

What is this thing called ideology?

-On Marx's method of thinking

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'Science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' Karl Marx (1865)

Introduction

The notion of ideology has enjoyed wide currency in the late 20th century academic literature. Although this notion has increasingly been used in different professional discourses: political debate, social theory, historical studies, cultural analysis, and so forth, there has been no common unitary concept of ideology. It is well known, however, that the expression 'ideology' was first invented by Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and their friends, who assigned to it as an object, the (generic) theory of ideas. But the concept of ideology, as Derek Sayer (1987) mentions, has suffered the fate of many in Marx. Of course, Marx's varied and comprehensive legacy has germinated intellectual authority in many modern contemporary doctrines and conceptual practices. The fate of the term 'ideology', then, could not possibly escape its very 'historic' destiny.

It is, perhaps, one of the peculiar ironies of our modern history that there has been no limit to the misinterpretation and distortion of Marx's concepts, even when one has had unlimited access to the original sources of his writings. Misinterpretation of Marx's fundamental concepts in which he frames his distinctive approach to society and history, certainly, is not an enterprise confined exclusively to the adherents of pseudo-Marxism of the former Soviets. Many Marxists and non-Marxists share this misinterpretation, wholly or in part, across a variety of perspectives and schools of thought. In the fields of social sciences, for instance, the standard interpretation of Marx persistently is ignorant of his substantive historical sociology and his distinctive analytic practice. Sociological reading of Marx is often based on secondary interpretations of his writings dealt with in a framework of the positivistic justificatory strategies.

Ideology, then, has become the hard core of Marx's program; like that free-floating thing called culture this notion appears *superfluously* in the late twentieth century 'Science Park', as the crowning point of many references to Marx's enterprise. Perhaps, from the perspective of social science's self-understanding Marx is (unknowingly) an admirable 'theoretician' of ideology. But this, in many ways, is odd. Marx's overriding interest, in his entire intellectual career, was not in 'theoretical bubble-blowing'; he was after all engaged in a 'critique of the dynamics of bourgeois society.'

Within Marxist tradition, different efforts have been made to formulate both a theory of ideology *in general* and a theory of *particular* ideologies. As a direct consequence of these kind of conceptual practices, Marxist parties of varying mode and strength have approved of "Marxist ideology" as "theoretical consciousness of working class", or even worse as its 'scientific world view'. In their struggle against capitalist powers, many parties within mainstream Marxism

have indeed paid constant attention to the "qualitative ideological upgrading of their memberships" as an important means of building the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. This *glorification* of ideology, of course, has gone hand in hand, for several decades, with a ceaseless Soviet distortion and Western ignorance of Marx's basic thinking.

The transformation of what we called "Marxism" into the official ideology of mass parties and latterly of "socialist" states in post-revolutionary societies has had, undoubtedly, much to do with the mutation of this Marxism from method to dogma. Still we can not challenge the very roots of this ideology; for, we do not know its real 'history'. This problematic, I believe, dates back much deeper to the history of 'Marxist tradition', odd though it may seem, perhaps even to those days when Marx himself felt compelled to comment ironically that he 'was not a Marxist'.

In the late nineteenth century, Marx's writings provided the primary impetus for a vital and forceful political movement in both France and Germany. The influence of his social thought was, therefore, far from just being of purely intellectual character; it was meant, on the contrary, to provide a raised platform for the accomplishment of a *definite praxis*. The 'laws of movement' of capitalism, which after the events of 1848 became the focus of Marx's attention, operated differently in France, Germany, and Britain. From the start Marx remained conscious of those variations in historical development which created social and economic differences between these countries. Thus, he never assumed a unitary relationship between level of economic development and the internal character of bourgeois *polity*. But the law in *Capital* always stayed the same (his favorite phrase): '*De te fabula narratur*': 'It is of you that the story is told.' 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own'. That is why *Capital* takes Britain as providing the basic model for the theory of capitalist development.

The professed adherents of Marx, influenced by the late nineteenth century positivistic and scientific intellectual milieu, failed to accomplish that of their mentor's distinctive *praxis*. They failed to establish an 'organic unity' between the peculiarity of their historical position and the 'law' in *Capital*: the progressive formation of two-class society, the 'pauperization' of the vast majority, and the immanent collapse of capitalism in a final catastrophic crisis. For German Marxists, this inadequacy of grasping the full significance of Marx's insights developed into a dramatic tension between the Marxian stress upon the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, and the Lassallean emphasis upon

the appropriation of the capitalist state through the achievement of a fully universal franchise. Bernstein's 'revisionism', which became the most concrete theoretical expression of Lassallean position, was rejected by SPD orthodoxy, but at the cost of the strengthening the trend towards a mechanistic-positivistic understanding of history which effectively reverted to that 'passive' materialism which Marx tirelessly had criticized and discarded in his early writings.

This inclination to 'passive' materialism was given a definite theoretical backing by the fact that 'Marxism' came to be identified, for both its adherents and its liberal critics, with the systematic exposition set out by Engels in *Anti-Düring*. By transferring the dialectic to nature, Engels obscures the most important element in Marx's materialist method of thinking, 'the creative dialectical interaction between subject and object in historical process'. Engels's theoretical exposition helped to stimulate the notion that ideas simply 'reflect' material reality in a passive sense. Marxists, following simple-minded but vigorous positivism of Engels, could now move in the direction of a philosophical materialism, which treated ideas as epiphenomena, and thereby were able to preserve the Marxist adherence to an immanent conception of ethics. The other path taken mostly by 'revisionism' was to reintroduce the possibility of forming an ahistorical traditional philosophy, which stressed upon the 'independent' roll of ideas in conditioning social change in history.

It was in this context, beginning shortly before Marx's death and the decade following it, that Marxism became a really important movement in Europe, both politically and intellectually. It is worthy of note that many modern sociologists like Max Weber and Emil Durkheim accepted the position of philosophical materialism disseminated by Engels, Kautsky, and Labriola, as the object of their critical evaluation of Marxism. Labriola's work *Socialism and philosophy*, which leant heavily on Anti-Düring was treated by Durkheim as the general exposition of Marx's social thought. Marxists, then, including Plekhanov, the younger Lenin, and many others, did not refuse to wear the straitjacket of philosophical materialism, which the professed followers of Marx sought to impose upon history in the name of "historical materialism."

It is against this backdrop that we should study and explore the real sources of the divergences between Marx's basic thinking, and that bulks of 'knowledge' which both his professed adherents and liberal critics have identified as Marxist approach to human society. The rise of a body of ahistorical theory and analytic practice which seriously dose violence to materialist ontology, by grounding knowledge in "meaning", "interpretation", and the like rather than in the activity of real, living individuals historically emerged as an antidote to the doctrine of philosophical materialism and its practices.

Nevertheless, grasping the 'organic related unity' of historical subject and its materialistic conditions of life enables Marx to ground a science of human society, which could do away with all forms of fetishes that operates as the 'religion of everyday life'. For him, both Hegel and Feuerbach are ideologists (not only the former). Because

ideologist 'remains in the realm of theory and does not view men [*sic*] in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them *what* they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men [*sic*]' (Marx and Engels, 1846/1976:46). Hegel and Feuerbach, thus, never arrived at the existing active men. One ended up in the ideology of *Absolute Knowledge* and the other in the ideology of *Human essence*.

Now in what follows I briefly outline and try to defend Marx's critique of ideology, as this is painstakingly integrated in his critical analytic practice. My argument, then, is meant to establish an intimate organic relationship between Marx's critique of ideology, the concept of science, and his materialist method of thinking. I shall thereby suggest that the misunderstanding and distortion of Marx's critique of ideology is not, as it may appear, an intellectual error. This kind of *miss* or distortion identifies a definite conceptual practice, a *real effect* due to the peculiarity of the social relations of capitalism. To express the point in terms of Marx's epistemology, I may say that this practice itself is a conceptual practice of ideology; a practice based on capitalism's conceptual fetishism.

Marx versus Althusser

Marx's understanding of the concept of ideology and the way he used it in his substantive inquiry differs radically from that normally ascribed to him. Marx *never* formulated a *theory of ideology*, he did not even, I shall hold, provided this concept with a set of systematic propositions or definitions of any kind- positive or negative!

Marx's critique of ideology is, in my view, *only* an organizing principle in his distinctive approach to society and history. This simply means that the critique of ideology operates for Marx as an integrated *aspect* of his method of thinking. It is an aspect of *how* he looks upon the social reality, *how* he argues and reasons about society and social process. Misunderstanding of this vital and dynamic point, I believe, has bowdlerized the kernel of Marx's social thought. For, Marx's critique of ideology is a *quality*, a permanent characteristic inherent in his methodology. The critique of ideology is indeed the very germ of the philosophical foundation of Marx's materialist method of thinking. The notion of ideology as *critique*, then, is, in Marx's method of thinking, of epistemological character. Thus, in terms of analytical procedures - or disciplinary definitions if you like - one cannot reconcile the notion of ideology as critique with a theory of ideology, without losing the critical edge of the concept in question. Any attempt, then, to mingle Marx's insights- as a point of departure- with a theory of ideology involves the inability to grasp the essence of his critique of ideology.

In his clarion call for a general theory of ideology, Louis Althusser wrote in 1969 that ideology for Marx, was the system of the ideas and representations, which dominate the mind of a man or a social group. In the process of elaborating this Marxist definition, Althusser reads in *The German Ideology* that 'ideology has no history of its own.'

Althusser who speaks in a Marxist language, knows well that if 'ideology' has no history of its own, then, there is no question of formulating a theory of ideology- at least from the standpoint of Marx's method of thinking.

He, therefore, leaves the terrain of *The German Ideology* but not his dogged determination to arrive at a general theory of ideology. In his essay on *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969) Althusser finds another theoretical reference point; this time the Freudian terrain of *unconscious*. He takes Freud's proposition that *unconscious is eternal* and writes: 'If eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud's expression word for word, and write: *Ideology is eternal*, exactly like the unconscious' (Althusser, 1969:127).

In order to express this Freudian position within a Marxist framework, Althusser goes back to *The German Ideology*, and exhibits his own understanding of the thesis that 'ideology has no history.' He, then, writes: 'The peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history'. That is why, he concludes, 'I believe, I am justified in proposing a theory of ideology in general, in the sense that Freud presented a theory of unconscious *in general*' (Althusser, 1969:128).

This, of course, is a scandalous travesty of Marx. The ideology in business, here, is a structure essential to the life of all historical societies as a *non-historical* reality. The concept of ideology is, for Althusser, *a priori*, a social universal, which has dominated the mind of humanity throughout the history. Althusser's ideology is then very much like "the spirit of *all ages*!"

Marx tirelessly fought such profoundly ahistorical use of concepts. In his critique of both Romantic conservatism (in German philosophy) and utilitarianism, as manifest in classical economics, Marx persistently demolishes all kind of conceptualizations, which are not based on 'people's materialistic connection.' Concepts, categories, and ideas are, for Marx, 'the abstract ideal expressions of...social relations'. He says: 'indeed, the categories are no more eternal than the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products' (Marx, 1846b:189). In *The Holy Family*, he defines the society not by any supra-historical 'philosophical constructions' whose doer stands outside history, but in terms of 'fundamental social relations'. On numerous occasions, as here, Marx criticizes the ideologically of philosopher's 'speculative construction' which is ignorant of society's extended social relations as the basis for a proper and realist critical analysis. As Derek Sayer has stressed the point: 'it was at such 'abstractions', rather than the relations of which they were the expression, that the Young Hegelians characteristically tilted. The objective of Marx's critique was to refocus attention on the relations themselves, to locate the secret of the 'holy family' in the 'earthly family' (Sayer, Derek, 1987:93).

Althusser's eternal ideology depends heavily on a conceptual

practice, which descends from an abstract discursive mode of thinking. In this mode of thinking, ideology (or any concept) becomes a time-honored, omnipresent 'noun', which sails through history innocent of any sociological content and any reference to real individuals and the lives they lead. And indeed, what in many intellectual circles and within mainstream Marxism is addressed as 'Marxist theory of' descends, in more ways than one, from such abstract mode of thinking.

Marx works differently. For him, concepts and theoretical categories are already expressive of social relations organizing, and co-ordering people's activities. They 'arise...from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the forms of appearance of essential relations' (Marx 1977:677). Political economists are, then, correspondingly and repeatedly criticized for losing sight of the actual social relations in which the categories of political economy arise. They come to treat these categories as permanent features of economic processes (Marx 1977:678). Marx's critique of political economy is, thus, an explication of just those relations that are presupposed when the categories of political economy are treated as given.

Marx's grounding of theoretical categories in the actual social relations of real living individuals is, then, intimately and necessarily bound up with his substantive historical sociology. His definite emphasis on the historical specificity of bourgeois society makes it explicitly clear that in capitalism a system of economic relations emerges as a differentiated and objectified form. Capitalism, thus, abstracts relations of interdependence arising from social division of labour from relationships between particular individuals and land. It creates an independent system of relations mediated by money and commodities. This independent system of relations underlies the category of "economy" as relations that can be seen apart from other dimensions of social existence. Thus, the peculiarity of capitalism's extended social relations distinguishes it from all previous social formations. At the same time, bourgeois society furnishes us with the necessary means to understand and explore those social formations. Bourgeois society, according to Marx, brings the whole of mankind, for the first time in history, within the purview of a single social order, and is genuinely 'world historical.' It is in this sense that bourgeoisie, for Marx, is the first true ruling class in history. 'It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals'. This we may call the specificity of bourgeois society. Then, how dare we to treat our very true capitalist concepts as pure ahistorical devices. Do not they 'bear the stamp of history' (1867a: 169)?

Marx on ideology

So, what is, then, ideology? Ideology, for Marx, arises *only* where social relations (or the natural world) manifest themselves to people's experience in misleading forms, and the critique of ideology accordingly involves showing – materially – why this should be the case. The task of *the critique*, thus, is not to treat its pure concepts *in abstracto*,

but to explicate materially the inhuman character of social relations underlying both our concepts and the 'natural. Self-understood forms of social life' or *Erscheinungsformen* in society. For, in capitalist society the essential relations manifest themselves to our experience in a misleading, ideological form. This ideologicity of form, pure appearance of social phenomena, conceals the true substance of its underlying social relations. This reified relation, for Marx, is a real social process of estrangement in a world in which social relations take on the mystifying form of 'the violence of things.' Accordingly, in the very same world (capitalism) the 'abstract ideal expression' of these relations is likely to be a reified one. Therefore, Marx's method instructs us not treat a concept as a theoretical primitive, in the logical sense, nor as interpretable solely in terms of other concepts. Instead, we must explore the ground of a concept in the actual ordering of people's 'materialistic connection.'

The process of reification in society, as an important feature of the nature of bourgeois reality, comes about in the particular social conditions of capitalist production. Marx's analysis of 'the fetishism of commodities' developed in *Capital* reveals how capitalist production transforms the relations of individuals into qualities of things themselves, and this transformation constitutes the nature of the commodity. As it is clearly expressed in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx pays great attention to the 'reifying' appearance of the social relations of capitalist production which, according to him, 'demonstrate the further development of the form of capital that takes place' in its movement. He, thus, writes about the relationship between capital, land, and labour:

This economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world (Marx 1894: 969).

Given the historical specificity of bourgeois society, it is this 'bewitched upside-down' world which appears to the consciousness of people, as the 'natural self-understood form of social life.' In capitalism, on the surface of society, we have a whole world of phenomenal appearances which operate in accordance with 'personification of things' and autonomization of the form of social elements. This fetishism, then, is manifested in capitalism's phenomenal forms, the ways in which the social relations of bourgeois society present themselves to the consciousness of its participants. However, beneath the surface of society, in the depths, entirely different processes go on; for, here lie the essential social relations of capitalist production. Thus, in the realm of the phenomenal world, neither the material groundwork, nor the historicity of capitalist phenomena are immediately evident in their appearance. These forms look, rather, to be natural, universal, and unquestionable, and are therefore understood in ordinary language and political economy in fetishistic ways: precisely as pure ahistoric abstractions. Indeed, in the consciousness of the agents of production, these mystifying forms of appearance present themselves as 'overwhelming natural laws, governing them

irrespective of their will' in a form in which the fetishistic act of capitalist phenomena 'prevails on them as blind necessity' (Marx 1894: 970).

Marx' distinction between the substance of 'essential relations' and the misleading 'phenomenal forms' in which they manifest themselves to people's experience constitutes the systematic feature of the methodology of *Capital*. He repeatedly, and in various occasions, emphasizes that vulgar economics finds the 'natural basis of its fatuous self-importance' in this 'false appearance and deception' of phenomena, 'in which the entire inner connection is obliterated' (Marx, 1894: 969). Marx actually points out that this position also corresponds to the self-interest of the dominant classes, since 'it preaches the natural necessity and perpetual justification of their sources of income and erects this into a dogma' (Marx, 1894:969). Marx criticizes even the best representatives of classical economics who have fallen far short of grasping the importance of this distinction. They remained, as he remarked, more or less trapped in 'the world of illusion' as their criticism dissolved and nothing else was possible from the bourgeois standpoint: 'they all fell therefore more or less into inconsistencies, half-truths and unresolved contradictions' (Marx, 1894:969).

Marx's analysis of the discrepancies between essence and appearance, as we have seen, conceives of it to be a necessary result of the very nature of the commodity and capital fetishism. Some Marxian social thinker like Sayer, however, has rightly suggested that Marx leans here on Hegel's distinctive logic of essence, which 'can be typified in the phrase "the essence must appear as something other than itself (namely, the phenomena). Hegel, of course, begins with the insight that the appearance and essence do not coincide, and the task of the dialectical thinker is to distinguish the essential from the apparent process of reality and to grasp their relations. However, it is important to remember that Hegel uses this distinction in the context of a general philosophical thinking. Marx, on the other hand, applies the discrepancies between essence and appearance in a specific historical context, and as the necessary outcome of the fetishistic act of capital and commodity in capitalist production. For him, therefore, 'the essence is as much historical as ontological.' Marx's critique of appearances, thus, shows explicitly that the rise of ideology as an *analytic practice* is bound up with the fetishism of capital and commodity in bourgeois society.

So, the task of the critique of ideology is to explicate and demystify the existing discrepancy between the essential relations of society and the misleading forms in which they manifest themselves to our experience. The critique, therefore, must penetrate the alienated social reality, and unmask the 'enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world' of capitalism. It must unmask 'this religion of everyday life.' and thereafter open the possibility of explicating the 'entire inner connections' of bourgeois society.

Now, as we have seen, the analytic practice of *Capital* and the methodology that informs it identifies those conceptual practices which fail to grasp the essential relations of bourgeois society - and remain, therefore, trapped in phenomenal world of appearances -, as half-truth, distorted and ideological accounts of bourgeois reality. Marx, for

instance, ridicules the conceptual practices of bourgeois economics for its 'inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society', the latter being 'only the inverted projection [*Lichtbild*] of this reality' (Marx 1858:246). The methodology of *Capital*, thus, identifies all practices, which uncritically take the bourgeois reality at its face value as distorted, misleading and ideological mode of thinking about capitalist society. This mode of thinking is perverted and ideological because it grounds its analytic categories on the 'natural self-understood forms of social life' or *Erscheinungsformen*. It is, however, the sheer massive obviousness of these capitalist *Erscheinungsformen* in bourgeois society that makes the whole phenomenal world of capitalism so deceptive, bewitched, and "natural" in the social consciousness of the agents of production.

Marx's science

Let me now try to put the strands of this argument in a more direct relation to Marx's method of thinking. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Marx's critique of ideology is an organizing principle in his distinctive approach to society and its social processes. This critique, thus, constitutes a *quality* and a characteristic inherent in Marx's materialist method of thinking. Marx's critique of ideology, in this sense, is a methodological enterprise. It involves a materialist ontology and an epistemology, which makes the social organization of knowledge *itself* the core of the investigation. Here critique is itself an inquiry, and the method of inquiry is that in which the method itself is *explicated* as an integral aspect of the inquiry.

Marx's emergent standpoint in his early writings constitutes indeed a decisive epistemological break with idealism, abstract philosophy, and philosophical materialism of his time. *The Holy Family* which documents Marx's final break with the young Hegelians, and *The German Ideology* in which he for the first time outlines a general view of the tenets of materialistic understanding of history, constitute, then, the most significant line of demarcation in Marx's intellectual career. It was from this standpoint that he wrote of the philosophical 'nonsense' of German philosophers and the abstracto 'nonsense' of political economists in the same derisive tone. Both philosophers and political economists constructed accounts of history and society as expressions of concepts. They were, according to Marx's critical analysis of their work, practicing ideology when the abstract categories of their pure knowledge of society superseded the actual social relations of real living individuals as the basis of inquiry. They were confined to the alienated world of abstracted concepts and its 'speculative constructions', the philosopher's "fictions" and the economist's "mystical connections."

In *The German Ideology*, thus, Marx and Engels take on this analysis of the ideological properties of others' work to define and separate from it the methods of a science that grapples with a real world. *The German Ideology* proposes to ground social science in the activities of actual individuals and the material conditions under which they live. The

ontological premises of this science, as *The German Ideology* defines it, 'are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions' (Marx and Engels 1973:57). For Marx, history is a process of the continuous creation, satisfaction, and recreation of human needs. He views history and social relations as processes that exist only in people's activities. The project of a social science, for Marx, insists, therefore, on the discovery of relations and processes that arise *only* in the actual activities of actual individuals. Marx's critical procedure identifies as ideological, those practices that mask and suppress this grounding of social science. The following passage in *The German Ideology* should make clear how Marx contrasts the ideological practices with a social science that grapple with a real world:

When speculation ends – in real life – there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At most its place can be taken by a synthesis of the most general results, that may be abstracted from observation of the historical development of men. Separated from actual history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the ordering of historical materials, to indicate the sequence of its separate layers. But they by no means provide a recipe or scheme, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties only first begin when we set about the observation and the arrangement – the real depiction – of the materials, whether it be of a past epoch or of the present (1846:1973:38-39).

This social science, as Marx puts it, is the science of the actual life-process of society, the representation (study) of the practical activity and the practical process of development of men. As soon as this active life-process is discovered, categories and concepts cease to be a kind of "currency" – a medium of exchange among ideologists and a way of reasoning about the world that stands between the thinkers and the object. They become, instead, a means of facilitating the arrangement of historical material, they become a means of rediscovering the practical activities underlying the apparent social phenomena.

Thus, the ontology of *The German Ideology* proposes to ground the social science in the activities of actual individuals and their real relations, and identifies therewith as *ideological*, those practices of thinking which give primacy to the concepts and their speculations based on abstraction. Ideology, then, in this ontological sense, is a kind of practice in thinking about society, a conceptual practice that masks and suppresses the presence of the actual life-process of individuals as the basis for claiming knowledge of society and history. The ideologist, Marx wrote, 'remains in the realm of theory and does not view men [sic] in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them *what* they are, he never arrives at the really existing active men [sic].'

The German Ideology, thus, provides us with a social science that grapples with the real world. We are, therefore,

able to make *existence* claims for its method and theories. The method of this science, as Marx says, 'confirms to real life' which is the actual activities of actual individuals under definite material conditions. This, we may call Marx's science, but it can also be, I argue, everybody else's science. It is, for instance, my science too. I think it was indeed Marx's hope that this science would be one day everybody's science, a true all-human science.

Marx's science and everybody's science

Cyril Smith (1997) has introduced a distinction between Marx's science as criticism and the theoretical science, as the established meaning of this concept in contemporary capitalist society. In his article *Marx's Conception of Science*, he writes thus: 'there are two kinds of science: 1. Marx's science-as-criticism; 2. everybody else's theoretical science.'¹ While I agree with Smith's focus on Marx's science as *critique* or criticism, I do not share his understanding of the nature of that distinction. Theoretical science, Smith says, constructs theories, and these at best provide us with different explanations of their object of investigation. He criticizes the theoretical science for it can only *explain* something, and it is, furthermore, dogmatic because its theories are based on presuppositions which take the object of investigation for granted (Smith Cyril, 1997:18).

Although Smith's criticism of this *particular* explanatory character of 'everybody else's science' fairly rings true, the nature of his distinction still gives rise to a methodological confusion. Smith's distinction, in my view, spills bleach on Marx's distinction between science and ideology. If we restrict the meaning of the word a bit—as Smith often does-, we can say that his treatment of theoretical science supersedes Marx's concept of ideology.

I think we have no way other than to denounce Cyril Smith's theoretical science as ideological practice. For, if we follow Marx's method of thinking, we see social science as a practice that seeks to discover and unmask the essential relations of bourgeois society. A social science which is capable of grasping radically the 'inner connection' of these social relations, and explicating a distinction between the substance of these relations and the misleading 'phenomenal forms' in which they represent themselves to people's experience. Marx held, therefore, that 'science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (1865a: 817). For Marx, to show materially capitalism's phenomenal forms to be mystifying is implicitly to criticize the immediate 'social forms of consciousness' and the theories and ideologies predicated on their plausibility - in which these forms are 'spontaneously' grasped. Marx's whole point in his historical sociology is that the discrepancy between the essence and its appearance, between the reality and its ideal forms is inherent in the nature of the bourgeois reality itself. Failing to see this is a 'utopian inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society' (1858a: 249). Marx's science is, thus, a method to depict and explicate the social reality in its totality. In *The German*

Ideology, he wrote:

This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as state, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace their origin and growth from that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another). (Marx and Engels, 1965:50).

Ideologies and ideological practices are also 'rooted in the material conditions of life', but they are not, and can not be, science as long as their analytic procedure is based on a total reversal of Marx's method of thinking. He criticized bourgeois economists because they failed to see these distinctions of form in their conceptualization. Marx says that 'in the succession of the economic categories, as in any other historical, social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject – here, modern bourgeois society – is always what is given, in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence' (Marx, 1857:106). What does he mean? I believe he is only emphasizing the historical and sociological anchorage of theoretical categories. He is saying that there is no an Archimedean point enabling the social thinker – including the generators of theoretical science – to stand outside the world they inhabit as actual living individuals, and producing theories which explain that world. This means that those who produce knowledge by making 'mystical connections' in the conceptual world and suppress the presence of the actual organization people's 'materialistic connection' generate nothing – not even theoretical science -, but ideology. Because ideology, as Marx's method shows, separates thought from actualities of society and history, and thus 'makes language into an independent realm' (Marx, 1973:107).

The standpoint of our contemporary social sciences, for instance, descends from a method of thinking that locates its problematic in an abstracted conceptual world without subjects. The theories, concepts, and methods of these sciences are generated in an academic discourse, and not by the actual life-process of real living individuals. The relevances, interests, and perspectives of the scientific discourse, then, are incorporated in the relations of ruling of capitalism. As Dorothy E. Smith's studies excellently shows, our modern sociology constitutes a part of the ruling relations of bourgeois society. Its relevances, theories, and subtending organization are given by relation of the ruling apparatus to the social world it governs. The institutional forms of ruling, she points out, 'constitutes its major topics-the sociology of organization, of education, of health, of work, of mental illness, of deviance, of law, of knowledge, and the like.' The organization of sociological thinking and knowledge is articulated to this institutional structure. It pioneers methods of thinking and the systematics of articulating particular actualities to a generalized conceptual order that serves it. To a significant extent, sociology has been busy clarifying, organizing, mapping, and extending the relations of the institutional forms of ruling to the

actualities of their domain' (Smith, Dorothy E., 1987:109). Such like are the ideological practices of our modern social "sciences"!

An ideological method of thinking, thus, is a method of superseding, substituting, and suppressing the actual life-process of society, a method of giving primacy to 'stupid dogmatic concepts' which confines the practice of thinking in the phenomenal world of pure appearances; 'this religion of everyday life' (1894:969). It is a method of practicing the conceptual fetishism in which categories and forms of thought assume an independent existence over and against the actual social relations of society, which underlies them.

If science, then, is ever to be judged whatsoever, it must be in the service of humanity. 'Science must not be a selfish pleasure,' Marx used to say. 'Those who have the good fortune to be able to devote themselves to scientific pursuits must be the first to place their knowledge at the service of humanity.'

Marx's social science is a science of praxis with a profound and clear emancipatory character. For him, therefore, 'human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man ...has become a species-being.' In all his major writings, Marx draws an analogy between religion and different ideological practices. We must take this analogy very seriously. We have to understand that there is no way 'to turn the weapon of ideology against the classes in power.' The working class does not need any ideology. The movement of working class, but, tries to create a reality which 'is precisely the true basis for rendering it impossible for anything to exist independently of individuals, in so far as reality is only a product of the preceding intercourse of individuals themselves' (1846:71).

Marx's critique of ideology, as I have tried to show, is an organizing principle in his substantive inquiry. There is an organic relationship between his critique of ideology, the concept of science, and his materialist method of thinking. Whenever we read Marx, we come to see these three elements as three inseparable aspect or moment of his analytic practice as *critique*.

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