solves Rosen's problem, and accounts for the idea that "false consciousness" does not involve false beliefs, or illusions, about the relationship between dominant forms of consciousness and prevailing oppression.

Before trying to develop an explanation for Adorno's notion of positivist ideology that answers Rosen's objection, I begin by examining further the claim that preferences produced by the culture industry under late capitalist society lead agents to act against their interests. I turn to Geuss's and Feinberg's respective discussions of "real interests" to explain how a distinction may be made in the theory of ideology between (i) immediate, apparent interests that agents follow as a consequence of

ideological beliefs, norms, or values; and (ii) real, or ulterior, interests that ideology obscures. I first explain how the notion of ideological domination involves a normative distinction between real and apparent interests, and how agents' real interests remain indexed to their desires, even when they are disregarded. I then briefly discuss a potential counterfactual approach through which to derive normative criteria for real interests under the pervasive conditions of oppression that give rise to ideology. In the final section I apply the distinction between real and apparent interests to Adorno's notion of positivist ideology to explain why agents continue to hold onto ideological beliefs, values, and practices even when they recognise their relation to domination.

True and False Interests under Relations of Domination

The function Rosen attributes to the theory of ideology is that it prevents members of society 'from behaving as their interests would otherwise dictate'.⁵⁸ Positivist ideology is particularly mysterious on this interpretation because it is supposed to function in this way without false beliefs, or illusions, about domination. Why, Rosen objects, would oppressed people hold beliefs that function like this? In the previous discussion of positivist ideology, it was noted that part of the reason Adorno thinks individuals knowingly reproduce oppressive conditions under late capitalism is because the culture industry induces them to desire the sorts of things provided under such relations of production. If this is so, it may be objected that if individuals are willing to put up with existing social conditions to get what they want, then they are not really oppressed. Consequently, if the theory of ideology involves the claim that ideological forms of consciousness prevent people from behaving 'as their interests would otherwise dictate', *of their own accord*, then an explanation must be given for the distinction thereby entailed between interests which oppressed social agents follow as a consequence of ideology, and interests by which they are oppressed.

To distinguish between interests that are ideologically induced (which may be satisfied under existing social relations) and non-ideologically motivated interests (which are illegitimately frustrated by existing social relations), it is helpful to turn to Geuss's discussion of real and apparent

interests in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*. As discussed in the first chapter, Geuss claims there are three senses in which ideological forms of consciousness are said to be false, and that these may be distinguished by their respective epistemic, functional or genetic properties. Here, we are specifically concerned with his functional model of ideology, which suggests that forms of consciousness are ideological by virtue of their role in supporting, stabilizing or legitimizing certain kinds of oppressive social institutions or practices.⁵⁹ Behind this notion of ideology, claims Geuss, rests the assumption that a belief which supports domination does not necessarily justify it.⁶⁰ Not all relations of power are illegitimate. For example, parents and teachers must control children in their charge within reason, just as officers should control their troops.

According to Geuss, ideological “domination” (*Herrschaft*) is a normative attribute of relations of power where interests are repressed that *ought not* to be repressed. To say that ideology supports domination is to say that it helps to frustrate the interests of certain individuals in society unequally, illegitimately, unnecessarily, and unacceptably.⁶¹ Ideology is said to sustain domination in the sense that it is linked to a claim to undeserved legitimacy.⁶² But if ideology is said to induce preferences that may be satisfied under existing social relations, then a normative distinction between real and apparent interests must be made which distinguishes preferences that are ideologically induced, from non-ideologically induced interests that ought not to be repressed. To the extent that ideology criticism is criticism of a form of domination, it inevitably involves normative judgments. But the claims of ideology criticism are couched not in terms of moral categories such as “good” and “bad”, but in functional terms of “true” and “false”. This is most notable in Adorno. Real *interests* only qualify as such if they are indexed to agents’ preferences, so the normative attribution of ideology to particular relations of power cannot be ascertained independently from preferences. Thus, ideology is said to be “false” in the sense that it helps to legitimize social conditions which have repressive features.⁶³ So long as it shores up relations of domination, ideology is considered false in this functional sense.⁶⁴

We see that, in Geuss's view, to identify domination, the theory of ideology depends on normative or evaluative criteria to decide what constitutes the illegitimate frustration of interests.⁶⁵

Domination or 'surplus repression' is an amount of repression exacted beyond that required to satisfy agents' legitimate needs and wants.⁶⁶ The minimal functional claim that ideology sustains domination depends on a normative distinction between legitimate (or "true") and illegitimate ("false") interests, such that ideology is said to lead agents to act against their true interests. To explain this claim, it is important to understand how true interests may be understood to diverge from agents' preferences – i.e. how I may be said to have preferences which I am not interested in satisfying (e.g. developing a preference for unprotected sex with strangers). These are not in their long-term interest and by fulfilling these short-term desires, they begin to act against their real interests. They may, or may not, be aware of their better interest, and interests need not coincide with subjective preferences, although they are linked. We often want what is not in our interest, yet our interests depend on our aims and choices. How, then, do preferences differ from interests, and how do basic interests depend on variable subjective interpretations, choices and goals?

To clarify these terms and show how true interests diverge from apparent interests, I turn to Joel Feinberg's schematic analysis of interests in *Harm to Others*. According to Feinberg, when we say someone acts against her interests, her having an "interest" in something essentially entails having a stake in their wellbeing⁶⁷ (as opposed to my taking an "interest" in something in the sense in which it "interests" me or absorbs my attention). My interests involve everything in which I have a stake. I have an interest in not smoking, and in receiving a pension, for example. To explain how desires and interests come apart and intersect, Feinberg distinguishes two kinds of interests, namely, welfare interests, and ulterior interests. My ulterior interests arise from the aspirations I hold personally. Ulterior interests involve general aims, goals or objectives, which enhance a variety of other ends to which they are linked.⁶⁸ Welfare interests, on the other hand, are generalized interests that must be satisfied for anyone to realize their ulterior interests; they are essential means to achieving one's goals.⁶⁹ Interests and desires come apart when my preferences threaten my ulterior and welfare

interests. I want to smoke a cigarette but it is not in my interest to do so since this threatens my ulterior interests. In this instance, my desires conflict with my interests.

Feinberg's account of ulterior interests shows that interests may depend on preferences, but not on *all* preferences, since some preferences generate apparent interests that threaten my real, ulterior interests. Together, Geuss and Feinberg help to explain how the theory of ideology may be said to entail a normative distinction between real and apparent interests, where "true interests" accord with ulterior interests, and "false interests" accord with ideologically induced preferences that frustrate these ulterior interests. In the following section, I argue that this distinction may be used to explain why oppressed agents accept ideological beliefs they recognise to be functionally integrated with oppressive socio-economic conditions. It is important to bear in mind that the normative distinction between true and false interests used in response to Rosen, raises a further issue regarding the legitimate normative criteria by which real interests may be identified. This will be examined in a lot more detail in later chapters, but it is helpful to look briefly at Geuss's counterfactual criteria of optimal conditions for real interests, in order to gain some initial understanding of the issue at stake, before responding to Rosen.

By what normative criterion might someone be said to act on false interests, i.e. against their true interests? What if conditions are so impoverished that agents develop goals which, under improved circumstances, they would reject? Or they reach an apathetic position whereby they fail to develop any goals at all? Geuss refers to a tribe called the Ik who have lived for so long under such harsh conditions that they have developed norms and aims we would find offensive or oppressive, but which they depend on for survival, such as stealing food from the very old and young.⁷⁰ If we do not think stealing food from vulnerable individuals is ever a "true interest", then on what grounds can we make such a judgment? If I find my life so unbearable when I weigh up all my goals, needs, desires and aspirations, that I decide to kill myself, can we say that I am acting in my interest when I do so? It is not implausible to grant that an unregenerate alcoholic may be able to acknowledge that

her true interest is to stop drinking even if none of her current goals point in this direction. But how is this so, if interests develop from agents' goals? Under the right, or rather wrong, conditions, it would seem that what Feinberg calls ulterior interests may conflict with the sort of interests that agents might have under improved conditions.

Like Feinberg, Geuss contends that interests arise from desires, and that critics cannot discredit agents' avowed desires even if they arise from awful social conditions.⁷¹ How, then, might desires ground true interests under such conditions? If interests are based on subjectively held desires, can we say of a suicide bomber, who acts in accordance with a consistently held set of desires fostered under extreme conditions, that by blowing herself up in a crowded restaurant for a political cause, she has acted against her interest? Geuss's solution to this problem is to formulate true interests as those an agent would under optimal conditions.⁷² In fact, the interests agents would form under conditions of perfect knowledge coincide with those they would form in optimal conditions, since they could not acquire perfect knowledge unless they were in optimal conditions. The self-knowledge required for perfect knowledge is something agents are very unlikely to attain in a society 'without extensive room for free discussion and the unrestrained play of the imagination with alternative ways of thinking'.⁷³ Had the suicide bomber not lived in objectively horrifying conditions, she would not have developed an interest in blowing herself up. Her true interest is thus *not* to blow herself up.

Geuss closes his discussion of interests with the following claim:

Although we can be in a position fully to recognise our real interests only if our society satisfies the condition of perfect freedom, still, although we do not live in that utopia, we may be free enough to recognise how we might act to abolish some of the coercion from which we suffer and move closer to optimal conditions of freedom and knowledge. The task of critical theory is to show us which way to move.⁷⁴

On Geuss's formulation, we can see how true interests are grounded by desires, even under conditions of domination. Under dire circumstances, agents can nevertheless recognise conditions

under which they would prefer to live, and under such improved conditions, they would form desires which would accord with their true interests. True interests can thus be formulated counterfactually as those the agent would desire in preference to existing conditions of domination. By way of analogy, even a fully informed, unregenerate alcoholic, who has no desire to stop drinking excessively, can recognise that under improved conditions, in which she was not addicted to alcohol, she would form an interest in not drinking. Despite her present situation, she can recognise that she would *prefer* to live under alternative conditions. True interests are those which agents would form, or would try to bring about, *in a situation they prefer*, and are thus ultimately linked to agents' desires and preferences. Thus, the claim that ideology sustains domination, may be formulated as follows: ideology helps to sustain social conditions which illegitimately frustrate the true interests of certain social agents more than others; and these true interests are identified by those desires they would try to satisfy under optimal conditions, desires which oppressed agents can recognise as preferable, from their existing situation.

“Necessary False Consciousness” in the theory of ideology

I have explained how the theory of ideology may be said to involve a distinction between real and apparent interests, such that real interests correspond with ulterior interests, and apparent interests may be understood as mistaken conceptions formed on the basis of induced preferences that clash with ulterior interests. I now wish to return to the problem addressed in the first half of this chapter, and show how this distinction may be used to provide a functional explanation for the adhesiveness of ideology in the face of positivist disillusionment. The aim here is to provide an explanation that (i) accounts for Adorno's notion of positivist ideology, which is said to require no false beliefs or illusions about the integration of ideas with pervasive conditions of domination, and (ii) responds to Rosen by showing why agents hold onto such forms of consciousness. The distinction between ulterior interests and immediate apparent interests, formed in response to conditions of domination, helps to explain how agents in the grip of positivist ideology, may be said to have objectively, empirically true ideas that are nonetheless ideological.

As discussed above, Rosen claims the functional aspect of ideology is the key component of the theory of ideology. He writes that ideological “false consciousness” may be irrational, cognitive or false, but it must be socially related, either because it is functionally explained by social circumstances, or because it is causally related to them in some other way.⁷⁵ I showed that Adorno’s notion of “positivist ideology” similarly seems to strip the theory of ideology down to its functional aspect by apparently doing away with the aspect of illusion. Both Rosen’s and Adorno’s functional accounts of ideology face the same problem, which is accounting for why agents hold on to ideology against their interests. This suggests that the aspect of illusion, which is missing from these functionalist models of ideology, may provide an explanation for how ideology functions. I now turn to Rosen’s discussion of the “essence-appearance” model of ideology to explore how the distinction between true and false interests can be used to explain both Marx’s accounts of ideology, commodity fetishism and bourgeois political economy, and Adorno’s account of positivist ideology.

In *On Voluntary Servitude*, Rosen explicitly addresses the aspect of illusion which he subsequently rejects as neither plausible, nor central, to the theory of ideology, through an exploration of Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism. He argues that Marx’s writings on the commodity form provide the basis for an “essence-appearance” model of ideology, whereby ideology corresponds to phenomenal appearances which “falsify”, or obscure, essential underlying aspects of reality, in particular, social “contradictions” such as relations of domination and class conflict.⁷⁶ Because these appearances are real (that is, they arise directly from our experience of social existence), they are not illusions in the sense that they involve false beliefs about reality.⁷⁷ Thus, although Marx writes that the commodity’s phenomenal appearance “*falsifies*” an underlying reality, Rosen suggests this is best interpreted to mean that actual and apparent aspects of the commodity obscure its social significance, such that its ‘false appearance’ can be understood to ‘suggest a theoretical explanation that is false’.⁷⁸

Rosen claims Marx’s theory of fetishism involves the following criteria: a fetish is (i) a material object invested with non-material power, (ii) as a result of agency which has operated on it, (iii) this non-

material property really is in the object, (iv) but perceivers are deluded by failing to recognise the social agency that gives the object its non-material property, and (v) this whole phenomenon arises because social labour is fragmented under capitalist social relations.⁷⁹ Fetish illusions, according to Marx, involve false appearances in the sense that the appearance of commodities suggests false *theoretical explanations* about the origins of their non-material aspects. Such a perception is not entirely misguided, since it involves an accurate representation of aspects of reality, and thus society generates these false beliefs spontaneously, suggesting theoretical explanations that are false. This explains why Marx claims that fetish illusions remain, despite being shown to be false, if the aspects of reality which give rise to them persist. Just as the sun continues to appear to go around the earth, even once we realise that in fact the earth moves around the sun, the truth about the origin of a commodity's value does not alter the conditions which suggest a false explanation.

Rosen objects, however, that the "essence-appearance" model lacks an adequate explanation for why agents would not reject and abandon a theoretical explanation which has been proven false, even if the phenomenon which gives rise to this false explanation persists.⁸⁰ On Marx's account of commodity fetishism, fetish illusions involve *false beliefs*, for example, that commodities have their value intrinsically. Marx claims reality remains opaque even after its inner workings have been disclosed. But Rosen argues it is not plausible to think these beliefs will remain unaffected by contrary knowledge. Scientific discovery might not change the appearance of the phenomenon itself, but it does alter false beliefs about the phenomenon in question.⁸¹ (I do not *believe* the earth goes round the sun just because it *looks* that way). Thus, the "essence-appearance" model falls prey to the same problem faced by the functionalist account outlined above: why would oppressed individuals continue to remain in thrall to these illusions even after they discover the truth about their operation? The "essence-appearance" illusion, it appears, does not help to explain this.

According to Rosen, Adorno's account makes an improvement on Marx's but still falls short of an adequate explanation for the persistence of fetish illusions. Rosen claims that whereas fetish

illusions for Marx involve *false beliefs* about the origins of non-material properties of the commodity, for Adorno the perceptible non-material qualities attaching to objects are *knowledge-independent*.⁸² Adorno's view deviates from Marx and follows Lukács' line in *History and Class Consciousness*, that commodity fetishism does not involve the *attribution* of a quality the object does not have, but the *elimination* of a quality it *should* have – i.e. a significance which objects should acquire but which alienated labour cannot confer on them.⁸³ Adorno's essence-appearance model goes some way towards showing how ideology persists in the face of true beliefs about them, by interpreting ideological illusion as a form of reification. Something vital or meaningful is reduced to something "thing-like" through a forgetting, or a failure to recognise, ascribe or attribute. This is effected by conditions of alienated labour. However, Rosen objects that this interpretation commits Adorno both to an overarching Hegelian concept of labour, and to the assumption that social labour as a whole, obscured though it is by fetishistic appearances, can be represented in the object which it produces.⁸⁴ Neither of these positions can sustain Marx's commitment to natural scientific explanations.⁸⁵

The explanation for the essence-appearance model does not depend on the explanation Rosen attributes to Adorno. As such, I will not delve into Adorno's presumed concept of social labour. The neglected qualities of the commodity may be explained without recourse to such technical mechanics for at least two reasons. (i) Positivism encourages us to overlook the normative mediation of experience; that is, intentional experience of empirical objects is mediated by agents' normative orientations, which are, at least to some extent, determined socially. To take these norms for granted in experience, may well lead to a failure to reflect on how experience is oriented under oppressive socio-economic conditions. (ii) Consumer culture (marketing etc.) *tends* to distance commodities from actual conditions of production. As I shall explain further, commodities may be produced under oppressive social conditions, but this is not usually taken into account in one's engagement with these commodities, even if one recognises these conditions are oppressive. In both cases, direct empirical experience of the commodity may overshadow the determination of this

experience to the extent that this is taken for granted and put out of mind. Meaning is not really *in* the object, which means nothing on its own, but immediate experience of it may distract attention from oppressive conditions that determine how it is evaluated, and how it is produced. The problem is not that the *object* lacks certain qualities, but that *we* fail to reflect on these aspects of it.

It is worth considering an example here. The irony, as I've sat here writing about false consciousness, true interests and fetish illusions, is that I've started smoking again, though I'd quit some six months before. Addiction to nicotine is no answer to why I've done this, since I was no longer addicted to nicotine. Rather, over a number of years, by habit and constant conjunction, I have developed an association between the material satisfaction of nicotine cravings, and the relief of more intangible stress arising from various pressures such as social integration and work, even though the causal link between the two is a product of (initially subconscious) choice. I smoke a cigarette as I sit here, even though I know smoking predominantly reduces stress through my own affirmed association of general stress relief with the satisfaction of nicotine cravings which I only have because I smoke. I know I have no strong desire to smoke under improved conditions (i.e. when I am not addicted to nicotine), and I realise this habit is in conflict with my ulterior and welfare interests. I have begun to reproduce those conditions which create desires, the satisfaction of which leads me to act against my true interests, even as I explore the mechanism which produces this effect. I can pontificate all I want about the illusion, but it won't go away unless I stop reproducing the conditions under which it arises – that is, unless I stop smoking.

To return to illusions about commodities, there is a significant difference between the experience of eating a tasty chicken pie, and having knowledge of the actual lived conditions of the crazed and crippled hormonal mutant that went into it. The distinction can even be comical in direct abstraction, and shows that it is quite plausible to imagine someone who cares about animals knowing the latter yet enjoying the former. It is possible to modify behaviour with informed principles, but it is also quite possible not to do so. One cannot meditate on everything at once, and

in ordinary activity, the idea of a tortured chicken may well fade before the temptations of the pie. Customers at supermarkets are presented daily with a choice between alternative fair-trade products and the usual goods on offer, but it takes a leap of imagination from the banality of the supermarket shelf to reflective awareness of the unacceptable alternative, which is unfair trade. These kinds of instances occur all the time. How much difference does it make to a floor trader, who may at least hesitate to exploit anyone directly, if she hears of the conditions of exploitation underpinning a profitable investment option as she frantically calculates her way through a grid of numbers? Widespread exposure of conditions in clothing factories does not affect profit margins enough to affect such practices. It is rare that anyone recognises those who perpetuate these conditions in the mirrors of brightly lit changing rooms, even if they know, theoretically, what they are doing.

Pervasive, immediate, concrete experience has more influence on people's behaviour than abstract considerations. The more we focus our attention on immediate, given circumstances the less we attend to remote considerations about the cause and effect of these conditions. For example, by focusing attention on the here and now, we come to ignore cataclysmic predictions and continue to destroy our environment. Marx writes, in *Capital*, that theoretical discovery of the origins of the commodity's non-material properties in social labour 'by no means dissipates the mist through which the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves'.⁸⁶ Mystery and illusion do not depend on false beliefs, and are not always deflated with explanation, which may even make them more compelling. Holding to an illusion in the face of evidence against it, is child's play. We see the arm beneath the puppet and indulge the appearance. Contra Rosen, Marx does not mean that I hold onto a theoretical explanation I know to be false with regards to what went into my chicken pie. Rather, I manage to avoid thinking about the life and death of the animal parts because of other more immediate satisfactions.

Early on in *On Voluntary Servitude*, when Rosen dismisses the aspect of illusion in the theory of ideology as superfluous on the grounds that ideology need not be false,⁸⁷ he is correct in that ideology does not depend on false beliefs. However, he is wrong to conclude that ideology can be reduced to a functionalist model that does not depend on illusions. As discussed in Chapter 1, de Tracy's "science of ideas" emphasised observation and reason over religious and metaphysical prejudices yet Napoleon rejected these idealistic fantasies against practical experience. Feuerbach criticised religion for its false projection of man's essential powers. The early Marx showed, in *The German Ideology*, how *material* struggles are obscured by *idealism*'s one-sided focus on ideas and the later Marx showed, in *Capital*, how *social agency* is obscured by one-sided *materialism*, and how the categories of political economy abstract from the social conditions that underpin them. All of these notions of ideology make reference to illusions. None are reducible to a functionalist model.

The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.⁸⁸

The pressure to adapt to prevailing economic conditions, to satisfy desires and preferences that give rise to *apparent* interests that stem from immediate objective circumstances, rather than ulterior interests, generates a preference for ideas which help us cope right now, over critical ideas based on normative, evaluative speculation about ulterior interests. Domination persists in illusory immediacy. Ideology functions to sustain domination by emphasising satisfaction of immediate preferences stemming from existing social conditions. It distracts us from real interests we may have pursued in improved circumstances, as well as from courses of action which might have brought us these improved conditions. This is the case even when we discover the illegitimacy of dominant social relations, and our part in their reproduction, and even if we lose out. Such illusions of immediacy often persist in the face of theoretical evidence to the contrary. So long as they allow us practically to cope, and survive, under existing conditions, we accept them even if we are aware on a

theoretical level that they frustrate development of alternative goals, habits, beliefs and practices that might help free us from oppressive conditions and which we ought to pursue.

When considered in the light of this explanation of the mechanism of illusion in Marx's conception of ideology, Horkheimer's distinction between *critical* theory and "positivist description" (which is addressed in his seminal essay on *Traditional and Critical Theory*), helps to explain some of the basic background assumptions underlying Adorno's notion of positivist ideology, and how it functions. Horkheimer claims that the theoretical considerations of traditional theory depend on the direction and goals of research but (unlike critical theory) traditional theory's mode of positivist description fails to take into account, and reflect upon, these goals, taking them instead as given.⁸⁹ Positivist description takes the world, society and human nature 'as a sum-total of facts to be accepted, a reality to be adapted to in a way that best suits our needs and interests'.⁹⁰

By shifting our focus to immediate conditions, traditional theory distracts attention from reflection on 'the fact that the world, including how we perceive it, is in fact a product of the activity of society as a whole', and that it is founded on oppression, and not the blind outcome of conflicting forces.⁹¹ As such, although our economic collaboration is rationally mediated by various interests, the goals of this collaboration are often not planned rationally by us, and thus appear beyond our control as 'an unchangeable force of nature'.⁹² Positivist description is an evasion of critical theoretical effort, whereby we forget that we produce the conditions under which we exist, take evaluative norms for granted, and focus our energies on adapting to these conditions instead of critically reflecting on our collective goals.⁹³

Positivist description, as opposed to critical theory, 'thinks the object apart from the theory', and takes facts as given, rather than made and subject to change.⁹⁴ Thus, it distracts from the critical task of resisting domination. Adorno's distinction between liberal and positivist ideology accords with Horkheimer's claim that liberal ideology at least afforded criticism a gap between normative ideas

and their material realization. 'Materialist description', or positivist ideology, affords the critic no such gap under monopoly capitalism⁹⁵.

Though Adorno sees Enlightenment rationality, and accompanying bourgeois liberal ideology, as a double-edged sword which provides grounds for criticism of the situation it also helps to perpetuate, he also follows through on Marx's insights into the deficiencies of one-sided, positivistic, vulgar materialism pitted against idealism. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno complains that 'if one accuses entity of non-identity without differentiation, and without the positive perspective of possibility, one aids and abets the dull bustle towards the liquidation of transcendence too'.⁹⁶ Traditional ideology criticism, which once nobly deflated hypocritical ideals by describing the corrupt mechanisms in underlying social conditions, now naively operates in a culture of materialism, cynicism and positivist ideology. Exposing particular interests, even in a mode of irony, to deflate the pretensions of bourgeois ideology, without engaging in practical emancipation, merely undermines those ideals which pointed to a better situation. 'Demythologisation devours itself, leaving behind what merely is; a closed system of immanence'.⁹⁷ Positivistic descriptions of conditions of domination, obscured by bourgeois ideology, lead us to forget that 'the object of critique is not the need in thinking, but the relation between the two'.⁹⁸ Positivist ideology treats thought as the reflection of immediate material needs and concerns, and thereby distracts us from the need to reflect on our larger goals and purposes.

This argument accords with Adorno's earlier contention in *Against Epistemology* that positivism (or empiricism), and its antithesis (idealism's rationalist ideological humanization of reality), both neglect the mediacy of spirit and matter. Both liberal and positivist ideology arise from a one-sided abstraction from a dialectical relation. But, whereas idealism, or rationalism, at least *attempt* to claim universality, by positing an ideal beyond the immediate, given confines of existing social conditions, empiricism (or positivism, or materialism) leads to 'resignation before the unchanging'

and ‘issues a taboo on the future’ by treating the products of social consciousness as ultimate facts to be accepted’.⁹⁹

Positivist ideology abandons ideals for “pragmatic” adaptation to the demands of existing social systems without putting these conditions into question or reflecting on ends. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes, ‘our perspective of life has passed into an ideology, which conceals the fact there is life no longer’.¹⁰⁰ That is, it conceals the fact that there is no right living under immediate oppressive social conditions. Like Social Darwinism, which sees *life* as the survival of the fittest, but which fails to recognise that life is not only about survival but also about flourishing, positivist ideology focuses on existing states of affairs and avoids normative or evaluative judgments. Focusing our attention on our existing practices leads us (a) to omit to diagnose what is wrong with them, (b) to ignore the fact that they ought to be changed, and (c) to overlook our power to transform these practices so as to realise our true interests.

At this stage, Rosen’s demand for a functional explanation for ideology may be satisfied even for the worst-case scenario of positivist ideology. (i) A distinction between real and apparent interests accounts for why Adorno thinks positivist ideology does not depend on illusions about present circumstances. Real interests can be predicated on past or future conditions. (ii) If such ideas are empirically accurate with respect to present circumstances, we can see why they are so resilient. (iii) Since ulterior interests are obscured by apparent interests, we can see why agents continue to hold such beliefs even when they recognise the relationship between their ideas and pervasive, oppressive socio-economic conditions. In answer to Rosen, according to Adorno, “necessary false consciousness” is *necessary* for two reasons: because reality really does produce it, and because it helps perpetuate existing relations of production. It is also *false* for two reasons: because social conditions are wrong, and because it leads people to act against their real interests.

I contend that ideology functions somewhat like Rosen’s abstraction of the functional from the appearance-reality model of ideology. Focusing on quantitative aspects at the expense of qualitative

ones, or vice versa, leads to self-defeating confusion. To see how ideology functions, one has to fit the pieces together. Ideology functions by means of one-sided focus either on ideals, which obscure reality (bourgeois ideology), or on a reality that obscures our ideals (positivist ideology). Ideology persists because it helps us navigate existing conditions. But it also perpetuates domination by encouraging unmediated, single-minded abstraction, thus generating illusions. On Geuss's counterfactual account of real interests, this prevents us from focusing on the true interests that emerge from optimal conditions which we might, in turn, prefer to bring about. First, positivist ideology distracts from reflective, normative evaluation with mere quietist description disguised as "objectivity"; second, the culture industry encourages a gap between induced preferences for commodities, and ulterior interests. Taken together, we can see why we hold onto ideas that lead us to reproduce the conditions of our oppression, even when we recognise the relationship between domination and ideas.

Before closing, note that the response given to Rosen's objection depends on a normative distinction between real and apparent interests to identify relations of domination in ideological conditions. Although it may, in principle, be possible to make such a distinction, it is yet to be established what *bona fide* normative criteria may be used to distinguish ideologically induced preferences from those which constitute real interests. Having examined and explained the cognitive and functional aspects of the pejorative sense of ideology used in ideology criticism, subsequent chapters will address the issue of how to determine criteria for this purpose.

¹ Rosen, M. 1996: 1. "Reich's question" is formulated here by Rosen.

² Reich, W. 1970: 20 (Rosen sums this up in the formulation presented earlier)

³ Rosen, M. 1996: 1.

⁴ Rosen, M. 1996: 1-2, 30: Rosen interprets "necessary false consciousness" to mean societies are 'systematic and maintained by the attitudes and beliefs of those who live in them' – i.e. ideological forms of consciousness are said to be necessary for the maintenance of the oppressive forms of society from which they emerge.

⁵ Rosen, M. 1996: 3.

⁶ Rosen, M. 1996: 32.

⁷ Rosen, M. 1996: 34. In this instance a true belief is ideological since it legitimates oppressive social relations.

⁸ In a later article, 'On *Voluntary Servitude* and the Theory of Ideology' Rosen elaborates that the key criterion of ideological consciousness is that it goes against agents' interests (2000: 395).

⁹ Rosen, M. 1996: 44-47.

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- ¹⁰ Such self-fulfilling causal relationships may also extend to the profiling of criminals and terrorists.
- ¹¹ Rosen, M. 1996: 53.
- ¹² Rosen, M. 1996: 7.
- ¹³ Rosen, M. 1996: 168.
- ¹⁴ Rosen, M. 1996: 171 – 175.
- ¹⁵ Rosen, M. 1996: 180.
- ¹⁶ Rosen, M. 1996: 180.
- ¹⁷ Marx, K. 1970: 64.
- ¹⁸ Rosen, M. 1996: 183.
- ¹⁹ Marx, K. 1970: 65.
- ²⁰ Rosen, M. 1996: 44-47.
- ²¹ Rosen, M. 1996: 185.
- ²² Rosen, M. 1996: 185, 2000: 399.
- ²³ Fluxman, A. 2005: 4.
- ²⁴ Rosen, M. 1996: 193-195, 2000: 399.
- ²⁵ Rosen, 1996: 186, 2000: 398.
- ²⁶ Rosen, M. 2000: 400.
- ²⁷ Fluxman, A. 2005: 7.
- ²⁸ Rosen, 2000: 400.
- ²⁹ See Heath, J. 2001. Also Rosen, 1996: 260, 2000: 406.
- ³⁰ Adorno, T. 1974: §58.
- ³¹ Adorno, T. 1974: §71. 'Fascism is itself less "ideological", in so far as it openly proclaims the principle of domination that is elsewhere concealed. Whatever human values the democracies can oppose it with, it can effortlessly refute by pointing out that they represent not the whole of humanity but a mere illusory image that Fascism has had the courage to discard. So desperate have people become in civilisation, however, that they are forever ready to abandon their frail qualities as soon as the world does their worse ones the obligation of confessing how evil it is... The deeper the divergence of an opposition from the established order, which at least affords it a refuge from a blacker future, the more easily Fascists can pin it down to untruths... The conversion of all questions of truth into questions of power.... has attacked the very heart of the distinction between true and false, which the hirelings of logic were in any case diligently working to abolish.
- ³² Cook, D. 2001: 7.
- ³³ Cook, D. 2001: 9.
- ³⁴ Cook, D. 2001: 10.
- ³⁵ Adorno, T. 1974: §134.
- ³⁶ Adorno, T. 1967: 29.
- ³⁷ Nietzsche, for instance, thinks such nihilism is an historical consequence but not an inevitable one. Phenomenally, social values always mediate empirical experience and may be disregarded but not abandoned.
- ³⁸ The interpretation given here follows a discussion with JG Finlayson in September of 2008.
- ³⁹ Adorno, T. 1974: §76.
- ⁴⁰ Larrain, J. 1979: 204.
- ⁴¹ Thompson, J. 1990: 104. See also Finlayson, JG. 2008: 646: 'Our desires are shaped in such a way that we want more of existing current social and political reality as it is'.
- ⁴² Thompson, J. 1990: 101.
- ⁴³ Finlayson, JG. 2008: 646.
- ⁴⁴ Finlayson, JG. 2008: 646.
- ⁴⁵ Adorno, T. 1967: 31.
- ⁴⁶ Adorno, T. 1967: 29.
- ⁴⁷ Adorno, T. 1967: 21.
- ⁴⁸ Adorno, T. 1967: 23.
- ⁴⁹ Adorno, T. 1974: §134.
- ⁵⁰ Adorno, T. 1967: 34.
- ⁵¹ Adorno, T. 1967: 34: 'There are no more ideologies in the authentic sense of false consciousness... The materialistic transparency of culture has not made it more honest, only more vulgar... its heritage has become trash. And the hucksters of mass culture can point to it with a grin for they treat it as such.'
- ⁵² McCarney, 1990: 22.
- ⁵³ McCarney, 1990: 22.

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- ⁵⁴ Adorno, T. 1974: §2.
- ⁵⁵ Adorno, T. 1974: §2.
- ⁵⁶ See also Finlayson, JG. 2003: 178.
- ⁵⁷ Thompson, J. 1990: 58. McCarney, J. 1980: 141. Marks, S. 2000: 10.
- ⁵⁸ Rosen, M. 1996: 2.
- ⁵⁹ Geuss, R. 1981: 13.
- ⁶⁰ Geuss, R. 1981: 15.
- ⁶¹ Geuss, R. 1981: 17.
- ⁶² Geuss, R. 1980: 16.
- ⁶³ Geuss, R. 1981: 32.
- ⁶⁴ Geuss, R. 1981: 33.
- ⁶⁵ Geuss, R. 1981: 35.
- ⁶⁶ Geuss, R. 1981: 35. For example, the government monopoly and strict laws on the sale of alcohol in Sweden are justified by authorities on the basis that false needs and desires to consume an excessive amount of alcohol should be controlled and curbed in favour of citizens' legitimate needs and wants.
- ⁶⁷ Feinberg, J. 1984: 33.
- ⁶⁸ Feinberg, J. 1984: 45.
- ⁶⁹ Feinberg, J. 1984: 42.
- ⁷⁰ Geuss, R. 1981: 49. Geuss takes this account of the Ik from Colin Turnbull in *The Mountain People*, Triad/Palladin, London, 1984.
- ⁷¹ Geuss, R. 1981: 45.
- ⁷² Geuss, R. 1981: 49. In fact, Geuss specifies two counter-factual conditions: conditions of 'perfect knowledge', and 'optimal conditions'. However, he goes on to show that these conditions ultimately coincide.
- ⁷³ Geuss, R. 1981: 54.
- ⁷⁴ Geuss, R. 1981: 54.
- ⁷⁵ Rosen, M. 1996: 53.
- ⁷⁶ Rosen, M. 1996: 200.
- ⁷⁷ Rosen, M. 1996: 200, 217-218.
- ⁷⁸ Rosen, M. 1996: 202-204.
- ⁷⁹ Rosen, M. 1996: 231.
- ⁸⁰ Rosen, M. 1996: 207, 232.
- ⁸¹ Fluxman, A. 2005: 10.
- ⁸² Rosen, M. 1996: 232.
- ⁸³ Rosen, M. 1996: 232.
- ⁸⁴ Rosen, M. 1996: 221, 233.
- ⁸⁵ Rosen, M. 1996: 227 – 228, 231.
- ⁸⁶ Marx, K. 1988: 338.
- ⁸⁷ Rosen, M. 1996: 53.
- ⁸⁸ Marx, K. *Capital* 1988: 342. Accords with *German Ideology* (1981: 58) 'All forms and products of consciousness cannot be dissolved by mental criticism... but only by the practical overthrow of the actual social relations which give rise to this idealistic humbug'.
- ⁸⁹ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 195. Note that similar materialist, or materialistic, narrow-mindedness accounts for commodity fetish illusions: positivist ideology and the culture industry complement each other in late capitalist society.
- ⁹⁰ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 199.
- ⁹¹ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 200.
- ⁹² Horkheimer, M. 1972: 204.
- ⁹³ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 213. See also Adorno, T. 'All reification is a forgetting' (1972: 213).
- ⁹⁴ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 228-9.
- ⁹⁵ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 236.
- ⁹⁶ Adorno, T. 1983: 398.
- ⁹⁷ Adorno, T. 1972: 402.
- ⁹⁸ Adorno, T. 1972: 408.
- ⁹⁹ Adorno, T. 1982: 27, 32, 36, 37.

Chapter 4: Ideology Criticism and The problem of Self-Implication

Immanent Circularity/ Transcendent Regress

The following chapter has two parts. In Part I, I introduce the problem of self-implication for the theory of ideology, explaining why it poses such difficulties for ideology criticism. I illustrate this with a discussion of arguments against the theory of ideology from Alasdair MacIntyre and Joseph Heath. Each concludes that the theory of ideology calls into question the normative criteria on which rational social criticism, and ideology criticism by extension, depends. Presuming an uncharitable attitude towards the rationality of its subjects, and the society in which it operates, the theory of ideology is alleged to raise the level of doubt to such an extent that ideology criticism paradoxically succumbs to a conspiracy of its own imagining, and undermines the possibility for effective political contestation.

I challenge Heath's and MacIntyre's outright rejection of the theory of ideology, but draw on their objections to formulate a more specific definition of the problem of self-implication that I take to be fundamental for ideology criticism. In the second part of the chapter, I explain how ideology criticism raises the same sceptical worries to which it succumbs, by exploring how the problem of self-implication follows the same pattern as an analogous problem for epistemological criteria. This leaves the ideology critic with a dilemma: either (i) find "transcendent" normative grounds for criticism that are immune from distorting conditions of ideology, or (ii) show an existing situation is self-undermining using "immanent" criteria. Each option appears to lead to ideology.

Part I: Normative Criteria for Ideology Criticism

Introducing the problem

The historical origins and development of the notion of ideology disclose two fundamental aspects of the pejorative sense of the term, namely, an illusory aspect and a functional aspect: Ideologies are, on one hand, cognitively deficient in some way, and on the other, functional, insofar as they perpetuate relations of domination. Thus, ideology is said to consist in prevalent, cognitively

deficient forms of consciousness which lead people to overlook, and unconsciously perpetuate, conditions of domination that shape their beliefs, values, norms, etc. Reflecting conditions of domination in a superficial manner, ideology obscures the way in which they are oppressive.

The illusory and functional aspects of “ideology” were explored in Chapters 2 and 3. From these discussions it is important to note that, although ideology may involve false beliefs about the world, it often functions more effectively by way of true beliefs, which are generally easier to maintain. False beliefs need not but may be ideological (e.g. ‘Obama is a Muslim’); true beliefs need not but may be ideological (e.g. ‘African-Americans are more likely to go to jail than other Americans’). Beliefs may prove accurate with respect to empirical social facts, yet still function ideologically if these beliefs accustom people to oppressive features of dominant socio-economic conditions, thus obscuring domination and their part in it.

Our grasp of the causes of everyday phenomena tends to be underdetermined by the immediate impression they make on us. Inquiry into underlying causal factors behind a phenomenon may, in principle, go on forever. The point at which inquiry stops depends on purposes at hand, to which we grow accustomed. Ideology mediates between appearance and reality, reflecting social conditions at a level of understanding that satisfies the requirements of participants’ immediate purposes but which obscures the broader, ongoing, oppressive relations in which their everyday activities are tied up. Ideology perpetuates domination by way of ideas about social conditions (and normative principles that generalise these ideas) that inhibit further inquiry into underlying socio-economic conditions.

To return to a previous example, it may be accurate to believe that African-American men are more likely to become criminals, but this belief also functions ideologically if, for instance, it leads the State to spend more resources monitoring and imprisoning African-American men than may be needed to address the adverse social conditions that have this effect in the first place. Ideology is functionally integrated in oppression to the extent that it leads people to perpetuate the conditions

of domination it represents objectively, while failing to recognise the oppressive effect of their actions and policies.

The theory of ideology asserts that dominant socio-economic conditions generally determine the dominant ideas, norms, values and culture of society. International recognition of academic research, for example, is weighted towards articles published in English because, first, British and, then, American influence has generally dominated global economic and political affairs for the past three centuries. Likewise, the prominence of scientific reasoning in Western society is linked more to its instrumental value in technological production than any intrinsic value it may or may not have¹. Just as the design of the computer mouse is affected by the dominance of the right-handed, and urbanisation forces people, often unconsciously, to re-assess traditional cultural values, so capitalism is credited with fostering narrowly self-interested commercially-oriented interactions between consumers and producers at the expense of traditional civic relations of mutual responsibility. Under such conditions, independently of truth or justice, the ideology critic claims dominant social norms are increasingly shaped by economic relations. Moreover, such norms are allegedly taken for granted in a way that obscures their determination under oppressive political circumstances. This leads people to adjust to such circumstances and perpetuate them, in ignorance of oppression in society and their complicity in it.

To illustrate these claims about ideology, Marx's objection to Malthusian claims about "overpopulation" in *Capital*² may be extended to the present debate in the UK about cuts to state services. Marx notes that 'the principle of population' was welcomed by the English oligarchy as an antidote to arguments put forward by 'passionate defenders' of the French Revolution. This is because the notion of overpopulation shifts responsibility for the miseries of poverty from distributive factors to a fact about population size, diverting attention from decisions of the powerful towards sins of the poor, and from the profit incentive towards reserved unemployed labour. The norm that the population is supposed to exceed is partly determined by relations of

distribution which are not natural, but social. To take this for granted inhibits inquiry into the legitimacy of the underlying social structures that affect these relations. Analogously, the argument that the State cannot support the present number of university applicants or welfare beneficiaries, for example, diverts critical focus, after a recent financial crisis, from the City to the State, undermining the role of public institutions at a time when greater regulation is needed of financial mechanisms which increasingly (irrationally, and illegitimately) channel public wealth to an elite minority. The belief that there are too many people, or there is not enough money, may be true but it is ideological if it obscures the oppressive features of illegitimate social circumstances that play a part in making it so.

Criteria for ideology criticism

Having established what *ideology* is, in what sense it is “false” and how it functions, I now want to consider the *task of ideology criticism*, and to ask how the ideology critic might identify ideology, so as to engage ideologically deluded agents through a process of enlightenment to achieve emancipation from the oppressive conditions it perpetuates. This chapter introduces what I take to be the defining problem which has shaped the development of ideology criticism, and consequently the theory of ideology itself: the problem of self-implication.

To explain provisionally, I concluded earlier that since the illusory aspect of ideology need not involve empirically false beliefs, the minimal sense of illusion that ideology can be said to involve is that it systematically *misleads* agents with respect to their part, and stake, in oppressive relations of power. But if the truth content of a claim is not sufficient to determine its ideological status - if truth cannot cut through power - how may the critic unmask ideology? Under such conditions it is hard to say why ideology criticism is exempt or immune from the illusions it must unmask. Such criticism seems to implicate itself unavoidably. The ideology critic cannot simply contrast ideology against a set of social facts, to unveil some truth ideology falsifies, since ideology is not necessarily averse to

truth or facts. Instead, the ideology critic must establish the existence of pervasive causal relations – between ideas and *oppressive* social practices – on grounds that are not implicated in the process.

A recurring problem raised in the first half of this thesis is that ideology, as Eagleton puts it, like bad breath, is always something someone *else* has³. At least in the pejorative sense of the term, and in contemporary everyday understanding, people tend not to identify their own thinking as ideological. The observation also implies not just that ideology is difficult to detect in one's own ideas, but that the irony about those who criticise ideology in others is that they may suffer from it themselves. This second assumption does not follow directly from Eagleton's comment, but latent in the observation is an invitation to deride with self-righteous recognition, the smug hypocrisy of those who make it their business to go around admonishing others for immoral beliefs⁴.

Eagleton's observation points to the fundamental problem of self-implication for ideology criticism, but the problem is more specific. Not only do ideology critics tend to *overlook* the possibility that their standpoint may be ideological, but more importantly, the very suspicion they raise *implicates* their own standpoint. It raises a question about adequate warrant for the criticism of ideology, since the ideology critic's own grounds for criticism make such criticism suspicious.

The problem of self-implication for ideology criticism arises because the critic casts the net of suspicion so wide. The pattern of hypocritical assertion and a "you too" response is an essentially destabilizing, and self-undermining, characteristic that stems from a general feature of criticism that is often conveniently overlooked. Criticism entails background assumptions about why conditions are bad, yet, the intrinsic dynamic of ideology criticism makes a paradox of such assumptions, since the critic's ideas are determined under the same conditions that the critic links to ideology.

The ideology critic contends that dominant norms function ideologically because they are determined by oppressive socio-economic conditions. Moreover, these norms are alleged to obscure the oppressive character of these conditions. But such contentions implicate criteria for ideology

criticism. Critical diagnosis of pervasive conditions for ideology implicates the critic's standpoint, shifting the onus back to her to show how she avoids such distorting factors. The more critical the criticism of ideology, the more vulnerable, suspicious and tenuous ideology criticism becomes.⁵

MacIntyre and Heath: the theory of ideology undermines itself

If the conditions that give rise to the normative criteria by which the critic identifies ideology are similar to the conditions that give rise to ideology, how can the critic avoid undermining her own standpoint with the suspicion she brings to bear on ideology? If we are to suspect that moral norms, epistemic norms or modes of rationality are swayed by dominant economic and political concerns (as the ideology critic insists), why should, and how can, we even trust her?

As discussed in Chapter 2, Foucault dismisses the notion of ideology for implicitly arrogating to the critic an unbiased grasp of the truth she denies to others, as if her standpoint of criticism is not mediated by the conditions she attributes to ideology.

Following this same line of argument, MacIntyre writes:

The theorist of ideology as we know him from Marx to the Frankfurt School, in that slow decline from the sublime to the ridiculous, has always been someone who identified ideological contamination in someone other than himself. This trait in fact renders him basically indistinguishable from his ostensible opponent, the positivist.⁶

MacIntyre claims the ideology critic faces the same problem as the revolutionary. The ideology critic dismisses dominant forms of consciousness on the basis of the prevailing material conditions by which they are determined. The revolutionary rejects dominant social institutions and relations of production outright. However, both also depend on what they dismiss. Revolutionary politics, and ideology criticism, MacIntyre argues, become trapped by the very conceptual schemes needed to justify their respective enterprises, and for this reason they are ultimately self-defeating.⁷ *Either* the ideology critic must defend the dominant social norms on which her appeal for change depends (which undermines her criticism of the conditions for such forms of consciousness under prevailing

conditions of domination), *or* she must take the very sort of anti-democratic, elitist, epistemologically self-righteous approach she rejects in positivist social science (thereby exempting her standpoint from material conditions for ideology – which is an ideological manoeuvre).⁸

The Marxist complaint about positivism is that it fails to account for the historical social, political and economic contours of knowledge in general and social scientific discourse in particular. The positivist assumes that a disinterested, universal and objective empirical description of social phenomena is possible. In fact, the Marxist ideology critic objects that the supposedly objective findings of social scientists, and the normative presuppositions which colour their assumptions, are shaped by dominant socio-economic concerns. They are not so much neutral objective statements, as implicit affirmations of what exists. But the challenge facing the Marxist critic on this basis is that the problematisation of normative foundations de-stabilises social criticism itself. To attack ground you share with your opponent damages your own standpoint. When the ideology critic complains that prevailing norms further dominant class interests, she faces the same challenge as the positivist she dismisses: to distinguish her standpoint from ideology. Given the ideology theorist's suspicion that norms are shaped by relations of domination, the question is by what criteria and, particularly, by what normative criteria, can she distinguish between ideological and non-ideological outlooks?

Breaking with the assumptions of the past, the ideology critic is hampered by the inadequate frame of reference of her interlocutors, which she must use to make the case for her own claim, and which, in turn, her claim discredits. The ideology critic's position stands in need of justification. She is making a normative judgment, open to challenge by those who views she calls into question, so her critical activities depend on normative criteria. But such normative criteria of justification stand in tension with the critic's problematisation of the relationship between dominant social norms (to which she appeals) and prevailing socio-economic conditions of domination.

MacIntyre poses the ideology critic with a dilemma: if the grounds of ideology criticism are not refuted by self-implication, then they are refuted by self-exemption. The trouble with MacIntyre's

objection is that he fails to consider that ideology criticism may aim at more nuanced treatment of its subject matter than outright refutation. MacIntyre presents us with a false, “witch-trial” dilemma. If the ideology critic claims material conditions are such that all social norms are ideological, and she makes a normative judgment, which entails a normative criterion, then she faces a choice of self-implication or self-exemption (both of which entail ideology). But must the ideology critic claim *all* social norms are determined ideologically by pervasive relations of domination? Does ideology criticism undermine *all* norms of criticism simply by tying *dominant* social norms to underlying material conditions of domination? Or might the domain it problematizes be insulated from justified norms for criticism without positivist entailment?

Joseph Heath develops this problem more carefully with the argument that Marx and Freud, the “grandfathers” of critical theory, developed theories that diagnosed widespread error in popular belief to such a pervasive extent that they undermined their own basis of interpretation. The problem is that ‘attributing massive error to people significantly expands the range of motives and beliefs that can be ascribed to them’, and this ‘makes it hard to show that any one interpretation is better than another’⁹.

Heath cites Donald Davidson to support the use of a principle of charity in social criticism that, he argues, rules out the theory of ideology. Since any interpretation is massively underdetermined by the available evidence, there is no fact of the matter about what people mean by what they say. Therefore, the meaning of any utterance must be determined by the best interpretation that hearers confer upon it. This interpretation, in turn, depends on beliefs ascribed to the person making the utterance. To make *sense* of what someone is saying, which is a formal requirement of interpretation, one must assume that a speaker has predominantly rational, true beliefs. Therefore, to suspend the assumption that people are, by and large, reasonable, and that their beliefs are predominantly true (as Marx and Freud allegedly do) prevents any meaningful interpretation of their utterances.¹⁰

Heath concludes that ideology criticism undercuts itself by spreading the charge of irrationality too widely in its diagnosis to make sense of the ideas it is supposed to interpret. Unlike MacIntyre, Heath does not maintain that the theory of ideology problematises *all* social norms. But the dilemma of self-implication/self-exemption remains equally serious if *any* social norm *may* be implicated, including any criterion which suggests otherwise. It may be that some norms are not determined ideologically, but if we are influenced by repressed subconscious motivations or oppressive economic structures, in a way that escapes conscious attention, then, even if there are non-ideological normative criteria, we cannot know that the normative criterion we are using is not influenced in such a manner.

The problematic conditions for ideology, which the ideology critic reveals, undermine her own interpretation. Since *too many* plausible explanations can be constructed, it becomes hard to rule out any *particular* explanation. For Heath, the widespread error and irrationality that ideology critics attribute to deluded agents counts against their own interpretations, not because these interpretations in some way hide or obscure the criteria to which ideology criticism appeals, but because their ill-defined variables flood the market with cheap alternatives. Like sceptics, they raise pervasive doubt, but the reasons for doubt they put forward, and the normative criteria used for critical analysis, succumb to this very same doubt in the process.¹¹

For Heath, as for MacIntyre, the theory of ideology undercuts the ground on which ideology criticism depends, by diagnosing pervasive social irrationality. This is because they also assume that beliefs and attitudes are formed by material social conditions, in the sense that people are induced, without knowing it, to acquire them. If ideology critics claim existing social conditions drive agents to form irrational beliefs, why should we presume the beliefs of ideology critics, formed under the same conditions, are not equally irrational, because formed under the same circumstances? By what right can the ideology critic claim to have assured herself of a reliable belief forming mechanism, whilst living under material conditions which give rise to necessary illusions?

Self-defeating criticism of irrational social norms

So far, the critical sense of ideology has been attributed to any set of beliefs, values, practices, or institutions that lead agents unwittingly to perpetuate relations of domination. Such self-defeating behaviour is especially puzzling for those who lose out in the equation, and therefore tend to act against their own interests. If dominant social norms are geared toward oppression as the ideology critic asserts, leading most people to behave in a self-defeating manner, then dominant social norms must be irrational. This means that the norms on which the practice of ideology criticism depends, which are produced by on the same socio-economic conditions, are likely to be irrational too.

Ideology criticism is, thus, alleged to problematise social norms on the basis of ideology, or, rather, it depends on the very social norms it also indicts. Each criterion, by which norms underlying ideology criticism may be distinguished from ideological norms, may already be functionally integrated in relations of domination. Ideology criticism thus succumbs to a regressive trail of meta-criteria.

The ideology critic must be able to distinguish the material conditions for criticism from conditions for ideology, if she is to avoid the dilemma raised by MacIntyre and Heath. To avoid self-defeating incoherence, revolutionary social critics cannot dismiss all norms as illegitimate, just as psychologists cannot rule out all conscious access to the unconscious, and scientists cannot dismiss current scientific understanding in its entirety. If ideology criticism is to succeed, there must be some way of establishing a reliable criterion that is also linked to material conditions, like ideology, but not determined by oppression. If the functional role of social norms in relations of domination determines its ideological status, then normative criteria for ideology criticism must be distinguished from conditions for this function. What *bona fide* normative criterion is available to the ideology critic to justify her claims that is immune to the kinds of illusions generated by the material conditions she posits?

As we have seen, ideological beliefs may be true, so the truth content of a belief cannot be the criterion for determining whether something is or is not ideology. Thus, ideological illusion cannot be dispelled simply by contrasting false claims against true ones. Moreover, since ideologically deluded agents do not recognise their causal role in oppression, the ideology critic cannot simply appeal to agents' conscious interests to discern irrational behaviour. To distinguish between interests that agents *consciously* pursue and ascribe to themselves, and interests they *ought* to pursue, or *would* pursue were they not ideologically deluded, requires discrete normative criteria, but such criteria, because they are set apart in this way, are ideologically suspicious. The causal relations postulated by the theory of ideology - between underlying socio-economic conditions and dominant social norms - must be clearly defined, bearing in mind the threat of circularity between norms functionally integrated in relations of domination, and norms for criticism of this relationship.

MacIntyre presents the theory of ideology with a stark alternative: either ideology criticism depends on ideological norms, or else it depends on the *bona fide* normative grounds it rules out. The revolutionary ideology critic links normative criteria, under prevailing socio-economic conditions, to social relations of domination, so she must rely on ideological criteria, which therefore refute her claims. Yet he interprets "revolution", the gap between now and then, too literally and abstractly, as if the critic has in mind some radically alien socialist utopia which rules out all given social norms. "Revolution" is surely not senselessly restrictive, to this abstract, incoherent extent¹². For Marx, communism should not be an abstract negation of capitalism, something utterly unrelated to it, but a determinate negation, namely the rational fruition of existing social, economic and political developments. Establishing widespread social conditions for ideological norms does not mean *all* norms are ideological. However, from MacIntyre we learn that the critic must be able to account for how the normative grounds of her criticism avoid being ideological.

If ideology is general – i.e. *all* norms are ideological – then ideology criticism is self-stultifying.

However, the theory of ideology may not go this far. The problem Heath raises is more damaging

than MacIntyre's since Heath does not saddle the ideology critic with the theory that *all* social norms are ideological. Only *some* normative criteria may be influenced by, and in turn influence, oppressive socio-economic conditions and relations of power. The problem is that we do not know which ones do, since the criteria for ideology criticism are not precise enough to rule out any potential candidates. But Heath also over-interprets the level of irrationality put forward by the theory of ideology.

An analogy, such as the contrast between Ebola and HIV, may illustrate this point. Ebola is less pervasive than HIV because it kills its host too quickly to give itself time to spread. The more drastic the symptoms of a virus, the less successfully it spreads. Likewise, brutal ideologies held by radical cults may benefit some more than others for a short time, but they do not sustain over an extended period. Rev. Jim Jones was less influential and economically successful than L. Ron Hubbard. If ideology leads individuals to undermine their interests to an extent that drastically reduces the spoils of domination, then it undermines the conditions that shape it, which in turn scales it back. The shape of ideology is, at least to some extent, constrained by the condition of its host, even if the host is not flourishing.

Heath allows that some norms may be non-ideological, but argues that the theory of ideology presents circumstances under which there is no reliable way of telling if the normative criteria to which one appeals are ideological. But what if ideology is limited so that people who are not ideologically deluded have reliable ways of acquiring knowledge and self-knowledge and reliable ways of developing interests, needs, desires, etc.? In that case, the ideology critic, in order to perform her task of revealing ideology and dispelling illusion, has to have a reliable way of telling what is ideology and what is not – a criterion. There are two ways that one may attempt to derive such a criterion.

Marxists believe that forms of consciousness are determined by material conditions. Socio-economic circumstances induce people to have certain beliefs and attitudes. If society is structured by

pervasive oppression, then dominant beliefs and attitudes reflect and reinforce such circumstances. In this case, the ideology critic has two options. Either (i) she may distinguish between two different sets of material conditions that give rise to, on the one hand, the unreliable beliefs of the ideologically deluded agents, and, on the other hand, the reliable beliefs (and criteria) of the ideology critic; or (ii) she may claim that the very same conditions give rise to the beliefs of the critic and the criticised, but that the critical reflection of the critic allows her to see through the illusions generated by the material conditions. This latter position, I take it, is the position of the Critical Theorists, Horkheimer and Adorno.

Criticism of the functional integration of dominant social norms and oppression need not rule out the rationality of all social norms, but the ideology critic must show why her own particular normative criteria are not vulnerable to the problems she raises with respect to the socio-economic conditions for ideological social norms. The critic must somehow sufficiently restrict the range of irrationality she detects, to ensure that her conclusions are not determined by the conditions for ideology she describes. This is particularly tricky, because techniques of insulation and exemption have proved historically vulnerable to ideological abuse. The more successfully one manages to exempt normative territory from critical scrutiny the more ground is secured for corruption.

Ideology criticism cannot be successful if it fails to account for the experiences of ordinary social agents, in terms that make sense to them, and to explain why they came to form the mistaken beliefs, practices or values that they did. This is necessary to restore a basis for coherent rational judgments which does not constantly and totally undermine it. The ideology critic must take care not to present some astonishing, disconnected, haughty revelation which no one else could have foreseen, but instead to help agents reflect on problematic relations between oppressive social conditions and social norms in accessible terms that make sense of everyday experience. In this way, if the ideology critic's normative criteria are not exempt from critical scrutiny, agents may be better able to judge which interests are rational for her to pursue.

Part II: Epistemic Criteria and Social Norms: A Sceptical Dilemma

Is it possible to identify a general boundary to normative grounds of ideology criticism which avoids the above dilemma of self-implication/self-exemption? I noted that one may either attempt to distinguish conditions for ideology criticism from conditions for ideology, or else show how critical reflection allows the ideology critic to see through the ideological delusions that are determined by oppressive social and economic circumstances (either (i) not an expression of oppressive material circumstances, or (ii) a non-ideological expression of oppressive material circumstances). In each case the ideology critic needs a criterion to determine whether some norm, value or belief is ideology or not. But unless the ideology critic knows her criterion is not itself ideological, she cannot be sure that her way of telling ideology apart from non-ideology is reliable (i.e. not itself the expression of ideology). In order to show how the problem of self-implication may be avoided, I will first outline the basic structure of the parallel problem of the epistemological criterion.

The problem of the epistemological criterion

The problem of self-implication for ideology criticism mirrors the structure of what Robert Amico, in his influential account of the problem of the criterion, calls a 'meta-epistemological problem concerning the justification of second-order knowledge claims among disagreeing disputants'¹³. This allows for a comparison of the structures of the epistemological problem of the wheel, with the problem of justification for the normative grounds of ideology criticism. My point is that the horns of this dilemma map onto the disjunctive contrast between, and alternative approaches of "immanent" and "transcendent" criticism, for these can be understood as attempts to deal with one or the other side of the problem (see Chapter 5). Knowledge of the mechanism of the wheel also helps to expose the presupposed, yet obscured, normative criteria behind ideological beliefs and practices, which the sceptic manages to draw from the views of her opponent (without positing any substantive normative criteria of her own).

Before proceeding, let us examine the sceptical dilemma: Sextus Empiricus begins with the question, how do you settle disagreements over what is true or false if different circumstances for different individuals give rise to different impressions, which are the basis for these divergent beliefs or disagreement in the first place? By what *criterion* is one impression credibly endorsed over another¹⁴? This question leads to the following seemingly unassailable sceptical challenge:

To establish the truth of the criterion one needs a proof/evidence, but the proof/evidence can be judged only by means of a criterion, therefore:

a validated criterion is wanting and you cannot settle the dispute about impressions, since:

(i) if this criterion is the one in question, this leads to a circle;

(ii) if this criterion is another independent criterion, infinite regress threatens¹⁵.

I wish to clarify this dilemma against Roderick M. Chisholm's influential reading of the problem. Chisholm wrongly presents the sceptic's challenge, not as the question, "How may we know?" but as the assertion that we cannot know. Such careless dogmatism makes the pseudo-sceptic vulnerable to sceptical challenge, and forces him into the defensive riposte, "How do you know I cannot know?" Real sceptics survive by avoiding sliding into disputes. Sextus does not make the dogmatic assertion that 'the dispute over the justification of knowledge claims *cannot* be settled'¹⁶. Rather, he asks what rational criteria agents *already* use to categorise experience, to see what criteria are appropriate for the task.

The point here is we *do* sort our experiences into knowledge claims by criteria, and so we *ought* to know what these criteria are. The sceptic does not assert that knowledge is impossible; she asserts nothing whatsoever. The aim of the sceptic is to get us to reflect on *how* we understand existing circumstances, to generate *appropriate* and coherent, rational criteria that suit reality and our ends. The aim of the sceptic is to encourage social agents to *reflect* on *actual* criteria for knowledge, to be more rational about this process, and not just to take given criteria for granted. The sceptic seeks *aporia* - not the replacement of one dogmatic assertion with another, but the suspension of

immediate judgment. Hence the sceptical technique of the wheel is useful for drawing out *obscured* ideological criteria behind the beliefs and claims made by one's interlocutor.

The problem of the ideological criterion

The problem of the criterion and device of the wheel highlight the difficulties confronted by the theory of ideology. Before exploring possible solutions, let's consider the implications of the dilemma for ideology criticism in relation to normative justifications and the problem of self-implication:

(i) To link back to the issue of *normative* justification, we see that normative standards for ideology criticism must be *independent* of the distorted social conditions subjected to criticism. Any response that begins with an appeal to "immediate" or "intuitive" experience to "derive" criteria *obscures an original, operative mediating judgment* that selects information from the outside world, that is to say, the criteria on the basis of which experience is derived. The wheel shows that a criterion lurks behind every empirical claim. The technique of smuggling normative criteria under the guise of empirical experience makes for an ideal candidate for ideology. Unpalatable budgetary criteria, or shameful norms such as racial prejudice, these flourish beneath the veneer of responsibility, disguised or corroborated by supposed intuitions based on empirical conditions in an "unmediated, realistic" fashion as if this is "just the way the world is". The sceptic reminds us that behind every observation, no matter how obvious or objective it may seem, wherever you think you have hit empirical rock-bottom, you are likely to find hidden criteria. And, conversely, where social norms appear self-evident, they turn out to be mediated by empirical social conditions. It follows that where oppressive aspects of these social conditions are obscured, the criteria tend to function ideologically.

(ii) In the context of the potential self-implication for the theory of ideology, the problem of the criterion is posed by the question: by what normative criteria might the ideology critic demonstrate

to “deluded” agents and ideology sceptics that dominant social norms, which appear reasonable, in fact support oppression? To identify ideology, the critic’s normative criteria must be isolated from the ideological conditions she diagnoses. But the theory of ideology rejects the discrete abstraction of criterion and evidence, or form and content, as the error that sets ideology in motion. Partial interests are alleged to be obscured by hypostatized dominant social norms in societies characterised by illegitimate social asymmetries. The problem of self-implication arises for ideology criticism because the critic has to give reasons for thinking that society – despite surface appearances – is characterised by pervasive structures of domination, and that dominant social norms obscure this. But by linking social norms to the conditions she aims to discredit, she raises the sceptical problem of the criterion, and thus implicates her own argument. If domination shapes dominant social norms, why should we trust the ideology critic’s criteria?

Ideology criticism sets the sceptical wheel in motion, but does not tolerate tranquil *aporia* in the face of domination. Unlike the sceptic, the ideology critic wishes to put forward substantial normative claims about the oppressive character of prevailing socio-economic conditions and the functional integration therein of dominant social norms. The device of the wheel shows formally why ideology criticism tends to rebound on the critic, and also introduces two alternative approaches at the boundaries of the problem of self-implication for ideology criticism. Ideology must be judged by a criterion, but (i) if this criterion *is not independent* of the conditions that give rise to ideology, this leads to a justification circle, and (ii) if this criterion *is independent* then infinite regress threatens. Following the problem of the criterion, we see that ideology criticism sets up a sceptical dilemma for itself, with a choice between (i) immanent norms that are caught in a justification circle, or (ii) transcendent, independent norms, which repeats the process with the threat of regress. If ideology criticism is to avoid self-implication, some way must be found to break out of this dilemma.

Immanent and transcendent criteria (Socratic criticism vs. philosophical ethics)

One way to understand the dilemma for normative criteria for ideology criticism is to interpret the divergent paths of circularity and regress in terms of a contrast between two competing approaches to social criticism: the applied ethics approach and the Socratic approach.¹⁷ Roughly speaking, the former is a form of *transcendent criticism* which posits discrete normative criteria as a foundation for criticism. To apply this approach to ideology criticism would require an interpretive standpoint that had an independent, ethical basis, distinct from the oppressive social conditions that shape social norms subjected to criticism. The transcendent critic focuses on the second horn of the above dilemma (ii), and attempts to establish valid independent criteria for ideology criticism in the mode of applied ethics. The latter, Socratic mode of *immanent criticism* abandons hope for such independence, and instead takes a *non-foundationalist* approach which focuses on the first horn of the dilemma (i), to criticise ideology from within, by demonstrating that an existing set of social norms invalidates itself on its own terms. Where transcendent criticism presents a last word to the sceptic, immanent criticism absorbs and draws on the sceptical trope, putting its criteria into question as it draws on existing, compromised grounds to expose contradictions and inconsistencies within floating premises.

The foundationalist, approach of applied ethics towards social norms (*bourgeois ideology*, in Adorno's sense) presents norms as antecedently justified, independent of the critical process. The transcendent critic appeals to independent normative ideals, presumed to be above suspicion and immunised from the particular social, economic and political concerns that might otherwise ideologically distort interpretation of the universal interest or the common good. This approach can obscure political motivations and economic conditions that shape norms, as well as their inadequate realization in social reality. Also, a "moralistic" style of critical admonition can backfire on the ideology critic by provoking resistance in those who feel patronised, threatened or disrespected by the act of the nanny-critic who thinks she knows best and whose ideals are unrealistic and superior.

By contrast, a non-foundational approach to social norms such as naturalism, pragmatism, utilitarianism or cultural relativism (*positivist ideology*, in Adorno's sense), avoids starting with antecedently justified criteria, and instead tries to base social norms on *a posteriori* experience of existing social conditions, so that these norms are appropriate for the real world. The immanent mode of ideology criticism takes its point of departure from existing, dominant, ideologically compromised social norms. Such an approach aims to prevent idealistic, subjectively motivated norms being accepted ideologically as universal collective goods, and to base its normative guidelines on a realistic appraisal of social relations and norms. But it also fails to offer the ideology critic an independent counterpoint to existing horizons. Immanent critique may prove more productive than repressive, since the critic already shares norms for social criticism with her interlocutor, but it can also draw the critic into paradoxical self-refutation.

¹ In fact dominant administrative thinking on academic research is increasingly geared toward this function (it is at least honest, to make the demonstration of projected ideological complicity a condition for research).

² Marx, K. 1974: chapter 25, §3.

³ Eagleton, T. 1991: 2.

⁴ Without direct self-implication, of course.

⁵ Ironic racist or sexist anti-comic parody, for example, may well not play subversively.

⁶ MacIntyre, A. 1973: 337.

⁷ MacIntyre, A. 1973: 340-341.

⁸ MacIntyre, A. 1973: 342.

⁹ Heath, J. 2001: 167.

¹⁰ Heath, J. 2001: 165-167. The epistemically high-handed ideology critic is like a tourist astonished by the pervasive irrationality of an alien culture she has insistently failed to understand.

¹¹ Sceptics, however, like Socrates, do not claim to know anything, so they get away with the doubt they raise.

¹² A bourgeois industrialist, for example, can imagine a possible future without private ownership and roughly gauge the extent and likelihood of such a threat to her perceived immediate short-term individual interests.

¹³ Amico, R. 1993: 143.

¹⁴ Matthey, G. 1997: 226-7.

¹⁵ Matthey, G. 1997: 227, and Cling, AD, 1994: 269.

¹⁶ Chisholm, R. 1982: 61-76.

¹⁷ Geuss, R. 1999: 72. Also 2008: 8, 9, 51, 52.

Chapter 5: The Ideology of Transcendent Criticism

The previous chapter showed that the sceptical problem of self-implication poses a dilemma for the ideology critic in the theory of ideology. Two alternative responses were suggested. One possibility is for the critic to try to find a way to insulate her own normative criteria from the conditions for ideological social norms she puts forward, by appealing to transcendent normative criteria. The alternative is for the critic to abandon any attempt to seek independent normative criteria, and to work instead within the normative horizon of ideology to reveal inconsistencies amongst social norms and between norms and practices. In the subsequent two chapters I am going to analyse each horn of the dilemma more thoroughly. Let us begin with the former. Can ideology criticism be construed as transcendent criticism, without succumbing to the regress problem, or some other equally damaging flaw? (In the next chapter I will examine the alternative – immanent criticism, in the light of the problem of circularity)

Transcendent social criticism is often dismissed by Marxist social theorists for having anachronistic religious foundations which are at odds with the secular premises of enlightened, and objective, empirical social science. The principle of toleration which is fostered by increased social and economic interaction between different social groups, especially in urban centres, makes one's religious persuasion a matter of personal opinion by implicitly linking religious norms to relative social circumstances. This raises the suspicion that all morality may be functionally indexed to relative positions in society. Despite this initial misgiving, however, to understand why the transcendent approach to social criticism holds such enduring mainstream appeal in political philosophy, political economy, and legal and social theory, and to avoid committing an *ad hominem* fallacy that presumes what it sets out to demonstrate, careful analysis is needed.¹ Such analysis should avoid assuming a caricatured representation of a moralising straw man, who is oblivious to the relative advantages of a privileged upbringing, and who hectors society with a set of ethical

principles that may suit his own individual circumstances, but which hold little, if any, value for less fortunate individuals in society.

For a more theoretically nuanced account of transcendent social criticism, I return to the distinction between real and false interests in Geuss's account of *Ideologiekritik*. As we saw in Chapter 3, this position hangs precariously between immanent and transcendent modes of criticism. Geuss's counterfactual approach to "real interests" is closer to transcendent criticism than the more assuredly immanent approach of his later work on "real politics", despite explicit reservations about "moralism" and "transcendentalism" in social criticism and political philosophy at this earlier stage. I use the sceptical device of the wheel to reveal an unresolved tension between immanent and transcendent ideology criticism in Geuss's original position in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*. Geuss later shifts his preferred approach to social criticism to one which he variously characterises as a more avowedly "immanent", "Socratic" or "contextualist" standpoint. I then consider some objections to "transcendental" political philosophy from later works, which argue that transcendent criticism functions ideologically, making it an unsuitable approach for ideology criticism. I close with some reservations which will be developed in subsequent chapters.

Part I: Counterfactual Criteria for Ideology Criticism

In Chapter 3, I followed Geuss's account of ideology in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, in identifying the characteristic illusion of ideology as a failure on the part of social agents to recognise their *real interests*.² To recall, if ideology, minimally, functions to perpetuate domination, then

(i) it must lead agents to act against their interest, and serve the interest of others. Furthermore, ideology must involve some kind of illusion that (ii) obscures this function, with the consequence that agents fail to recognise their role in domination. The illusion (ii), or failure to recognise one's role in relations of domination, affects the function (i) (that is, unwitting perpetuation of illegitimate, asymmetrical relations of power). Between the appearance of legitimacy in ideology and the reality of domination, Geuss identifies a discrepancy between agents' real interests, and ideologically

motivated false interests which lead them to perpetuate on-going oppressive social conditions. In light of the normative considerations raised in the previous chapter, if ideology can be said to obscure causal connections between false interests and domination, on what grounds might the critic show ideologically deluded agents that some of their ideas consistently lead them to misrecognise their “real interests”?

“Real interests”, claims Geuss, are those we would form if we had perfect knowledge of our circumstances. In fact, he writes, ‘without extensive room for free discussion and the unrestrained play of the imagination with alternative ways of thinking,’ the self-knowledge required for perfect knowledge is something agents are very unlikely to attain.³ So, the ultimate criterion for “real” interests must be that agents enjoy optimal conditions of freedom. That agents *could* recognise their interests as the ones they would have under optimal conditions is enough for the ideology critic to attribute these interests to them right here, right now.⁴ From optimal social conditions, the critic derives normative standards for “real” interests against which agents’ *false* identification of their interests may be measured, and subjected to criticism. If an agent makes decisions on the basis of a set of beliefs or values to engage in activity which limits her freedom, and this behaviour systematically benefits others to her disadvantage (or vice-versa) on the criterion of optimal conditions of freedom for “real” interests, then such a set of beliefs or values is ideological.

Contextualism vs. transcendentalism

Although the ideology critic’s task, by this account, is to posit a break between optimal and actual circumstances, as well as between “real” interests and “actual” perceived interests, Geuss maintains that normative criteria for ideology criticism should not be imposed moralistically, or be placed beyond contestation. Although counterfactual normative criteria on his “optimal conditions” account are ideal, that is, not yet real, they must nonetheless be grounded in the will and desires of actual social agents, such that they *would* affirm and identify with such interests under social conditions which, from their current situation, they can be shown to prefer. Following a broadly

traditional Marxist-Hegelian affinity with the dialectical principle that the theorist or social critic should not reject, but rather mediate, that to which she is opposed, Geuss argues that agents' "real interests" are not to be stipulated and imposed by the critic from an external perspective in a "moralistic" sense.⁵

"Real interests" cannot be formulated in abstract, moralistic detachment from agents' actual needs and desires if they are to retain any genuine sense of the term "interest". Real interests accord with the pursuit of individuals' freely chosen ends, so long as this does not serve to reinforce or perpetuate domination. Real interests follow from free society, and the only condition imposed on the motivation or desires that qualify as "real", is that they do not lead agents to perpetuate oppressive socio-economic conditions. This constraint may be seen to articulate a constitutive, rather than a moralistic, condition for "real interests" that follows a broadly transcendental, Kantian approach to actions that perpetuate domination: real interests cannot be predicated of behaviour that counteracts the very freedom needed to constitute an interest in the first place.⁶ Actions which perpetuate domination curtail the freedom that constitutes an interest, and therefore cannot follow "real" interests. A normative appeal to "real interests" need not pitch moralistic injunctions against desires, nor curtail agents' freedom to pursue self-defined ends (which the critic ought to encourage, in order to confound the conformist delusions of ideological domination).

Geuss goes on, in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, to draw a distinction between early "first generation" Frankfurt School critical theorists, who try to resolve the tension between what he calls "contextualism" and "transcendentalism" in favour of the former, and "second generation" critical theorists whom he claims favour the latter.⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno, he argues, presume agents' epistemic principles depend contingently on their historical *context*.⁸ They presume the task of the ideology critic should be to identify, as a basis for criticism, the *actual* frustrations of a particular set of agents in a particular time and place. To break from ideological norms, the critic should not appeal to timeless, independent, "transcendent" standards that abstract from, and thereby obscure,

the empirical social circumstances that determine their value (in true ideological fashion). Rather, she should identify *tacit* epistemic principles, and point out *inconsistencies* and the *implications* that are entailed.⁹

Setting aside the question of whether these terms are sufficiently fine-grained to distinguish the work of Adorno and Habermas, for example, note that “immanent” ideology criticism, as described in the previous chapter, may be seen as “contextual” rather than “transcendental” on this account: the normative criteria of such criticism are not opposed directly to ideologically deluded norms, but must overlap in some way. Motivated by the thought that uncritical submission to abstract norms (that obscure their functional connections with socio-economic conditions) is not the solution, but rather part of the problem of ideology, the immanent ideology critic aims to engage agents from the standpoint of shared social norms which are contextually related to empirical circumstances.

“Transcendent” ideology critics, by contrast, would insist on a radical break of some sort between norms for criticism, and criticised ideological norms in order to insulate criteria from ideological complicity.

In *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, Geuss outlines the conditions for the normative grounds for ideology criticism with a *minimal* definition of what constitutes “conditions free from domination”. This avoids undermining the freedom of agents to shape their own ends and interests, so that these interests can rightly be predicated of these agents, and avoids repeating the ideological tendency to abstract from, and thereby obscure, the relations between dominant socio-economic conditions and social norms. This also keeps them open to challenges that make for more accountable interpretation. However, he is also aware of the need to maintain a critical distance from agents’ ideologically deluded, existing self-interpretations. In this early work, he therefore aims to draw on existing, “immanent” social norms, and yet maintain sufficient critical distance to “transcend” the conditions for ideology.

Geuss's original position aims to resolve two conflicting tasks of ideology criticism: (i) to ground criticism in the beliefs, values and norms of ideologically deluded agents such that they recognise, identify with, and are motivated by criticism, and are not mystified by rational or metaphysical abstractions that obscure the roots of social norms in everyday commercial, and social transactions and interactions; (ii) to create an independent, critical, emancipatory break from current social relations of domination, and the ideological norms that help to perpetuate them. Or phrased with reference to the dilemma of the wheel, he aims to reconcile the tension between the (i) immanent and (ii) transcendent responses to the problem of self-implication with recourse to counterfactual conditions for the criterion of "real interests". Thus, Geuss claims ideology criticism must be grounded on the "real interests" agents *would* have if their desires, hopes and expectations were not distorted by existing oppressive social relations of power. The transcendent lift of the counterfactual from ideology is nonetheless grounded in an immanent context, which is to balance, and mediate, the relation between the normative criterion and the social circumstances that give rise to it.

Contextualist transcendentalism?

If we keep in mind the problem of the criterion from the previous section, a tension is exposed in the goal of the critic: what she says people "really want" she derives from a counterfactual normative standpoint which is independent of distorting conditions for contemporary norms, yet these "tacit principles", or social norms, following from "ideal conditions" must be presented to, and recognised by, actually existing social agents, in context, under contemporary social conditions which are characterised by pervasive domination. Agents cannot be expected to engage rationally in normative frameworks which are ostensibly based on their interests but are also made up of abstract normative principles derived from ideal conditions known only to the critic. But how can the critic appeal to norms that agents accept from their current oppressive situation whilst simultaneously calling into question the legitimacy of these norms? Is the critic's interpretation of ideal conditions not thereby implicated in ideology?

It is worth playing Geuss's original position through the sceptical device of the wheel. For Geuss, "ideology" is a set of beliefs and values that leads people to act against their interests.¹⁰ But for the critic to establish that certain interests are "false", she must provide evidence that existing social conditions distort the criteria by which people judge their interests. Furthermore, the critic's own normative criteria must be independent of these conditions. One can only unmask ideology as the product of social conditions with reference to some normative criterion of "false" interests, but if this normative criterion is shaped by the same conditions of domination that shape ideological social norms, then it is itself implicated in ideology. If, however, the critic's criterion is derived from *independent* social conditions, then how is it to be identified and justified? If the criterion is not linked to existing social conditions, it may not be applicable or appropriate. But the link between social conditions and normative criteria, that is needed to yield *appropriate* criteria, also undermines the independence that immunises it from conditions that give rise to ideology.

Where on the contextualist-transcendentalist divide does Geuss's counterfactual approach stop once it is spun on the wheel of self-implication? Although he rejects "moralism" and "transcendentalism" in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, his use of the example of the Ik tribe (discussed in the previous chapter) recognises that the criterion of "real interests" cannot be subject to the same distorting social conditions as those that ideologically integrated social norms were, as this leads to a circle.¹¹ Therefore, the point of the counterfactual device of "optimal conditions for real interests" is to open up a critical distance between (i) independent, ideal conditions for real interests, and (ii) immediate oppressive, distorting social conditions, which give rise to ideological norms. In the end, Geuss appeals to (i) an independent criterion, predicated on ideal conditions that agents *would* form under "optimal conditions of freedom". The danger is that this succumbs to the regression problem. Why is this?

The interests agents *would* ideally form must be judged by a criterion free of ideologically distorting social conditions, and derived from independent social conditions (that make it the appropriate

standard of criticism). These conditions, in turn, must be assessed by an appropriate criterion, which itself must be independent of ideological conditions, and so on and so forth. The problem remains either way, but the point is that by failing to question the normative criterion by which the critic judges existing society, namely whether or not it satisfies the interests a subject would ideally form under optimal conditions, or to ask if it may be ideological, Geuss's use of real interests as a counterfactual device to reveal ideological domination looks remarkably like a version of transcendentalism.

But anyway, either his suggested criterion is *genuinely* independent, which pushes the problem back along a regressive meta-normative trajectory without getting closer to a solution, or it is tied to existing distorted conditions and interests, in which case we are stuck in a justificatory circle.

To get a contrasting viewpoint, let's consider two important thinkers Geuss cites as "contextualists", who are said to oppose "moralistic" "transcendentalism". Marx distinguishes 'ruthless criticism of the existing order' from transcendent, moralising criticism.¹² By means of the former, the social critic is supposed to be able to detect rational content, or a good society, in nascent form, in actually existing irrational society. Similarly, Adorno thinks immanent criticism is predicated on the assumption that existing reality contains reference to norms which can serve as a meaningful basis to assess reality's rationality. Ideology criticism is central to the task of the immanent critic, as it confronts reality with its ideals.¹³ Through unremitting criticism of the *status quo*, and by spotting shards or fragments of the good in the historical debris of exploitative relations of domination, both Marx and Adorno are able to find appropriate norms for criticism with which to bring to light the reality of oppressive, damaged social existence. But how do they know what to look for? By what criteria do they identify these fragments? Are these criteria *appropriate*?

Geuss notes that Habermas, in the mid-1960s, drops early Frankfurt School "contextualism" for a form of "transcendentalism", moving, one might say, from immanent to transcendent social criticism.¹⁴ Perhaps Habermas picks up on the problem that follows the motion of the sceptic's

wheel from the standpoint of contextualist ideology criticism: what if the critic's normative criteria are themselves ideologically distorted?¹⁵ The immanent ideology critic, moreover, sets up the very sceptical dilemma that implicates her standpoint. Why trust the normative orientations of a critic who tells us all social norms so far, have been locked into an interdependent functional relationship with structures of domination? Clearly, the normative grounds of ideology criticism cannot be subject to the same distorting conditions as ideology, or these normative grounds would be ideological too. But if the normative grounds of ideology criticism are independent of such conditions, then how can we legitimately attribute the "real" interests on which they are predicated to real agents?

Part II: Against Transcendent Ideology Criticism: Real Interests, Real Politics

In more recent work,¹⁶ Geuss abandons the transcendental background of his earlier position with respect to the normative criterion of "real interests" to be derived from optimal counterfactual conditions and "real interests". The more contextualist, immanent criticism of what he calls 'real politics' is explicitly distanced from theoretical approaches which are closer to his work on optimal conditions, such as Rawls' counterfactual "original position" and "veil of ignorance", and Habermas' accounts of ideal speech conditions and the pragmatics of speech discourse. Geuss seems to have decided that critical analysis of "real politics" offers a more propitious normative framework of orientation for philosophical social criticism, than the postulation of the "real interests" we would ideally develop under optimal conditions. If we turn the later position against the earlier one, it may be argued that the very idea of the "real interests" which agents *would* form under optimal conditions where everyone is free, abstracts from ideologically distorting social conditions in an unacceptable manner. Ideal norms are all very well, but real people have to deal with the real world. The counterfactual ideal of unrestricted freedom casts an ideological shadow over the necessary political equipment and apparatus of *realpolitik*.

When criticising ideological social norms, whatever normative criterion we use to predicate optimal conditions of knowledge and freedom must still be judged from present circumstances. The theory of ideology problematizes this context, however, by claiming such circumstances are mediated by pervasive relations of domination that determine ideological normative criteria. Real politics, to recall the genealogy of the notion of “ideology” from Chapter 1, marked the original premise of Napoleon’s appropriation of the term from the “ideologues” who originally coined it. Napoleon dismissed as naive the theoretical abstractions and normative criteria which Destutt de Tracy had hoped would provide a rational, scientific and independent basis for the study of society. Similarly, Geuss abandons the theoretical abstractions of “ideal theory” (i.e. transcendent criticism, on independent normative criteria) in his later work for what he calls “political realism” (i.e. immanent criticism of contradictions embedded in existing social and political conditions), and moves from the transcendent criteria of “optimal conditions of freedom”, to a modest “contextualism”, or “realism” as he puts it.¹⁷ Like Napoleon, but for different reasons, Geuss comes to dismiss ideal theory as ideology.¹⁸

To clarify these terms, and explain Geuss’s reasoning, let me start by further explaining the contrast he draws between philosophical ethics, or ideal theory (what roughly falls under the category of “transcendentalism” in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*),¹⁹ and Socratic or immanent criticism (empirical, historically grounded political “realism” which belong to the category of “contextualism”, which was used to characterise a first-generation Frankfurt School approach to social criticism, which – he claims – Habermas abandons in the mid-1960’s).²⁰ I draw on Geuss’s criticism of Kantian philosophical ethics, and Rawls’ political philosophy, to identify his broader argument in favour of immanent criticism, via historical inquiry into existing political conditions, and against a transcendent criticism based on independent criteria abstracted from a particular context of needs and interests.

Against philosophical ethics

Especially in his more recent work, Geuss explicitly dismisses contemporary political philosophy that takes a ‘strongly Kantian’ approach, which he believes moralises political discourse and interaction, and construes politics as ‘applied ethics’.²¹ He objects to *starting* with an “ideal theory” of ethics as a framework in which to think about the social world (i.e. independent, normative criteria) and from which to derive principles prescribing how humans should act.²² Such a form of ‘philosophical ethics’, he argues, usually starts with some basic principles about ‘human nature’ (for instance, that we are rational and self-interested) and then derives principles, or a series of constraints, on how we should behave.²³ Such “moralised” political philosophy usually presupposes some form of individualism regarding interests, and some supposedly shared “ethical intuitions” or principles, and then attempts to render these intuitions consistent.

But in fact this approach tends merely to reformulate, and generalise, existing post-Christian, Western European “common sense” intuitions to derive a series of constraints on action.²⁴ On principle, Geuss objects to the idea that normative grounds for social analysis (or criticism) could be derived without reference to history, sociology, economics, psychology, and so forth.²⁵ He argues we should turn away from “Kantian” “universalism”, and instead of focusing on independent normative foundations, pay more attention in political philosophy to the role of ‘contingency, history and politics’. This will allow us to step back from conventional beliefs and standards, and consider the wider historical and social context before we think about how rationally to organise society.²⁶ By supposing a normative standpoint abstracted from, and free of, the prejudices born of oppressive social structures, and by focusing exclusively on abstract principles, transcendent criticism takes its functional position in socio-economic conditions for granted.

A “liberal” Kantian construal of political philosophy as “applied ethics”, focuses on the centrality of individual autonomy, and the priority of the individual’s right to the good, and rests on a substantive normative framework of moral categories of universal consensus with which to evaluate political

behaviour in society.²⁷ Against this, Geuss draws on Marx and Nietzsche to argue that ‘consensus is a pragmatically achieved *momentary* truce with no moral implications’.²⁸ In fact, he claims, Marx shows how apparent consensus has masked conflict and domination. Against ‘ideal theory’, Geuss advocates the ‘more fruitful’ approach of ‘realist’ political philosophy.²⁹ Instead of political philosophy based on universal principles of justice or equality, he argues that social theorists should not only look at what people say, think or believe, but at what they actually *do*, and study the *effect* these actions have in society.³⁰ We should start, he says, with Hobbes’s *secular* answer to the political question, ‘How should we live together?’ recognising that ‘coordination of action is always a social achievement attained at a price and can change’.³¹ From here we should ‘study various actual historical forms of collective action and the ways people can organise their action to limit intolerable disorder’.³²

We see that this later work argues more emphatically against “ideal theory”, which begins with independent normative criteria, and in favour of a “realist” approach to political philosophy, which begins with contextual analysis of actual historical events, to derive general normative and explanatory criteria in order to assess actual social and political behaviour. But, to get back to ideology criticism, following the problem of self-implication, the crucial question to ask here is, by what criterion are we to decide what counts as “tolerable” or “intolerable” behaviour on Geuss’s account? To get a better idea of how realism in political philosophy substitutes for the counterfactual standpoint of real interests as a basis for ideology criticism, I look at what Geuss thinks is wrong with a particular version of ideal theory that closely parallels his own earlier position in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, but which he subsequently criticises for being too idealist. The ideal theory in question is Rawls’ “original position” which, from behind a “veil of ignorance”, aims at “reflective equilibrium” between “immanent” moral intuitions, and “transcendent” normative criteria.

An ideological veil of ignorance

Geuss describes how, in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls follows Kant in trying to find a 'pure normative standpoint' (an independent, normative criterion) 'to overcome conflict and instability in the real world'.³³ Rawls claims to describe a "reflective equilibrium" that would be attained by rational agents engaged in discussion under idealised conditions not unlike those counterfactual conditions under which Geuss had earlier argued we may recognise our "real" interests. This "reflective equilibrium" is Rawls' successor to the "pure normativity" of Kant. Under this principle, we should revise our best normative principles so that they are compatible with our intuitions, and reciprocally cultivate our intuitions so they conform to our theories. But, Geuss argues, 'intuitions arise historically under circumstances and as a result of certain pressures, malleable but not at our immediate disposal'.³⁴ Additionally, he cites the standpoint of early critical theorists like Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, arguing that moral intuitions are too fragmented, disparate and contradictory - due to *real* political, and economic, contradictions in society - to be fit to offer enduring, systematic value as advertised. The point in political theory should not be to *revise* our moral intuitions, and normative criteria, according to existing political circumstances (which is quietist, if not defeatist), but rather to change 'actual social institutions which systematically prevent equilibrium from being attained'.³⁵

The most important problem Geuss identifies in such ideal theory, especially for our purposes, is that it overlooks the importance of power in its consideration of normative first principles.³⁶ Rawls' veil of ignorance is supposed to be designed to allow us to formulate normative criteria which would suit everyone, and, in so doing, get *away* from partial interests that may prejudice the sorts of rational decisions we want to make in political philosophy about how best to organise society. Rawls should be an ally of the ideology critic since the veil of ignorance 'is designed to occlude empirical information that might prejudice the normative force of the outcome'.³⁷ As such, this should be useful for generating normative criteria for ideology criticism which is free from the distorting effects of relations of domination.

Geuss, however, argues that the veil of ignorance functions as a 'heuristic tool to get clear about politics by covering over power relations,'³⁸ and, 'is artificially defined so as to allow certain bits of knowledge "in" and exclude other bits'.³⁹ 'Conditions under the veil of ignorance are idealised to nullify the relevance of existing political relations.' But why, Geuss asks, would agents in such a position agree at all? And of what relevance is this to us? How would pure, formal abstractness help us understand the actual world we live in?⁴⁰ The veil of ignorance deprives people of important relevant pieces of information which they need to make rational political decisions, thereby perpetuating deep-rooted oppression, or ideological delusions.

It is no coincidence that Rawls ends up with an ideal constitutional schema remarkably similar to that of the USA. Geuss claims Rawls' purported egalitarian theory became more influential in the USA at the same time as social inequalities increased drastically in almost all industrialised states in the world.⁴¹ He argues that, historically, 'it is no coincidence that deflecting attention from actually increasing inequality was overlooked by a theory that', by abstracting *away* from existing social and political conditions in its consideration of an ideal universal social contract, 'completely overlooked historical social and economic institutions'.⁴² This is no straightforward tautology. In fact, he follows on, 'the danger in using highly abstractive methods in political philosophy is that one will succeed merely in generalising one's own local prejudices and repackaging them as demands of reason.' To remedy this, 'the study of history can help counteract this natural human bias', by 'judging what is actual relative to what is possible', and 'pointing to real possibilities'.⁴³

By drawing attention *away* from the issue of power, Rawls' work is 'ideological':

To understand the political world by appealing to "our" intuitions of what is just is to divert attention from where those intuitions come from, how they're maintained, what interests they serve and the possibility that these intuitions themselves may be ideological.⁴⁴

'Rules without power are empty,' writes Geuss.⁴⁵

In real politics, theories like that of Rawls are non-starters, except, of course, as potential ideological interventions... a theoretical approach with no place for a theory of power is... actively pernicious, because mystifying.⁴⁶

On Geuss's reasoning, normative criteria for social criticism are all the more likely to be ideological if they are formulated in abstraction from the historical origins of contemporary political conditions.

Criteria for real politics

Following the path of the sceptic, Geuss asks after the appropriateness of the conditions by which Rawls derives his normative principles of justice. But, to keep the wheel in motion with respect to the problem of self-implication for ideology criticism, one may well ask by what appropriate criteria the "realist" political philosopher might identify, and evaluate, significant aspects of a great mass of historical evidence, or empirical data? Historical, and even contemporary, records are, in turn, framed by prevailing normative criteria that are likely to be ideologically compromised under the theory of ideology, before we even begin to address the issue of ideologically compromised interpretation of this evidence. To be fair, there is probably no escaping the wheel and besides, Geuss is no naive realist. He acknowledges the importance of rational mediation of our political affairs. He aims, like Nietzsche and the early Frankfurt School theorists, to *avoid* the dualistic choice between positivism and transcendentalism, writing,

Just because there is no God's eye view of the world does not mean we're trapped with the facts and can only engage in piecemeal criticism of our social institutions, as "positivists" would have it... An historically and contextually sensitive approach to those areas of life directly concerned with our human world is an excellent way to contribute to further enlightenment.⁴⁷

Geuss does not deny the effect of people's ideals, morals or rationality on their experience of intuitive experience, but claims 'these are only important insofar as they influence behaviour'.⁴⁸ 'The world, naturalistically, has been good enough for us to become functionally rational agents', who 'may yet make a distinction between real and apparent interests'.⁴⁹ Are we back with "real interests", or did we ever leave them? Geuss favours a strongly "materialist", "Nietzschean" reading

of early Frankfurt School critical theory, which interprets “enlightenment” as the devotion of ‘persistent focused attention on what is genuinely important in human life’ in a manner that is neither subjective nor arbitrary, since ‘the values relative to what we pick out are generally embodied in a network of factual and other beliefs perfectly amenable to revision on the basis of new information and further reflection’.⁵⁰ It feels, rather appropriately, like we have come full circle: we revise our evaluative criteria according to factual beliefs, and presumably, in turn, discern factual beliefs from ideological beliefs on the basis of these criteria. But if we should not simply aim at a coherent fit between criteria and facts (i.e. a reflective equilibrium of sorts), how do we know which conditions should be transformed, and which normative criteria should be adjusted to existing conditions?

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I showed that Heath and MacIntyre take issue with ideology criticism for casting the net of suspicion of distorting conditions for normative criteria too widely over conventional norms. Yet, they themselves posit too strong a dichotomy between what are considered to be “safe”, or valid, normative criteria for criticism, and the social conditions criticised by the ideology critic. Criticism, I argued, must be *credible* from our current, apparently distorted social setting, but the question is, how? Do we start with immanent, normative grounds for ideology criticism, or do we begin with transcendent grounds of ideology criticism? I showed here that whereas Geuss, in his early work on critical theory, tries to balance the burden of contextualist evidence with the enlightenment of transcendent ideal theory by means of the counterfactual criterion of “optimal conditions of freedom”, he later rejects this approach along with “philosophical ethics” and adopts a “realist” position instead. Though I am wary of this “realist” position, the reason I have drawn on his work is to better identify potential ideological problems with transcendent criticism, which motivate a number of influential theorists to characterise ideology criticism as a form of “immanent critique”.

One ought to be wary of starting with an ideal, normative framework of philosophical ethics, derived in abstraction from actually existing power structures, when attempting to generate basic principles for a series of constraints on action. Endeavouring to secure normative grounds for ideology criticism through recourse to transcendent principles (which are free from the distorting influence of oppressive political interests), may well reinforce existing prejudices. This is particularly the case if the influence of one's own historical social context is not carefully scrutinised, and opened to further contestation. The transcendental approach of "ideal theory" may well serve ideological purposes by deliberately abstracting from material determinations. We cannot overlook power in deciding how best to rationally coordinate our collective political affairs if we wish to avoid implicating these decisions in ideology, but this is precisely what heuristic devices like the "state of nature" and the "veil of ignorance" do, deflecting critical scrutiny from questionable power structures and prejudiced assumptions. Should ideology criticism therefore be construed as immanent criticism? In the following chapter, I assess this approach to ideology criticism in more detail. Once I have surveyed both approaches, in the final chapter, I consider Nietzsche's genealogical style of criticism as a potentially fruitful alternative to the dilemma of "positivism versus transcendentalism" for ideology criticism.⁵¹ I agree with Geuss that some of the most important central European thinkers, including Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Adorno and Heidegger shared the goal of *breaking* with the traditional, transcendent form of philosophical ethics.

It is not the philosopher's job to tell anyone what to do,⁵² but to bring agents to rational, critical self-awareness. This is a task shared by the ideology critic, and possibly the immanent critic who, as Geuss describes, 'takes over "for the sake of argument" the normative conceptions of the person (or society) in question, without necessarily affirming them or being committed to them'. The critic is merely 'pointing out internal inconsistencies and contradictions in these normative conceptions (and associated material)...'⁵³ However, keeping in mind the Frankfurt School's critique of positivism, as well as, the wheel of the sceptic from the previous chapter, we should watch carefully for hidden normative criteria in immanent critique. If the Socratic approach to ideology criticism is preferable to

transcendent critique (since the latter functions ideologically), as Geuss implies when objecting to Rawls' veil of ignorance, what is to be made of Socrates's claim that he knows nothing?

¹ To assume that transcendent social criticism is relatively indexed to social, political and economic conditions, is to assume from the outset that it is not at all possible to insulate social norms from such conditions. Similarly, *ad hominem* argument dismisses an opposed view for its origins rather than its merits. Some Marxist theorists, such as Lenin and Lukács, make this mistake by reducing theory directly to class consciousness.

² Geuss, R. 1981: 41.

³ Geuss, R. 1981: 54.

⁴ Geuss, R. 1981: 54.

⁵ Geuss, R. 1981: 26.

⁶ The danger with such argument concerns possible subsumption of particularity under universality, or individual interests under the common good (it seems unlikely that moral generalities would intrinsically happen to outstrip particular circumstances that give sense and purpose to linguistic concepts).

⁷ Geuss, R. 1981: 64.

⁸ Geuss, R. 1981: 63.

⁹ Geuss, R. 1981: 63.

¹⁰ Geuss, R. 1981: 72-74.

¹¹ Under brutal economic conditions, social norms we would find abhorrent under improved circumstances may prove to some extent contextually justified – hence a likely contrast between the social norms of New Zealand sheep farmers and Colombian cocaine growers, for example.

¹² Marx, K. 1975: 207.

¹³ Adorno, T. 1974: 43, 210. Also Buchwalter, A. 1987: 299.

¹⁴ Geuss, R. 1981: 64. Habermas, of course denies that his approach is a form of transcendent critique. Indeed he continues to maintain that his new paradigm of rational reconstruction is a form of immanent criticism, albeit also weakly transcendental.

¹⁵ This may explain his fondness for the “pragmatic contradiction” criticism he uses on many of his opponents.

¹⁶ *Morality, Culture, History*, 1999, *Outside Ethics*, 2004, and *Philosophy and Real Politics*, 2008.

¹⁷ Geuss, R. 2008: 21.

¹⁸ Geuss, R. 2004: 39.

¹⁹ Geuss, R. 1981: 64.

²⁰ Geuss, R. 1981: 63.

²¹ Geuss, R. 2008: 1.

²² Geuss, R. 2008: 6.

²³ Geuss, R. 2008: 7.

²⁴ Geuss, R. 2008: 8.

²⁵ Geuss, R. 2008: 7.

²⁶ Geuss, R. 2004: 7.

²⁷ Geuss, R. 2004: 16.

²⁸ Geuss, R. 2004: 19.

²⁹ Geuss, R. 2004: 9.

³⁰ Geuss, R. 2004: 10.

³¹ Geuss, R. 2004: 22.

³² Geuss, R. 2004: 22.

³³ Geuss, R. 2004: 22.

³⁴ Geuss, R. 1999: 68-69.

³⁵ Geuss, R. 1999: 71.

³⁶ Geuss, R. 2008: 94.

³⁷ Geuss, R. 2004: 22.

³⁸ Geuss, R. 2008: 90.

³⁹ Geuss, R. 2008: 87.

⁴⁰ Geuss, R. 2004: 33.

⁴¹ Geuss, R. 2004: 34.

⁴² Geuss, R. 2004: 38.

⁴³ Geuss, R. 2004: 39.

⁴⁴ Geuss, R. 2008: 90.

⁴⁵ Geuss, R. 2008: 93.

⁴⁶ Geuss, R. 2008: 94.

⁴⁷ Geuss, R. 2004: 10.

⁴⁸ Geuss, R. 2008: 9.

⁴⁹ Geuss, R. 2008: 110.

⁵⁰ Geuss, R. 2004: 9. This sounds more like the coherentist position of “reflective equilibrium” we started with.

⁵¹ Nietzsche is the first modern thinker to ask the fundamental question underlying this chapter: not ‘What is valuable?’ but ‘What is the value of morality?’ – What is the value of the normative criteria by which we judge our moral intuitions? This question points to regression, which calls for on-going re-valuation, interrogation and contestation in shifting political and economic circumstances and historical social conditions.

⁵² Geuss, R. 2004: 51, citing Hegel.

⁵³ Geuss, R. 1999: 72.

Chapter 6: Immanent Ideology Criticism

Having considered the case against “transcendent” ideology criticism, I now turn to examine “immanent” ideology criticism. The basic argumentative strategy of “immanent critique” – as opposed to “transcendent critique” – may be said to turn on a contrast between two alternative modes of power. Hegel’s idealist representation of the master-slave dialectic, and Marx’s materialist representation of the capitalist-proletariat dynamic, both present the weaker partner as the agent of transformation, who subverts the strength of the more powerful other. True to the dynamic, Nietzsche turns an evaluative inversion on this relationship, questioning its intrinsic value with a genealogical representation of the proud, self-affirming noble who is overcome by cunning, resentful slaves. Likewise, Foucault contrasts sovereign, repressive power with productive, disciplinary power, distinguishing between direct, open confrontation that elicits resistance, and opaque, subversive mechanisms of structural domination.

These basic models of agency and political interaction demonstrate a strategy for managing conflict that is central to “immanent critique”: learn to draw on the strength of your opponent. Instead of fighting her directly, deploy her, manipulating conflicting aspects of her motivational set to your benefit. This strategy helps to explain the principle behind ideological domination. The motivations and desires of oppressed groups become structured in a fairly stable fashion by ideological social norms, such that the agency of ideologically affected subjects unwittingly defeats itself and serves the interests of others. The aim of immanent critique is to bring this to light for emancipatory purposes, to induce rational reflection on the restrictive normative structures that regulate oppressive power relations, and so to open them up to critical contestation. Ideology criticism is thus thought to be immanent. Nietzsche’s inversion is mentioned here as a background *proviso*, which will be used in the following chapter to raise the question whether such a dialectical method of “table-turning”¹ is open to ideological abuse.

This chapter presents a positive account of immanent criticism; the following chapter sees if ideology criticism should be construed in this way. To explain how ideology criticism may be interpreted as “immanent critique”, I first trace the notion to Hegel’s conception of dialectical negation, and then look at Marx’s application of the method to social criticism. Hegel’s dialectic explains the structure of “immanent critique”, and his criticism of the “ought” and the “spurious infinite”² tells us what is wrong with transcendent criticism. Marx shows how ideology criticism may be interpreted as an “immanent” method that accords with this dialectical structure. In Part II, I look at two contemporary accounts of social criticism as “immanent critique”. I begin with Michael Walzer’s advocacy of “local”, “internal” social criticism, to identify a problematic ambiguity with this position. I then follow up Geuss’s criticism of moralising “transcendent criticism”, (which I addressed in the previous chapter), by looking at various discussions where he advocates internal, “Socratic criticism” as a valuable method of social and political criticism, that overcomes some of the ideological worries that beset “transcendentalist” political philosophy.

Part I: Immanent Critique from Hegel to Marx

Hegel

There are two parts to this section. First, I draw on Hegel’s account of the dialectical method of critical philosophical inquiry in the preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to outline the argument he makes in favour of determinate, rather than abstract, negation, and to elaborate on the structure of the immanent, rather than transcendent, method of ideology criticism that follows from this contrast. The second part of my account of immanent critique in Hegel goes into more detail on the *aspect of transcendence* that emerges from dialectical critical inquiry, to show how this is different from direct transcendent criticism. To do this, I draw on Hegel’s distinctions between (i) abstract and genuine finitude, (ii) the abstract and the determinate “ought”, and (iii) the “spurious” and “genuine” infinite. Each consecutive distinction elaborates further on the manner in which immanent critique maintains transcendent critical detachment, without simply rejecting that which

it negates (in the manner of direct transcendent criticism). The distinction between the genuine and spurious infinite, in particular, shows how the reflective structure of immanent critique may be said to allow the position of the critical inquirer to transcend both its objective content, and the insufficient direct, transcendent negation of this content, in a manner that is at once both critical and comprehensive.

Phenomenology of Spirit: immanent critique is a determinate, not an abstract, negation

The more conventional opinion gets fixated on the antithesis of truth and falsity, the more it tends to expect a given philosophical system to be either accepted or contradicted; and hence it finds only acceptance or rejection. It does not comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees it in simple disagreements.³

This passage, from the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, describes two different philosophical approaches which correspond closely to the distinction I have drawn so far between immanent and transcendent critique. Transcendent critique may be thought of here as simple, direct opposition, whereas immanent critique aims at a dialectical *Aufhebung* of a contradiction. To help clarify the Hegelian origins of the contemporary sense of the distinction between these respective methods of criticism, in the following passages I interpret as "transcendent critique" Hegel's notion of abstract, primary negation, which is "fixated" on antithetical distinctions between truth/falsity, or acceptance/rejection. By contrast, "immanent critique" corresponds to a determinate, secondary negation (*Aufhebung*) which does not reject, but incorporates, that which it opposes, comprehending each antithetical term as the one-sided moment of a progressive unfolding.

'The aim,' Hegel writes, and this may be said for immanent critique too, 'is not to reject each insufficient moment, but to free it from its one-sidedness... by recognising the reciprocally necessary moments that take shape as a conflict and seeming incompatibility'.⁴ The aim of the immanent critic is to unblock an impasse that has been reached between opposed, conflicting, and yet interdependent, tendencies. This is achieved not by opposing, or suppressing, either of the operative

terms, but by managing the dynamic tension between them productively - through the reconciliation of statically opposed terms by way of a teleology that sees that each term makes up for what the other lacks, without essentially undermining it. As Michael Rosen puts it in his analysis of Hegel's dialectic, 'The true system develops and vindicates itself by including those lower standpoints within itself.' But it must not, Hegel says, do that "externally". Rather, it must 'establish common ground with them, and this means participating in their assumptions'.⁵ What abstract negation directly opposes, determinate negation incorporates for a higher end. The same may be said for immanent critique.

Against transcendent, abstract negation, Hegel's immanent approach rejects, 'the concern... with passing judgments on various thinkers'.

Instead of getting involved in the real issue this kind of activity is always beyond it – instead of tarrying with it and losing itself in it, this kind of knowing... remains essentially preoccupied with itself instead of being occupied with the real issue and surrendering to it. To judge is easy, to comprehend much harder.⁶

Hegel's dialectical epistemology interprets abstract negation as a matter of superficial immediate judgment that is inferior to the deeper mode of mediated comprehension to which he appeals. Philosophical Science, like criticism, should therefore seek to comprehend its object and not cling too closely to the rigid distinctions it imposes, between form and content, method and proof, subject and object, or truth and falsity. 'The standpoint of consciousness which knows objects in their antithesis to itself, and itself in antithesis to them,' he writes, 'is for Science the antithesis of its own standpoint'.⁷

Hegel claims a mode of thinking that rigidly distinguishes itself from its object domain and 'does not benefit Science', since such modest complacency merely receives, 'giving back nothing'.⁸ Moreover, 'Substance is actual only in virtue of... Subject'⁹ – so it would be naïve for science to overlook the mediating function of its hypotheses, and conceptual abstractions, with respect to empirical

observation. Subject and Substance are not only opposed, as per the model of the detached inquirer, but also mutually determining. Hegel, therefore, argues that Science should not be polarised by an abstract disjunction between immanent 'material intelligibility' (e.g. Hume's raw sensations) and transcendent, 'immediate rationality and divinity' (e.g. Kant's rational categories), but mediate between them whilst remaining cognisant of their mutual implication. Likewise, the immanent critic, like Hegel's phenomenological observer, should always remain aware that her perspective of the intended object is determined by her relationship with it, such that neither term can be discretely abstracted from the other. This is so, at the very least, in virtue of the relationship established in trying to grasp it, but also because of the shared environment in which they both subsist.

To recall the epistemological problem of the criterion, Hegel's dialectical approach to the relationship between Subject and Substance, somewhat like the method of Sextus Empiricus, demonstrates that for every point of view, there exists a circular relationship between rational criteria and empirical evidence. The point Hegel makes here is that Science (the organisation of knowledge) must remain attuned to the co-dependence of form and content. The one, to some extent, determines the other, though one should, at the same time, be careful not to conflate the two. Direct opposition overlooks the extent to which it is determined by that from which it distinguishes itself. But *reflection* - on the co-dependent relationship between critical inquiry and its object domain - helps to overcome 'the antithesis between the process of... becoming and the result',¹⁰ as Hegel explains in a passage that summarises his position on immanent critique:

If the refutation is thorough, it is derived and developed from the principle itself, not accomplished by counter-assertions and random thoughts from outside. The refutation would, therefore, properly consist in the further development of the principle, and in thus remedying the defectiveness, if it did not mistakenly pay attention to its negative action, without awareness of its progress and result on their positive side too.¹¹

Immanent critique, on this reading, is a mode of reflection on deficient one-sidedness within a given perspective, rather than a rejection of it from the opposite point of view. The positive aspect of critical negation depends on such immanent dialectical reflection, to recognise the mutual dependency and dynamic tension between polarised terms within a given conception. Immanent critique productively presses past external negation by reflectively mediating contradictory tendencies within its determinate object-domain, rather than passing a judgment which obscures the extent to which it is determined by that which it opposes. The sceptical aspect of philosophical Science is to keep questioning the extent to which one's criteria determine the content, and vice-versa, to avoid positing a naive distinction between the two.

In parallel terms, Hegel touches here on the territory of ideology that his method is later used to address, noting that 'The familiar is generally not cognitively understood - one of the commonest ways of deceiving ourselves and others about understanding is by assuming something as familiar and accepting it on this account'.¹² He points, for example, at unquestioned distinctions between Subject and Object, and God and Nature, which obscure the co-dependency between these antagonistically polarised terms. External criticism merely sets out the abstract negation of the object of criticism.

While these remain unmoved, the knowing activity goes back and forth between them, thus only moving on their surface.... But the analysis of an idea, as it used to be carried out, was in fact nothing else than ridding it of the form in which it had become familiar... The activity of dissolution is the power of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power.¹³

Ideology criticism de-contexts relations of domination in just such a manner. Consequently, to interpret ideology criticism along this Hegelian model, the ideology critic, *qua* immanent critic, should not reject ideology as false, but examine and *reflect* upon certain underlying antagonisms that remain obscure at the immediate level of appearance.

[Spirit] wins its truth only when... it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or false, and then, having done away with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.¹⁴

Thought, Hegel is saying here, only becomes actual through that which it mediates.¹⁵ Abstract, external negation remains trapped within the terms of contradiction. With respect to the problem of ideology in particular, to simply oppose false consciousness with the opposite point of view, is to neglect dangerous undercurrents that affect one's own standpoint in virtue of its determination by that which one opposes. The ideology critic should not simply reject ideology as false, since 'truth does not stand alone, and there is no such thing as the false... each has its own essence as against the other... Even when the true is distinguished correctly from the false, yet the negative dwells in the true'.¹⁶ For ideology criticism to be *immanent* criticism, it must not simply posit an opposed truth against false consciousness, but inquire into its underlying determinations, so that it is not unwittingly determined by the same conditions that determine the standpoint it opposes.

Closing the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel opposes simply adopting a 'negative attitude' toward content (and, thus, I argue, by extension in social criticism), 'only refuting and destroying it'; 'that something is *not* the case is a dead-end, a reflection into the empty "I"', he writes,¹⁷ whereas the 'determinate negative' is seen 'to belong to the content itself', 'moving and determining the content', and 'is thus a positive content as well'.¹⁸ Abstract negation (external criticism), detached from conventional opinion from the outset, becomes mere 'rhetoric' presented as 'direct revelations from heaven'. However, the immanent critic should also be careful not to become dependent on 'sound common sense', 'making his appeal to feeling... finished and done with anyone who does not agree'.¹⁹ The critical standpoint must not be reduced to the immanent context on which it depends. To rely on common sense – to 'keep up with the periodicals of the

times in a preliminary and general way, and to provide critical appraisals which stand high above the work judged'²⁰ – is as shallow as “transcendent”, or “external” criticism.

Science of Logic: the mysterious origin of “post-immanent transcendence”

The above account of determinate negation shows that immanent critique may have a positive aspect to the extent that it does not simply reject that which it negates, but this negation of primary negation also does not simply amount to a return to the original position. The role of secondary negation is different from that of double negation elimination. The second negation negates both antithesis *and* thesis. In this sense, the notion of “immanent critique” is paradoxical, raising the question, how does this transcendent, normative aspect of *criticism* outstrip its *immanent* context enough to gain leverage on it?

There are three problems to be distinguished here. First, an essential aspect of *criticism* is that it *negates* that to which it is opposed. So, if determinate negation also negates this prior negation, why does it not simply restate the thesis? Second, if it does not simply restate but also negates the primary thesis, why is it not simply opposed to it – i.e. how is it *different* from the primary negation that characterises transcendent criticism? Third, if it neither directly opposes nor endorses either position, how does it reconcile these contradictory standpoints? How does immanent critique allow for a productive and transformative understanding that incorporates the necessary critical *detachment* of negation, to move beyond what already is the case, and yet also act as more than a *merely negative reaction* to the given, which is bound to its terms by opposition?

In the section on ‘Finitude and Infinity’ in the second chapter of *Science of Logic*, Hegel addresses these issues through the analysis of analogous dialectical relations between three sets of terms, namely, (i) abstract and genuine “finitude”, (ii) the abstract and determinate “ought”, and (iii) the spurious and genuine “infinite”. The dialectical structure of these pairs helps shed light on the distinction between immanent and transcendent critique, particularly with regards to the question of how the *Aufhebung* is supposed to both transcend and incorporate the given context on which it

is predicated. It thus incorporates, and yet also negates, both the determinate content and its direct opposition. Keeping these parallels in mind, I will now show how Hegel's account of finitude and infinity, and his criticism of the abstract ought, illuminate the relation in immanent critique between the positive, determinate aspect of criticism (whose actuality is elicited from its immanent basis), and the abstract, negative aspect that remains unable to prescribe a way forward while it remains trapped in merely prescribed terms of opposition.

(i) Abstract and determinate finitude

Prior to his discussion of infinity, Hegel explains *finitude* by way of a distinction between abstract and genuine finitude that foreshadows the distinction soon to be drawn between the genuine and spurious *infinite*. 'Abstract finitude,' he writes, 'is irreconcilable with the infinite and cannot be united with it'.²¹ 'Determinate finitude', by contrast, 'is related to its limit, its otherness' (the infinite). To explain: abstract finitude (the concept of finitude) is determinately what it is in virtue of its limit (the infinite that it is not) such that the infinite limits our conception of finitude. But actual finitude is not just-not-its-limit, but is also determined by its limit. Whereas, firstly, abstract finitude is a negation of the infinite; secondly, determinate finitude is also a negation of this prior negation, such that it is not *only* a negation of the infinite but is also determined by this limit. Determinate finitude is thus determined both (i) by infinity's being negated *and* (ii) by a negation of this negation. The third term incorporates both the *difference* between finitude and infinity, and their *relation* to one another. Actual, 'determinate finitude', writes Hegel, 'transcends its own *self*', 'since the limit [infinity] is in the *determination* itself as a limitation'.²²

(ii) The abstract and determinate 'ought'

Following this preliminary discussion of genuine finitude, Hegel analyses the "determinate ought". Here he goes into greater detail on how exactly (i) determinate negation's transcendence over its determinate content, is supposed to differ from (ii) the deficient transcendence of direct opposition, or primary negation. For Hegel, the relationship between abstract normativity and actuality, the

“ought” and the “is”, follows the same dialectical structure as the relationship between “infinity” and “finitude”. In virtue of their analogous structure, his analysis of the “ought”, helps to explain how the transcendent, *normative* aspect of immanent critique is supposed to *outstrip its immanent context*, without being determined by this limitation in the manner of direct opposition. Hegel’s critique of the abstract Kantian *Sollen* as a *schlechte Unendlichkeit* may be read as an argument against transcendent criticism, with his alternative conception, of *echte Unendlichkeit*, standing for immanent critique. Hegel claims the “abstract ought” is ‘only *finite transcending*... Therefore it has its place and its validity in the sphere of finitude where it holds fast to being-in-itself in opposition to limitedness’.²³ Failing to account for this necessary dependence, Hegel writes, ‘The philosophy of Kant and Fichte’ – which may be said to represent the standpoint of external, transcendent critique on this reading – ‘sets up the ought as the highest point of the resolution of the contradictions of Reason’. The “ought”, however, is not detached from the given, but ‘is only the standpoint which clings to finitude and thus to contradiction’.²⁴

The determinate “ought” is a ‘negation of the negation’, ‘which is borne in the thing immanently as its negative relation to its own limit’.²⁵ The determinate ought, one might say, is born of, and shaped by, the circumstances to which it is opposed. Actual determinate finitude transcends itself in virtue of the fact that its limit is in the determination itself as a limitation. Thus, by implication, the “ought” is in determinate actuality (what “is”) itself as a limitation (of actuality). The “ought” transcends, but is shaped by its limitation – what actually *exists*. What “is”, in turn, is only *limited* in virtue of what “ought to be”. By analogy, the normative grounds of immanent ideology criticism may be said to be determined by the same oppressive socio-economic conditions that determine the ideological norms which the critic opposes. The immanent critic reflects on how her criticism is shaped by what it negates, so that she can truly transcend the limitations this imposes on it, and not be blindly determined by underlying contradictions she has failed to comprehend. The emancipatory standpoint of the immanent ideology critic is not just opposed to ideology, but also takes into account how it is determined by this antagonism, in order to overcome the limitations this imposes.

(iii) The spurious and genuine infinite

Finally, the distinction between genuine and spurious infinity repeats the logical structure of prior distinctions between immediate/determinate finitude, and ought/is. Like the “ought”, ‘the infinite is not free from limitation and finitude’. The “spurious infinite” (an abstract, primary negation) is limited by finitude, from which it is distinguished. ‘The *purely* abstract negative infinite becomes a mere other to finite determinateness’. This infinite - ‘as indeterminate void and other of the finite’ - is a “*spurious infinite*”.²⁶ ‘In the very act of keeping the infinite pure and aloof from the finite, the infinite is only made finite’.²⁷ ‘What we have is an abstract transcending of a limit, a transcending which remains incomplete because *it is not itself transcended*’ – ‘a *contradiction* which is not resolved but is always only enunciated as *present*’. ‘This spurious infinity cannot free itself from the finite, which is its constitutive other’.²⁸ ‘The spurious infinite arises where realisation is posited as external’.²⁹ ‘In such a relationship, with the finite *here* and the infinite *away yonder*, the one immanent, the other transcendent, the finite is invested with the same degree of permanence and independence as the infinite’.³⁰ Rosen notes that Hegel does not see the empirical and metaphysical as separate realms but as united in Thought. Even the empirical categories of natural science have an infinite, speculative aspect. The infinite is not a separate transcendent reality.³¹

The “genuine infinite”, by contrast, transcends finitude because it is not only not-finite, but it also includes all that is finite. The “genuine infinite”, is ‘in its simple determination’ the ‘negation of the finite’ as the ‘abstract, one-sided infinite’ but it is also ‘the self-sublation of this [prior] infinite and of the finite, as a *single* process’.³² The genuine infinite follows ‘the negation of the negation’ (the negation of the prior, abstract infinite). However, the genuine infinite ‘attains affirmative being’ (rather than being merely negative) not by reaffirming finitude, but ‘only by means of negation’ (i.e. the negation, *and* the negation of the negation), recognising – against the negative thesis of the primary negation – that ‘as each is in itself and through its own determination the positing of its other, they are *inseparable*’.³³ ‘When the two are opposed’ (in the manner of transcendent criticism), ‘the infinite – which is supposed to be the whole – appears only as one side and is thus

limited by the finite. But a *limited* infinity is only finite'.³⁴ Transcendent criticism, on the basis of Kantian abstract universality, for example, is deficient because it fails to reflect on the relations between the universal and the particular under which it is subsumed.³⁵ Immanent criticism is not merely a *repudiation* of this transcendent aspect, but qualifies it in relation to its immanent context.

The genuine infinite is, in sum, 'the unity of the finite and infinite, which is itself the infinite which embraces both itself and finitude, and is therefore infinite in a different sense from the other from which the finite is separated'.³⁶ The genuine infinite, which emerges from and incorporates both the spurious infinite and finitude, is a different infinite from the spurious infinite, and finitude, by virtue of this incorporation, and thus genuinely infinite since it is not just the other of the finite. 'True infinity', 'as affirmation *in contrast* to [the] abstract negation [of finitude]', 'has acquired a concrete content'.³⁷ By incorporating its relation with its limit (concrete finitude) "genuine infinity" overcomes this limit concretely. The genuine infinite must *incorporate* finitude or else finitude is its limit. And limited thus, it is not truly infinite. The infinite *incorporates* its limit – finitude – or else this limit limits it. But it also negates it.

It is important to keep in mind here Hegel's emphasis that the genuine infinite is not just a unity of finitude and its abstract negation, but a "sublating" of these two terms. This is different from either. Hegel writes that 'the false progress to infinity is the straight line with the finite and infinite on either side where the line is not; the true infinite is a circle, reaching itself, without *beginning* and *end*'.³⁸ Though 'each returns to itself through its negation', the negation of the negation does not merely take us back to where we started. It does not restate the thesis, since it *also* incorporates the negation thereof – i.e. the primary negation that may be taken to stand for transcendent ideology criticism. The negation of the primary negation does not cancel out the primary negation. He explains the difference between finitude and the negation of the spurious infinite (i.e. the 'return') as follows:

The reason why understanding is so antagonistic to the unity of the finite and infinite is simply that it presupposes the limitation and the finite, as well as the in-itself, as *perpetuated*; in doing so, it *overlooks* the negation of both which is actually present in the infinite progress, as also the fact that they occur therein only as moments of the whole and that they come on the scene only by means of their opposite, but essentially also by means of the sublation of their opposite... [The true infinite] is a mediation between itself and its other, and its otherness from this relative self... not an abstract formula of unity of finite and infinite.³⁹

Progress in the above dialectical structure depends on reflection upon both the co-dependency and difference entailed in the tension that exists between two complementary yet contradictory terms.

The *Aufhebung* is not just a unity of thesis and antithesis, but also transcends these terms by reflecting on the relation between them and that which makes each insufficient unto itself.

These accounts of determinate negation have implications for social criticism. For the critic to truly transcend an opposing position, such that it no longer *limits* her position in the manner of an “abstract negation”, the speculative, transcendent aspect of criticism – the emancipatory goal and normative standard – should not simply oppose the given social context, but rather overcome its one-sidedness. Although the immanent critic’s normative standpoint is *not simply opposed* to the given social context, but also incorporates it, it nevertheless *outstrips* or *transcends* this immanent context. The normative ought, that emerges by way of such reconciliation, is not reducible to its immanent context, nor to its antithesis (nor even to both), though it begins with, and incorporates these, since it reflects on the one-sidedness of each term through their relation to one other.

To recall the question posed at the outset, if immanent criticism shares a transcendent aspect with transcendent criticism, how are these aspects different? In the dialectical relations we have examined, the distinction between these two aspects has been expressed in terms of a difference between primary and secondary negation. In mistakenly assuming a discrete break from the conditions it opposes, transcendent criticism fails to recognise the extent to which it is shaped by these conditions. By contrast, although immanent criticism (determinate negation) negates the

transcendent aspect of transcendent criticism (primary negation), such that it is not simply opposed to the thesis, it equally does not simply restate the thesis, since it *also* incorporates the transcendent aspect of primary negation. Determinate negation does not simply oppose the primary negation (as the primary negation opposes the thesis), but reflects on the one-sidedness of each term through their mutual implication and dependency on each other. Immanent criticism is not simply the opposite of transcendent criticism; it is more than this. Whereas transcendent criticism is a ‘transcending that is not itself transcended’⁴⁰ (an unresolved contradiction, trapped by conditions imposed by its constitutive other), immanent criticism incorporates its limit – i.e. concrete social circumstances – thus reflecting on how it is shaped by these circumstances, so that it is not limited by them in the manner of the spurious, or false, infinite. Finally, immanent criticism is also not just a unity of existing circumstances and their direct negation, but an overcoming of both of these terms, since it mediates between the two positions by recognising how they determine each other.

Before closing this section, Rosen’s objection that immanent critique ‘only yields positive results within Hegelian discourse’,⁴¹ must be acknowledged. That each determination yields a positive result can only be proved from within his system and not from without, and therefore only be demonstrated at the completion of his system.⁴² Hegel’s insistence on the unity of method and system generates what Rosen calls a “*post-festum* paradox”, in that ‘the dialectical process of criticising presuppositions is not open to criticism before the point of completion’.⁴³ Immanent critique cannot be justified in Munchausen-fashion by immanent critique.⁴⁴ A significant difference between immanent and transcendent criticism is revealed in this insight, recalling the problem of the criterion discussed in Chapter 4 (the criterion calls into question intuition, which calls into question the criterion). Where the transcendent critic posits a static, independent criterion to measure objective content, immanent criticism puts both criterion and intuition into question simultaneously, and in relation to one another, in order to avoid dogmatic prejudice. Rosen goes to great lengths to demonstrate that immanent critique cannot be said to generate a positive result, since the final *telos* of Absolute Spirit and the unity of reason and reality is unjustified. Hegel’s

implicit faith in this ultimate unity, I would agree, is as misguided as Socrates' faith in the implicit value of truth-seeking, or the implicit value of *aporia* in *elenctic* argument. I address this in the following chapter by arguing that immanent criticism fails to account for a prior evaluative stance.

Having noted this problem, however, it is not my task to reflect on the inadequacy of Hegel's dialectical system *per se*, but to focus on the implications of the dialectical method of immanent criticism for criticism of ideology. As Rosen admits, Hegel also rejects "ex post justification", which is only provisional and hypothetical. Instead, he thinks justification is determined by the subject matter.⁴⁵ If a formal difference has been demonstrated so far, between the transcendent aspect of primary negation (transcendent critique) and the transcendent *Aufhebung* of determinate, secondary negation (immanent critique), it remains to be shown what difference this makes in actual social criticism.

I have explained so far how Hegel thinks "post-immanent transcendence" overcomes the limitations imposed on abstract, direct transcendence by its objective, determinate content. This is achieved by reflecting on both the unity and difference between each term - in relation to one another, rather than in discrete, one-sided negation. But in what concrete sense does it help in actual social criticism to reflect beforehand on what each term of opposition has in common, rather than simply oppose what is already given in any case? What difference does this reflective, immanent grounding make in an actual example of social criticism? In the following section, I turn to Marx to show how the formal Hegelian distinction drawn between immanent and transcendent criticism, is illustrated and elaborated by the distinction he draws between (i) the characterisation of Communist society that serves, for the utopian French socialists he criticises, as a standpoint for criticism of capitalist social conditions, and (ii) his *dialectical* interpretation of an emancipatory standpoint for social criticism.

Marx

In a letter to Ruge in September 1843, Marx argues that transcendent criticism is no longer feasible in secular society. 'Philosophy', he writes, 'used to wait open-mouth for the roasted pigeons of

absolute science to fly in' – accepting *a priori* justified norms – but it has now become secularised. All we have to go on are worldly values and concrete historical events. A transcendent, religious normative foundation for social criticism is no longer feasible. However, Marx also admits that the *progressive* normative ground of criticism – the emancipatory, speculative moment of the goal, end or *telos* – *transcends* its immanent context. He claims the (transcendent) aim of *emancipation* can be grasped through '*the ruthless criticism of the existing order*, ruthless in that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries nor from conflict with the powers that be'.⁴⁶ What is the ground for such transcendence? What is the difference between these respective religious and secular transcendent moments in social criticism?

The last clause in the above quotation follows Hegel's logic of immanent critique. The genuine infinite – the emancipatory "ought" – comes to be through its conflict with the existing, finite order which determines it. But it is not reducible to the antithesis of this order (an abstract, primary negation) since it also negates this antithesis through 'its own discoveries'. Marx emphasises that the *abstract* negation of capitalism, an example of what I have so far called transcendent critique, is 'only a particular, one-sided realisation of the principle of socialism'. He is 'not therefore in favour of hoisting a dogmatic banner. Quite the reverse'.⁴⁷ The immanent critic, by implication, should not declare a dogmatic normative principle from the outset, which directly opposes the object to which her criticism is directed. Otherwise, as we saw with the spurious infinite, her standpoint is not only determined, but *limited*, by the terms it opposes. For example, Marx writes that the "communism" taught in the writings of Cabet, Dezamy and Weitling, 'is itself only a particular manifestation of the humanist principle and is infected by its opposite, private property.' But, 'the abolition of private property is by no means identical with communism'.⁴⁸

To be clear, the *aim* of emancipation – the establishment of legitimate social relations, for example, in communist society – serves as a ground for criticism by which to reflect on the deficiencies of existing social relations. Marx thinks it is mistaken to assume that such conditions are directly

opposed to existing circumstances. Such an assumption limits the shape of emancipatory conditions for legitimate social relations by simply disregarding the prior conditions on which it depends. Struggles for domination cannot be assumed away, but must be “tarried” with (to recall Hegel). Communism is opposed to capitalism, but it does not simply annul what capitalism accomplishes. It depends on the *development* of capitalism, just as capitalism is determined by developments in the feudal order. The critic’s ideal, and final, goal is ‘implicit in the *actual* forms of an existing reality’⁴⁹ (just as the normative “ought” that transcends finitude in the dialectical terms of Hegel’s logic, is implicit in determinate finitude as its limit). As critical negation becomes substantial through the determinate content of what it opposes, so immanent critique derives its standpoint not just from the simple negation of that which it opposes, but also by *reflecting* on the extent to which it is thereby determined by this initial contradiction. For example, since religion and politics, ‘are matters of very first importance in contemporary Germany,’ Marx writes, ‘our task must be to latch onto these as they are and not to oppose them with any ready-made systems’.⁵⁰ Rather, ‘the critic can take his cue from every existing form of theoretical and practical consciousness and from this ideal and final goal implicit in the *actual* forms of existing reality he can deduce a true reality’.⁵¹

Marx stresses the importance of this *reflective* aspect of immanent social criticism - the positive, speculative moment of determinate negation – as opposed to the merely negative moment of abstract negation (transcendent criticism). By reflecting on the dependency of its opposition on that which it opposes, immanent critique becomes more than mere opposition. The value of practising ideology criticism, in this manner, is that such reflection helps to re-invigorate familiar terms which are set in static opposition to each other. Impasse occurs where the *relation* between antinomies is obscured. The immanent critic does not bring a presupposed standpoint to bear on this situation, but rather, elicits her standpoint from existing contradictions that determine the point of view of her interlocutor. ‘Reason’, writes Marx, ‘has always existed but not always in rational form’.⁵² The task of critical reflection is to recognise an incipient rationality that is already operative, even when it is blocked in impasse, and obscured behind confused, conflicting and contradictory principles that

exhibit to the critic an implicit, but as yet unrecognised, potential for progressive reconciliation.⁵³

Reflecting on the points at which reason breaks down, puts one in a better position to be reasonable.

The immanent critic finds an emancipatory rationale already at work, yet not fully realised, in contradictory social configurations. We should not simply describe this situation but take sides, 'entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them.' However,

This does not mean we shall confront the world with new doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it! We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with the true campaign-slogans.... Instead we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it must acquire whether it wishes or not... We are therefore in a position to sum up the credo of our journal in a single word: the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age.⁵⁴

Marx relates this general principle more explicitly to the task of ideology criticism in *The German Ideology*. Before closing this discussion, then, it is worth briefly considering a few points from this work which have already been addressed in previous chapters.

The critique of ideology, Marx argues, takes its point of departure from the critique of religion, but also negates this prior negation in dialectical fashion. In line with his comment that effective criticism should latch onto religion, Marx criticises dogmatic atheists such as Fichte, who directly oppose religious ideology. Such direct opposition succumbs to the dominant metaphysical, political, juridical and moral conceptions of religion, by treating these products of consciousness as straightforwardly false, independently of the 'real chains of men', in which the problems with these ideals are deeply rooted, and which they faithfully reflect (albeit in hypostatised superficial terms). Such critics 'fight phrases' but not the real existing world.⁵⁵

Whether or not a religious view is theoretically false, to dwell on the issue of its falseness is to overlook what it *reflects*: the social conditions that give rise to such beliefs or doctrines. Ideology is

not so much false as superficial, deceptively suggesting reconciliation where there is conflict, but in terms nonetheless determined by real historical contradictions. It is a “true representation of a false state of affairs”. The material circumstances that determine ideology are reflected, not merely falsified, in its code. True or false, the pejorative significance of ideology concerns its functional integration within oppressive social structures. As such, ideology critique that fails to reflect upon real history ‘has no value whatsoever’.⁵⁶

Since “false consciousness” is not simply a matter of error, on Marx’s account, the ideology critic cannot rely on the simple opposition of truth and falsity.⁵⁷ Marx does not simply contradict the Young Hegelian critique of religion, but by way of demonstration he gives a materialist explanation of how idealism misconceives, but is expressive of, real contradictions between material and mental labour. The historical division between material and mental labour, he argues, gives rise to the illusion that consciousness enjoys independence from existing practice.⁵⁸ Consequently, the aim of the ideology critic should not be to contradict ideology with wholly new, or radically other doctrine, for this merely perpetuates an illusory disjunction. Rather, ideology criticism should reflect on the real conditions that determine what ideology represents superficially. Bourgeois ideology, for example, ‘is represented as rational and universally valid’, since ‘each new class... is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest’.⁵⁹ The aim of the immanent ideology critic is not simply to oppose and falsify these claims, but to show how these ‘pretensions’ arise and are ‘taken for granted’.⁶⁰

Later, in *Capital*, though he drops the term “ideology”, Marx’s discussion of the commodity form recalls his earlier criticism of hypostatized religious forms of consciousness. He shows here how the commodity bears social value, but fetishism obscures where it comes from, and treats it as inhering in the object. The ‘enigmatical character’ of such fetishism ‘arises from the commodity form’, just as in ‘the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world’, ‘productions of the human brain’ such as gods, or idols ‘appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one

another and the human race'.⁶¹ Again, the task of the immanent critic is not to smash these idols, but to reflect on conditions that shape their appearance. Truth is subordinate to emancipation.⁶²

The advantage of construing ideology criticism as immanent critique, is that such a method does not depend on a discrete “non-ideological” standpoint, presumed to exist independently of ideologically compromised social conditions, as if it is self-sufficient. Theory of ideology (as we saw in Chapter 4) maintains that social theory and criticism are compromised by domination, so that ideology criticism construed as transcendent criticism (as we saw in Chapter 5), is implicated in the problems it raises. There is no Archimedean standpoint which the ideology critic can assume is valid from the outset, to close the question whether her own normative standards can be juxtaposed to facts by further criticism. The immanent ideology critic does not privilege, or exempt, her own criteria by setting these aside from ideologically compromised criteria which the object or phenomenon under question uses to judge itself.⁶³ That ideology criticism cannot rely on first-principles, or independent variables, is not a problem for the immanent critic, since she resists resting her critical standpoint on normative grounds that are independent from those subjected to criticism. Instead she relies on the rational potential implicit in existing social conditions (pointing, for example, to how social relations of production may be improved without impeding the productive process). The immanent ideology critic reflects on underlying conditions which shape both ideology and the standpoint of criticism, in order to transform, and thereby transcend, these conditions.

Part II: Immanent Criticism in Contemporary Social Criticism

Before moving to contemporary interpretations of immanent criticism, it is important to bear in mind a problem, briefly discussed above, that arises with respect to Hegel’s and Marx’s normative grounds for criticism. First, recall Rosen’s objection that Hegel’s system depends on the illicit presumption of an ultimate unity of reason and reality. If reality is ultimately rational, all the critic need do is unearth this implicit rationality, and demonstrate the deficiency of unrealised stages in an historical progression, on the basis of the rationality of the whole. But Rosen claims we have no

good reason to think that Reason actualises itself in history. In fact, one might add, there is also no reason to think, even if history were progressively developing rationally, that this is a good thing. Hegel's method of immanent criticism does not secure the value of such an enterprise from within, but begs the question of an external standpoint from which to evaluate the present in an overall positive, affirmative light. Second, as discussed earlier, Marx presupposes the existence of an un-actualised rational potential (for communism) within capitalist reality. Without this, the normative project of deriving the true from the false, fails.⁶⁴ In each case –with Hegel and Marx - at some point, the “immanent critic” takes something of value for granted *a priori*.

In the remainder of the chapter, I look at two contemporary arguments in favour of construing social criticism as immanent criticism, first from Michael Walzer and then from Raymond Geuss. Walzer gives an ethical version of immanent critique. Although Walzer's ethical approach to social and political theory may yet run up against the Marxian taboo on prescriptive normative ethics, he is at pains to argue in favour of “internal” or “local”, contextualised social criticism that seems, at first, like what I have identified as immanent critique. Walzer leaves certain fundamental questions unanswered, but it is nevertheless helpful to see why he fails to bridge the distinction, to use Geuss's terms, between transcendental philosophical ethics and contextual Socratic criticism. In the final section, I show that Geuss's support for the latter approach suggests that immanent ideology criticism may be construed as a form of Socratic criticism. This idea is evaluated in the next chapter.

Between celestial prophecy and common complaint

In line with Hegel's claim that the refutation ‘properly consists in the further development of the principle’,⁶⁵ and Marx's criticism of prescriptive criticism, Walzer argues against the thesis that the proper social critic ‘stands outside the common circumstances of collective life’ with disinterested, open-minded objectivity, and emotional and intellectual detachment. He states that the critic is not ‘in some privileged place, where he has access to “advanced” or “universal” principles; and he applies these principles with an impersonal (intellectual) rigour’. Instead, Walzer advocates the

figure of the 'local, connected judge, who earns authority through argument with his fellows, appealing to localised principles'.⁶⁶ Social criticism cannot depend on objective moral principles which have been stripped of interests and prejudices, he argues, since, 'it is impossible to step back to nowhere... We have only our particular world'.⁶⁷ Like Geuss, he disagrees with the idea that social criticism depends on universal principles, abstracted 'from all knowledge of social standing, interests, values, talents or relationships' (as Rawls believed), or derived from a reconstruction of the 'outcome of actual conversations in an ideal scenario'⁶⁸ (as argued by Habermas).

Walzer offers two main arguments against the establishment of objective moral principles for social criticism prior to the actual process of criticism. First, even if we could come up with a perfect moral code, abstracted from all particular interests, it still does not follow that it would be a universally *valuable* arrangement. He compares this to using an hotel room as a model for a home, arguing that, 'What people want is not to be permanently registered in a hotel but to be established at home, in a dense moral culture within which they can feel some sense of belonging'.⁶⁹ 'Moral principles', he writes, are not 'external to everyday practice, waiting out there to be discovered by detached and dispassionate philosophers from a universal, transcendent standpoint'.⁷⁰ Rather, the cultural and socio-economic setting of the 'uncertain but rich and dense'⁷¹ everyday world 'is a moral world'⁷², a 'moral fabric' in which we are 'embedded'⁷³, which is authoritative 'since it creates the moral beings we already are'.⁷⁴ The value of morality, it follows, is predicated upon its function in everyday social, political and economic relations, and the interactions and transactions out of which it develops.

Second, Walzer argues that even an ideal morality, supposedly stripped bare of the affective cultural authority of immanent norms and social values, must appeal to normative intuitions in its elaboration and interpretation.⁷⁵ In this respect we may recall Geuss's claim that 'repackaging entrenched prejudices' as 'demands of reason' serves an ideological function which obscures significant interests at play in the critic's position.⁷⁶ Walzer himself intimates as much, writing that normative 'reconstructions' (such as Habermas's and Rawls') 'are merely disguised

interpretations'.⁷⁷ He takes this further, arguing that disconnected criticism, derived from 'discovered', 'invented' or 'constructed' moral standards, is an 'external intervention' that tends to 'manipulation and coercion'.⁷⁸ In this respect Walzer is in agreement with Geuss's claim that a transcendent moral framework serves an ideological function, and he reiterates Horkheimer and Adorno's worry that transcendent social criticism conceals ideology.

In response to these problems with transcendent criticism, Walzer appeals to Lenin's reflection on the Soviet experience, that 'it was necessary to collect and utilise every grain of even rudimentary protest' from among the communal values of Russian villagers. This, Walzer claims, shows how social criticism is most effective when a 'connected critic' appeals to 'local values'.⁷⁹ He also draws on Gramsci's Marxian insight that every ruling class is compelled to present itself as a universal class. Thus, the dominant ideology embodies not only ruling-class interests, in 'universalistic disguise', but also 'lower-class interests, else the disguise would not be convincing.' 'The fact of hegemony presupposes that one takes into account the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony will be exercised... Ideology strains towards universality as a condition of its success'.⁸⁰ This gives it traction, or leverage, for criticism.

'Morality takes shape in conversation with other people as a speculation on what arguments might or should persuade others of our righteousness,' observes Walzer, and so, 'is always potentially subversive of class and power'.⁸¹ It follows that the immanent social critic must recuperate this subversive normative power. Rulers always claim to be guardians of the common interest, he continues, 'setting standards they cannot live up to given their particularistic ambitions'; this 'gives hostages to future social critics'.⁸² Thus, he cites the Hegelian principle that 'the critique of existence begins, or can begin, from principles internal to existence itself'.⁸³ He sketches a rather charmless homily in favour of this account of internal criticism:

The same men and women who act badly create and sustain the standards by which (at least sometimes) they know themselves to act badly.⁸⁴

On this basis, one may claim that the aim of ideology criticism should not be to refute one ideological norm with another, but to work through them to reconcile the contradictions between them. Ideologically compromised norms do not obstruct, but rather support, the task of the immanent ideology critic, who, in the manner of determinate rather than abstract negation, uses them as leverage against the oppressive structures in which they are functionally integrated. To this extent, Walzer's account of social criticism accords with dialectical criticism, or immanent critique.

However, the hermeneutic notion of "interpretation", which Walzer uses to elaborate on how internal criticism operates in practice, remains unclear in his account. Though he argues consistently against the detached critic in favour of the "local judge", when it comes to defining the actual approach such a "local" critic might take, he writes: the 'best reading' is not different in 'kind' but in 'quality', one which 'illuminates the code in the most powerful and persuasive way, confirming or challenging received opinion'.⁸⁵ He also backtracks slightly, arguing firstly that 'not detachment but *opposition* determines the shape of social criticism,' and then later that 'an *enemy* is not recognizable as a social critic, he lacks standing'.⁸⁶ A tension in his position is revealed. Although he advocates connections to local values, he must also make space for the break that criticism introduces with respect to the standpoint of its object. The immanent critic may invoke local norms, but the evaluative thrust of her interpretation is oppositional. Walzer's "local judge" suspicion. If she's just one of us, and her norms are ours, by what criterion does she have access to the "best reading"?

By what appropriate norms, or values, may the internal critic break from internal norms? Why aren't *these* norms in question? Walzer's position here is unclear. He writes that 'we need to apply *and extend* existing principles from within to gain critical traction... interpretation requires a *back and forth between detachment and engagement*...'.⁸⁷ This sounds like what a transcendent critic does: she *abstracts* broad normative principles from a contradictory tangle, and then re-applies these principles in a more consistent fashion. Is the detached critic no longer beyond reproach? Walzer

goes on to claim, 'criticism requires *not being fully involved* in local forms... *a little to the side but not outside*, committed but not in control... nor detached... nor an enemy....'.⁸⁸ But the critic should take an 'antagonistic' stand⁸⁹ and 'join in *without being engulfed*'.⁹⁰ He cites Buber's claim that the critical philosopher should be free from 'the megalomania of the leaders and the giddiness of the masses'⁹¹ to offer a sober judgment. But is this immanent? Internal criticism sounds like only one side of the overall task.

Walzer spells out his problem, somewhat unreflectively: 'Social criticism is less the practical offspring of scientific knowledge than the educated cousin of common complaint... an elaboration on existing moralities and *reference to a not-so-distant future*'.⁹² And later: 'Prophets don't only recall but interpret *and revise* the tradition... parasitic on the past, but *also giving shape to it*'.⁹³ The social critic should express 'the aspirations of one's people' and, like Hamlet, 'hold up a mirror to reveal what they don't want to see'.⁹⁴ The prophet's technique may indeed require close attention to the given, but her aim is surely to *prophecy*: bad outcome Z will happen if we continue doing X and not Y, therefore we should do Y and not X. An everyday critical hypothesis, "If I were you, I would ..." illustrates the problem here. Strictly speaking, if I were you, I would do as you do – there would be nothing left of me. Walzer's emphasis on "local" criticism obscures the independent normative criteria by which criticism outstrips its immanent context. The contours of such criteria are ill-specified by the wide open terrain between Walzer's "local judge" and "prophet": on one hand, a firm, upstanding figure connected to established power structures, soberly weighing admissible evidence; on the other, a slightly crazy figure on the fringe who claims to have divine visions.

By what rights may an "internal" critic, on this account, break with established convention? Such a break is especially crucial for the ideology critic if she wishes to avoid self-implication. Touching obliquely on ideology, Walzer asks, 'What if the masses are satisfied? Why should they accept [the critic's] aspirations'?⁹⁵ His answer – effectively an account of the break from internal criticism he thinks is needed – is that in such cases the critic should (i) show us how we really are, stripped of

pretence, (ii) give an interpretation of what we would like to be, and (iii) insist there are *other* legitimate hopes and aspirations.⁹⁶ What is the basis for this second-order, “post-immanent” position? Would it preclude some kind of formal reconstruction of implicit normative presuppositions? Or would that be ideological? If we accept Geuss’s distinction between philosophical ethics and contextual criticism, Walzer’s attempt to bridge the gap between the two leaves fundamental questions unanswered. Perhaps a standpoint “outside ethics” is better suited to immanent ideology criticism.

A real alternative to ideological political philosophy

As discussed in Chapter 5, Geuss favours the political “realism” of what he variously calls “contextualist”, “internal”, “immanent”, or “Socratic” criticism. This is broadly characterised as concrete, historical, critical analysis of actual socio-economic conditions and institutions subject to the contingencies of on-going political conflict, and shifting cultural values. This position is posited over and against “moralistic”, “transcendental”, “idealist” criticism, which is based on a systematic normative framework of “philosophical ethics” consisting of universal, abstract principles whose moral rightness is determined independently of empirical historical socio-economic and political considerations (for instance, it could be determined in virtue of transcendental pre-conditions or pragmatic presuppositions). Without repeating too much from Chapter 5, I would like to follow up Geuss’s argument that transcendent criticism conceals ideology, by analysing his case for construing ideology criticism as a “Socratic” form of criticism (as derived from his various discussions of this form). Geuss’s distinction between “Socratic criticism” and “philosophical ethics”, and his advocacy of the former over the latter, suggests that the construal of ideology criticism as a “Socratic” form of criticism may help to overcome the weakness of Walzer’s interpretation, while avoiding the pitfalls of “philosophical ethics”, as practised by Kant and Rawls.

In his earlier work, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, Geuss re-affirms Horkheimer’s claim that critical theory, as a mode of *social* theory that involves agents *in* society reflecting *on* society, must be

included in its own object domain. Following the above Marxist-Hegelian insights into the dialectical structure of antinomies, Geuss supports Horkheimer's contention that a critical theory of society takes the form of a '*reflexive cognitive structure*', which must give an account of its contexts of origin and application.⁹⁷ It follows that ideology criticism, in this tradition of critical theory, must remain reflexively aware of the manner in, and extent to, which the standpoint of the critic is implicated and embedded in the ideologically compromised society it subjects to criticism. This reflexive need may be taken to motivate interpreting ideology criticism as a "Socratic" mode of criticism, where the critic is compelled to work from within the object domain without imposing her views.

Ideology criticism is intrinsically related to the central aim of critical theory which is 'to free us from coercion which is effective because of our lack of awareness thereof'.⁹⁸ The legitimacy of social institutions depends on their relation to the normative world-view of a group,⁹⁹ and coercive institutions can influence this world-view, thereby lending such coercion a false sense of legitimacy.¹⁰⁰ Geuss writes that critical theory 'aims to get out of this self-reinforcing bondage by inducing *self-reflection*':¹⁰¹ to get agents to *recognise* such self-imposed bondage so that coercion loses its objectivity. He attributes to Habermas the insight that critical theory 'dissolves self-generated "objectivity"' - making the subject aware of underlying conflicts that may be traced back through the genesis of her ideas.¹⁰² Geuss affirms what he calls Adorno's 'historicist' 'contextualist' commitment to 'internal criticism', which insists that ideology criticism must first identify the frustrations of particular societies or agents, before going on to reconstruct their tacit epistemic principles in order to point out inconsistencies and implications.¹⁰³ This gives further impetus to the case for construing ideology criticism as "Socratic criticism".

In *Morality, Culture, History* Geuss develops a broader argument against social criticism practiced on the basis of some prior, transcendent framework, or "philosophical ethics", which he associates with a dominant mode of liberal political philosophy which is oriented around the normative frameworks of Kant and Rawls. Against the widely held view that social criticism presupposes a prior account of

one's own moral standards, Geuss argues 'this neglects a long-established alternative method of *internal* criticism' (the "*more socratico*"). He then gives a succinct explanation of the term:

As a "Socratic" critic I take over "for the sake of argument" the normative conceptions of the person (or society) in question, without necessarily affirming them or being committed to them myself. The criticism consists in pointing out internal inconsistencies and contradictions in these normative conceptions (and associated material)... The Hegelian demand that criticism must be "internal" is a development of this Socratic procedure, and Critical Theory is a further development of this same general approach. The proponents of a Critical Theory explicitly claim that what they are trying to do is criticise contemporary society by confronting it with its own terms.¹⁰⁴

In favour of "Socratic criticism" and against "philosophical ethics", Geuss cites Nietzsche's claim that 'the taste for the unconditional is the worst of all possible tastes... the taste of slaves who understand only tyranny'.¹⁰⁵ "Socratic criticism" avoids imposing prescriptive norms by staking the position of criticism on the normative conceptions of the interlocutor. Socratic criticism need not adduce norms to which the critic is committed, provided the interlocutor is.¹⁰⁶

One may argue, on this basis, that a contextualist, hermeneutic style of criticism, reflectively adjusted to the contingent object domain in which it is embedded, lies closer to Enlightenment ideals of autonomy and humanity; and that it is less susceptible to the objectifying, instrumental tendencies of Enlightenment than the transcendent method of criticism inherited from the Church, which pays no attention to the social and political, material basis of the unconditional obligations it puts out. Moreover, to fail to reflect on how one's standpoint is determined by what one opposes, is to perpetuate ideologies.

In challenging Rawls's "applied ethics" approach to political philosophy, Geuss argues:

It is no coincidence that deflecting attention away from actually existing inequality was overlooked by a theory that completely overlooked historical social and economic institutions... The danger in using highly abstractive methods is that one will succeed merely in generalising one's own local prejudices and repackaging them as demands of reason.¹⁰⁷

Geuss rejects the assumption that some *prior* normative framework of philosophical ethics, which prescribes how humans should act, is needed for social and political criticism. He argues that ethics cannot be studied without reference to history, sociology, economics, psychology, and so on. "Real politics" must be *immanent*, in the sense that it starts with how social, political and economic institutions *actually* operate in society.¹⁰⁸ Geuss claims that, 'theories like that of Rawls are nonstarters, except of course as potential ideological interventions'.¹⁰⁹

Political philosophy construed transcendently as an attempt to 'render shared "ethical intuitions" consistent'¹¹⁰ abstracts from actual social behaviour. In doing so, it merely re-formulates principles of post-Christian, Western European "common sense", which in turn functions ideologically to obscure mediating influences of the conflict and power that determine "common sense", and reinforces entrenched prejudice as if it is warranted by universal rational intuition. By drawing attention away from the central issue of power in politics, Rawls's work functions ideologically.

To understand the political world by appealing to "our" intuitions of what is just is to divert attention from where those intuitions came from, how they're maintained, what interest they serve and the possibility that these intuitions themselves may be ideological.¹¹¹

If, as Geuss maintains (and I agree), transcendent criticism, or social criticism construed as a form of "philosophical ethics", serves an ideological function, and immanent criticism, or "Socratic criticism", avoids this, then it is worth considering whether ideology criticism is best construed as a form of "Socratic criticism". I noted earlier that Hegel needs, and presupposes, a standpoint of absolute knowing that breaks with the immanent self-conception of his dialectical method of analysis. Marx presupposes that the capitalist present is pregnant with its communist future, which also oversteps immanent constraints. If direct, transcendent criticism conceals ideology, then surely it is even more ideologically problematic to smuggle in external normative conceptions under the guise of immanent critique? Later, I argue that these external presuppositions may not be intrinsically and ideologically problematic, if the critic acknowledges the break from an immanent perspective. But first, I look at "Socratic criticism" in more detail, in the following chapter, to see if such a construal of

ideology criticism might avoid the ideological problems Geuss attributes to its counterpart,

“philosophical ethics”. Socrates is supposed to be wholly absorbed in the view of his interlocutor. He

claims ignorance and makes no normative commitments of his own. The implications of this show

why such strictly immanent criticism is not sufficient for ideology criticism.

¹ Adorno, T. 1974: §152. Adorno compares the dialectic to a mercenary, as we shall see later on in Chapter 7.

² I use Miller’s translation of the *Science of Logic*, which distinguishes the “genuine” and “spurious” infinite, where *echte* and *schlechte Unendlichkeit* are often translated otherwise as “good” and “bad”.

³ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 2.

⁴ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 2.

⁵ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 30.

⁶ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 3. This argument prefigures Horkheimer and Adorno’s critique of instrumental rationality.

⁷ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 15.

⁸ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 5.

⁹ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 10.

¹⁰ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 11.

¹¹ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 13.

¹² Hegel, GWF. 1977: 18.

¹³ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 18.

¹⁴ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 19.

¹⁵ Actuality is a technical term for Hegel, which means that something is one with its concept and hence as it ought to be (cf. Rosen, 1982: 79).

¹⁶ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 22-23.

¹⁷ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 37.

¹⁸ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 36.

¹⁹ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 43.

²⁰ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 43.

²¹ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 130.

²² Hegel, GWF. 1976: 132.

²³ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 135.

²⁴ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 136.

²⁵ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 132.

²⁶ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 139. See also 144: ‘Holding the infinite apart from the finite gives it a one-sided character that constitutes its finitude’ - a problem, for example, that often besets workers’ unions in their negotiations with management. And again, in 146: ‘The finite is not sublated by the infinite as a power existing outside of it [my emphasis]; on the contrary, its infinity consists in sublating its own self.’

²⁷ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 137.

²⁸ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 142.

²⁹ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 143.

³⁰ Hegel, GWF, in Rosen, M, 1982: 108.

³¹ Rosen, M, 1982: 77 – 78.

³² Hegel, GWF. 1976: 137.

³³ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 141 [my emphasis]

³⁴ Hegel, GWF in Rosen, M. 1982: 78.

³⁵ Rosen, M. 1982: 102.

³⁶ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 144.

³⁷ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 149.

³⁸ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 149.

³⁹ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 147.

⁴⁰ Hegel, GWF. 1976: 142.

⁴¹ Rosen, M, 1982: 49.

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- ⁴² Rosen, M, 1982: 49.
- ⁴³ Rosen, M, 1982: 39.
- ⁴⁴ Rosen, M, 1982: 42.
- ⁴⁵ Rosen, M, 1982: 50.
- ⁴⁶ Marx, K. 1975: 207.
- ⁴⁷ Marx, K. 1975: 207.
- ⁴⁸ Marx, K. 1975: 207.
- ⁴⁹ Marx, K. 1975: 208.
- ⁵⁰ Marx, K. 1975: 208. Recall Hegel's attribution of the latter, external approach to Kant and Fichte, above.
- ⁵¹ Marx, K. 1975: 208. Note that this characterisation of the role of the critic may be construed as *maieusis*. I will deal more explicitly with this notion, with reference to Socrates and Adorno, in the following chapter.
- ⁵² Marx, K. 1975: 208.
- ⁵³ By way of example, Marx points to the modern political state, which 'consistently assumes that reason has been realised and just as consistently... becomes embroiled at every point in a conflict between its ideal vocation and its actually existing premises.' (1975: 208). Reason is already at work in the modern state but falls short where the rationality of social conditions is *taken for granted* - hence the value of reflection. The immanent critic does not set out the contours of some future state that would be directly opposed to what exists at present. Rather, the legitimating assumption that political conditions are *already* rationally consistent gives the immanent critic leverage to point out underlying contradictions. 'The internecine conflict within the political state enables us to infer the social truth... the particular form and nature of the political state contains all social struggles... Hence the critic not only can but must concern himself with these political questions.' (1975: 208).
- ⁵⁴ Marx, K, 1975: 209.
- ⁵⁵ Marx, K. 1970: 46.
- ⁵⁶ Marx, K. 1970: 48.
- ⁵⁷ As Foucault, for example, assumes it does (see Chapter 2).
- ⁵⁸ Marx, K. 1970: 51.
- ⁵⁹ Marx, K. 1970: 65.
- ⁶⁰ Marx, K. 1970: 180.
- ⁶¹ Marx, K. 1975: 336 (what one may call an example of anthropomorphic cathexis).
- ⁶² Contra the 'Socratic optimism' of the belief that truth is intrinsically good.
- ⁶³ Benhabib, S. 1986: 33.
- ⁶⁴ From a different angle, Seyla Benhabib argues that Marx follows Hegel in presuming an external (not immanent) ideal of unified ethical life. Although he does not think this is already realised as Hegel does, Marx nonetheless presumes such teleological historical progression. Immanent criticism, alone, does not warrant such assumptions (Benhabib, S. 1986: 38-42). The value of such criticism depends on the practice in which it is engaged and cannot be *presumed*.
- ⁶⁵ Hegel, GWF. 1977: 13.
- ⁶⁶ Walzer, M. 1987: 36-38.
- ⁶⁷ Walzer, M. 1987: 7.
- ⁶⁸ Walzer, M. 1987: 11.
- ⁶⁹ Walzer, M. 1987: 16.
- ⁷⁰ Walzer, M. 1989: ix.
- ⁷¹ Walzer, M. 1987: 19.
- ⁷² Walzer, M. 1989: ix.
- ⁷³ Walzer, M. 1987: 55.
- ⁷⁴ Walzer, M. 1987: 21.
- ⁷⁵ Walzer, M. 1987: 17.
- ⁷⁶ Geuss, R. 2004: 39.
- ⁷⁷ Walzer, M. 1987: 21.
- ⁷⁸ Walzer, M. 1987: 64.
- ⁷⁹ Lenin, VI in Walzer, N. 1987: 63.
- ⁸⁰ Gramsci, A in Walzer, M. 1987: 41. See also Lukács, G. 1972: 4: the ultimate objective 'is a reality which has to be achieved' but, 'positing it above and beyond the immediate advantage does not mean abstracting from reality or attempting to impose ideals on reality.' Rather, 'it entails the knowledge and transformation into action of those forces already at work *within* social reality – which are directed toward the realisation of the

ultimate objective...The Marxist theory of class struggle... changes the transcendent objective of Hegel's conceptual system into an immanent one... The means are not alien to the goal; instead they bring the goal closer to *self*-realisation.'

⁸¹ Walzer, M. 1987: 22.

⁸² Walzer, M. 1987: 41.

⁸³ Walzer, M. 1987: 21.

⁸⁴ Walzer, M. 1987: 48. This is ideologically disingenuous, since these same standards also obscure oppression. Walzer criticises Marxists' use of the notion of false consciousness here for interpreting ideology as a collective mistake and 'failing to treat socialism in socially validated terms'. He goes on, 'Criticism does not require us to step back from society as a whole but only to step away from certain sorts of power relationships within society.' (1987: 60). But false consciousness is not the kind of 'collective mistake' Walzer implies. It is a correct representation of a false (contradictory) state of affairs (an *objective* delusion) whose socially validated terms Marx pays a great deal of attention towards. Walzer could take greater cognisance of false consciousness to see how the abstraction of criticism from power plays into his own problematic of internal criticism.

⁸⁵ Walzer, M. 1987: 30.

⁸⁶ Walzer, M. 1987: 59 [my emphasis].

⁸⁷ Walzer, M. 1987: 59 [my emphasis].

⁸⁸ Walzer, M. 1987: 61 [my emphasis].

⁸⁹ Walzer, M. 1989: 22.

⁹⁰ Walzer, M. 1989: 26 [my emphasis].

⁹¹ Walzer, M. 1989: 75.

⁹² Walzer, M. 1987: 65 [my emphasis]. And, uncritically, in 1989, x: 'Success in criticism has more to do with the place and standing of the critic than with his theory of society or political ideology.' Furthermore, Critical Theory, he argues, is too removed and 'theoretically difficult' (10); unlike the straightforward, self-evident matter of detaching a critical standpoint from that, from which one must not be detached.

⁹³ Walzer, M. 1987: 83 [my emphasis].

⁹⁴ Walzer, M. 1989: 230.

⁹⁵ Walzer, M. 1989: 230.

⁹⁶ Walzer, M. 1989: 231-232.

⁹⁷ Geuss, R. 1981: 56.

⁹⁸ Geuss, R. 1981: 58.

⁹⁹ Geuss, R. 1981: 59.

¹⁰⁰ Geuss, R. 1981: 60.

¹⁰¹ Geuss, R. 1981: 61.

¹⁰² Geuss, R. 1981: 62.

¹⁰³ Geuss, R. 1981: 63.

¹⁰⁴ Geuss, R. 1999: 72.

¹⁰⁵ Geuss, R. 1999: 172. Nietzsche, F. 1990: 31.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that Adorno, in 'For Post-Socratics' (1974: §44), cites the same quote from Nietzsche, and connects this insight to dialectical criticism, remarking that, 'The point should not be to have absolutely correct, irrefutable, watertight cognitions – for they inevitably boil down to tautologies – but insights which cause the question of their justness to judge itself...' [not to seek obedience but understanding]. 'Hegel's... whole procedure...[of immanent critique] transfers the concept of mediation from formal connections to the substance of the object itself, thereby attempting to overcome the difference between the latter and an external thought that mediates it.'

¹⁰⁷ Geuss, R. 2004: 36-39.

¹⁰⁸ Geuss, R. 2008: 9.

¹⁰⁹ Geuss, R. 2008: 94.

¹¹⁰ Geuss, R. 2008: 6-7.

¹¹¹ Geuss, R. 2008: 89-90.

Chapter 7: After Aporia: the ideology of immanent criticism

There are two parts to this chapter. Part I deals with the characterisation of immanent criticism as “Socratic method”, or *elenchus*, which Geuss contrasts against transcendental criticism. I argue that if immanent ideology criticism is truly internal, then it is self-implicating and thus ideological. Second, if the critic makes a transcendent normative judgment, then it is self-exempting and ideological. Finally, if Socratic criticism is genuinely *aporetic*, then it is inadequate for emancipatory criticism. Although Socrates uses *elenchus* to provide support for his own moral doctrines, standard *elenchus*, which merely aims to expose inconsistency in the standpoint of the interlocutor, cannot justify its claim to provide a constructive proof for any particular normative conclusion. A moral good cannot follow directly from *aporia*¹.

Part II explains how Adorno identifies a problem with immanent social criticism which is structurally identical to the problem with *elenchus* that I identify in Part I. I question a dominant misconception that Adorno favours immanent criticism, as a method of social criticism in general, and as a method of ideology criticism in particular. On the contrary, Adorno’s ideas about immanent criticism evolved in response to a series of historical and theoretical problems that demonstrated to him an inextricable complicity between immanent social norms and authoritarian structures of domination. Adorno abandons hope of finding any emancipatory rationale at work in society. As he becomes increasingly sceptical about the emancipatory potential of immanent criticism, he begins to think that social criticism – especially ideology criticism - must break definitively with our distorted conceptualisation of experience. But he does not simply become a transcendent critic. He is equally wary of the problem I have identified as one of “transcendent self-exemption”, and is critical of a disjunctive contrast between immanence and transcendence. I argue, however, that his radical negativism leaves no room for criticism of ideology.

Part I: Socrates - the Missing Moral Premise of *Maieusis*

Immanent criticism and *elenchus*

As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, Geuss explicitly identifies this method of argument with Socratic *elenchus*. He contrasts what he calls the “*more socratico*” of “internal criticism” with the “hopelessness” of the transcendental Kantian ambition to discover reflexive, absolute normative grounds for universal ethical judgments.² Geuss considers the ‘Hegelian demand that criticism must be “internal”’ to be ‘a development of this Socratic procedure’, and also regards Critical Theory as ‘a further development of this same general approach’, in that it tries to ‘criticise contemporary society by confronting it with its own contradictions’.³

‘As a “Socratic” critic,’ he writes, ‘I take over “for the sake of the argument” the normative conceptions of the person (or society in question), without necessarily affirming them or being committed to them myself. The criticism consists in pointing out internal inconsistencies and contradictions in these normative conceptions (and associated material).’⁴ Criticism can be immanent, in the *maieutic* sense, if the object is pregnant with its goal.⁵ The Marxist critic, for example, draws emancipatory potential out of already existing socio-economic norms, conditions and historical tendencies, and identifies incipient rationality in given situations, without putting forward her own, independent prescriptions, to assist the birth of communism from capitalism.

Just as contemporary social theorists use the metaphor of *maieusis* to contrast immanent criticism with transcendent criticism, so Plato, depicting Socrates as aiming at the moral improvement of his fellows by means of *elenchus*, contrasts this method with argumentative “admonition”. According to Richard Robinson,

Admonition includes more ordinary methods of moral education, such as rebuke, persuasion, harangue and advice. Plato says that practitioners deliberately prefer the use of the *elenchus* to admonition.⁶

Admonition badgers the agent with prejudiced ideals. *Elenchus* draws on her existing opinions to reveal inconsistencies blocked in impasse to thereby clear the way for a more adequate position to emerge from her own point of view.

If, as Geuss claims, ideology criticism is a “Socratic” mode of criticism which elicits normative judgments from the standpoint of the interlocutor without “imposing” any prior, or external, normative criteria or beliefs, then the standpoint of the ideology critic is itself implicated in ideology. But if we look carefully at Socratic *elenchus*, we see that Socrates aims beyond *aporia* towards some good, in which case his claim of ignorance, and his renunciation of interference under the *maieutic* characterisation of *elenchus*, is somewhat deceptive.

From false beliefs to ignorance?

The exact nature of the *elenchus* is subject to a great deal of debate, in particular concerning whether it is a positive method, leading to knowledge, or a negative method used solely to refute false claims to knowledge. Richard Robinson claims Socrates, in Plato’s early dialogues, proceeds as follows: first he asks his interlocutor a general question, usually ethical. In return he receives an answer, a primary proposition. He then asks secondary, seemingly irrelevant and disconnected questions, which elicit seemingly obvious and inescapable answers. Lastly, he *demonstrates* an *inconsistency* between the primary proposition and these secondary beliefs such that *the interlocutor* feels he must agree that his original assertion has been *refuted*.⁷

The sureness of the refutation gives the impression that Socrates possesses knowledge about the subject on which he refutes others. This, however, he invariably denies.⁸

Gregory Vlastos adds that although Socrates claims he is ignorant, he uses *elenchus* to prove the *falsehood* of the proposition which was refuted as inconsistent, to support his own moral doctrines.⁹

Three distinct conclusions are drawn from the argument. i) Socrates demonstrates inconsistency. ii) The interlocutor interprets this as a refutation of her primary claim. iii) Socrates claims this proves a converse claim. The first conclusion is valid. Then we run into problems. First, (i) does not entail (ii).

Second, (iii) does not follow. Most commentary focuses on the second problem - that the negative refutation (ii) does not allow for a constructive conclusion (iii). Vlastos argues Plato had already realised this latter problem by the time of the *Meno*:

False answer P is eliminated because P contradicts Q, and Q is what the answerer himself accepts as true... [but] how far does this take [him]? Only as far as convicting him of error. *Elenchus* is good for this and only this. It does not begin to bring him to the truth he seeks.¹⁰

Elenchus may be thought of as an unconstructive, *negative* method of argument that aims to refute false claims to knowledge but fails to prove anything true. Ronald McKinney argues for instance that Socrates stands accused of being no better than his Sophistic rivals in demonstrating ignorance since he fails to offer an alternative solution and only seems interested in winning arguments, in refuting anything at any cost.¹¹

It is surprising that much of the early debate oversteps the first problem and focuses instead on the point that (iii) is invalid – that Socrates' refutation of the primary proposition does not allow him to make a further claim, usually about some moral good. Strictly speaking, if (ii) were valid, (iii) should follow: if *P* is false and *Q* is the converse of *P*, then *Q* is true. If 'bachelors are not unmarried men' is false, then 'bachelors are unmarried men' is true. Perhaps the reason commentators have focused on this second problem is that moral judgments seldom break down into such cut and dry arguments. If, however, Socrates were able to secure agreement from his interlocutor to a disjunctive distinction between the primary proposition and his own moral claim (say, 'torture is either always good or always bad'), then (iii) would follow (ii).

Even so, even if we agree that (iii) does not follow (ii), perhaps the refutation of the primary claim is not just negative but may be construed as an attempt to get closer to the truth by eliminating false candidates. Aristotle objected to *elenchus* on grounds that not only does it fail to appeal to primary, necessary, self-evident truths required by demonstrative argument, but, merely proceeding from the opinion of the interlocutor, it does not even appeal to what is *commonly* believed. The secondary

premises are also not logically secured within the argument, but are put forward to the interlocutor and are dependent on her agreement.¹² Aristotle passes over a further problem here that Socrates' input is disguised not only by the appeal to self-evidence, but by the attribution of claims he originally suggested to the interlocutor. Since the interlocutor accedes to these claims of her own accord, the suggestion that Socrates smuggles in his own opinions behind those of the interlocutor, under the cover of apparently consensual dialogue, does not yet hold (though I will soon show how he does do so). One may object to Aristotle however, on the basis that moral issues are seldom settled demonstratively, and that where they are, to proceed from people's actual opinions on these matters, in order to clear up confused inconsistencies, is a good place to start.

The first problem - that the primary proposition can't be refuted just by inconsistency - seems more damaging for *elenchus*. Robinson maintains that Socrates 'even implies at times that there is no refutation at all, of anybody, or by anybody of anything.'¹³ But although *elenchus* does not evince a direct refutation, Robinson argues, it does elicit an indirect refutation by reduction to absurdity, showing that the thesis entails consequences the interlocutor is likely to find repugnant. He claims the aim of *elenchus* is to,

Change ignorant men from the state of falsely supposing that they know to the state of recognising that they do not know... which is an important first step to knowledge since it arouses the desire to know... it does not actually increase knowledge, but only prepares the ground for it.¹⁴

Aporia, from paradox, leaves one certain that one's contradictory position cannot be maintained but unsure of where to turn. The aim of *elenchus*, writes Robinson is, 'to take men out of their dogmatic slumbers into genuine intellectual curiosity.'¹⁵ On this reading, although Socrates neither demonstrates, nor refutes, a positive claim with *elenchus*, nevertheless, *aporia*, following from the demonstration of inconsistency, is still constructive, positive or good in some sense.

Bringing the interlocutor to a state of *aporia*, to provisionally suspend judgment on certain preconceived ideas that the critic has reduced to absurdity, can clear the way for more rationally consistent, cogent judgments through conscious reflection. *Aporia* arises from the fact that what has been taken for granted often teems with underlying contradiction. In sympathy with this view, Vlastos writes that Socrates' aim is not to tell us what is true, but to demonstrate what commitments are implied by certain opinions.¹⁶ Since we pick up information and experience in various, often disconnected, situations many of our beliefs fail to cohere. *Elenchus* leaves it up to us what to decide, but on a sounder footing. The rational task of criticism is not to present a set of invulnerable facts, but to reflect on existing problems with how and what we think. But Vlastos disagrees with Robinson's claim that Socrates does not try to refute his interlocutor. Even though all that is proved is inconsistency amongst various premises, Socrates concludes that the primary proposition is proved false, and the aim of the method is to give this impression.¹⁷

Vlastos believes this explains why Socrates, sensing the fallibility of this method, disavowed all knowledge, even knowledge secured by *elenchus*.¹⁸ One may suggest Socrates intends this humble gesture to be interpreted ironically, to help disguise the fact that his method does not actually refute the primary proposition. However, Michael Frede argues that the claim to ignorance is genuine. To interpret *elenchus* as a proof leading to the conclusion that the primary proposition is refuted, makes nonsense of the purported aim of the early dialogues: to dumb the interlocutor into a state of *aporia*, where she can't yet decide what to think about the subject under discussion¹⁹ - and therefore has to re-evaluate what she has taken for granted in light of the absurd consequences with her position. Socrates does not wish to admonish his opponent with facts of moral goodness, nor refute her point of view. Rather, he wishes to demonstrate absurd consequences, and the contradictions that follow from it, and so to suspend judgment on the issue. How does this get us any closer to moral goodness?²⁰

As stated at the outset, there is much debate over whether Socrates, or Plato, was aware of this inconsistency in the early dialogues - between the negative aim of *aporia* and claim of ignorance, on one hand, and the ostensibly positive task of seeking authoritative moral ideals, on the other. Socrates optimistically assumes that it is good to expose rational error in this way, but no such claim about the good is justified from his immanent standpoint, as we can see if his method is used against him: i) Socrates claims ignorance, ii) Socrates claims it is good to establish rational error as he does. So, Socrates claims to know nothing and to know a good, which is absurd. Note the argument does not establish whether Socrates is ignorant, or whether Socrates knows a good. It merely demonstrates that Socrates has made two inconsistent claims.

Perhaps Socrates is unaware of this inconsistency in his position, or perhaps he feigns ignorance or pretends to refute a proposition when he knows he has merely identified inconsistency. Whatever he thought he was doing here, he uses a more secure method of argument in the later dialogues to progress beyond absurd *aporia* to more emphatic normative conclusions. Whether or not Socrates or Plato were aware of the shortcomings of *elenchus* in the early dialogues, it is worth considering that Socrates' claim to ignorance and the pretence of refutation by virtue of inconsistency together help to disguise his own opinions and the agenda behind the opinions of his interlocutor, under the cover of consensual dialogue.

The Socratic critic guides the hapless interlocutor to an ambush through a passage of seemingly innocuous, yet secretly interconnected, propositions. The claim to ignorance allows the Socratic critic to disguise incoherence as proof, inconsistency as refutation, and to obscure the critic's agenda, role and normative commitments in the outcome. The objective mask of *elenchus* helps to evade critical retaliation and accountability. As Nietzsche notes of Socrates, 'his nature is also full of concealment, of ulterior motives, and of underground currents.'²¹

To recall the problem of "post-immanent transcendence" from the previous chapter, the *maieutic* approach of immanent ideology criticism is not to bring in outside concerns and opinions, but to

reveal to the interlocutor what she already knows but has failed in some sense to recognise.

However, *maieusis* fails to account for the transformative, emancipatory function of the critic.

Aporia is not valuable in and of itself. But if the critic directs the interlocutor towards a specific end with the critical process, then a standpoint is assumed which is not wholly immanently derived. Identifying inconsistent principles amongst established norms and beliefs serves as a valuable starting point for critical engagement with de-contested ideological pre-conceptions, but the emancipatory social critic's aims extend further than this.

If the critic takes more than an immanent standpoint, but successfully pretends to go no further than an immanent standpoint, then she is attempting to exempt her position from critical interrogation, obscuring social and economic conditions that mediate it. This is especially dangerous if we suppose, dialectically, that the critic's standpoint is shaped and determined by its relation to that to which it is opposed – i.e. social relations of domination and structural/material conditions of oppression. Ostensibly “immanent” social criticism, by failing to acknowledge and address this aspect of criticism, may effectively serve as an insidious, fresh point of transmission for the function of the original ideology. Drawing on agents' *own* norms and processes of cognition may prove effective for ideology criticism, but this subtle method of persuasion may prove equally functional for ideological processes by obscuring the critic's aim, role and standpoint.

If the critic's therapeutic aim is to empower the agent by guiding her own emancipation such that she brings herself to a specific conclusion by her free will and rational cognition, then it is crucial that the critic also stands aside to leave the agent space to think for herself.²² The tension in this goal relates to a pedagogical dilemma with which philosophers from Plato to Kant, to Adorno have attempted to grapple: to actively guide someone to rational maturity, on the one hand, it is necessary, on the other, that one does so in such a way that she arrives there on her own. Ideology emerges in *elenchus* where the rift between agent and critic is obscured - where the critic's act of ventriloquy veils her influence over the views of the agent that emerge. The immanent critic may

well dismiss the abstract moral absolutism of transcendent critique, as Geuss does, for 'generalising... local prejudices and repackaging them as demands of reason',²³ but to construe ideology criticism purely in terms of the "*more socratico*" may cloak certain presuppositions under a mystifying "veil of (Socratic) ignorance" only to repackage admonition and prejudice as a consequence of inconsistency in the interlocutor's position.

Part II: Adorno - Objectivity Beyond Reflection

"Knowledge for its own sake" -- that is the last snare laid by morality...;²⁴ A thing that is explained ceases to concern us—What did the God mean who gave the advice, "Know thyself!" Did it perhaps mean "Cease to be concerned about thyself! Become objective!" — And Socrates?—And the "scientific man"?²⁵

The second part of this chapter takes issue with a dominant misconception that Adorno construes critical social theory (and ideology criticism) as immanent criticism. I draw on a number of readings of Adorno, together with passages from his later work, which indicate, to the contrary, that he came to reject immanent criticism in favour of a radically negative form of Utopian transcendent criticism.

However I stop short of the conclusion that Adorno reverses his earlier position on immanent criticism. Adorno does not reject immanent criticism in the manner of an abstract, transcendent negation. Rather, he begins to find the strictly "internal" interpretation of immanent criticism increasingly problematic, realising, for example, how this obscures essential evaluative, transformative aspects of social criticism in an unmediated, potentially ideological fashion. He is thus critical of similar limitations with immanent criticism to those identified with Socratic criticism above. In response, Adorno interprets the distinction between immanent and transcendent criticism dialectically, taking into account the determination of criticism by its relationship with its opposed immanent standpoint, and its underlying conditions. However, I argue that Adorno's radical negativism does not address the problem of self-implication successfully.

Adorno as an immanent critic

It is with good reason that Adorno is usually interpreted as an exponent of immanent criticism in the Marxist-Hegelian tradition. McCarney for instance claims that for Horkheimer and Adorno, “dialectical social theory” is, necessarily, “critique” in the mode of “immanence”²⁶ In support of the view one may note that Adorno writes in *Against Epistemology*, for example, that, ‘Dialectic’s very procedure is immanent.’²⁷ and then cites Hegel’s argument in *Science of Logic*, referred to in the previous chapter, that ‘the refutation must not come from the outside... the system in question... [in a way that is] inconsistent with it’ (primary, direct negation); rather, ‘genuine refutation must penetrate the power of the opponent and meet him on the ground of his strength’.²⁸ In dialectical criticism the standard of criticism must not be externally imposed on the object, but must in some sense arise within it. The immanent critic presumes existing reality contains reference to normative ideals, which can serve as a meaningful basis to assess reality’s rationality, and to confront reality with those ideals.²⁹

What does it mean to “confront reality with its ideals”? The idea behind this is that the shape of society - the object of social criticism – determines the shape of particular normative ideals by which that society may be evaluated. For Horkheimer, ideology criticism is central to the task of pointing out where society falls short on its collective ideals. Ideologies are not entirely false, but are only illusory relative to a dogmatic form of life, and they at least stand testament to the aspiration that reality *should* conform to normative ideals. Thus ideology critics should not dismiss such ideologies but should unmask their illusory aspect by pointing to gaps between reality and its ideals. To this extent Horkheimer characterises immanent ideology criticism in *maieutic* terms. Adorno initially favours such an interpretation of Critical Theory, which should aim ‘to expose the rift between social reality and the values it posits’,³⁰ by targeting, ‘liberal society’s pretensions to freedom and equality’.³¹ Immanent criticism, he writes, ‘takes seriously the principle that it is not ideology itself which is untrue, but rather its pretension to correspond to reality. Immanent criticism of intellectual

and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp... the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension.³²

Noting that Adorno stresses the importance of social criticism which 'judges the object "in its own right"',³³ Gillian Rose cites the use of irony as an argumentative device in *Minima Moralia* as an example of immanent criticism. According to Rose, Adorno's "melancholy science" follows Nietzsche's "gay science" in deploying ironic inversion as an *immanent* procedure to deflate false claims of legitimation. Adorno uses ironic inversion to point to the perverse outcomes of accepted normative principles without making a moralistic judgment. The essay titles of *Minima Moralia* for example, slightly alter and invert well-known phrases to invite re-assessment of their meanings. Irony 'takes the objective idea of a work and confronts it with norms it itself has crystallised'.³⁴ Irony shows that: 'such it claims to be, but such it is.'³⁵ Adorno criticises morality in a similar way to Nietzsche who pretends to be an a-moralist, rejecting the world's moral distinctions and sometimes endorsing what the world disapproves, 'to expose the sheer falsity of the world for what it is'.³⁶ 'Anti-morality', writes Adorno, 'in rejecting what is immoral in morality, inherits morality's deepest concerns.'³⁷ He praises 'that tradition of bourgeois thinkers who since the Renaissance have revolted against the untruth of society and have cynically played its reality as an "ideal" against its ideal, and by the critical confrontation have helped that other truth which they mock most fiercely as its untruth.'³⁸ To portray existing social conditions as ideal emphasises the distance between capitalist society and its legitimating principles, without the need to justify a further set of normative standards outside of the given social context. Rose claims,

Pitting reality against its ideals is a way to criticise both the ideals and the reality without assuming a different fixed reality or a dogmatic standpoint. Adorno is part of this tradition too.³⁹

Transcendent normative principles function ideologically where we treat them as basic or given and hence exempt from further critical scrutiny into their determination by prevailing social

circumstances of oppression. Adorno uses irony as an immanent method of criticism just as Marx gives an immanent criticism of bourgeois ideology. Rather than admonishing an opponent with counter-productive opposition, Adorno often ironically pushes ideology to the point where it reveals itself as such. However he is not a consistent immanent critic, since he comes to believe that 'irony's medium, the difference between ideology and reality, has disappeared.'⁴⁰

Adorno's criticism of immanent criticism

The culture industry assimilates working class consciousness

Adorno identifies two main problems with immanent social criticism. First, as explained earlier, he and other Frankfurt School theorists feel that the proletariat has assimilated into the structures of late capitalist society.⁴¹ (Marx explicitly denied the normative dimensions of his own ideas.⁴² He attributed transformative potential to the revolutionary standpoint of the proletariat). However, by the 1940's the Frankfurt School Critical Theorists find it increasingly problematic to attribute to the ideologically assimilated proletariat an incipient form of rationality gesturing towards immanent emancipatory ends. They feel that the proletariat as a class-conscious subject of progressive historical transformation has effectively disintegrated⁴³. Adorno thinks the standpoint of the proletariat is thoroughly compromised by structures of domination. The culture industry, he believes, makes politically significant development of proletarian class consciousness so unlikely that critical theory can no longer be oriented towards their historical situation.⁴⁴ Immanent criticism cannot rely on the emancipatory potential of proletarian class consciousness in late capitalist consumer society.

Immanent criticism supports positivist ideology

The second problem is more complex and will be examined in some detail. The central issue here is that Horkheimer and Adorno believe the emancipatory function of liberal, enlightenment rationality has been inverted. Our scientific way of thinking, which in the past has been used to dominate the world around us, has rebounded upon us.⁴⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of instrumental

reason argues that domination persists even in forms of reason that are taken as neutral or simply methodological. All rationality so far has been entangled in domination.⁴⁶ The problem for the immanent critic is that she relies on a way of thinking that is intrinsically oppressive. To complicate matters further, the identification of this problem emerges from *within* the tradition of which it is critical. It would be inconsistent for Horkheimer and Adorno to criticise enlightenment rationality outright, since this criticism is indebted to that which it would dismiss. Thus the criticism of enlightenment rationality by means of such rationality must also be examined critically. Adorno, for one, is especially cautious not to dismiss the emancipatory potential of enlightenment thinking.⁴⁷

The critique of instrumental reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* leads Adorno to recognise that immanent materialist ideology criticism is disillusioning in two senses, and ridding society of its illusory ideals debilitates criticism itself. First, immanent criticism shows how the self-conceptions of liberal, bourgeois, capitalist ideology fall short of its context of origin and application in concrete unfreedoms. Immanent criticism points to gaps between ideals and concrete oppression. Where hypostatised concepts and ideals are assumed to correspond directly to actuality, contradictions are exposed beneath the surface. Second, to recall discussion of the distinction between “bourgeois” and “positivist” ideology in Chapter 3, ideology criticism functions ideologically if it simply *annuls* bourgeois ideals. For example, an ironic, one-sided focus on the hypocrisy of liberal ideology may lead individuals to dismiss these ideals as naïve or out of touch with reality. But if these ideals are simply dismissed, to avoid hypocritical inconsistencies, and if the gap between ideals and reality closes, this leads to cynical resignation and acceptance of the seeming inevitability of the capitalist order. We are left with a society which aspires to a state of affairs characterised by systematic relations of domination which it both recognises and accepts. If immanent criticism has this effect, then it is complicit in the ideological function it opposes.

This disillusioning effect of ideology criticism may be attributed to its foundational principle of the material determination of ideological forms of consciousness. Whereas Horkheimer and Adorno see

Marx's materialist critique of political economy as an integrating medium of inter-disciplinary theory, they also recognise that the positive, specialised sciences are functionally integrated with instrumental structures of domination. As such, they turn Marxist materialist criticism of philosophy on its head by questioning the rational norms and precepts that *guide* empirical inquiry.

'Philosophy,' write Horkheimer and Adorno, 'is not synthesis, nor the fundamental science, nor even the executive science, but rather the effort to resist suggestion and the resolve toward intellectual and substantive freedom.'⁴⁸ Horkheimer cautions against Marx's faith in the emancipatory potential of technological development, noting he is not pessimistic about scientific progress, 'but it is true that neither the achievements of science by themselves, nor the advance in industrial method, are immediately identical with the real progress of mankind.'

Against the objectivising tendencies of the sciences, Horkheimer appeals to the philosophical aim of critical theory, 'to exercise particular control over all those factors of life which are generally held to be unconquerable forces or eternal laws.' He argues,

Discussions in philosophy are so much more radical and un-conciliatory than discussions in the sciences.... because it does not have a field of action marked out for it within the given order. This order of life, its hierarchy of values, is itself a problem for philosophy. While science is still able to refer to given data which point the way for it, philosophy must fall back on itself, upon its theoretical activity.⁴⁹

Horkheimer's point is that materialist criticism of liberal ideals and political economy becomes deterministic when construed in the dominant objectivising, positivist terms of modern scientific rationality. This calls for philosophical reflection on the structures of mediating rationality used to assess empirical evidence.

Horkheimer finds materialist criticism of ideology insufficient for the emancipatory function of social criticism, for an analogous reason to the problem with "Socratic criticism". Immanent reflection on the confrontation of concept and reality simply leads to paradoxical aporia. If the critic's task is just to describe inconsistencies, this leaves no space for evaluative judgment. This is insufficient for the

emancipatory purpose of productive social criticism. Moreover, if the critic brings additional normative commitments to bear on the matter, and these are smuggled through under the guise of immanence, these norms may function ideologically. To achieve a determinate negation of ideology, the critic should also reflect critically on the normative criteria that orient her criticism of ideology.

It is important to be cautious, as McCarney is, of the “scientistic” Marxism of the Second International, which interprets Marxist political economy as a primarily descriptive explanation of laws of history which ensure the downfall of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. This interpretation, McCarney argues, is inconsistent with Marx’s own ‘meta-theoretical reflections’.⁵⁰ Adorno’s criticism of positivistic interpretations of Marxist sociology and political economy may even be said to *recover* Marx’s philosophical reflections on the shortcoming of deterministic, descriptive bourgeois political economy. But whereas Marx attributes such blindness to underlying social relations, and to a consequence of the division of intellectual and practical labour, Adorno goes further with his philosophical criticism of positivist social science. He extends this criticism to the very dialectical structure of immanent criticism, ‘as a confrontation of concept and reality’.⁵¹

Positivist ideology, which drives the “scientistic” construal of Marxism for example, reflects a real ‘crisis of ideology critique’⁵², revealing that “disenchanted” late capitalist society has lost touch with its ideals. We are means to the ends of systems that were supposed to serve our ends. The gap between ideals and reality, which immanent criticism could exploit in order to gain leverage on its object, has closed up. For Adorno, neither ideology criticism, nor immanent criticism, is possible under late capitalist society, since reason itself functions oppressively.⁵³ Empiricist sociology duplicates what it observes instead of explaining.⁵⁴ Likewise, immanent criticism counters ideological forms of consciousness with objective descriptions of material reality, and thereby ‘devours itself, leaving behind what merely is, a closed system of immanence’.⁵⁵ The immanent critic’s aim, of not bringing in outside normative commitments, is symptomatic of a problem with modern reasoning.

Immanent criticism is expressive of identity-thinking

We see that the crisis of immanent criticism is due not only to the compromised standpoint of the proletariat in late capitalist modernity, but also due to the problem that emancipatory discourses, including immanent critique, are, Adorno claims, quickly assimilated ideologically through identity-thinking. Adorno explains that instrumental rationality subordinates all spheres of life to a logic of identity under the exchange principle that suppresses qualitative differences, thus limiting individual autonomy and meaningful social interaction. The norms of social criticism are shaped by this rationality, such that immanent ideology criticism today has a merely apologetic function. Criticism of the real in terms of its own ideals depends upon the problematic mode of reasoning in question, thereby contributing to the irrationalities it aims to expose.⁵⁶ Immanent criticism becomes 'itself an ideology', constantly 'in danger of acquiring a coercive character'.⁵⁷ Immanent ideology criticism contributes to the social irrationalities it once exposed, perpetuating the 'coercive logic of identity' that should be criticised.⁵⁸

To explain this line of argument, Adorno thinks (following Marx and Lukács) that all categories are objectified in capitalist society. The way we conceptualise experience shuts us off from the non-reified, particular qualitative properties that objects have. We describe social phenomena as if they just have the properties our concepts refer to, as if the object is captured by the concept that refers to it.⁵⁹ In commodity exchange, for example, incommensurable use-values are misrepresented as abstractly identical exchange-values. Non-identical and unequal relations between people are misconstrued as though they are identical and equal relations between things. Exchange-value appears as an inherent property of the commodity rather than a result of human labour. The social characteristics of labour are treated as objective characteristics of the products of labour, commodities.

In these examples, historical forms of exchange and social organisation appear natural.⁶⁰ As such, immanent criticism points at the gap between the reality and the concept, to offset prejudiced

identity-thinking, but also to show that society does not yet have the properties it *potentially could have*. Identity-thinking should not be rejected outright since it also gives leverage for social criticism.

Theory... must transform the concepts which it, as it were, brings from the outside into those which the object has by itself, into that which the object would itself like to be, and confront it with what it is.⁶¹

Materialist criticism (Horkheimer and Adorno's earlier approach) emphasises the difference between socio-economic conditions and an idealised conception that obscures material inequalities. However, the concept not only says *more* than the objects subsumed under it (which gives leverage for immanent criticism); it also says *less* than what the object really is. There is more to the object than meets the jaded, well-adjusted eye.

Materialist criticism, which points to the bleak reality beneath a glossy self-conception, must be supported by some form of transcendent criticism. This is crucial in late capitalist society, which as we have discussed, is dominated by positivist rather than idealist ideology. Ideology today is not so much a dishonest legitimisation of the status quo but a matter of 'blind faith in the descriptive'.⁶² The problem with Marxist criticism of idealism is that, under positivist ideology, this tends to be construed un-dialectically and un-philosophically as an appeal to immediate "given-ness" in 'an illusion of passive knowledge about some datum which cannot be interrogated further'.⁶³

Adorno's critique of identity-thinking can also be likened to the sceptical problem of the criterion. It works on the basis of two opposing conditions, only one of which is satisfied by immanent criticism. Although intuitions shape concepts, concepts also shape intuitions. Thus we cannot start philosophy from a first principle. The adequacy of concept to intuition and vice versa is always in question; hence Adorno's caution against Hegel's idealist *identification* of terms such as form/content, reason/intellect which were initially separated by Kant, but which also cannot be discretely *distinguished* from each other. Although Kant is right to bring together empiricist and idealist insights (that categories are always conjoined with experience), the consequence of this, noted by

Hegel, is that neither can be predicated discretely from the other. Adorno agrees with Hegel that concept and intuition are always mediated, but rejects his *identification* of the two, in reason and reality for example. The value of the sceptical worry is not to say that all objects are the products of thought. Rather, we see that there is no unmediated touchstone of reality to mark form from content in empirical experience. To appeal to “concrete un-freedom” depends on some prior criterion. If this criterion is caught up in relations of domination, it begs the question.

Although *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reveals that the paradox of Enlightenment rationality is that such a tool of emancipation leads to domination, Simon Jarvis argues this is not a polemic against Enlightenment, but an argument that the reduction of Enlightenment to positivism and rationalism is not enlightened enough.⁶⁴ What we find is not a ‘liquidation of empirical facts from some higher domain of wisdom, but a ‘rebellion of experience against empiricism’.⁶⁵

Jarvis claims the paradox of Enlightenment thinking is that it ‘insists that if knowledge is really going to be knowledge of an object, it must not be contaminated by anything subjective. But its reflex scepticism leads it in practice to claim that any “object” actually invoked is in fact a fiction of the subject.’⁶⁶ To present the particular as objective is therefore ideological.⁶⁷ As Nietzsche also demonstrates in the third essay of the *Genealogy of Morals*, the one-sided demand for objectivity ironically results in the conclusion that nothing can stand outside of thought. The closed reflection of taboo on any predication that literally extends towards the transcendent, preponderant thing-in-itself severely limits thought, such that it becomes ‘unable to understand what it depends on’.⁶⁸ The disenchanted de-mythologisation of Enlightenment thinking belies the *purpose* of general concepts, limiting thought to changelessness such that “what is” becomes construed as fate in inverse, mythic generalisation.⁶⁹

Adorno is faithful to the Hegelian notion that determinate negation does not reject but appropriates and transforms the object of critical investigation. He writes that it is ‘easy [...] to make a principle of the demand that all relations be reduced to their material origin [...] to discern cloaked interests

beneath all that mediates the material [...] But to make a principle out of this is to throw out the baby with the bath-water.'⁷⁰ The socialist emphasis on matter over spirit, he writes, shares a dubious *affinity* with political economy, and is subjected to immanent criticism in a mysterious complicity. 'In the face of the lie of the commodity world, even the lie that denounces it becomes a corrective.'⁷¹ This is especially so for emphatically "immanent" Marxist critics who set aside the idealistic, or "moralistic" emancipatory *telos* of a communist utopia and 'become all too practical', so that 'fear of theory's impotence' becomes a 'pretext for bowing before the production process in impotence....'⁷² At least culture, he cautions, might prevent the domination of the exchange principle. Immanent criticism should not further the demise of failing culture.

Conclusion: immanent criticism is insufficient for ideology criticism

To summarise so far, we see that by the late 1940's Adorno thinks traditional, scientific Marxist criticism of ideology - which appeals to the gap between our conceptions of reality and reality itself - is no longer tenable. For Adorno, no immanent class standpoint is viable for emancipatory social criticism since (i) class-consciousness is ideologically geared to the *status quo*; (ii) substantive ideals, social norms and the dominant instrumental mode of reasoning are hopelessly ideologically complicit; (iii) the dominant positivist ideology has the effect that, 'the very idea our social experience could change may be lost forever'.⁷³ Even dispassionate, objective empirical observation is ideologically suspect. Near the close of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno claims:

The difference between ideology and reality has disappeared. The former resigns itself to the latter by its mere duplication.... The world, even in its most radical lie, falls back on the argument that things are like this, a simple finding which coincides for it with the good.⁷⁴

Adorno criticises purely immanent criticism which is as one-sided as transcendent criticism. The materialist attempt to distinguish ideology from scientific social criticism is an extension of 'the old philosophical attempt to seek indubitable grounds for its own endeavour whilst making no concessions at all to the power of old illusions and their social basis'.⁷⁵ He argues that intellectual and social transformation must acknowledge the influence of traditions and draw on their power. The new only becomes the new by determinate negation of the old; without a relation to what is not new there can be no new at all. 'Whatever aims for an entirely fresh start, far from presenting us

with a really new, will involuntarily recapitulate the old even whilst claiming to be absolutely new.’⁷⁶

The problem is not that we have ideals at all, but that we take them as given, losing a grip on their relation to empirical social relations and conditions that lend them meaning and value in our lives.

The social critic is not to start afresh by dismissing broken ideals; she should link them to reality.

At the same time, Adorno continues to assert that there is a truth to our ideals which positivist ideology obscures. Liberal ideology contains an historically conditioned moment of truth against which the pathetic rationality of existing conditions can be judged, ascribing to objects properties they could only have under improved conditions and therefore tacitly denouncing existing conditions.⁷⁷

He notes that, ‘metaphysical categories’, or ideals, such as the bourgeois, liberal conception of freedom or equality, ‘are not merely an ideology concealing the social system; at the same time they express its nature, the truth about it, and in their changes are precipitated those of its most central experiences’.⁷⁸ To explain by way of example, religious relics, idols, and ritualistic face masks, provide archaeologists, historians and anthropologists with substantial and profound cultural insight into different societies. It would be absurd to interject with the misplaced secular objection that gods, ghosts and goblins are bad or do not exist. A true realist would address their social reality, not just dismiss their ideality.

The immanent critic is right to criticise the idealist illusion that the thinking subject is self-sufficient, but the “realist” or “positivist” illusion that describing empirical evidence is self-sufficient, overlooks the *significance* of previous traditions and the *value* of ideals. Bourgeois or liberal ideology at least acknowledges that society *should* measure up to its ideals. To dispel all illusion may serve the idea that the real is absolute: that what is cannot, and therefore should not change. For example, Adorno writes that the claim on the part of the artwork to be more than a mere thing (its “illusory” or “fetish-character”) ‘is not merely an idol in need of shattering’.⁷⁹ Simon Jarvis explains, ‘the point of ideology critique is not to make domination more honest.’⁸⁰ As I argued in reference to Socratic criticism, to merely expose inconsistencies (between ideals and reality), is insufficient for critical

evaluation and judgment. *Aporia* is not an end in itself. The interlocutor may be relaxed about inconsistency, or she may simply drop her ideals, to be more “realistic” about the inevitability of pervasive domination. If the critic is to avoid these options, she must offer something more than immanent criticism.

A radically negative utopian solution

The title of the 149th aphorism of *Minima Moralia*, ‘*Halblang*’ (‘come off it’, or ‘don’t exaggerate’) criticises the immanent self-conception of positivist empiricism, which aims for neutral, dispassionate observation: ‘To abstract out historically unchanged elements,’ (of particular experiences into broader principles or laws of nature), he writes, ‘is not to observe neutral scientific objectivity, but to spread, even when correct, a smoke-screen behind which whatever is tangible and therefore assailable is lost to sight.’⁸¹ Immanent ideology criticism of bourgeois society, which opposes reality with its ideals, may be misplaced if we simply adjust and aspire to the *status quo*.

But if it is wrong to simply dismiss our ideals, without understanding where they come from, it is also wrong simply to dismiss positivism. True to the literal sense of the ascription, “disillusioning”, positivist ideology not only strips out illusions but also reflects a situation in late capitalist society where all substantive, transcendent normative ideals are caught up with structures of domination. Positivism, which denies the transcendence of our ideals, also shows up the fact that our ideals have lost their vitality. Women’s emancipation, for example, is identified with its meagre actualisation. Freedoms promised by the US constitution, a product of liberal Enlightenment thinking, are taken not as lacking, but as given, such that an inadequate political system is to be defended against the “tyranny” of “unrealistic” alternatives.

Thus, in a further negation, Adorno reflectively takes issue with the criticism of immanent criticism.

As he writes, ‘to insist on the choice between immanence and transcendence is to revert to the traditional logic criticised in Hegel’s polemic against Kant.’⁸² Just as secular morality should neither reject religious ideals, nor simply go back to them, so socialism must not revert to the toothless

liberal ideals that are the target of immanent critics. The refusal of critical theorists to separate fact and value should not be a pretext for the affirmation of existing values. Adorno's nostalgia for bourgeois ideals is neither naïve, nor reactionary. He does not believe meaningful social change can be achieved by actualising norms present in existing conditions, but he also rejects abstract utopianism.⁸³ As I shall now explain, this leads him to reformulate Marx's immanent communist *telos* in the radically negative, transcendent terms of a Utopian *Bilderverbot*.

Caught between the ideological complicity of immanent, substantive ideals and the ideological complicity of empirical, objective reality, Adorno and other late first-generation Critical Theorists abandon hope of finding any *immanent* emancipatory standpoint for criticism of ideology at work in contemporary society at present.⁸⁴ 'With no prospective bearer for theoretical insight, the capacity of theory to orient political action can now be determined only negatively: by resisting the political instrumentalisation of theory.'⁸⁵ The totalising instrumentalism and identificatory rationality of late capitalist society is not grounds for pessimism. 'Adorno's pessimism does not foreclose meaningful social change.'⁸⁶ Change may not occur through *maieutic* actualisation of norms already present in existing conditions, but Adorno in his later work believes rational society is attainable in the 'wholesale negation of the real'.⁸⁷ Change depends on complete, determinate negation of existing reality as it is.

The critic cannot just confront reality with its own immanent norms, but equally, in a world Adorno claims to be radically evil, transcendence is neither to be posited substantively. Social criticism must not revert to the transcendent moralising criticism, or abstract utopianism. Thus Adorno endorses a *Bilderverbot* – an image taboo – on any substantive, positive representation of transcendence that would be ideologically conditioned by identificatory concepts, instrumentalising structures of rationality and ideological norms or ideals.⁸⁸ 'Anyone who would nail down transcendence can rightly be charged with a betrayal of transcendence itself'.⁸⁹ The potential for emancipation is not to be found in positivism, empiricism, in positive ideals, or in substantive normative conceptions, but in

transcendent immediate, qualitative aspects of reality which escape instrumentalising concepts oriented solely towards exchange relations.⁹⁰

Despite his criticism of positivist ideology, Adorno remains a materialist thinker to the extent that his utopianism focuses on immediate reality, or unregimented experience, in heightened perception of the thing-in-itself (since immanence itself has a transcendent dimension).⁹¹ Such radical materialism is the basis of his utopianism: utopian images originate dialectically in the most negative aspects of reality experienced as fate.⁹² The transcendent, utopian task of social criticism is to decode in actual social relations the 'mirror-writing' of the good society.⁹³ His "negative dialectic" insists on consistent consciousness of non-identity; of the transcendent aspect of the object of consciousness.⁹⁴ Contrary to immanent criticism, which scrutinises the real in terms of its own potential, Adorno appeals to that which transcends mere potentiality bound to the given.⁹⁵ The "merely possible" *obstructs* its realisation, just as Hegel's "bad infinite" is circumscribed by finite limits and representation of the transcendent deity is idolatrous - hence the *Bilderverbot*.

Maieutic concern for the "possible" perpetuates the given; but the *noumenal* realm outstrips its conceptual identification with ideological concepts. Adorno's "post-positivist", materialist ideology criticism is based on the assumption that 'utopia is blocked off by possibility, never by immediate reality'.⁹⁶ In the penultimate and final aphorisms of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno expounds, first, on dialectic, and second, on the emancipatory standpoint of social criticism. First, he cautions against the *misuse* of dialectic (failing 'to give oneself up to it' but applying it for some prior subjective end), and then directly considers of the question its teleology.

The dialectic stems from the sophists; it was a mode of discussion whereby dogmatic assertions were shaken and, as the public prosecutors and comic writers put it, the lesser word made the stronger [...] But as a means of proving oneself right it was also from the first an instrument of domination, a formal technique of apologetics unconcerned with content, serviceable to those who could pay: the principle of constantly and successfully turning the

tables. Its truth or untruth, therefore, is not inherent in the method itself, but in its intention in the historical process.’⁹⁷

As noted earlier with respect to Socratic criticism, Adorno cautions that “immanent” dialectical social criticism may be used to smuggle through unacknowledged ends under the guise of a disinterested technique. In the next section he goes on to agree with what the *Phenomenology of Spirit* promises, but fails to do: elicit the truth of the object of investigation, allowing the dialectic to unfold without pushing prior instrumental concerns.⁹⁸

The threatening relapse of reflection into un-reflectedness gives itself away by the facility with which the dialectical procedure shuttles its arguments, as if it were itself that immediate knowledge of the whole which the very principle of the dialectic precludes... the thinker uses the dialectic instead of giving himself up to it.’⁹⁹

Adorno may be said to have recognised that supposedly “immanent” criticism may disguise a prior standpoint which - exempted from critical reflection - functions in the same ideological manner as transcendent criticism or primary negation (which fails to reflect on its determination by its relation to its object). Whereas Hegel’s “Absolute Spirit” identifies criterion and intuition, Adorno maintains that such happy coincidence is not possible in antagonistic society. However, this does not mean his “negative dialectic” lacks entirely the idea of progressive, determinate development. Adorno thinks we can break free of our closed context of immanence by attending to those particular qualities of experience that escape identificatory conception, and by latching onto the transcendence entailed in intentional experience.

With respect to the emancipatory *telos* of his negative dialectic, Adorno closes the final section of *Minima Moralia*, ‘Zum Ende’,¹⁰⁰ as follows:

Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without... violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought.¹⁰¹

So, Adorno does not simply dismiss Enlightenment rationality or bourgeois ideals. Rather, he reminds us that transcendence depends on qualitative aspects of concrete experience that identificatory thinking obscures, and which point to real, not just possible, utopia. Neither does he simply dismiss materialist social criticism, but rather, he calls for a radicalisation of materialism that attends to whatever it is that outstrips hypostatization. Negative dialectic is geared to transcendence by way of negative dialectical, rather than abstract, negation. It refuses to set forth substantive normative ideals from the outset, without first examining the relationship between criterion and intuition, by which each shapes the other.

My principal aim in the final section of this chapter is to reject the later Adorno's position. However, I also aim to show how it is shaped by the objectivising principle to which it is opposed. My worry is that Adorno's negative dialectic is a radicalisation of ascetic nihilism. Like a sceptic, the immanent critic abjures responsibility for a standpoint. But, unlike the sceptic who settles for *aporia*, the immanent critic's hidden standpoint functions ideologically as she plays the force of her opponent against herself. If this is so, the premise that thought should gain its perspectives '*entirely* from felt contact with its objects'¹⁰² goes too far. Dialectically, the criterion *should* be tested against the preponderant object, but – as the wheel turns – Adorno's position begs the question: *Halblang*, which transcendent perspective would be *good*? What criterion is assumed?

Against first philosophy after Auschwitz

In contrast to Adorno's later negativism, Horkheimer's classic treatise against traditional theory asserts that the conditions for future society have always appeared in concrete circumstances, but he also notes there is no perception of the change that critical theory aims towards until it actually happens. *Constructive thinking* is more important in critical theory than empirical verification is in common sense.¹⁰³ All theory, especially social theory, contains political motivations, so truth must not be decided in supposedly neutral reflection on concrete activity as this obscures political motivations in an ideological manner.¹⁰⁴ 'If we think of the object of the theory in separation from

the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism.’¹⁰⁵ Critical theory reflects man’s efforts, ‘to emancipate himself from coercion by nature and from those social forms of life and of the judicial, political and cultural orders which have become a straightjacket for him... This demands activity, effort and will power in the knowing subject.’¹⁰⁶ The ideology critic cannot abjure responsibility for normative criteria by resting her goal on the transcendence of the object of criticism, since both criterion *and intuition* are at stake.

In sympathy with Horkheimer’s earlier view here, Andrew Buchwalter argues that Adorno is mistaken to put emancipatory transcendence *at odds* with its immanent social context. He argues that Adorno rejects Hegel’s concept of objective rationality for its logic of immanence, and therefore fails to question whether reality is rational.¹⁰⁷ Adorno’s rejection is based on the misconception that Hegel only evaluates given reality in terms of the “immanent” question of whether it is adequate to its acknowledged concept.¹⁰⁸ Against this, Buchwalter argues that Hegel thinks immanent criticism is *compatible* with the aims of transcendent criticism, and is the sole basis for a meaningful conception of transcendent criticism.¹⁰⁹

As we saw in Chapter 6, the falsity of the finite is only comprehensible in the contrast between existence and reason, or between the given and the pure, undetermined concept of rationality per se.¹¹⁰ Thus adequation is not a matter of realisation, but of transcendence.¹¹¹ Both Hegel and Adorno believe the grounds of reconciliation transcend the existing categories of reason.¹¹² Where Adorno argues we need to totally *transcend* the domain of immanence, Hegel claims the basis for the “ought” in the genuine infinite must surpass the finite realm. But Hegel, as we saw, believes the genuine infinite *includes* the finite. For Hegel, transcendence is juxtaposed to immanence, but is only possible *through* immanence.¹¹³

To give an example, both Hegel and Adorno see life and death as central to the dynamic between immanence and transcendence. For Adorno, life and death are polarised such that the interests of life are radically juxtaposed to this world. For Hegel, however, such abstract juxtaposition of life and

death leaves life in the grip of death, lacking its own positive content (like the spurious infinite) and thereby presupposing the deadly reality it seeks to overcome.¹¹⁴ Adorno's proposed categorical imperative about Auschwitz 'reveals Adorno to be fixated on these events, and thus unable to proffer a vision of the future not crippled by the horrors he would surmount.'¹¹⁵

One might add that Adorno neglects the horrific potential that even the Holocaust may serve an ideological function for the children of its victims in Israel as its context shifts. Hegel asserts that life is not served by fleeing death, that 'the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures and maintains itself in it.'¹¹⁶ Where Adorno claims, after Auschwitz, 'our feelings balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of victims' fate',¹¹⁷ Hegel thinks the interests of life *depend* on finding meaning in death and devastation¹¹⁸ - by 'developing a framework that accommodates the horrors.'¹¹⁹

However, against Buchwalter's point, that Adorno is mistaken to put a break between immanence and transcendence,¹²⁰ a problem should be noted which Seyla Benhabib brings to light with respect to the self-conception of Marxist-Hegelian dialectical criticism: Marx and Hegel presume that dialectical criticism transcends the normative variety of evaluative theories which rely on ideal ethics or politics. This leads them to overlook the normative content of their theories.¹²¹ Marx argues that to understand actuality is at the same time, to criticise it. This presupposes a naïve "Socratic optimism" regarding the relation between reason and reality, implying an implicit teleological ought which man develops towards. Such an ought, Marx believes, may be derived from actuality in the mode of *maieutic* social criticism.¹²²

To give an example, Marx fails to be explicit about his own commitment to unified ethical community, and thus neglects the extent to which the "ought" *transcends* the given.¹²³ According to Benhabib, Hegel's and Marx's implicit ideals of unified ethical life are respectively taken from their conceptions of past and future historical circumstances. The predicament, particularly with respect to the problem of ideology, is that they do not account for this external evaluative aspect.¹²⁴ Adorno,

too, falls into the same trap by relying on the instrumentalising model of reason to which he is opposed, and by failing to dwell on his own susceptibility to it. With regards to the transcendence of the preponderant object, the for-itself is always already predicated in intentional relations with the in-itself (in experience), but this does not warrant the assumption that the for-itself is *in* the in-itself. The buck stops with the critic; one meets ideology where this is overlooked.

Adorno thinks critical social theory does not seek positive evidence to support existing hypotheses, but seeks negative evidence to clear the way for improved principles with which to explain and transform circumstances for the purpose of emancipation. 'Society stays alive,' he writes, 'not despite its antagonism, but by means of it.'¹²⁵ The problem with Socratic criticism is it optimistically treats immanent refutation – the bringing to light of refutation – as valuable in itself, as Hegel sees reflection as a determinate negation that does not bring external criteria to bear on the object, and as Marx thinks change is the upshot of the bringing to light of contradiction. But socialism cannot be predicated solely on a scientific description of social contradictions,¹²⁶ since the *defect* of any contradiction is related to a given *purpose*, end or *telos*.¹²⁷ A normative evaluation of contradiction cannot be said to arise from contradiction, or inconsistency, alone. As McCarney puts it, 'the critical thrust of the category of exploitation is predicated on more than just contradiction'.¹²⁸

Adorno's negativist *Bilderverbot* rules out any appeal to substantive normative principles in social criticism (to avoid ideological assimilation), but this prohibition often leaves him working with unmediated intuitions which by his own lights are vulnerable to ideological assimilation. For example, he claims that failure to resist Auschwitz proves all culture – including philosophy, art and the 'enlightened sciences' – is the ideologically compromised 'garbage' that 'it always was potentially'.¹²⁹ He therefore proposes a new categorical imperative: to arrange all thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz does not happen again. He emphasises this is an *imperative* beyond justification, since to deal with it discursively 'would be an outrage'.¹³⁰ Any dialectical, discursive inquiry which tries to trace out an incipient rationale from beneath such abhorrence is profane. Any

rationalisation of Auschwitz defiles its victims. Where Hegel thought historic existence relevant to transcendence and metaphysics,¹³¹ ‘actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience’.¹³²

Such reflections lead Adorno to conclude, ‘we need a fresh start in metaphysics’.¹³³ This claim not only contradicts the evidence for it, by making theoretical headway out of reflections on the significance of Auschwitz, but it is also paradoxically metaphysical.¹³⁴ As we know, the demand: “never again Auschwitz” functions for Israel today as a first principle which is disconnected from socio-economic conditions. This prevents the children of the Holocaust from subjecting themselves to criticism, and acts as a point of transmission for the conditions that determine what it negates. As an unquestioned principle, a criterion disconnected from its relationship to context, “Auschwitz” comes implicitly to justify the ghettos that imprison Palestinians on the basis of their race.

We have seen, then, that Socrates, Hegel and Marx all smuggle external criteria under the guise of immanent criticism. Such exemption from criticism makes their standpoint ideologically vulnerable. Adorno’s solution is to posit a radical gap between the transcendent object and our immanent conceptualisation thereof. But the need for measurement, judgment and evaluation remain, which leaves an uncritical gap for ideologically compromised conceptions of the “transcendent object”. The problem is not that these thinkers presume some criterion to start with, or fall back on an intuition, but that in disavowing this, they all exempt their criterion from reflective scrutiny. A sceptic would ask what criterion one’s intuition presupposes, and what intuition one’s criterion presupposes. These are linked. Ideology beckons where that is neglected.

Towards a Genealogy of Ideology

The question whether immanent criticism must *incorporate* a transcendent aspect, or acts as a necessary *prelude* to transcendent criticism, is a matter for further debate. In each case, Benhabib’s argument - that social criticism must incorporate both immanent and transcendent aspects - should be acknowledged: i) the ‘explanatory-diagnostic’ standpoint demonstrates internal contradictions,

limitations and crises of the social system; ii) the ‘anticipatory-utopian’ standpoint addresses the lived needs and experiences of social agents in order to interpret them, and render them meaningful in light of a future normative ideal.¹³⁵ Without (i) critical theory succumbs to the dangers of normative philosophy (bourgeois ideology, based on insubstantial, formal, rational criteria). Without (ii) it is reduced to a merely naïve empiricist, social-scientific attempt to gain value-free knowledge of the world and reflects a positivist ideology, based on “immediate”, irrational sensations.¹³⁶ Even *if* Marx slides to (ii), his understanding of the relationship between criterion/ intuition, theory/ practice, is dialectical in principle (practice does not determine theory in one direction for Marx).¹³⁷

In closing I would like to follow McCarney’s proviso that the orthodox, deterministic Marxism, with which Critical Theory takes issue, is inconsistent with Marx’s own meta-ethical reflections – by turning to Georg Lohmann’s argument that Marx’s critique of political economy in *Capital* is not only immanent, but also transcendent. Lohmann agrees that Marx’s immanent description of the capitalist mode of production shows that bourgeois society is self-contradictory. Marx demonstrates that supposedly universal legal and moral principles of natural right such as freedom, equality and private property are in fact particularistic and coercive. But, moreover, Lohmann also claims that his criticism of capitalism goes further than such immanent exposition, to show that these immanent normative standards are not reasonable or justifiable.¹³⁸ Where Benhabib claims Marx assumes a transcendent normative ideal of unified ethical life, Lohmann detects four aspects of transcendent criticism in Marx: an objectivist teleology that assumes *progress*, a productivist standard of criticism with respect to labour, Rousseau’s political ideal of a “free association of men” and, finally, “historiographical critique”.¹³⁹

Contrary to Benhabib and Lohmann, I would argue that progress, productivism, unified ethical life and the democratic ideal of freely associating citizens, or consumers, are – if not intrinsic – widely held *immanent* normative principles of western, capitalist, democratic, political systems. But Lohmann’s point about historiographical critique is worth pursuing. Echoing Adorno’s complaint

about the impression of “ineluctable necessity” that positivist ideology generates, Lohmann notes that the immanent criticism of capitalism in the first three quarters of *Capital* gives the impression of an historical progression with no other alternative.¹⁴⁰ However, in the last quarter (chapters 23-35), the object, *Capital*, is no longer considered in terms of immanent self-exposition, but in its totality. This transition to historiography has two important aspects: first, Marx shows how ‘original accumulation’ is not the work of a peaceful, industrious, thrifty elite, but a violent establishment of private property. Marx contrasts actual history against the ideological Lockean myth about the state of nature. Capital is thereby ‘thematized against the horizon of its historical genesis, mutability and abolition’.¹⁴¹ Second, the historiographical chapters of *Capital* show how the historical life world is impacted by capitalism, surveying its historical effects on the working class and showing how pre-existing forms of life are subsumed by capitalist integration processes.¹⁴²

Lohmann goes on to argue that these historical observations call capitalist development to account for its history from multiple perspectives, both from the point of view of the capitalist and the oppressed, from the present and the past, in virtue of both immanent and transcendent normative criteria. ‘The internal development and eventual establishment of the history of the “victor”, is reproached for being the history of “barbarity” and the history of the repressed and exploited.’¹⁴³ This historiography is told from *shifting* perspectives, to break with the immanent self-understanding of capitalists. It is an ‘argumentative-narrative’ history, rather than a simple empirical description of facts and effects – ‘a history of the normative claims of participants relative to specific events’. ‘By retrospectively describing the struggle of conflicting claims from the perspective of the self-interpretation of the participants, both of the capitalists and the workers...’ The ‘prior history’ of the ‘victor’, capital, is unmasked as the history of ‘an unrelenting vandalism... carried out under the drive of the most infamous, filthiest, most pettily hateful passions’.¹⁴⁴

Crucially, Lohmann argues this transcendent historical standard remains under-theorised by Marx, with undue focus on ‘objective history’ which ‘under-defines the relation to historical agents,

hypostatizing them as subjective “carriers” of development in a collective singular’.¹⁴⁵ Effectively, we need to find someone who is able to address a vulnerability to self-exemption in Marxist ideology criticism. Where could we find another secular naturalist who shares Marx’s ability to write history from multiple perspectives that demonstrate mutable historical genesis? Someone that shares his anti-“moralism”, on a similar basis of insight into ideological connections between historical struggles for domination and ethical, as well as epistemological norms; and the dangerous consequences this poses for objective scientific method, but someone who is also able to give a pluralist representation of historical agents, with a dynamic understanding of relations of power.

¹ What Nietzsche and Adorno call “Socratic optimism” is the hope that negating falsehoods is *intrinsically* good. However Socrates’ method does not even establish falsehood, just inconsistency.

² Geuss, R. 1999: 70. Also, 2004: 6.

³ Geuss, R. 1999: 72.

⁴ Geuss, R. 1999: 72.

⁵ McCarney, J, 1990: 27.

⁶ Robinson, R. 2005.

⁷ Robinson, R. 2005.

⁸ Robinson, R. 2005. See also McKinney, R, 1983: 180.

⁹ Vlastos, G. 1982: 713.

¹⁰ Vlastos, G. 1988: 375.

¹¹ McKinney, R. 1983: 180.

¹² Vlastos, G. 1982: 712.

¹³ Robinson, R. 2005.

¹⁴ Robinson, R. 2005. Note the parallel between this foundational outcome for *elenchus* and the normative foundations of Adorno: ‘When everything is bad it must be good to know the worst.’ (1974: §83)

¹⁵ Robinson, R. 2005.

¹⁶ Vlastos, G. 1956: lviii, 69.

¹⁷ Vlastos, G. 1956: lviii, 69.

¹⁸ Vlastos, G. 1982: 713 - 714.

¹⁹ Frede, M. 1992: 201-19.

²⁰ To recall Hegel from Chapter 6, ‘that something is not the case is a dead-end.’ (Hegel, GWF. 1977: 37).

²¹ Nietzsche, F. 1998: 13.

²² See Adorno, T. 1973: 85: ‘When men are forbidden to think, their thinking sanctions what simply exists.’

²³ Geuss, R. 2004: 39.

²⁴ Nietzsche, F. 1990: §64.

²⁵ Nietzsche, F. 1990: §80

²⁶ McCarney, J. 1990: 18.

²⁷ Adorno, T. 1982: 5.

²⁸ Hegel, GWF in Adorno, T. 1982: 5.

²⁹ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 299.

³⁰ Horkheimer, M. 1941: 122.

³¹ Adorno, T. 1976: 115.

³² Adorno, T. 1967: 32.

³³ Rose, G. 1978: ix.

³⁴ Rose, G. 1978: 17.

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- ³⁵ Adorno, T. 1974: 210-211.
- ³⁶ Rose, G. 1978: 20.
- ³⁷ Adorno, T. 1974: 95.
- ³⁸ Adorno, T. 1974: 95.
- ³⁹ Rose, G. 1978: 21.
- ⁴⁰ Adorno, T. 1974: 147.
- ⁴¹ In Foucault's terms, this may be interpreted as a problem of productive power.
- ⁴² McCarney, J. 1990: 172.
- ⁴³ Dubiel, H. 1985: 81.
- ⁴⁴ Dubiel, H. 1985: 82.
- ⁴⁵ In the introduction to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno write, 'When the public sphere has reached a state in which thought... willingly abandons its critical element and allows itself to become merely an instrument in the service of the status quo, it then tends, despite itself to transform the positive which it desires, into something negative and destructive' (Horkheimer, M and Adorno, T. 1991: xv).
- ⁴⁶ Jarvis, S. 1998: 24.
- ⁴⁷ The steely strength of cold-hearted realism inverts into weak autistic abstraction if it loses touch with the vitality of values which embrace life's contradictions without worrying too much about consistency. Adorno's relationship with liberal modernity is both critical and nostalgic, like the ironically deflated feudal pageantry in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Nietzsche's praise of noble morality, and the good old days of direct oppression Foucault contrasts against disciplinary society.
- ⁴⁸ Horkheimer, M and Adorno, T. *DE*: 243.
- ⁴⁹ Horkheimer, M. 1982.
- ⁵⁰ McCarney, J. 1990: 2.
- ⁵¹ Adorno, T. 1973: 144.
- ⁵² McCarney, J. 1990: 28.
- ⁵³ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 300.
- ⁵⁴ Rose, G. 1978: 102.
- ⁵⁵ Adorno, T. 1973: 402.
- ⁵⁶ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 300.
- ⁵⁷ Adorno, T. 1974: 43, 50).
- ⁵⁸ Adorno, T. 1973: 5.
- ⁵⁹ Rose, G. 1978: 48.
- ⁶⁰ Jarvis, S. 1998: 52 – 53.
- ⁶¹ Adorno, T in Rose, G. 1976: 70.
- ⁶² Adorno, T. 1974: §134.
- ⁶³ Jarvis, S. 1998: 149.
- ⁶⁴ Jarvis, S. 1998: 22.
- ⁶⁵ Jarvis, S. 1998: 42.
- ⁶⁶ Jarvis, S. 1998: 25.
- ⁶⁷ Cook, D. 2001: 6.
- ⁶⁸ Jarvis, S. 1998: 25.
- ⁶⁹ Jarvis, S. 1998: 26.
- ⁷⁰ Adorno, T. 1974: 22.
- ⁷¹ Adorno, T. 1974: 22.
- ⁷² Adorno, T. 1974: 22. (a little further on, he adds, 'hence the resemblance between a business mentality and sober criticism...')
- ⁷³ Jarvis, S. 1998: 116.
- ⁷⁴ Adorno, T. 1974: §147. See also §149: 'Criticism of tendencies in modern society is automatically countered, before it is fully uttered, by the argument that things have always been like this... the obviousness of the disaster becomes an asset to its apologists... and under cover of silence is allowed to proceed unopposed.'
- ⁷⁵ Rose, G. 1978: 138.
- ⁷⁶ Jarvis, S. 1998: 106.
- ⁷⁷ Cook, D. 2001: 10.
- ⁷⁸ Adorno, T. 1974: §148.
- ⁷⁹ Jarvis, S. 1998: 116.
- ⁸⁰ Jarvis, S. 1998: 117.

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- ⁸¹ Adorno, T. 1974: §149.
- ⁸² Adorno, T. 1967: 31.
- ⁸³ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 302-303.
- ⁸⁴ Dubiel, H. 1985: 95.
- ⁸⁵ Dubiel, H. 1985: 85.
- ⁸⁶ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 302.
- ⁸⁷ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 302.
- ⁸⁸ Adorno effectively inverts, or rather, radicalises, the Kantian taboo on any representation of our experience of the thing-in-itself.
- ⁸⁹ Adorno, T. 1973: 400. Nietzsche, on the other hand, demonstrates in *Genealogy of Morals*, that the idolatry taboo forbids not only the lie of the transcendent deity that allegedly motivates it, but also, nihilistically, the very will to truth that actually motivates it, when it discovers itself as its own explanatory premise. Elsewhere, Adorno agrees: 'The idea of truth is supreme among the metaphysical ideas... it is why one who believes in God cannot believe in God, why the *possibility* represented by the divine name is maintained by him who does not believe'. (1973: 401)
- ⁹⁰ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 301.
- ⁹¹ Adorno, T. 1967: 32. See also Buchwalter, A. 1987: 305.
- ⁹² Adorno, T. in Dubiel, H. 1985: 96.
- ⁹³ Dubiel, H. 1985: 96.
- ⁹⁴ Jarvis, S. 1998: 215.
- ⁹⁵ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 305.
- ⁹⁶ Adorno, T. in Buchwalter, A. 1987: 305. Don't just assist birth, one might say, propagate.
- ⁹⁷ Adorno, T. 1974: §152.
- ⁹⁸ Adorno, T. 1993: 93.
- ⁹⁹ Adorno, T. 1974: §152.
- ¹⁰⁰ The title appears to refer to its place in the book, the subject of dialectical teleology, and the question of Adorno's own standpoint, or end.
- ¹⁰¹ Adorno, T. 1974: §153.
- ¹⁰² Adorno, T. 1974: §153 [my emphasis]
- ¹⁰³ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 220-221.
- ¹⁰⁴ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 222.
- ¹⁰⁵ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 229. As David Held notes, Horkheimer cautions that while materialists must acknowledge what is given in experience, they must also not absolutise sensation, which is conditioned and changeable, depending on how sensations are interpreted by human activities in various changing societies (1980: 181).
- ¹⁰⁶ Horkheimer, M. 1972: 230.
- ¹⁰⁷ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 307.
- ¹⁰⁸ Adorno, T. 1973: 176.
- ¹⁰⁹ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 308.
- ¹¹⁰ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 310. This is perhaps analogous with the Platonic conception of the good in the dialectic of Plato's *Republic*.
- ¹¹¹ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 311.
- ¹¹² Buchwalter, A. 1987: 312.
- ¹¹³ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 313.
- ¹¹⁴ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 314.
- ¹¹⁵ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 314.
- ¹¹⁶ Hegel, GWF. *PS*: 19.
- ¹¹⁷ Adorno, T. 1973: 316.
- ¹¹⁸ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 315. It is worth repeating RJ Lifton here, quoted in Buchwalter: 'The problem, then, is not only calling forth end-of-the-world imagery, but in some degree mastering it, giving it a place in our moral and aesthetic imagination... In blocking our imaginations we impair our capacity to create new forms we do desperately require. We need Hiroshima and Auschwitz, as we need Vietnam and our everyday lives, in all their horror, to deepen and free the imagination for the leaps it must make... The vision of death gives life. The vision of total annihilation makes it possible to imagine living under and beyond that curse.'
- ¹¹⁹ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 316.

¹²⁰ Buchwalter, A. 1987: 320. I accept Buchwalter's point that Hegel's speculative principle of the unity of reason and reality is *critical* and not apologetic towards the *status quo*, that Hegelian immanent critique does not rule out a concern for transcendence but is a pre-condition for transcendent critique, aimed not towards a transfiguration of irrational existing circumstances.

¹²¹ Benhabib, S. 1986: 8.

¹²² Benhabib, S. 1986: 38. This is Nietzsche's problem with Socrates (1990: §64, quoted in the section heading), a problem that Adorno also recognises: a moralistic snare subsequently codified in Aristotle.

¹²³ Benhabib, S. 1986: 40.

¹²⁴ Benhabib, S. 1986: 42.

¹²⁵ Adorno, T. 1973: 320. For 'post-Socratics', he writes, the aim is not to be right, but 'to convict one's opponent of untruth'.

¹²⁶ McCarney, J. 1990: 75.

¹²⁷ McCarney, J. 1990: 68-69

¹²⁸ McCarney, J. 1990: 76.

¹²⁹ Adorno, T. 1973: 367.

¹³⁰ Adorno, T. 1973: 365. See also Adorno, T. 1973: 361: 'No sense can be squeezed out of the victims' fate'.

¹³¹ Adorno, T. 1973: 361.

¹³² Adorno, T. 1973: 362. He later writes (1973: 367) that to either accept or reject this culture is 'barbaric'.

¹³³ Adorno, T. 1973: 368.

¹³⁴ Perhaps Adorno's taboo on substantive normative principles makes such self-contradiction an example of internally consistent irony

¹³⁵ Benhabib, S. 1986: 142.

¹³⁶ Plato's later "ascending-descending" dialectic incorporates both these aspects.

¹³⁷ The material determination of forms of consciousness does not mean that consciousness is epiphenomenal; the relationship between the two is more comprehensively understood in dialectical terms.

¹³⁸ Lohmann, G. 1986: 355-356.

¹³⁹ Lohmann, G. 1986: 356.

¹⁴⁰ Lohmann, G. 1986: 364. A similar criticism is often lodged against Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*, overlooking the critical thrust of the evaluative contrasts in this genealogical analysis of mechanisms of power.

¹⁴¹ Lohmann, G. 1986: 365 - 366.

¹⁴² Lohmann, G. 1986: 366.

¹⁴³ Lohmann, G. 1986: 367.

¹⁴⁴ Lohmann, G. 1986: 367 (like Nietzsche's genealogy of morals).

¹⁴⁵ Lohmann, G. 1986: 366.

Chapter 8: Ideology Criticism and Genealogy

What is to be done?

If the demand for theory was, in Iris Murdoch's words, a cry for a house that could provide a shelter from empiricism, it was also a political demand born of the realisation that theories are never politically innocent. They express political prejudices and reproduce them, even when they deny it.¹

The question of the demand for a world change leads back to a famous sentence by Karl Marx in the *Theses on Feuerbach*... "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to change it" ... It is disregarded [here] that a change of the world presupposes a change in the conception of the world, and that a conception of the world will only be obtained by a sufficient interpretation. That means Marx relies on a certain interpretation of the world to demand his change of the world. And therefore this sentence proves to be a non-founded sentence. It provokes the impression that it is decisively spoken against philosophy while in the second part of the sentence - unexpressed – the demand of a philosophy is presupposed.²

Empiricists aim to be scientific and objective, not idealistic. Ideology criticism is born of secular, empiricist presuppositions about the determination of consciousness. Ideas are determined by material circumstances and contexts of action. Ideas are also susceptible to wishful thinking, self-deception, imagination and fantasy, bias, political intrigue, endless contestation, hyperbole, lies and error. Sound empirical observation is used to avoid such delusions and make headway with self-evident or *apodictic* beliefs. Like truth, empirical facts function as a touchstone for criticism of mistaken, misleading ideas - as an independent variable that immunises social criticism against distortions effected by dominant, oppressive power structures. Yet to prioritise empiricism and practice over rationalism and theory, to be objective in social criticism, can also produce distortions in abstraction from the synthetic unity of subject and object, and of criterion and intuition in empirical experience of phenomena. Heidegger implies that the attack on philosophy neglects and *distracts from* the very philosophical criteria that the attack presupposes.³

Criticism, if unreflective and abstract, can be secretly determined by that which it negates. This explains why criticism of ideology may itself function ideologically. The ideas ideology criticism contests are supposed to be determined (or at least influenced) by material conditions. But then so are the criteria on the basis of which the criticism is made. Not to reflect this dual determination is an invitation to succumb to it, making it likely that the criticism will succumb to the “blindness” it aims to reveal. If one abstracts the criteria for ideology, without reflection, from the conditions for ideology criticism, then ideology criticism is unwittingly dialectically determined by conditions it aims to negate. Like empiricists, pragmatists and moralists, ideology critics tend to sneak outside their story.

If objective reflection on empirical conditions may unwittingly convey and even disguise political prejudices, since theories ‘are never politically innocent’, as theorists of ideology insist, ‘even when they deny it’, how can ideology critics resist lapsing into complicity in systematically oppressive social relations?⁴ If even objectivity itself is said to be complicit, how is any standpoint of criticism exempt from oppressive conditions for ideology?

As I claim in Chapter 4, this problem may be formulated analogously to the sceptical problem of the criterion by the mechanism of the wheel. How is belief justified (or how is criticism legitimate) if the criterion that determines the evidence is in turn determined by the evidence? If the criterion is said *not* to be determined by the evidence, this threatens regress; if it *is*, this threatens circularity. This dilemma is especially significant for social science since it counts against any touchstone for objective social criticism (foundational or otherwise) – to mark off a standpoint apart from political mediations. Given the circular, possibly hermeneutic, relationship between intuition and criterion, if criteria are partly determined by systematically oppressive relations of power, how is the theorist to identify *bona fide* criteria for social criticism and its aim of emancipation?

Nietzschean genealogy and Marxist ideology criticism are both directed against forms of consciousness that lead individuals to behave in a self-defeating manner. Both are emancipatory

forms of social criticism in this sense. They criticise social formations from a broadly secular scientific standpoint that is inherently critical of religious, idealist and liberal systems of belief, but which is historically mediated, as opposed to positivistic. Both give a naturalistic account of the socio-economic conditions of consciousness and both give historical accounts of common practices that clash with dominant self-understandings and prejudices, from multiple perspectives that engage the reader in a re-evaluation of conventional assumptions about relations between past and present, oppressors and the oppressed.

Genealogy and ideology criticism, like psychoanalysis, reflect on underlying conditions and motivations that are neglected and taken for granted with the effect that agents actively frustrate their own interests, willing against themselves. These theories expose disavowed, or hidden, motivations beneath dominant values and social phenomena. To this extent, they aim at self-clarification. Militating as they do against acceptance and affirmation of the *status quo*, they often give polemical accounts of the origins of conventional, immanent self-ascriptions that provoke readers to re-evaluate dogma that is so misused that it has lost its ostensible purpose. This historiographical method – an ‘argumentative-narrative history’ as Lohmann describes the latter chapters of *Capital* – clears a space for normative judgments that are not foundational, immediate or moralistic but rather plural, dynamic and rationally self-reflective.⁵

With respect to the problem of self-implication that I have identified as central to ideology criticism, Nietzsche’s genealogical method of criticism, and Marx’s historical materialist approach, both attempt to account for the fact that the standpoint of the social theorist is not disconnected from her object domain. Both claim that an objective account should incorporate reflection on the theorist’s relationship with the object. But one simply cannot account for oneself from an objective perspective – one’s credit-rating is not customarily taken at one’s word. Thus, they have also both been criticised for the problem Heidegger raises with respect to Marx in the above quotation, and

which Habermas (for one), identifies in Nietzsche⁶: their theories are said to presuppose conditions they reject, the critical standpoint predicated in part upon that which it is supposed to transgress.

To Heidegger's question of what interpretation Marx tacitly relies on in his demands for change of the world, one might respond that socialist criticism takes up the revolutionary standpoint of the agent of transformation, that is, working class consciousness. The working class is not an end in itself, however, but a means to universal emancipation. Marxist social criticism appeals to and aims for the common good. As discussed in Chapter 7, Marx and Hegel each presume a transcendent ideal of unified ethical life and assume that reason is in history – hence the *maieutic* role of the immanent critic. Such “Socratic optimism” absconds from the normative responsibility of the social critic and obscures her actual role in criticism. Adorno is rightly critical of the presupposition of an intrinsic emancipatory rationality in history and wary of its ideological function. In his later work, he postulates a utopian ideal that is immunised from ideological complicity by a *Bilderverbot*. But, the cost of immunising the emancipatory idea in this way is that it is also immunised from critical reflection, indeed from discursive thought. Adorno's negativism is thus ideological.

Like Adorno, Nietzsche is critical of “Socratic optimism” – the assumption that reason is intrinsically emancipatory - and he is wary of presuming a selfless appeal to the objective common good upon the part of social critics. Nietzsche's ontologisation of relations of power addresses such presuppositions with suspicion. Being is a metaphysical abstraction from becoming in relations of power.⁷ For Nietzsche, there is no being that is not willing. Ideology crops up in hypostatisation wherever this *caveat* is dismissed. Irrationality need not follow from the *implication* of one's critical standpoint with the relations of power that one contests, which he sees as unavoidable in any case and fruitful to affirm, but it certainly follows from self-exemption. Of the two horns of the immanent/transcendent, circularity/regress dilemma that has been discussed so far with regards to alternative modes of social criticism, Nietzsche is most critical of the latter, transcendent approach.

Assuming the supposedly apolitical standpoint of the common good in theory often leads social critics to overlook the political contours of their relationship to dominant social structures. The supposedly apolitical function of such devices in political theory as the state of nature, the veil of ignorance, and the universally emancipatory standpoint of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, have all respectively functioned ideologically to legitimate oppressive political regimes such as British imperial monarchy, US capitalist hegemony and Soviet Stalinist tyranny. Agency remains under-theorised in political philosophy if one presumes a standpoint aside, in theoretical abstraction, from political antagonism. Marx's understanding of power in terms of "sovereignty" leads him to abstract emancipation and subjectivity from social relations of power, un-dialectically. This makes Marxist ideology criticism vulnerable to the problem of ideological self-exemption.

Although Marx, like Nietzsche, thinks that forms of consciousness, including normative criteria, are determined by material socio-economic conditions, Marxist ideology critics have tended to focus on the economic implications of this assumption at the expense of the political implications for social theory. Later theorists indebted to Nietzsche (such as Adorno and Foucault) interpret power in terms of productive, relational networks, in which Reason is presumed to be embedded. Power, particularly in contemporary Western culture, is not only sovereign or subsuming. Rather, interests, needs, and desires are caught up in an intricate web of interdependencies that calls for a more complex model of political analysis than Marx's basic class distinction is equipped to deal with.

Using Nietzsche's method of genealogy, Foucault shows that by deflecting criticism from its own political conditions, the standpoint of "emancipation" is vulnerable to, and sometimes politically instrumental for, oppressive political structures. In common with "positivist ideology", the conflation of representations of the common good with a cynically deflated myth of altruism hurts the "idealist" political left more than the "realist" political right, whose medicine consists in laying bare universal naked self-interest. Foucault is critical of conceptions of madness, sexuality, discipline and punishment, whose political function is disguised as "enlightened emancipation". One may extend

such criticism to the mode of emancipation of slaves, to neo-colonial processes of de-colonisation, to the consumer identities of emancipated working women, liberated homosexuals, and a plethora of marketised modes of self-expression and liberation in western culture that drive people to participate in their own systematic oppression eagerly, and with apparent self-indulgence.

Marxist critical theory has been enriched in recent years by a tension between those influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical theory, and those influenced by post-structuralists such as Foucault and Derrida. Since Foucault in particular was deeply suspicious, and often dismissive, of Marxism and the concept of ideology, it is interesting that his work has had this effect. From the 1970's, Foucault's understanding of power was very much influenced by Nietzsche, in direct opposition to the "sovereign" understanding of power he attributed to Western Marxism. Some critical theorists such as Habermas however, regard Nietzsche's influence as dangerously irrational.⁸ In response to this tension between post-structuralism and critical theory, it is useful to re-examine the much maligned practice of ideology criticism in relation to Nietzsche's conception of genealogical criticism.

There is considerable disagreement as to whether there can be any compatibility between genealogy and ideology criticism. As discussed in Chapter 2, Foucault, for example, expressed scepticism about the latter. His Nietzschean conception of power led him to object to the conception of truth he attributed to the criticism of ideology. Foucault maintained that the notion of ideology is problematic because it always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth.⁹ In Chapter 2, I argued that his criticism of the notion of "false consciousness" is misplaced, since the "falsity" of false consciousness need not consist merely in false beliefs. Indeed, it need not involve any false beliefs. However, it is worth revisiting his comments, since a larger problem is also at work with respect to the broader concern of ideology criticism with "emancipation". The problem, Foucault argues,

Does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scienticity or of truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in

seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false.¹⁰

Foucault's central thesis here is that what is regarded as true is often what works in the service of power. The "production of true discourses" is often linked to oppression. In *History of Sexuality Vol. I* for example, Foucault shows how discourse on sexuality was mediated through supposedly objective scientific practices such as psychiatry, reinforcing behavioural norms appropriate to particular power structures in society under the guise of liberation. This criticism is not restricted to objective truths, however, but is extended to all forms of consciousness which posit a sharp analytic break in political philosophy between relations of power and conditions of emancipation.

Genealogy presupposes that no set of beliefs is free from conflicts of interest and relations of power, or willing. The aim of ideology criticism, on the other hand, is often understood to be to free discourse from conflicts of interests. Even if this is not with naïve recourse to objective truths, which ideology critics tend to acknowledge and even insist 'are not politically innocent', ideology criticism is nevertheless more often than not predicated on some or other condition of emancipation from relations of power, whether this takes the form of proletarian class consciousness, utopian conditions of communist universality, or counterfactual, idealizing pragmatic conditions of speech, or perfect knowledge and freedom. If we focus on this gap in the presumptions of (i) constant relations of power in genealogy, even from the standpoint of resistance, and (ii) a break from power in ideology criticism, especially for the standpoint of emancipation, then it would appear that the presuppositions of these two forms of criticism are in conflict with each other.

Foucault is sceptical of ideology criticism for assuming that discourse can be articulated from a perspective supposedly freed from conflicting relations of power.¹¹ It is here that his Nietzschean conception of power stands most starkly in contrast to that normally assumed in the tradition of ideology criticism. Foucault sees Marxism generally, and ideology criticism particularly, as drawing a distinction between emancipation and power, and claiming that the former excludes the latter.¹² He

and Nietzsche, on the other hand see the effects of power as inescapable. Power is unavoidable in social relations, but is also potentially enabling. Emancipation does not consist in somehow escaping from relations of power. The aim of political leadership – and, no doubt, this includes both matters of interpretation *and* practice – should not be to repress particular interests, but rather to harness antagonistic forces toward a flourishing society and culture, if only so that the leader's personal interests encounter the most support and least resistance. The political common good cannot depend on, altruistic, disinterested (and ultimately irrational and self-defeating) motivations (i.e. moralism) if society is to flourish. Politics is inadequately theorised in moral terms. The general interest depends on an excitement of interests, not subordination and repression. This, crudely speaking, explains the enduring success of capitalist domination that socialists must, despite themselves, acknowledge.

Unlike Nietzsche, Foucault shares with Marxist critical theorists a concern to ground social criticism in the leftist political task of resistance to systematically asymmetrical relations of domination. Nietzsche's focus is on values, and he aims to challenge the hegemony of life-negating (post-) Christian values, by initiating processes of evaluation that will bring about conditions under which life can flourish. In both cases, under a relational ontology of power, ideology criticism is legitimate only where it appreciates that criticism must not be conducted from a universal standpoint outside of regimes of power where it transcends conflicts of interest, but from within an historical framework acknowledged as contingently conditioned by strategic relations of power. If relations of power are always already in play, criticism is a matter of ongoing re-evaluation in response to different perspectives and shifting circumstances, not an *a priori* matter of how to approach each and every political dispute from a single, correct interpretation or with one correct practice.

However, in spite of these differences between them, I maintain that ideology criticism may not be essentially at odds with Nietzsche's, and especially Foucault's, use of genealogy as a method of criticism. In both genealogy and ideology criticism, the unquestioned and unquestionable status of

dominant discourse is part of what enables it to function effectively in perpetuating domination in society. With ideology, a set of beliefs taken for granted is shown to perpetuate domination.

Ideology criticism challenges these naturalised beliefs by showing that what is thought to be universal and necessary, is in fact contingently bound to particular interests amidst particular socio-economic conditions. Similarly, genealogy traces the historical processes which give rise to value-systems and beliefs. By juxtaposing historical viewpoints with current understandings, genealogy puts into question “self-evident” assumptions. The contingency of beliefs, values and practices is revealed by exposing their contingent historical origins. The difference between these two forms of criticism has too often been over-emphasised.

In fact, ideology criticism and genealogy often go further than merely exposing historical contingency. They do not merely present a singular objective history, but rather deliberately trace beliefs, values and practices back to premises unacknowledged, or even explicitly disavowed, by their proponents. *The German Ideology* associates idealism with religion. *Capital* points to systematic appropriation obscured by the functionally integrated, superficial categories of political economy. Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* ties Christian morality to traits and values that Christians disavow. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* shows how certain disciplinary practices regarded as liberal and enlightened can be used as a means to more effective control of society.

However, Nietzsche’s relational conception of agency makes genealogy better equipped to address the multiple networks, perspectives and nodes of contestation of modern productive power. Though Horkheimer and Adorno similarly reconceive agency in their criticism of totally administered, late capitalist, consumer society, genealogy is also better equipped to avoid the nihilistic defeatism to which these Critical Theorists appear to succumb when, in their mature work, they jettison the transcendent potential of emancipatory resistance from within an immanent historical context. It would be problematic to equate the aims of Nietzschean genealogy with the Enlightenment project of liberation from domination that we see in Critical Theory. However, genealogy, and particularly

Foucault's clarification of the relational ontology of power in Nietzsche's later work, is fruitful for criticism of the self-defeating acceptance of the *status quo* that is central to *Ideologiekritik*.

David Owen has argued that ideology criticism and genealogy are distinct, yet complementary, forms of criticism, both of which are needed 'in the ongoing quest for enlightenment and emancipation.'¹³ In the following section, I explore Owen's position in greater detail in order to clarify some central distinctions between these two methods of social criticism. The difference between these methods of criticism, he claims, is that ideology criticism makes claims regarding the truth of its own position, which genealogy avoids.

I argue that if ideology criticism and genealogy take a *distinct* position with regards to the truth content of their respective forms of criticism, then the two are in direct conflict with each other and certainly not complementary. However, Nietzsche only rejects conceptions of truth which fail to take into account that beliefs are tied to a particular historically conditioned perspective, mediated by relations of willing. In this case, if the standpoint of ideology criticism is conceived of as being always already conditioned by historically contingent relations of power, then it is compatible with, and not distinct from, the perspectivism presupposed in genealogy. Genealogy, furthermore, helps to provide an illuminating and fruitful approach to power and agency that is so often under-theorised in Marxist ideology criticism, and it also avoids the theoretically sophisticated, but practically debilitating, negativism of Adorno's later work.

Part I: Ideological and Aspectival Captivity

In *Criticism and Captivity*, David Owen argues that genealogy and critical theory address distinct aspects of enlightenment, involving distinct kinds of ethical dialogue. His argument is directed against theorists working in the tradition of the Frankfurt School who, he argues, have typically misinterpreted genealogy as an empirically insightful but normatively confused form of *Ideologiekritik*.¹⁴ Instead, Owen argues that genealogy addresses a logically distinct form of self-imposed constraint on our capacity for self-government: ideology criticism addresses situations

which involve being held captive by an ideology or false consciousness; genealogy, on the other hand, addresses situations which involve being held captive by a perspective, or restricted consciousness. On this view, ideology criticism aims to free us from captivity to an ideology by showing us the correct way of seeing things, while genealogy aims to free us from a limited perspective by showing us that there is not only one way of seeing things. Owen characterises this distinction by opposing *ideological* captivity to what he calls *aspectival* captivity.¹⁵

Ideological captivity, according to Owen, involves being held captive by 'false beliefs which legitimise certain oppressive social institutions.'¹⁶ It is important to note that the form of oppression from which the agents suffer is a form of self-imposed coercion aided by the fact that the agents do not realise that it is self-imposed.¹⁷ Thus ideology criticism aims to produce a form of self-reflection within the agents subject to ideological captivity, which facilitates recognition of the fact that these false beliefs have come to legitimise their oppression. Ideology criticism is successful if the agents subject to ideological captivity become motivated, through this process of enlightenment, to fight against the oppressive social institution in question. Ideological captivity is thus a matter of *false consciousness*, and the criticism thereof involves bringing agents to recognise the falsity of their beliefs in light of the truth. Owen claims it is distinct from aspectival captivity, 'most notably in that aspectival captivity is independent of the truth-or-falsity of the beliefs held by the agent.'¹⁸ Ideological captivity, as opposed to aspectival captivity, is about false beliefs. Aspectival captivity is just one-sided.

Like ideology criticism, then, genealogy aims to enlighten, and liberate, those to whom it is addressed about a perspective which undermines their capacity for self-governance, but not by identifying the single, correct account. Rather, by contrasting antagonistic perspectives against one another, genealogy opens up a space of freedom and possible transformation. What appears universal and necessary is revealed to be singular, contingent and questionable. If things have been different before, then that which we take for granted as self-evident and given, could be otherwise.

Owen claims that genealogy shows us a different perspective but withholds from claiming which is the correct perspective; it does not concern itself with truth or falsity.¹⁹ With respect to this distinction between genealogy and ideology criticism, Owen thus distinguishes between matters of truth-or-falsity and matters of perspective.

Owen draws on this contrast between the methods of genealogy and ideology criticism to argue that Frankfurt School critical theorists are mistaken to see genealogy as a botched form of ideology criticism. He argues they are themselves held captive by a perspective which sees the existence of false beliefs concerning the justifiability of our moral norms as the *only* threat to the exercise of our capacity for self-government. Instead, he sees the two forms of criticism as addressing distinct aspects of enlightenment and emancipation. Ideology criticism presents an undistorted view and the dialogue this calls forth with one's interlocutors is a means to an end, namely getting to a non-distorted viewpoint. Genealogy is the freeing of a person from the limitations of a singular perspective, and the dialogue this calls for relies not on the question, 'Who is right?' but, rather, 'What difference does it make to look at the problem from a different perspective?'²⁰

By this reasoning, in order to transcend the forces of domination which ideology helps to perpetuate, ideology criticism posits a 'non-distorted view, that is, something like the truth of the matter',²¹ regardless of the contingencies of perspective. But genealogists do not believe such a position exists. Ideology criticism sets out to correct our false beliefs by showing how they perpetuate domination, and by giving us true beliefs in their place. Genealogy frees us from aspectual captivity by contrasting one perspective with another, showing us the limitations of our perspective and the ways in which it inhibits self-government.²² The genealogist acknowledges that discourse is immersed in power relations. As Foucault puts it, 'the Nietzschean genealogist admits to polemical interests motivating the investigation [...] no longer claiming to be outside the social practices analysed.'²³ By contrast, ideology criticism, on Owen's account, claims to offer us the one

true account, undistorted by conflicts of interest. “Truth-or-falsity” is thus considered to be distinct from matters of perspective.

In a similar characterisation, Raymond Geuss argues that the aim of genealogy is not to refute, or reject, a point of view but rather to put a point of view into question, to ‘provide a historical dissolution of self-evident identities’.²⁴ ‘The principal targets of this problematising approach are the apparently self-evident assumptions of a given form of life and the (supposedly) natural or inevitable and unchangeable character of given identities.’²⁵ According to both Geuss and Owen, genealogical criticism is not concerned with the truth or falsity of a belief, but rather with differences in perspective. However, I want to question whether this latter position is really so different from ideology criticism. At issue here is the standard of criticism and the truth status accorded to claims made in criticism.

Owen concludes that, ‘If we are to engage in the ongoing quest for enlightenment and emancipation, we will need to participate in both these kinds of dialogue.’²⁶ Thus genealogy and ideology criticism make distinct claims with respect to their truth-status, but they are nonetheless seen to be compatible with each other. In the following section, I argue that if ideology criticism makes claims to truth that are distinct from the sorts of claims made in genealogy, and if these claims entail a notion of truth where the truth outstrips all perspectives on it, then Nietzsche's rejection of such a notion of truth puts genealogy in direct opposition to ideology criticism, and they cannot be compatible as Owen claims. Under a perspectivist account of truth however, genealogy is compatible with ideology criticism, with the consequence that the distinction Owen makes between the two forms of criticism falls away. In the final section I argue that since ideology criticism and genealogy are compatible, the latter may be, and should be, integrated with the former. Such integration helps provide an account of agency and power that openly acknowledges and addresses the problem of self-implication. This avoids the typical reversion of ideology criticism to ideology, as

well as the nihilistic quietism of despair that characterises Adorno's attempt to reconcile the thesis of total ideology with conditions for transcendent emancipation.

Part II: Nietzsche's Truth

Nietzsche contra truth

Genealogy as a method of criticism was developed by Nietzsche in response to his disavowal of a correspondence account of truth. In this section, I explain that the rejection of truth presupposed in genealogy involves a rejection of truth understood as a single, correct account which corresponds with things as they are in themselves, independently of any given perspective mediated by material conditions and relations of power. If the ideology critic identifies false consciousness from such a standpoint – as a form of consciousness which fails to correspond with the single correct interpretation that the ideology critic has in hand – this involves a conception of truth that Nietzsche's rejection of truth is directed against.

One need not go as far as Maudemarie Clark's argument in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, that Nietzsche significantly changed his position on truth between his early and later works, to agree that one can distinguish different conceptions of truth at work in his writings. When Nietzsche explicitly rejects truth, this does not include the perspectival truths he later endorses. Clark argues cogently that Nietzsche's rejection of truth entails a rejection of a metaphysical conception of truth as correspondence to things as they are in themselves, independently of any particular perspective.²⁷

As Nietzsche writes in *Human, All Too Human*,

It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it is hardly to be disputed. We behold all things through the human head and cannot cut off this head; while the question nonetheless remains what of the world would still be there if one cut it off.²⁸

Nietzsche implies here that an awareness of reality unmediated by our different interests is unattainable. Since we view all things 'through the human head', it is impossible to decide whether

our views correspond with how things are independently of this. Hence he rejects the notion of truth if it depends on a correspondence with reality which is constituted independently of us.²⁹

In his later writings, Nietzsche claims that 'truth is an illusion we've forgotten to be an illusion' and that the truth 'is the kind of error we couldn't live without'.³⁰ He continues to reject a conception of truth as something independent of our interests, agreeing with Kant in this respect that we can't know things as they are in themselves; we can have no conception of something that would be independent of all knowers. Whilst Clark argues that in his earlier writings Nietzsche rejects truth because he presupposes a correspondence theory of truth,³¹ one might put aside the issue of what conception of truth Nietzsche presupposes and still claim that he most certainly rejects a correspondence account. Certainly, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche mocks correspondence truth for the epistemological problems it raises.³² A metaphysical account of truth as a correspondence to the ways things are, independently of our viewpoint, cannot get far without running into the consequent epistemological problem that we cannot know whether what we know is true, even if it is. Our statements are necessarily put forward in relation to our interests, so we should avoid trying measure their truth against the way things are independently of these interests.

Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, V:

These historians of morality (particularly the Englishmen) do not amount to much: usually they themselves unsuspectingly stand under the command of a particular morality...Their usual mistaken premise is that they affirm some consensus among people, at least among tame peoples, concerning certain moral principles, and then conclude that these principles must be unconditionally binding also for you and for me – or, conversely, they see that among different peoples moral valuations are *necessarily* different and infer from this that *no* morality is binding – both of which are equally childish.³³

Though Nietzsche speaks here of morality, he also applies this principle to truth as we see in his criticism of the nihilism that results from the questioning of truth by the will to truth in *The Genealogy of Morals*. Nietzsche shows how the claim, that "God is dead" (a position arrived at

following questioning of a *singular* origin and foundation for our values), leads to, but need not entail, nihilism: the belief that without such a foundation of our values, our values have no value. Similarly, the putting into question of the truth no-matter-what, by the will to truth, can result in, but need not entail, relativism. Nietzsche sees both truth and morality, both epistemic and ethical normative criteria, as conditioned by, and subject to, processes of evaluation and historically contingent human interests which are, in turn, affected by relations of power.

Owen claims that 'the state of un-freedom' described by the concept of aspectival captivity is 'logically distinct' from that described by that of ideological captivity, 'in that aspectival captivity is independent of the truth-or-falsity of the beliefs of the agent' expressed in ideology criticism.³⁴ It is worth emphasising that *if* ideology as "false consciousness" in critical theory is "false" in the sense given by a correspondence account of truth and falsity, then Nietzsche's position does not address an aspect of enlightenment that is distinct from, yet complementary to, ideology criticism, as Owen claims, but is straightforwardly inconsistent with it. However, Nietzsche's position accords with the positions on ideology of the Marxist Critical Theorists, in this respect, which do *not* endorse a notion of truth which entails correspondence to the way things are in themselves (independently of the observer, her background acculturation, and her particular human interests).

In support of the above claim, consider the following: (i) Horkheimer writes in his review of Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* that contingent truth is only relativist compared with the notion of eternal, unchanging truth. If we abandon a conception which posits truths as true for all times, regardless of contingent natural or social circumstances, this need not entail relativism about truth. Fallibility does not entail relativity since we distinguish between truth and error in relation to currently *available* means of knowledge.³⁵ (ii) Adorno criticises relativists for positing events as random and accidental in contrast to absolutist universalism. The present is an unavoidable point of reference but this is what gives concrete meaning to the concept of truth.³⁶ (iii) Habermas, though he often seems to posit universal standards for social criticism, criticises Plato and Kant for mistakenly

locating the standards of truth in a metaphysical world, and instead argues these are immanent to actual practices of communication.³⁷ Though this leaves open a wide range of possible interpretations of what truth is, Nietzsche and the Critical Theorists are in agreement here as to what truth is not. Neither believes this necessarily lead to relativism.

Marxist ideology criticism is predicated on naturalistic assumptions, which Nietzsche shares, regarding the material determinations of consciousness. Morality, religion, law and politics (ideas and forms of consciousness) are determined, for Marx, by socio-economic conditions, but the historical determination of ideas does not preclude epistemic or normative judgment. As discussed in Chapter 2, “false consciousness” for Marx and for later Frankfurt School thinkers, includes both true and false beliefs. The pejorative term, “false”, does not refer to the status of a belief with respect to its correspondence to actual states of affairs, but rather to superficial interpretations that obscure the underlying empirical social conditions and interests that determine beliefs. A metaphysical, correspondence account of truth may in fact be said to function ideologically in this very sense, by obscuring the conflicting perspectives and historically contingent material circumstances and relations of power that determine our interpretations of the world, and characterising a true interpretation as one that remains unaffected by such “distorting” conditions.

Perspectivism

The human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and *only* in these. We cannot look around our own corner: it is a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspective there *might* be.³⁸

Whatever conception of truth Nietzsche endorses, it cannot depend on a point of view which transcends the contingent conditions of our perspectives. Owen sees a “perspective” as,

A system of judging in terms of which we make sense of ourselves as beings in the world [...] such systems govern what is intelligibly up for grabs as true-or-false. They do not determine what is true or false, but rather what statements or beliefs can count as true-or-false.³⁹

Having discussed what Nietzsche thought the truth is not, it remains to be seen if ideology criticism is compatible with the epistemological premises of perspectivism. First I will explain what perspectivism is, and how it informs the process of re-evaluation that genealogy intends to engage us in. I interpret genealogy as a method of criticism that is developed in response to a problem of self-implication that perspectivism brings to bear on the standpoint of criticism. By adopting multiple, shifting perspectives, genealogy avoids the ideological function that accompanies the identification of a single, correct account presumed to transcend perspectival conditions. I then argue that the perspectival epistemic status of the sorts of claims made in genealogy is not only compatible with, but suitable for, the claims to truth-or-falsity made by ideology critics.

Genealogy demonstrates that the political relations shaping knowledge claims are obscured by the claim to a single, correct universal standpoint seen to transcend the conditions which govern perspectives. Yet this point is not entirely negative. In Foucault's terms, if discourse transmits power, it can also undermine and expose domination. The claims made by genealogy are not worse off than any other claims because they are conditioned by a perspective. In *The Genealogy of Morals III: §12*, Nietzsche gives an explicit account of what has come to be called perspectivism:

From now on, my dear philosophers, let us beware of the dangerous old conceptual fable which posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject", let us beware of the tentacles of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason", "absolute spirituality", "knowledge in itself"; - for these always ask us to imagine an eye which is impossible to imagine, an eye which supposedly looks out in no particular direction, an eye which supposedly either restrains or altogether lacks the active powers of interpretation which first make seeing into seeing something – for here, a nonsense and a non-concept is demanded of the eye. Perspectival seeing is the only seeing there is, perspectival knowing the only kind of "knowing".⁴⁰

This passage accords with Nietzsche's question, in *The Gay Science*, whether 'existence without interpretation, without "sense" does not become nonsense'.⁴¹ Nietzsche suggests here that everything we perceive is conditioned by our interests, capacities and values. No account of the

world can be given which is not interpreted in light of a perspective. Since there is no “knowledge in itself”, the claims we make about reality are, at the very least, perspectival. The only means we have to ascertain the truth-status of the claims we make about the world are conditioned by the interests that govern a perspective. Perspectivism as an epistemological thesis insists on the interdependence of knowledge and interests, discourse and power, form and content.

As Maudemarie Clark emphasises in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Nietzsche does not think truth is limited by the inability to transcend perspective since such a limit is incoherent.⁴² I explained in the previous section that Nietzsche rejects the notion of a metaphysical correspondence with truth that such a limit entails. However, his denial that the truth is independent of the perspective of human interests does not mean he rejects truth altogether. Truth as correspondence to the thing as it is in itself is not the only standard of truth available to us.⁴³ Nietzsche criticises Kant shortly prior to the above quoted passage on perspectivism, arguing that the “intelligible character of things” means that things are constituted in such a way that they are understood only to the extent that the intellect acknowledges them as *completely beyond its grasp*. Nietzsche is arguing that the truth-status of our claims about reality is not *limited* by “perspectival seeing” since it ‘is the only kind of seeing there is.’⁴⁴

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche claims that the will to truth at any price is based on the ascetic ideal, which,

Has a goal – and this goal is sufficiently universal for all other interests of human existence [...] It relentlessly interprets periods, peoples, men in terms of this goal, it allows no other interpretation, no other goal, it reproaches, negates, affirms, confirms exclusively with reference to *its* interpretation.⁴⁵

What compels the will to truth is belief in the ascetic ideal, ‘it is belief in a metaphysical value, the value of truth itself.’⁴⁶ Nietzsche’s response, as Clark argues, is that we should value the truth only insofar as our needs are served by this.⁴⁷ Thus the self-overcoming of truth that he describes at the

end of the Third Essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* is a denial not of truth *tout court* but of truth as an overriding value. Nietzsche denies that truth is independent of human interests.

Perspectivism does not involve the claim that human knowledge falsifies reality, since such a yardstick is unavailable. Rather, it involves the minimal claim that ‘all knowledge and values are perspectival’.⁴⁸ Perspectivism denies the possibility of a view from nowhere, independent of interests, values, and purposes, which it treats as a metaphysical abstraction that neglects the relationship between criterion and intuition. Our perspectives govern the truth of our claims about reality just as reality determines our perspectives and interpretations. Perspectives are constituted by cognitive capacities, practical interests, conflicts of interest and standards of rational acceptability. These in turn are determined by our perspectives and dominant norms and beliefs. Perspectivism allows for claims to truth if such truth does not entail a single correct account of the way things are in themselves. There may be more truths than any human can know since different interests lead to different truths to be discovered, but this does not mean there can be no truth.⁴⁹

Nietzsche’s criticism of the “will-to-truth-no-matter-what” – the search for an objective correspondence independent of the willing that drives it – may be interpreted as the criticism of an ideology that dominates western philosophy. If theory is never politically innocent, then it is no accident that vested political interests are served by their disguise behind the illusion of a single, correct account of things that successfully abstracts from political antagonism. Perspectivism involves the idea that, ‘there is no coherent notion of justification other than ratification in the terms provided.’⁵⁰ Truth is tied to the perspective best able to further the quality of life in particular contexts and circumstances. There is no critical standard independent of particular perspectives, but this does not mean there is no basis for social criticism: one perspective can be thought of as superior to another when it satisfies more fully (than an earlier theory) the interests and relevant beliefs from which it is constituted.⁵¹

The claim of one perspective to be better than another can only be made in terms of what it could do for the occupants of the lesser perspective; hence the initial immanent requirement. A standard of criticism is posited by the perspective which is able to take on board the interests shared by both perspectives and yet overcome inconsistencies in the former position. This serves as a yardstick, a standard of evaluation by which the truth of critical claims and evaluations are to be judged. To this extent, genealogy is oriented to providing an initially immanent criticism of our modern perspective, by taking on other antagonistic perspectives which throw dominant prejudices into relief. Genealogy interprets and criticises contingent social formations without laying claim to a single correct account.

We see here that a shared perspective is established in an initially immanent criticism that cites beliefs and norms to which the interlocutor is willing to accede, before an inconsistent flaw is identified by the theorist or critic, which she then claims to be able to remedy from another perspective that does not otherwise conflict with the initial self-defeating standpoint. To recall Rose's discussion of Nietzsche and Adorno's use of irony in Chapter 7, Nietzsche's "anti-moralism" may be interpreted as an *immanent* procedure used to deflate false claims of legitimation. But, like Adorno, Nietzsche is also not content with the *maieutic* façade and "Socratic optimism" of immanent criticism.⁵² He does not merely expose inconsistency by associating immanent social norms with what they ostensibly negate, but contrasts dominant norms against historical ones, and emphatically affirms multiple, conflicting perspectives.

By contrasting perspectives against one another, genealogy estranges us from views we take for granted, making conscious previously unconscious practices. Genealogy reveals how people lived successfully with different practices from our own, allowing for a plurality of perspectives rather than presenting us with the singular truth of the matter. That one's viewpoint is a perspective reminds one of its underlying contextual significance. Seeing one's understanding as a perspective allows one to begin to criticise it but, as David Couzens Hoy argues in *Critical Theory*, 'The source and ground of criticism is not some standpoint beyond our context, but other voices within our

context.⁵³ Thus no voice can claim to represent the single truth. Genealogy reminds us not only of the contingency of a perspective but, furthermore, contrasts it with a different, yet valuable perspective, or associates it with another perspective of defective value. The presentation of multiple antagonistic perspectives and inconsistencies forces one to re-assess the *value* of a single perspective that is taken for granted to the extent that its perspectival character is obscured.

Genealogy puts us in a position where we are better able to assess the value of a single, dominant perspective in relation to other perspectives, and thereby engage in a process of re-evaluation essential to enlightenment – an ongoing process in which we are encouraged to think for ourselves with rational reflection. Genealogy is rational and motivating. Provoking us with conflicting perspectives, genealogy also appeals to our own perspective, putting it into question, revealing contingency and opening up possibilities within the perspective which can be addressed without strictly rejecting it. The genealogist adopts multiple perspectives to shake up the sedimented hypostatisation of a single, transcendent dogmatic account, drawing on the *agonism* of the dialectical approach to philosophy, which encourages the broadest available range of perspectives and views in any investigation. This helps establish the boundaries of an issue or concept, which allows us to make well-informed, well-considered judgments, and to avoid self-defeating behaviour.

One of the central claims of his *Genealogy of Morals* is that our will to truth *no-matter-what* has brought us to the brink of nihilism. It is this *no-matter-what* of truth – our commitment to the unconditional value of truth – independent of the socio-economic conditions, values, purposes and interests, that diminishes us as agents. This claim echoes Adorno's critique of "Socratic optimism" and positivist ideology. The truth about the way things really are is not valuable in and of itself; nor is it attainable. Rather, our interests condition the perspectives from which claims to truth are made. Better to reflect on these determinations rationally than be determined by them, unwittingly and irrationally. As Nietzsche argues in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'A virtue must be *our* invention, *our* most personal need and self-defence.'⁵⁴ So far, I have argued that Nietzsche's criticism of a

correspondence account of truth is compatible with ideology criticism. I have explained what perspectivism is and how it informs Nietzsche's practice of genealogy. It is time to discuss the relationship between perspectivism and ideology criticism. Of crucial concern here is Nietzsche's conception of power.

Part III: Genealogical Ideology Criticism

Productive Power and the Dialectic of Enlightenment

For Nietzsche and Foucault, interests are socially mediated by relations of power. Just as freedom is manifested in its relations with the obstacles it is set against,⁵⁵ so the exercise of power is shaped in relation to resistance, as resistance, in turn, is shaped by its relation with power. Thus power is not held by individuals, groups or institutions over others, but exists in relations of force *between* individuals, groups and institutions. As with ideology criticism, domination depends on the participation of those who are dominated. Foucault thus claims that, 'Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free [...] Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power.'⁵⁶

In Foucault's genealogy of punishment, this relational understanding of power stands in contrast to prior conceptualisations which distinguish universal sovereign rights from coercive power, which itself is considered as the illegitimate overstepping of these pre-established sovereign rights.⁵⁷ Under the prior conceptualisation, political criticism comes to be seen as taking the neutral role of arbitration, preventing the abuse of pre-established rights. Genealogy overturns this. As Foucault puts it, 'Law is neither the truth of power nor its alibi. It is an instrument of power which is at once complex and partial.'⁵⁸ Power does not only prohibit and is not so fragile as to take only the form of repression. Modern technologies of power are more productive, individualised and efficient than centralised, transparent, coercive or prohibitory force. Foucault's book *Discipline & Punish* shows how norms of subjectivity are often the means by which individuals internalise the constraints of power and begin to watch over themselves.

I explained in Chapter 2 how, according to Foucault, with the development of disciplinary technology and the human sciences, power primarily incites us to internalise disciplinary norms⁵⁹ rather than forcing us to obey its commands through the more expensive mechanisms of prohibition, which generate increased resistance. Foucault argues that history has neglected the *mechanisms* of power by focusing exclusively on those who repressively ‘held it’.⁶⁰ Treating human rights as universal and sovereign, obscures the productive power relations which constitute them. Modern power is no longer centralised through the Sovereign, or exclusively through the State, but is dispersed through capillary institutions such as schools, the clinic and prisons, as well as the norms established by the biological and human sciences. Disciplinary mechanisms have been super-imposed over the system of sovereign rights, concealing the actual procedures and domination in its techniques. According to Foucault, the theory of sovereignty and its codes are used to legitimate disciplinary constraints and thereby disguise actual mechanisms of domination.⁶¹

If power is purely repressive and uni-directional, then liberation from domination requires liberation from power. But if we understand power as a relation of forces, then liberation takes place within relations of force. If we engage with agents who are subject to ideology on their own terms and present them with conflicting perspectives which call their beliefs into question without necessarily *rejecting* these beliefs, then we harness agents’ interests and at the same time put them in a position where they are forced to re-evaluate their perspective. Regarding power as relational, genealogy is thus enabling of power to the benefit of agents who had failed to realise that things could be otherwise, and that the power to effect change has been within their grasp all along.

Lohmann’s account of Marx’s historiographical critique in *Capital*, discussed in the previous chapter, follows a remarkably similar method to Nietzsche’s method of genealogy. *Capital* begins with an immanent criticism of its object that demonstrates inconsistency and conflict in dominant self-conceptions, which is then contrasted against multiple, shifting perspectives that reveal alternative feasible perspectives. These alternative perspectives break with simple, deterministic, empirical

descriptions of unfolding historical events, such as a Whiggish view of progress, by retrospectively describing conflicting claims from the point of view of a variety of participants, relative to specific, contingent events, which clash with dominant norms and beliefs that legitimate the *status quo*.

Both Nietzsche and Marx use multiple perspectives to demonstrate mutable historical genesis and connections between dominant social norms, beliefs, and conflicts of interest from a naturalistic, materialist standpoint. The major break between the two theorists, however, concerns their respective conceptions of agency, power, and emancipation. Marx's standpoint of criticism is predicated on emancipation from oppressive relations of power. He conceives of power as something exerted over and above the freedom of social agents. Nietzsche, by contrast, sees power as fundamental to existence and agency – as constitutive of freedom rather than a constraint on subjectivity. This does not mean resistance is impossible. Rather, both resistance and oppression are shaped by each other in ongoing relations of antagonism and conflict.

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 7, the first generation of Frankfurt School Critical Theorists aimed to address a perceived failure on the part of Soviet communists, as well Weimar social democrats, to realise the emancipatory goals of Marxist theory. This resulted in a certain complicity with oppressive structures of power on the part of the latter, and outright oppression on the part of the former. In addition, the experiences of the members of the Frankfurt School in exile, in relation to the development of consumerist culture and what Adorno calls “positivist ideology” in the social sciences, demonstrated the remarkable resilience and sophisticated plasticity of capitalist social relations of power.

Western Marxists and other left-leaning critical social theorists have been forced to reckon with a failure in Marxist theory to address the ability of oppressive political regimes to accommodate, incorporate and utilise emancipatory discourse – liberal and socialist – to legitimate conditions of domination. Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1940s show how Enlightenment instrumental rationality is perverted and corrupted to realise purposes to which it is ostensibly opposed; Foucault

demonstrates how dominant norms of liberation and self-expression are moulded in an irrational, self-defeating fashion. Voluntary servitude is achieved through the manipulation of needs, desires and perceived interests such that the condition of agents' oppression is made less directly repressive as an insidiously structured consequence of the pursuit of freedom.

The point is that Foucault and the early Frankfurt School theorists share a concern with modern modes of the political instrumentalisation of agency, cultural identity, objective and emancipatory social scientific discourse, and even critical social theory. But, while Horkheimer and Adorno go some way towards addressing the political instrumentalisation of agency in late capitalist consumer society, they nonetheless cling to a traditional Marxist conception of emancipation, which predicates liberation in opposition to relations of power. Adorno cannot reconcile reason and liberty, since he thinks that all forms of rationality are mediated by instrumentalising relations of domination.

I argued in the previous chapter that Adorno is mistaken to set emancipatory transcendence at a radically apart from the immanent social context (and the forms of knowledge and discursive thought that this context determines). The price of immunising the standards of criticism from ideological contamination in this way is to locate them beyond the bounds of determinate thought. Although the multiple and contingent perspectival dispersion of genealogy breaks with the polarised structure of the dialectic, Nietzsche's and Foucault's relational conceptualisation of critical resistance is closer to Hegel's dialectical logic than it is to Adorno on this count. Adorno's *rupture* between transcendence and immanence involves a failure to reflect on how conditions of resistance are intrinsically determined by conditions of domination, in relation to such conditions. Nietzsche's and Foucault's *relational* conceptualisation of power is, if anything, more thoroughly dialectical. If freedom is conceived in unreflective opposition to power, then the shape of such negation is determined irrationally by its other (like a bad infinite).

Genealogy presents multiple, alternative perspectives that put dominant beliefs, norms and concepts into question without necessarily rejecting the perspective of the agent being addressed.

Moreover, genealogy does not exempt itself from perspectival conditions and the mediation of power. Rather than seeking an emancipatory standard of criticism predicated on the illusory metaphysical transcendence of the one, true account of how things are, genealogy shows how our current perspective depends on our circumstances, purposes and assent, which is precisely what ideology obscures. Genealogy gives an immanent criticism of its object, often associating dominant beliefs with explicitly disavowed premises. But the genealogist goes further. She does not disavow the role of the critic or abjure responsibility for transformative criticism. Rather, she addresses the problem of self-implication head-on, affirming multiple, conflicting, provocative perspectives that clash with the dominant immanent self-conceptions the genealogist addresses.

Seeing truth in opposition to power, from a single, correct standpoint, that transcends the agonistic conflicts of interest underlying a dominant perspective, relies on the presupposition that power can somehow be overcome. But if power is everywhere, then emancipation is not a final destination we arrive at as the communist model, for example, seems to suggest to many of its interpreters.

Resistance against oppression is still available *through* and *within* relations of power. Since there is no escaping power, emancipation is an activity that needs to be worked at continually in relation to the context of forces around us. If there is no emancipatory position outside power, we are compelled to re-evaluate our beliefs in relation to shifting contexts of perspective, in an ongoing “critical interrogation of the present” as Foucault puts it.⁶² Thus Nietzsche’s conception of power is a valuable corrective to forms of ideology criticism that see power as opposed to truth and emancipation - as something that can be avoided. Genealogy reminds us that no perspective is inherently valuable. Rather, our perspectives gain their value through processes of evaluation and interpretation formed in relation to shifting, contingent socio-economic conditions and practices.

Ideology criticism can and should address “aspectival captivity”

As discussed earlier, Marx is critical of religious criticism which fails to reckon with the conditions that give rise to religious belief. Fichte’s simple negation of religion is determined by the same

underlying conditions Marx attributes to religion. Similarly, Owen points out that Nietzsche is critical of Schopenhauer's failure to infer from his criticism of religion significant implications for his own atheistic standpoint.⁶³ In both cases, an 'admitted and uncompromising atheism' is 'stuck', for Schopenhauer, in 'Christian and ascetic moral perspectives',⁶⁴ and for Fichte, in illusions about the priority of consciousness, which each is ostensibly supposed to negate.

Note that Nietzsche's major problem with ascetic perspectives is that they deny their perspectival character – i.e. they deny the determination of forms of consciousness by material contingencies. The inconsistency of Schopenhauer's perspective on religion reflects, for Nietzsche, a broader failure in Western secular society, science and culture to fully reckon with the meaning of the death of God, or rather with the loss of a transcendent, unified, metaphysical and epistemological foundation for the good and the true. Modern, secular scientific theorists cling to a 'metaphysical perspective', 'that denies its own perspectival character'.⁶⁵ Thus 'we do not draw the appropriate implications from the death of God because we are held captive by a metaphysical perspective according to which the source and authority of our values is entirely independent of us'.⁶⁶ To this extent, Nietzsche's motivation for genealogy is in sympathy with Marx's motivation for ideology criticism.

If, as Owen points out, genealogy is aimed against a perspective through which it appears that 'the source and authority of our values is entirely independent of us', I would argue the same may be said for Marx's diagnosis of irrational, self-defeating blindness to underlying material conditions and interests in his criticisms of religion, idealism, commodity fetishism and liberal political economy. Nietzsche recognises a failure in contemporary theory to infer crucial implications from criticism of religion for the ethical and epistemic justification of naturalistic secular discourse. A similar insight informs Marx's criticism of German Idealism (which initiates ideology criticism) and also his later criticisms of liberal political economy, reification and fetishism, where human interests, needs, values, and socio-economic practices are obscured and forgotten in the hypostatized forms of

consciousness to which they give rise. Both theorists are critical of perspectives that are taken for granted, in such a way that their material conditions are thereby obscured.

With respect to the Hegelian notion of “immanent critique” discussed in Chapter 6, both Marx and Nietzsche share the insight that if criticism is abstracted from that to which it is opposed in simple, unreflective negation, without reflective engagement in criticism of the standpoint of negation (as regards its relationship with the object of criticism and its underlying conditions), then such criticism is unwittingly determined by the conditions that determine ideology. This insight is central to Marx’s and Nietzsche’s respective aversions to “moralism”. Both theorists are wary of self-exempting transcendent criteria for social criticism. Eschewing metaphysics, they aim to present a naturalistic account of the material determination of forms of consciousness that accounts for, and does not exempt, the position of the social theorist from conditions she examines in abstraction.

Nietzsche and Marx share a desire to recover the contextual significance of underlying social conflicts which are obscured by ossified institutions, practices, norms and concepts that are taken for granted in theory and in everyday life. In this respect both critics resemble Walzer’s figuration, in *The Company of Critics* and *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, of prophets and dissidents who strive to retrieve obscured social significance from corrupt, dogmatic, moral codes by beginning with an immanent criticism of these principles, norms and beliefs.

In *Revaluation and the Turn to Genealogy*, Owen largely concurs with the account of perspectivism I have given. He argues that one’s perspective determines what is intelligibly up for grabs, which in turn allows for true beliefs.⁶⁷ He endorses Geuss’s claim that Nietzsche’s criticism of truth is aimed at ‘the correspondence theory of truth and the unquestioned belief in the absolute value of truth’, and also concurs with Clark’s interpretation, which claims that Nietzsche rejects only the “unconditional value” of “truth” (i.e. truth considered independent from the conditions of a perspective).⁶⁸ The distinction between “aspectival” and “ideological” captivity may be unhelpful with respect to the “truth” set against “false consciousness”, but it is relevant to the issue of “singular emancipation”.

To explain, Nietzsche's evaluative criticism of Christianity is directed immanently, at the dishonest and vindictive slave value of *ressentiment*. His criticism of the will to truth no-matter-what, that is born of such ascetic self-denial, is also directed against any singular, transcendental standpoint that pretends to infer what *must* be the case from contingent empirical conditions of experience (by assuming a metaphysical stance that denies its own perspectival character, as Owen puts it).⁶⁹ This diagnosis takes in Platonic philosophy and contemporary science. Like Christianity, these succumb to the position which Owen (in *Criticism and Captivity*) calls 'aspectival captivity', or 'being limited in terms of thought' either 'taken for granted' or thought to be 'universal and necessary'⁷⁰. In response to such illusory transcendence, genealogy presents rival perspectives in circumstances of conflict and struggle, in order to question the value of fixed dominant views which are taken for granted.

Nietzsche develops genealogy to account for how we have become subject to a 'taste for the unconditional', and to show why we ought to disavow this taste in a way that is compelling from both his own perspective, and from the perspective of the Christian morality which led to our taste for this singular perspective in the first place.⁷¹ Our 'taste for the unconditional' could well characterise the position of ideology criticism *if* its emancipatory standpoint is supposed to replace beliefs which are subject to conflicts of interest, with beliefs which transcend the conflicts of interest that govern perspectives. Such a position is precisely what Nietzsche's development of genealogy is intended to debunk, and in this respect Owen and Foucault are right.

I argued in Chapter 2 that "false consciousness" is a pejorative term that is not restricted to false beliefs. I have now argued that ideology criticism does not make truth claims in the correspondence sense, but endorses the perspectivist premise, that forms of consciousness are determined by perspectives and interests caught up in contingent socio-economic conditions. If this is so, then the truth-status accorded to the standpoint of ideology criticism is not opposed to the perspectivist approach to conditions of discourse that genealogy takes. Yet, although ideology criticism is not a matter of truth and falsity, it *has* traditionally been aimed at the identification of one correct

standpoint of “emancipation”. Ideology criticism and genealogy share a perspectival account of their object domain, but ideology criticism often reverts to ideology where the standpoint from which it is practiced is exempted from critical scrutiny into the implications for its relationship to power.

In answer to Owen and Foucault, one has to question whether ideology criticism *must* assume a privileged standpoint in relation to all other perspectives, or whether, perhaps, ideology criticism can afford an emphatically perspectival emancipatory standpoint. Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, endorsed historicist assumptions, that reason is embedded in society and that there is no final picture of reality.⁷² More recently, Hoy writes that, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno admit the complicity and embeddedness of criticism within the framework of a perspective.⁷³ Thomas McCarthy argues that critical theory gains critical perspective by revealing contingent relations of force in what is seen as universal and necessary, although he argues, on this basis, for transcendent universal ideals as grounds for criticism.⁷⁴ Nevertheless McCarthy agrees with Horkheimer that, ‘the content of these ideas is not eternal but subject to historical change [...] because the human impulses that demand something better take historically different forms.’⁷⁵

Foucault believed theorists who claim to be unmasking ideology tend to conceive of truth in opposition to false consciousness. Yet, not unlike ideology criticism, his genealogies of discipline and sexuality unmask illusions that people have about their social practices by showing how these are bound to relations of power which in fact frustrate desires for self-governance. Genealogy presents us with rival perspectives that contest our own, but avoids appealing to a standpoint transcending perspectives. Ideology criticism should do the same, since it is precisely the belief that a certain perspective is beyond contestation that characterises ideology. Ideology criticism not only *can* afford such an emphatically perspectival emancipatory standpoint, it also *ought* to take such an approach.

It is perhaps for this reason that Maeve Cooke argues for retaining the category of ideological distortion whilst denying the possibility of a privileged vantage point which transcends the contingencies of the interests which govern a perspective, and from which false consciousness is

posited.⁷⁶ Instead, the trick is to identify ideological distortion from a perspective acknowledged as being itself perspectival. False consciousness may thus be articulated as the illusion that a desired state of affairs is beyond the very mediation of ongoing contestation and the critical interrogation to which a perspective is subject. This conception of false consciousness as closed consciousness, as Cooke demonstrates, fits well with a common understanding that ideology masks the social contradictions which make up a perspective.

As discussed in Chapter 3, in *On Voluntary Servitude*, Rosen claims the falsity of false-consciousness is not necessarily a matter of failure to describe reality adequately as it is in itself, but is a matter of whose interests a particular belief benefits in oppressive relations of power.⁷⁷ The pejorative sense of “false consciousness”, to recall, depends less on its epistemological status than on its political and social function (although we have seen that the epistemological status of correspondence truth may well function ideologically by distracting from politically significant circumstances). Ideology is not identified as false from the standpoint of truth as correspondence or of the one correct account of the way things are, free from the influence of power: it is identified as false in virtue of a superior *perspective*, that is acknowledged as such.

Beliefs and norms are ideological due to the oppressive interests they promote, usually as a consequence of failure to acknowledge that they are bound to a perspective. Ideologies de-contest the meaning of political terms, covering over power relationships that mediate the sense of a given concept. Ideology occurs where relations of power behind the normative commitments of a perspective are overlooked due to agents’ failure to recognise a perspective as such.⁷⁸ This conception of ideology accords with what Owen describes as *aspectival* captivity – the belief that a given perspective is the only one available. I have argued that “false consciousness” is a matter of perspective, that the falseness of ideology depends on purposes it serves in relation to a perspective. Ideology functions best when its perspectival character is overlooked, and its content seems natural and necessary. Ideology criticism opposes this, de-contesting the apparent

naturalness and necessity of norms or beliefs, and revealing them to be bound to a particular perspective which functions oppressively or irrationally.

Like aspectual captivity, ideological captivity involves being held captive by beliefs which legitimise oppressive social institutions. Coercion is reinforced by the fact that the agents involved do not realise their oppression is partly self-imposed.⁷⁹ Ideology criticism thus aims to produce a form of self-reflection within agents subject to ideological captivity which facilitates recognition of the fact that their beliefs and norms are complicit with their oppression. Both genealogy and ideology criticism yield various critical perspectives, yet these should not be thought of as bound to a standpoint which transcends context. Presumption of context-transcendence is itself ideological. The theory of ideology assumes that part of the reason we collude in our oppression is because we fail to evaluate and interpret certain perspectives in relation our purposes and interests. Re-evaluation is a necessary precondition for any process of enlightenment and the emancipation that such criticism may intend.

Merely seeing the contingency of one's perspective is not enough to shake off ideology (as Adorno's notion of "positivist ideology" testifies). Agents deluded by ideology must also be motivated to re-evaluate their perspective with an appeal to their motives, values and interests. Criticism gains critical purchase through the association of norms and beliefs with a different perspective which puts agents' perspectives into question. Re-evaluation is necessary not only to dispel the belief that a state of affairs is inevitable or beyond contestation, but also to motivate agents to realign their beliefs and norms in accordance with their circumstances and interests. It is precisely the belief that beliefs or norms transcends the context of a perspective that ideology criticism ought to address.

Genealogy supplements ideology criticism on power, agency and emancipation

Although genealogical perspectivism does not conflict with presuppositions of ideology criticism regarding the perspectival character of ideology, Marxist ideology criticism has proved historically

weak on agency, and vulnerable to the ideological colonisation of its emancipatory standpoint. As Foucault points out:

In a certain academic conception of Marxism, or a certain conception of Marxism that was imposed on the university, there is always the underlying idea that relations of force, economic conditions, and social relations are given to individuals beforehand but at the same time are imposed on a subject of knowledge that remains identical, except in relation to ideologies construed as errors.... [But] the political and economic conditions of existence are not a veil or an obstacle for the subject of knowledge but the means by which subjects of knowledge are formed.⁸⁰

The early Frankfurt School Critical Theorists attempted to redress this weakness but their disillusionment, particularly prevalent in Adorno's late negativism, led them to overly pessimistic conclusions about the potential in contemporary society for eliciting an emancipatory perspective from the immanent criticism of late capitalist social formations. The perspectivism of Nietzsche's genealogy does not threaten any major presuppositions of ideology criticism, but genealogy does shed light on the vulnerability of ideology criticism to the problem of self-implication. In closing, I hope to offer some suggestions as to how genealogy may be said to supplement ideology criticism, without inconsistency with it, to address this vulnerability to ideological self-implication.

Geuss's account of Nietzsche's genealogical reading of Christianity makes for an interesting analogy of the ideological manipulation of Marxist theory. This in turn may help to serve as an indication of how genealogy could supplement ideology criticism's long-standing vulnerability to the problem of self-implication. Geuss takes from Nietzsche the point that Christianity has a 'bi-partite' structure consisting of 'antecedently existing practices, modes of behaviour, perceptions and feelings, which at a certain time are given an interpretation which imposes on them a meaning that they did not have before'. Thus, 'an essentially apolitical, pacifist, non-moralising form of existence' is transformed into a 'hierarchically organised public institution'⁸¹ – 'just the kind of thing Jesus preached against'.⁸² Significant circumstances vary, but the history of Marxist ideology criticism is

not far off from this history of Christianity, for reasons to do with the relationship between self-exemption and ideology.

In my view, antagonism itself may be read dialectically in Nietzsche's work⁸³. In a pattern that is typical of the philological evolution of the meaning and significance of words, Nietzsche's genealogy of Christianity demonstrates that each successive, successful interpretation of Christianity takes over or reinterprets an existing set of practices, but is never 'so successful that *nothing* of the original form of life remains'.⁸⁴ As Geuss writes, 'the dominant interpretation won't be able to eradicate the "meanings" that have previously accumulated.'⁸⁵ This recognition - that each layer of successfully embedded, sedimented sense to some extent determines the contours of the next successive layer - is equally significant with respect to the standpoint of criticism. The dialectical insight, that criticism should reflect on the influence on its position of that to which it stands opposed, stands in accordance with genealogy's approach to the mutual determination of force and resistance.

For Hegel and for Nietzsche, failure to reflect critically on circumstances that determine the phenomenon being criticised is a common cause of self-defeating irrationality. One should not fail to reckon with the determination of the standpoint of emancipation, or enlightenment, from that to which it stands opposed. Negation is not exempt from the influence of its dialectical counterpart, and should be subjected to the same healthy, critical, antagonistic and accountable scrutiny that it gives to its object, if it is to avoid reducing to the terms of that object. Hence the double-edged, self-reflective character of Enlightenment criticism, to which 'everything must submit'.⁸⁶ Self-conscious, and rationally mediated reflection on the relationship between subject and object in immediate experience, is the pre-condition of freedom. Freedom as pure negativity is as void as emancipation defined as absence from power.

In response to the successively embedded, politically oriented, interpretations that contribute to an ideology, genealogy engages in 'analysis of the contingent synthesis of meaning' that the ideology represents, and 'the process of disentangling the separate strands will take the form of an historical

account⁸⁷ that recounts previous episodes of struggle between different wills, each trying to impose their own interpretation. Genealogy, however, does not take the form an 'objective history', or 'history for its own sake' since knowledge 'pursued for its own sake', rather than 'in the service of life', 'becomes a dangerous cancer'.⁸⁸

The purpose, interests and circumstances of any perspective that genealogy adopts is consciously acknowledged and reflected upon, with provocative rhetoric and polemic, for example, that does not obscure, but rather affirms and motivates this perspective in relation to other conflicting perspectives. Thus genealogy gives an account of an ideology that does not dismiss it by duplicating underlying conditions irrationally and unwittingly, but examines and explains underlying conditions and sedimented conflicts in such a way as to challenge dominant prejudices whose perspectival character is taken for granted. Genealogy does not provide one correct account but challenges us to re-evaluate one perspective in virtue of another, with explicit reference to the historical antagonisms and socio-economic circumstances behind such interpretations.

Rather than exempting the standpoint of emancipation or enlightenment from oppressive political circumstances, without withdrawing the critic from the *agon*, genealogy affirms the status of the critical standpoint as an antagonistic perspective. Rather than attempting to avoid the problem of self-implication by following the inevitably ideological path of self-exemption, genealogy takes on board its implication in the conditions it criticises. It deliberately and mischievously provokes an active challenge from the reader, from her own perspective, instead of demanding obedient, passive acceptance of one correct account. For all Nietzsche's anti-egalitarian sentiment, Marxist social critics should be sympathetic to his desire not to think for his readers, but to provoke them to think through their perspectives.⁸⁹

By what suitable criterion, and with reference to which appropriate intuitions, are we to rank and adjudicate amongst perspectives to decide on a suitable course of action with respect to systematic social relations of domination? Examining Nietzsche's genealogy of Christian ideology in the

Genealogy of Morals, Geuss notes that the superior perspective 'gives a more plausible account of the emergence and development of our Christian morality from the perspective of its new positive valuation of life than Christians themselves can from the standpoint of their own ascetic ideals'.⁹⁰

Genealogy begins with a shared or immanent perspective, and then disentangles underlying sedimented conflicts, antagonisms and inconsistencies that have significantly determined its development over time.

But genealogy is not merely *immanently* situated in the perspective of its interlocutor, and the standpoint of genealogical criticism is not exempted from agonistic dispute, in the mode of a spectator or omniscient narrator whose emancipatory credentials or objective lack of prejudice may be taken for granted. The genealogist offers another perspective, affirmed as such and put forward as superior, for reasons justified from the perspective of the original viewpoint and its immanent deficiencies, as well as from the positively evaluated perspective she offers. The transcendent position of the critic is explicitly addressed, affirmed and related back to an immanent context of justification, not cut off in nihilistic, abstract negativity. Where emancipation is swiftly integrated by contemporary, productive forms of power, genealogy affirms the political implication of its perspective, challenging naturalistic political philosophers not to hide in a state of nature.

In sum, first, genealogy and ideology criticism are compatible. Neither seek one, true account of how things are, independently of the conditions of a perspective. Both are directed against hypostatized abstractions whose perspectival conditions are taken for granted (perspectives that are not treated as such, but as "natural", "objective" or "inevitable"). Second, where Marxist ideology criticism has proved weak on power and vulnerable to the problem of self-exemption, from conditions for ideology, genealogy is able to supplement the traditional theory of ideology with an alternative approach that helps to realize, rather than constrain, the fundamental concern of ideology criticism: to help agents avoid self-defeating behaviour by recognising the mutually determining relationship between ideas and material social conditions, mediated by ongoing relations of power.

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- ¹ Macey, D. 2000: 1.
- ² Heidegger, M. 1969.
- ³ Note how this foundational claim expresses the fist-clunking circularity that plagues Heidegger's phenomenological ontology – *philosophy* is presumed by default just as Marx is said to presume otherwise. A similar paradox besets Horkheimer and Adorno's criticism of Enlightenment, which relies on what it rejects.
- ⁴ Macey, D. 2000: 1.
- ⁵ Lohmann, G. 1986: 367. Lohmann claims these latter chapters are not written from an immanent but from a transcendent standpoint of criticism, which emerges out of the previous immanent standpoint of justification.
- ⁶ Habermas, J. 1987(b): 94.
- ⁷ This is perhaps why Plato comes to represent Being as ideal, against contingent, contaminated Becoming.
- ⁸ Habermas, J. 1987(b): 94.
- ⁹ Foucault, M. 1980: 118.
- ¹⁰ Foucault, M. 1980: 119.
- ¹¹ Foucault, M. 2001: 15.
- ¹² Foucault, M. 1980: 120.
- ¹³ Owen, D. 2002: 216.
- ¹⁴ Owen, D. 2002: 216.
- ¹⁵ Owen, D. 2002: 218.
- ¹⁶ Owen, D. 2002: 220.
- ¹⁷ Geuss, R in Owen, D. 2002: 216.
- ¹⁸ Owen, D. 2002: 221.
- ¹⁹ Owen, D. 2002: 222.
- ²⁰ Owen, D. 2002: 227.
- ²¹ Owen, D. 2002: 227.
- ²² Owen, D. 2002: 227.
- ²³ Foucault, M. 1987: 103.
- ²⁴ Geuss, R. 2002: 212.
- ²⁵ Geuss, R. 2002: 211.
- ²⁶ Owen, D. 2002: 227.
- ²⁷ Clark, M. 1990: 83.
- ²⁸ Nietzsche, F. 1996: §9.
- ²⁹ Clark, M. 1990: 41.
- ³⁰ Nietzsche, F. 1968: §493.
- ³¹ Clark, M. 1990: 83.
- ³² Nietzsche, F. 1999: III: §12: 'lasciviousness... reaches its peak when ascetic self-contempt, the mockery of reason decrees: "A realm of truth and freedom does exist, but reason is the very thing which is excluded from it!" ... this persists in the Kantian concept of the "intelligible character of things" ...' This raises the second-order problem of how we are to measure the truth to be addressed shortly.
- ³³ Nietzsche, F. 2001: V §345.
- ³⁴ Owen, D. 2002: 221.
- ³⁵ Horkheimer, M in McCarthy, T. 1994: 10.
- ³⁶ Hoy, DC 1994: 132.
- ³⁷ Finlayson, JG. 2003: 184. Habermas adopts what he calls "weak transcendentalism". The universals of communication are anchored in, and can be reconstructed from, the pre-conditions of existing practices of communication and speech.
- ³⁸ Nietzsche, F. 2001: V §374.
- ³⁹ Owen, D. 2002: 217.
- ⁴⁰ Nietzsche, F. 1999: III §12.
- ⁴¹ Nietzsche, F. 2001: V §374.
- ⁴² Clark, M. 1990: 133-4.
- ⁴³ Clark, M. 1990: 141.
- ⁴⁴ Nietzsche, F. 1999: III §12.
- ⁴⁵ Nietzsche, F. 1999: III: §23.
- ⁴⁶ Nietzsche, F. 1999: §23.
- ⁴⁷ Clark, M. 1990: 194.
- ⁴⁸ Hoy, DC. 1994: 127.

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- ⁴⁹ Hoy, DC. 1994: 133-5.
- ⁵⁰ Owen, D. 2003: 261.
- ⁵¹ Clark, M. 1990: 143.
- ⁵² To recall, “‘Knowledge for its own sake’ is the last snare laid by morality.” (Nietzsche, F. 1990: §64).
- ⁵³ Hoy, DC. 1994: 197.
- ⁵⁴ Nietzsche, F. 1990: IX §260.
- ⁵⁵ Nietzsche, F. 1998: 38.
- ⁵⁶ Foucault, M. 1983: 221.
- ⁵⁷ Foucault, M. 1980: 95.
- ⁵⁸ Foucault, M. 1980: 117.
- ⁵⁹ Foucault, M. 1980: 119.
- ⁶⁰ Foucault, M. 1980: 51.
- ⁶¹ Foucault, M. 1980: 104-6.
- ⁶² Foucault, M. 2001: 50.
- ⁶³ Owen, D. 2003: 254.
- ⁶⁴ Nietzsche, F. 2001 §357 in Owen, D. 2003: 254.
- ⁶⁵ Owen, D. 2003: 254. Note the analogy with Heidegger’s criticism of Marx at the head of this chapter.
- ⁶⁶ Owen, D. 2003: 254.
- ⁶⁷ Owen, D. 2003: 255.
- ⁶⁸ Geuss, R. 1994: 279. See also Owen, D. 2003: 249.
- ⁶⁹ Owen, D. 2003: 249.
- ⁷⁰ Owen, 2002: 219.
- ⁷¹ Owen, D. 2003: 263.
- ⁷² McCarthy, T. 1994: 8-9.
- ⁷³ Hoy, DC. 1994: 115.
- ⁷⁴ McCarthy, T. 1994: 19.
- ⁷⁵ Horkheimer, M in McCarthy, T. 1994: 8-9.
- ⁷⁶ Cooke, M. 2006: 9-15.
- ⁷⁷ Rosen, M. 1996: 31-33.
- ⁷⁸ Cooke, M. 2006: 12.
- ⁷⁹ Geuss, R. 2002: 216.
- ⁸⁰ Foucault, M. 1994: 15.
- ⁸¹ Geuss, R. 1994: 280.
- ⁸² Nietzsche, F. 1968: §168.
- ⁸³ Although, as I claimed earlier, Nietzsche’s understanding of power is plural and multiplicitous.
- ⁸⁴ Geuss, R. 1994: 280.
- ⁸⁵ Geuss, R. 1994: 281.
- ⁸⁶ Kant, I. *CPR* A xii, in Deligiorgi, K. 2005: 14.
- ⁸⁷ Geuss, R. 1994: 282.
- ⁸⁸ Geuss, R. 1994: 285.
- ⁸⁹ Philosophically, Marxists should also be sympathetic to a further virtue of genealogy which Aristotle attributes to dialectical, as opposed to deductive, reasoning: ‘the ability to raise searching difficulties on both sides of a subject will make us detect more easily the truth and error of several points that arise... He who has heard all of the contending arguments as if they are parties to a case, must be in a better position for judging.’ (McKinney, R. 1983: 187).
- ⁹⁰ Geuss, R. 1994: 288.

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