

## THE CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

GEORGE LICHTHEIM

Few concepts play a larger part in present-day discussions of historical and political topics than does that of ideology, and yet it is not always clear what meaning is applied to the term by those who employ it. Even if one confines one's attention to the utterances of sociologists and historians, leaving out of account the terminological misuse seemingly inseparable from ordinary political discourse, it is apparent that different and conflicting meanings are intended by writers who casually refer to the "ideology" of this or that political movement.

From the vulgar misunderstanding inherent in the familiar phrase "we need a better ideology to fight the enemy", to the refinements of academic dispute over "the ideology of science", one encounters a terminological vagueness which appears to reflect some deeper uncertainty about the status of ideas in the genesis of historical movements.

It is here intended to clarify the theme by examining the different significations attached to the term "ideology", and the shifting status of the phenomenon itself, granted that a propensity so widespread as the duplication and distortion of reality in thought lends itself to the historical approach. If this initial assumption is allowed to pass as a working hypothesis, it is hoped that the term "ideology" will be shown to possess both a definite meaning and a particular historical status: the history of the concept serving as a guide to the actual interplay of "real" and "ideal" factors whose dialectic is obscurely intended in the formulation of the concept itself. The subject has recently been dealt with by, among others, Mr. Ben Halpern ("Myth' and 'Ideology' in Modern Usage", *History and Theory*, I, 2, 1961, 129-149). In what follows it is not proposed to take issue with his analysis, but to pursue a line of thought suggested by the present author's concern with the manner in which the ideology concept relates to what is usually known as the "philosophy of history", notably in its Hegelian form.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY HERITAGE

Historically, the term "ideology" made its first appearance at the time of the French Revolution, its author, Antoine Destutt de Tracy, being one of the

group of *savants* whom the Convention in 1795 entrusted with the management of the newly founded *Institut de France*.<sup>1</sup> During the brief period of its predominance – until Napoleon in 1801 made his peace with the Church, and concurrently turned against the liberal intellectuals who had helped him into the saddle – the *Institut* became associated in the public mind with an outlook which indeed pre-dated the Revolution, but was now made official and brought into relation with the practice of the new regime. In 1794, at the height of the Terror, the guiding ideas of the faith had been given their final expression, under the most dramatic circumstances possible, by Condorcet in his *Tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*; but it was under the Directory, with moderate liberalism briefly in the saddle, that the “*idéologues*” of the *Institut* placed the official seal on his doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Their prestige flattered the vanity of Bonaparte, who in 1797 became an honorary member of the Institute. How much the distinction meant to him appears from the fact that during the Egyptian campaign of 1798–9 he signed his proclamations to the Army as “Général en chef, Membre de l’Institut”. It was a justified appreciation of their influence over the educated middle class that in 1799, at the time of the *coup d'état de Brumaire*, induced him to seek the support of the “*idéologues*”, who in turn helped to promote his accession to power.<sup>3</sup> It was likewise fear of their hold over public opinion which in January 1803 led him to cap his growing personal despotism (and his Concordat with Rome) by the virtual destruction of the Institute’s core, the *classe des sciences morales et politiques*, from which liberal and republican ideas radiated throughout the educational “establishment”. The story of Bonaparte’s degeneration can be written in terms of his relations with the “*idéologues*”: down to the day in December 1812 when – returned to Paris from the disaster in Russia – he blamed them, in an address to the *Conseil d’Etat*, for the catastrophe into which his own despotism had plunged the country.<sup>4</sup>

The “ideologists” of the Institute were liberals who regarded freedom of thought and expression as the principal conquest of the Revolution. Their attitude was “ideological” in the twofold sense of being concerned with ideas,

<sup>1</sup> Georges Lefebvre, *La révolution française* (Paris, 1957), 443. The creation of the Institute was part of an attempt to provide France with a nation-wide system of higher learning committed to the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

<sup>2</sup> Lefebvre, 578: “Destutt de Tracy se proposait de déterminer par l’observation comment se forment les idées: de là le nom de l’école.”

<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre, 534: “Arrivé à Paris... il montrait une discrétion toute républicaine et fréquentait l’Institut, où il fraternisait avec les idéologues.” Cf. A. Aulard, *Histoire politique de la révolution française* (Paris, 1926), 694, for the illusions of the liberal intellectuals, who firmly expected Bonaparte to inaugurate the enlightened commonwealth of their dreams.

<sup>4</sup> “C’est à l’idéologie, à cette ténébreuse métaphysique qui, en cherchant avec subtilité les causes premières, veut sur ces bases fonder la législation des peuples, au lieu d’approprier les lois à la connaissance du cœur humain et aux leçons de l’histoire, qu’il faut attribuer toutes les malheurs de notre belle France.” Cited in Hans Barth, *Wahrheit und Ideologie* (Zürich, 1945), 30; cf. Taine, *Origines de la France contemporaine* (Paris, 1898), II, 219–220. On other occasions he put it more briefly, e.g., “Cannon killed feudalism. Ink will kill modern society.” (Napoléon: *Pensées*; Paris, 1913; 43).

and of placing the satisfaction of “*ideal*” aims (their own) ahead of the “*material*” interests on which the post-revolutionary society rested. They could put up, at least temporarily, with an enlightened dictatorship which safeguarded the major gains of the Revolution, but not with a regime which visibly steered back towards an absolutism supported by established religion. Napoleon ignored them, though he defended the social foundations of the new order and in 1815, after his return from Elba, made a last attempt to win their support. Under the Bourbon Restoration they headed the liberal opposition. In 1830 the July Revolution, by introducing parliamentary government, at long last realized one of their chief aims, though in a somewhat prosaic form. Marx, from a different standpoint, shared Napoleon’s disdain for them. In 1845, remarking upon the manner in which the bourgeois character of the Revolution had gradually disclosed itself, he commented ironically upon their illusions, having previously noted that “Robespierre, Saint Just and their party fell because they confused the realistic democratic commonwealth of antiquity, which rested on the basis of real slavery, with the modern spiritualist-democratic representative state based on the emancipated slavery of bourgeois society.”<sup>5</sup> Yet the ideologists, whatever their political fancies, had another and tougher side to them: they were the forerunners of positivism. The *Institut* under their direction became a centre of experimental studies. While Destutt de Tracy turned his attention to the history of ideas, Cabanis pioneered experimental psychology, Pinel placed the treatment of mental illness on a new foundation, Dupuis (in his *Origine de tous les cultes*) treated the natural history of religion in an empirical manner; others extended the new viewpoint to the history of literature and art. This intellectual explosion was the counterpart of the better known and perhaps even more brilliant achievements of Lagrange, Laplace, Monge, Berthollet, Cuvier, Saint-Hilaire, and Lamarck in the natural sciences, which between 1790 and 1830 raised France’s contribution in this field to a pinnacle of achievement never equalled before or since. When Comte around 1830 synthesized the new world-view (in the light of what he had learned from the far more original Saint-Simon), he was drawing upon the work of a generation of scholars who had already transformed the inherited eighteenth-century view by introducing the historical approach. If the ideologists continued the rationalist tradition, they also began the process of modifying it, though – unlike the German Romantics – they did not abandon its basic principles.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Die Heilige Familie* (1845 [reprinted Berlin, 1953]), 191; cf. *The Holy Family* (London, 1957), 164. “It was not the revolutionary movement as such that became Napoleon’s prey on the 18th Brumaire... it was the *liberal bourgeoisie*... Napoleon was the last stand of revolutionary terrorism against the bourgeois society which had likewise been proclaimed by the Revolution... If he despotically suppressed the liberalism of bourgeois society – the political idealism of its daily practice – he showed no more concern for its essential material interests... whenever they conflicted with his political interests. His contempt for the industrial *hommes d’affaires* was the counterpart of his scorn for the ideologues.” (*Ibid.*, tr. from 1953 German edition, 193-194).

<sup>6</sup> Lefebvre (*op. cit.*, 578) includes Madame de Stael’s *La littérature considérée dans ses*

The twofold character of the liberal “ideology”, as a system of normative ideas and as an incipient critique of the very notion of absolute norms, makes its appearance already in the work of Destutt de Tracy from which the school derived its name. His *Eléments d’Idéologie* (1801–15) presents a “Science des idées” for which he cites the authority of Locke and Condillac.<sup>7</sup> They are praised for having inaugurated the “natural history of ideas” – that is, the scientific description of the human mind – though Condillac had qualified his naturalism by retaining the traditional religious emphasis upon the substantive reality of man’s soul and the uniqueness of man compared with the animal creation.<sup>8</sup> For Destutt, who superimposed the materialism of Cabanis upon the Lockean sensationalism of Condillac, the study of “ideology” is part of zoology. What he means is that human psychology should be analyzed in biological terms; that is, without paying attention to religion. Moral problems are relegated to metaphysics, described as a realm of illusory fancies “destinés à nous satisfaire et non à nous instruire”.<sup>9</sup> The true foundation of the sciences is rather to be found in a “Science des idées” which will describe the natural history of the mind, that is, the manner in which our thoughts are formed. There is no supersensible reality behind the individuals and their several “ideas” (sensations and notions).

Il est seulement à remarquer qu’il n’existe réellement que des individus et que nos idées ne sont point des êtres réels existant hors de nous, mais de pures créations de notre esprit, des manières de classer nos idées des individus.<sup>10</sup>

But this “materialist” theme is crossed by a normative purpose: the “Science des idées” is to yield true knowledge of human nature, and therewith the means of defining the general laws of sociability. The reduction of individual “ideas” to generally held notions is intended to lay bare the common ground of human needs and aspirations, thus providing the lawgiver with the means of furthering the common good. What is “natural” is also “social”. Once human nature is properly understood, society will at last be able to arrange itself in a harmonious fashion. Reason is the guarantor of order and liberty.<sup>11</sup> As with Condorcet, Destutt’s aim is pedagogical: it is to lay bare the guiding principles of republican citizenship. His theorizing has a practical, normative, purpose. The freeing of the human mind from ignorance and superstition is not undertaken for its own sake, but because only a mind delivered from error can perceive those universal

---

*rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) among the notable productions of the school.

<sup>7</sup> A. Destutt de Tracy, *Eléments d’Idéologie* (2nd. ed., Brussels, 1826), I, 3; cf. Barth, *Wahrheit und Ideologie*, 16 f.

<sup>8</sup> Condillac, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1798), III, 592.

<sup>9</sup> *Eléments*, I, XIV.

<sup>10</sup> *Eléments*, I, 301.

<sup>11</sup> “Le perfectionnement des lois, des institutions publiques, suites des progrès des sciences, n’a-t-il point pour effet d’approcher, d’identifier l’intérêt commun de chaque homme avec l’intérêt commun de tous?” Condorcet, *Tableau historique* (Paris, 1822), 292.

laws which make it plain “que la nature lie par une chaîne indissoluble la vérité, le bonheur et la vertu”.<sup>12</sup> The pathos of the Enlightenment is retained in the “Science des idées”, for all its incipient naturalism. Reason progressively discloses a true picture of humanity which constitutes the foundation of civic virtue. Morality is anchored in nature. The best social order is that which corresponds to the permanent needs of man.

The antecedents of this faith are Baconian and Cartesian. To Condillac, who preceded the ideologues and the Revolution, it had already seemed plain that Bacon’s criticism of the “idols” must be the starting point of that reformation of consciousness which was the principal aim of the Enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> Bacon’s *idolum* becomes Condillac’s *préjugé*, a key term also in the writings of Holbach and Helvétius. The idols are “prejudices” contrary to “reason”. To remove them by the relentless application of critical reasoning is to restore the “unprejudiced” understanding of nature. Holbach maintains that

l’homme n’est malheureux que parce qu’il méconnaît la Nature... La raison guidée par l’expérience doit enfin attaquer dans leur source des préjugés dont le genre humain fût si longtemps le victime... La vérité est une; elle est nécessaire à l’homme... C’est à l’erreur que sont dues les chaînes accablantes que les Tyrans et les Prêtres forgent partout aux nations.<sup>14</sup>

Helvétius (a favourite of both Marx and Nietzsche) develops this notion in the direction of a rudimentary sociology of knowledge: “Our ideas are the necessary consequence of the societies in which we live.”<sup>15</sup> Scepticism is held in check by the rationalist faith inherited from Descartes: reason has the power of correcting its own errors.<sup>16</sup>

For Helvétius, the idols (*préjugés*) are the necessary fruit of social constraint and selfish interest, but he is convinced that they can be discredited by reason and removed by education. “L’éducation peut tout.”<sup>17</sup> The cure for popular superstition is pedagogy on a national scale. This is the point where Marx later introduced his criticism of the Enlightenment.<sup>18</sup> Helvétius in fact never succeeded

<sup>12</sup> Condorcet, *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> “Personne n’a mieux connu que Bacon la cause de nos erreurs, car il a vu que les idées, qui sont l’ouvrage de l’esprit, avaient été mal faites, et que par conséquent pour avancer dans la recherche de la vérité il fallait les refaire.” Condillac, *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* (Oeuvres, I, 507); cf. the article on Bacon in the *Encyclopédie*, III, and d’Alembert’s “Discours préliminaire”.

<sup>14</sup> Holbach, *Système de la Nature* (Paris, 1770), preface.

<sup>15</sup> *De L’Esprit*, (1758), 114; cited by Barth, *op. cit.*, 62. For Rousseau’s share in the elaboration of this attitude cf. Iring Fetscher, *Rousseaus politische Philosophie* (Neuwied, 1960), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> “ce qu’on nomme le bon sens ou la raison, est naturellement égale en tous les hommes... la diversité de nos opinions ne vient pas de ce que les uns sont plus raisonnables que les autres, mais seulement de ce que nous conduisons nos pensées par diverses voies” (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, cf. *Oeuvres*, ed. Pléiade, 1952, 126.)

<sup>17</sup> Helvétius, *De l’Homme* (1773), II, 332.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing... forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the

in clarifying the relationship of "interest" to "education". Wandering off into cynicism, he anticipated Nietzsche by arguing that the sole motor of human action is self-love and the will to power.

Chacun veut commander parce que chacun veut accroître sa félicité... L'amour du pouvoir fondé sur celui du bonheur est donc l'objet commun de tous nos désirs... toutes les passions factices ne sont-elles en nous que l'amour du pouvoir déguisé sous ces noms différents:"<sup>19</sup>

A suggestion which greatly pleased Nietzsche when he came across it.<sup>20</sup>

The confusion in which Helvétius landed himself was inherent in a "materialism" which treated the mind as the passive receptacle of sense impressions. At the same time he retained enough of the rationalist faith to remain confident that "prejudices" could be shown up as such, and that interest psychology could be subordinated to an objective understanding of the real needs of society. The "justesse de l'esprit" displays itself in the discovery of general laws whose truth is demonstrable. Their application to social life is a political problem that is, a problem of power. Philosophy and politics have their common ground in education, whereby inherited prejudices (mainly religious) are overcome and replaced by insight into the true nature of man and his environment. The place of religion is taken by a secular morality, inherently social because man is a social being.

By and large – and allowing for disputes between deists, materialists, and agnostics – this was the faith which the "ideologues" of the Institute inherited from their pre-revolutionary ancestors and which eventually became the official doctrine of French democracy and indeed of the French Republic. The point here is that, for all the inherent scepticism with respect to shared beliefs, the power of rational thought was not seriously called in question. Almost a century later, Comte's positivism, notwithstanding its authoritarian features, was still rooted in the same confidence. His complacent certainty that the "philosophie positive" represented the "véritable état définitif de l'intelligence humaine"<sup>21</sup> may today strike one as humorous, bearing in mind the paucity of discoveries attributable to the new method; but there is no mistaking the rationalist pathos which rings through his pseudo-religious rigmarole. Compared with the older generation, the change lies in the hierarchical straitjacket imposed upon the social order by a theorist in whom the generous optimism of the Enlightenment had congealed into a worried concern with social stability.<sup>22</sup> For Comte the "development of the human mind" issues in the recognition

---

educator himself needs to be educated. Hence this doctrine necessarily divides society into two parts, of which one is superior to the other..."

<sup>19</sup> *De l'Homme*, I, 238-239.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Barth, 316.

<sup>21</sup> *Cours de philosophie positive*, ed. Ch. Le Verrier (Paris, Garnier), I, 23.

<sup>22</sup> For this aspect of Comte cf. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (London, 1955), 342 ff.

that all historical phenomena are subject to “invariable natural laws”,<sup>23</sup> but this chilling thought somehow sustains reason’s faith in itself. To anticipate Engels’s later formulation (itself an amalgam of Comtean and Hegelian determinism), freedom is anchored in the recognition of necessity. *Science* enables us to bind these extremes together. The dogmatism of Comte does not subvert the conviction that the study of society yields the discovery of universal rational principles.

#### THE HEGELIAN TRADITION

Although Comte on some points anticipates Marx (or at any rate the version of Marxism subsequently canonized by Engels and his successors), his critique of the “ideologists” cannot be regarded as the forerunner of Marx’s onslaught on the “German ideology”, which latter had evolved quite independently of the French variant. The two lines of development must not be confused just because Marx affected to believe that Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians were the legitimate heirs of the *idéologues* (whence the title of his bulky tract which was not published in full until 1932).<sup>24</sup> The officially sanctioned “German ideology” of the 1840’s had come into being as a reaction against the theory and practice of the French Revolution. Its true originator was Hegel, who from his youthful Jacobinism<sup>25</sup> had gradually moved to an almost Burkean worship of continuity, without ever quite renouncing his faith in universal reason and the rule of law.<sup>26</sup> His radical critics retained the historical approach he had introduced, and at the same time restored the moral iconoclasm he had abandoned. Their target was the conservative “Christian-German” ideology then invested with a quasi-official function by the pre-1848 regime. In assailing it, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and the left-wing Hegelians in general, inevitably went back to the ultimate source of their own faith: the French Enlightenment and its naturalist critique of theology and metaphysics.<sup>27</sup> A few years later Marx was to claim that their criticism of the official ideology was itself ideological. The precise

<sup>23</sup> Comte, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> For the following cf., *Die deutsche Ideologie: Kritik der neuesten deutschen Philosophie in ihren Repräsentanten, Feuerbach, B. Bauer und Stirner, und des deutschen Sozialismus in seinen verschiedenen Propheten*, MEGA, V (1932); and the various translations.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Briefe von und an Hegel* (Leipzig, 1887); *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Tübingen, 1907), *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Philosophy of Right* (1821): “It is part of education, of thinking as the consciousness of the single in the form of universality, that the ego comes to be apprehended as a universal person in which all are identical. A man counts as a man in virtue of his manhood alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian etc. This is an assertion which thinking ratifies, and to be conscious of it is of infinite importance.” (Tr. T. M. Knox, Oxford, 1942, para. 209; 134).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bruno Bauer, *Das entdeckte Christentum. Eine Erinnerung an das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und ein Beitrag zur Kritik des neunzehnten* (1843). For the influence of Holbach, Helvétius, and the *Science des idées*, on Feuerbach, Bauer and Marx, cf. Barth, *op. cit.*, 73 ff.

significance he gave to this charge needs to be understood in the light of the philosophical situation then prevailing.

The belief that general concepts, though held by particular individuals, are of universal application, is common to all thinkers who can be described as rationalists. It was retained by Hegel, notwithstanding his disillusionment with the outcome of the French Revolution, in which he had originally seen the practical working of Reason. Kantian philosophy had already synthesized Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism in a procedure which restored the primacy of mind over matter: general concepts, though rooted in experience, were held to be independent of experience, inasmuch as they organized the sense data into intelligible wholes. The imposition of order upon the chaos of sense impressions was the work of the mind, which was in possession of the true and universal forms of understanding, the categories. The dependence of the individual mind upon the material presented by the senses – that hobby-horse of empiricism, from Locke to Hume – was not disputed, but treated as a state of affairs which occupies merely the foreground of reasoning. The “given” experience present to the individual is not an assemblage of brute “facts”, but an ordered whole. In extending this Kantian approach from the realm of nature to history, Hegel affirmed the governing principle of the idealist faith: matter is organized by mind. Experience – the shibboleth of the British school – ceased to be a final datum. The way to the attainment of universality lay in grasping the principles which held the sensible world together.

Seen from Hegel’s standpoint, Kant had remained in a half-way position between empiricism and true universalism. The latter required the assumption that the mind recognizes a world independent of the subject, whereas the Kantian categories were merely the necessary forms of any singular subject’s possible experience. They constituted a phenomenal world, one and the same for all experiences, yet Kant never took the decisive step of acknowledging that the world can be common to all experiences only if all finite minds are differentiations of a universal mind: he did not, that is, conceive Mind as a “concrete universal”. Reason for him is not indeed passive, but the individual consciousness is not seen as transcending itself, and its activity is not viewed as the immanence of a universal reason working through finite minds. If Kant in consequence has “no philosophy of Nature, only a philosophy of natural science”,<sup>28</sup> Hegel on the contrary has a philosophy of History precisely because for him Reason is at once general and particular: a concrete universal which differentiates itself into particular thinking minds. On this view, the problem for the individual thinker is to apprehend the movement of Reason, of which his own thinking is a reflex. What manifests itself to philosophic thought is the history of Mind – veiled by its embodiment in Matter, but still plainly discernible as the motive force of the universal process. When “stood on its feet” by materialism, this philosophy yields the conviction that the logic of history is deci-

<sup>28</sup> G. R. G. Mure, *An Introduction to Hegel* (Oxford, 1940), 105.

pherable through an understanding of Man's capacity to "produce" his own world. Beyond the recorded facts there lies the totality of history which men have made, and are therefore able to understand. It is worth stressing this continuity, so often obscured by emphasis upon the naturalist inversion effected by Feuerbach and Marx. Feuerbach indeed "saw through" Hegel's terminology to the theology of Spirit lying behind it, but his return to the naturalism of the French Enlightenment did not imply acceptance of the empiricist mode of reasoning. Nature is a universal for Feuerbach, as history is for Marx. This is not to say that either of them was uncritical of Hegel's manner of treating logical concepts. (It was left for Marx's less intelligent followers to personify History into an independent entity: a misunderstanding against which he had protested in advance.)<sup>29</sup>

We are here concerned with the concept of ideology, not with the truth of Hegel's philosophy. What needs to be retained is that on Hegel's assumption the problem of overcoming the particularity of thinking is not insoluble; nor does it follow that because philosophers – or for that matter ordinary men – are born and raised under particular circumstances, they cannot rise above them. Man is essentially a thinking being, and as such able to apprehend the concrete universality which is history. Our historical concepts possess true generality because they relate to a universal agent that unfolds through the histories of particular peoples and civilizations. This agent for Hegel is Mind, for Marx it is human activity, *praxis*: the practice of men struggling to subdue nature and to develop their own latent powers. The determinant in each case is conscious activity, though Marx protests that for Hegel the historical process tends to become an independent entity superior to the individuals who compose it.<sup>30</sup>

The problem of ideology (in the sense of "false consciousness" or "imperfect consciousness") arises for Hegel because in his view individuals, and even entire nations, are instruments of history, executors of a process whose meaning is concealed from them, and which becomes selfconscious only *post festum* in the philosopher who sums up the sense of the epoch.<sup>31</sup> Hegel was aware that history is set in motion by men's interests and passions. He did not question its rationality just because men commonly behaved in an irrational manner: the process

<sup>29</sup> "History, like truth, becomes a person apart, a metaphysical subject, of which the real individuals are merely the bearers." *Die Heilige Familie* (Berlin, 1953), 116.

<sup>30</sup> "Hegel's conception of history presupposes an abstract or absolute spirit which develops in such a way that humanity is nothing but a mass which more or less consciously bears it along. Within the framework of empirical exoteric history, Hegel introduces the operation of a speculative esoteric history. The history of humanity becomes the history of the abstract spirit of humanity, a spirit beyond the real man. Concurrently with this Hegelian doctrine, there developed in France the theory of the doctrinaires, who proclaimed the sovereignty of reason in opposition to the sovereignty of the people..." *Die Heilige Familie* (1953), 57; cf. *MEGA*, 1/3, 257; *The Holy Family* (London, 1957), 115.

<sup>31</sup> *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Lasson (Leipzig, 1930), I, 9 ff. 25 ff, 78 ff.; cf. *The Philosophy of History*, ed. C. J. Friedrich (New York, 1956), *Introduction and passim*; Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 224 ff.

had its own logic, which was not that of the individuals. The “cunning of reason”<sup>32</sup> could be observed in the manner in which the Idea (the rationality of the whole) triumphed at the expense of its own agents. The individual’s fate was swallowed up in the dialectic of the process. The youthful Marx rebelled against this world-view, which struck him as theological; he lived to see it reinstated (with his own silent acquiescence) by Engels, though it was only gradually that the wheel came full circle, with the determinist emphasis upon “general laws” governing the course of history: laws apparently general enough to conform to Hegel’s “cunning of reason”, and scientific enough to be acceptable to a generation raised on positivism.<sup>33</sup>

For Hegel the problem had been to justify the ways of God to man. He did not doubt that these ways could be understood, at any rate retrospectively. This understanding is the work of philosophy, which in every age makes its appearance when a particular phase of Spirit has come to a close. Philosophy does not change the world: it interprets it and thus reconciles the world to itself. Yet Hegel’s own philosophy was to change the world – if only because, even on its most conservative interpretation, it was subversive of revealed religion.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, his system – more particularly his teachings on Right and the State – appeared to his radical critics as the “ideology” of the political status quo: its intellectual projection and justification. From here it was only a step to the notion that speculative philosophy as such barred the way to that reconstruction of the world which was required to realize the aims of philosophy: liberty and rationality. This step was taken by Marx, with the help of Feuerbach who had taught him to regard speculative thinking as the ultimate barrier to the understanding of man’s role in the world.

The Marxian concept of ideology thus fuses two different principles: Hegel’s insight into the transitory character of the successive manifestations of Spirit, and Feuerbach’s materialist inversion of Hegel, with its stress on the this-worldly character of natural existence. Separated from each other these concepts remained speculative; joined together they yielded an explosive mixture. The explosion, however, did not depend for its effect on the kind of scepticism which follows from the alleged discovery that abstract thinking does not yield access to universal truths. The despairing conclusions drawn by Kierkegaard from this conviction do not form part of the intellectual revolution underlying the new philosophy of history: they belong – with Nietzsche’s

<sup>32</sup> *Vorlesungen*, I, 83; cf. *The Philosophy of History*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Close of Classical German Philosophy*, *passim*. Cf. Engels to Mehring, July 14, 1893 (in Marx-Engels *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow, 1954, 541): “Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; else it simply would not be an ideological process.”

<sup>34</sup> Barth, 78 f. To Hegel’s followers the matter presented itself in a somewhat different light: since his philosophy was the fulfilment of speculative thinking in general, its appearance plainly marked the end of European history; cf. K. Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* (Stuttgart, 1950), 44 ff. This may well have been Hegel’s own view.

kindred writings – to the attack on rationalism which in our own age has given rise to the existentialist analysis of the lonely individual. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard – just because they are concerned with the individual's role in a world whose functioning is indifferently taken for granted – have nothing to say about the manner in which history operates. Their revolt against rationalist metaphysics issues in subjectivism. Among the first universals to be cast overboard by these influential critics of rationalism was the concept of humanity.<sup>35</sup>

#### FROM HEGEL TO MARX

What Marx meant by “ideology” appears plainly enough from the *Theses on Feuerbach*, where the latter is blamed for not having carried through to the end his inversion of Hegel's system. He says, for example:

Feuerbach sets out from the fact of religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious and a secular one. His work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis. But the fact that the secular basis deserts its own sphere and establishes an independent realm in the clouds, can only be explained by the cleavage and self-contradiction within the secular basis.<sup>36</sup>

This radicalization of Feuerbach's naturalist starting-point (itself a continuation of a tradition rooted in antiquity) left intact the rationalist principle which Marx shared with Hegel: namely, the belief that cognition gives access to universal truths not present in immediate experience. The Marxian conception of world history as a process of human self-alienation draws on Feuerbach's impassioned protest against the sacrifice of nature and of real, living, human beings, whose activities and whose sufferings Hegel had obscured. But Marx retains the Hegelian conviction that in the final analysis “history makes sense”. The historical process vindicates Reason because it can be understood. To this extent Marx always remained a Hegelian, for all the emphasis upon “the real

<sup>35</sup> Kierkegaard still tried to find logical flaws in Hegel's system. With Schopenhauer's disciple Nietzsche, subjectivism and aestheticism have already reached the point where logic is consciously discarded. One cannot take seriously Nietzsche's so-called critique of traditional thought. When he says (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, in *Werke*, ed. K. Schlechta, Munich, 1960, II, 571) “It has gradually emerged that every great philosophy has hitherto been the confession of its author and a kind of unintended and unnoticed *mémoires*”, he is being trivial in the Voltairean manner, which is caricatured throughout this overrated essay; cf., his similar observations (in *Werke*, I, 448) on the “hereditary fault of philosophy”: “All philosophers share the fault of proceeding from the currently existing man (*vom gegenwärtigen Menschen*) and expecting to reach the goal through analyzing him. Insensibly they have an image of “Man” as an *aeterna veritas*... as a sure measure of all things. Yet everything said by the philosopher about Man at bottom only applies to the men of a very limited period. Lack of historical sense is the hereditary fault of all philosophers...” That this kind of thing should have been taken seriously *after Hegel* testifies to a state of affairs perhaps best described as the collapse of responsible thinking.

<sup>36</sup> *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, ed. Bottomore and Rubel (London, 1956), 68.

history of real people" which occupies so prominent a place in his polemics against his former associates.<sup>37</sup>

Marx's conception of ideology as "false consciousness" leads back to the problem of establishing the true consciousness which will enable men to understand their role. There is only one truth about history, and only one criterion for judging the discrepancy between what men are and what they might become: this criterion is supplied by philosophy, specifically by its understanding of man as a rational being. Thus philosophy, as the norm of reality, entails an implicit critique of this reality. Yet Marx also held that the philosophy of every age is the "ideological reflex" of determinate social conditions. How then could it function as the source of normative judgments pointing beyond the existing state of affairs? The problem did not arise if human self-alienation was conceived in the manner of Fichte and Hegel, as a mere misfortune which could be rectified by opposing a true consciousness to a false one. This had been Marx's standpoint in 1843, when he was already a revolutionary, but not yet a materialist.<sup>38</sup>

It might seem that on the materialist assumptions Marx accepted as part of his conversion to socialism in 1844-5, he was bound to arrive at a radical historicism and relativism. But although in many places the language of the *Holy Family* and the *German Ideology* (not to mention the *Communist Manifesto*) seems to support this conclusion, he did not in fact do so. He took over from his French predecessors the critical demolition of traditional metaphysics, yet he also went on ascribing a rational content to history. The rationality was a hidden one and had to be discerned in the logic of the "material" process itself, not in the "ideological" reflex it left in the minds of the participants. Like Hegel, he distinguished between Reality and Appearance. The reality of the historical process for Hegel was alienated Mind coming to terms with itself; for Marx it was alienated human labor reflecting itself in an ideological cloud-cuckooland. What he was later (in *Das Kapital*) to describe as the "fetishism of commodities", appears in his early writings as human self-alienation, whereby man's creations acquire a status independent of their creator.

The Marxian concept of ideology takes shape in this context, and from the start has a meaning different from that which it had for his eighteenth-century predecessors. Interest psychology is replaced by a metaphysic of human nature

<sup>37</sup> *Deutsche Ideologie*, 28 ff. and *passim*. In 1844-5 Marx (then resident in Paris) had partly excerpted Destutt de Tracy's *Eléments d'Idéologie*, and his use of the term "ideology" reflects a clear awareness of the devaluation it had meanwhile undergone.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Ein Briefwechsel von 1843*, in *Der historische Materialismus*, ed. S. Landshut and J. P. Mayer (Leipzig, 1932), 226. "The reform of consciousness consists only in this, that one enables the world to become aware of its own consciousness, that one awakens it from its dream, that one *explains* its own actions to it. Our entire purpose, as with Feuerbach's critique of religion, can only consist in transforming the religious and political questions into the self-conscious human form... It will then appear that the world has long possessed the dream of something of which it need only possess the consciousness in order to have it in reality."

whose outline Hegel had developed in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. Alienated social activity is to Marx what alienated mental activity is to Hegel. For both, the distinction between Reality and Appearance is involved in the manner in which *real* processes are transformed into *apparently* fixed and stable characters. Reality is process, appearance has the form of isolated objects. The task of critical thinking is to grasp the relations which constitute these apparent objects.

This approach still left unsolved the problem of relating the social content of ideology to the rational meaning of the process, as it differentiates itself through its various concrete manifestations. The historical character of the Marxian dialectic, and with it the problem of ideology in the modern sense, is a consequence of the discovery that there is not – as Feuerbach had thought – a single universal human standpoint from which to judge the alienations imposed by history; there are only particular human standpoints, corresponding to forms of society which arise from the interplay of material conditions and (more or less) conscious attempts to organize the “productive forces”. The dialectic of being and consciousness is worked out in history; not, as Hegel had implied, as a shadow-play reflecting a metaphysical process, but as the “real” play. The “actors” are individuals and groups whose changing circumstances are mirrored in varying modes of thought. These modes are “ideological” in that the participants fail to comprehend the situation in which they are involved. But even the most thorough clarification of their actual historical role cannot, it would seem, enable them to transcend the particularity of their standpoint, since this is bound up with the concrete needs of their time and place. The only difference between “objective” and “ideological” thinking appears to lie in the capacity of the critical intellect to comprehend the particular determinations which condition each successive phase of human activity.

The principle that “social being ... determines consciousness”<sup>39</sup> appears to imply that every social order (however defined) has forms of consciousness peculiar to it. Yet Marx also asserts that “mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve”,<sup>40</sup> thus placing a statement about the whole process within the framework of a doctrine intended to supersede the “pre-scientific” viewpoint. To invoke “mankind” is to make an assertion about the totality of history, however empirical and non-metaphysical the writer’s intention. There is not in Marx a clear distinction between sociological statements relative to particular situations, and philosophical generalizations pertaining to history as a whole. How is the dilemma to be met?

The principle that social being determines consciousness must be understood as itself an historical one: it refers to a state of affairs which has characterized history from the very beginning, but which is due to disappear when a rational

<sup>39</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, preface. Cf. *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1958), I, 363.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

order has been created. For the attainment of such an order implies the conscious direction of social life, hence the emancipation of consciousness from blind, uncomprehended, necessity. Consciousness is ideological because it is powerless. When it becomes the determining factor, it sheds its blinkers along with its dependence on material circumstances. *A rational order is one in which thinking determines being.* Men will be free when they are able to *produce* their own circumstances. Historical materialism is valid only until it has brought about its own dialectical negation. When this stage has been reached, it will no longer be possible to speak of historical "laws", for history is subject to "laws" only in so far as it is unconscious, that is, in so far as it is *not*, properly speaking, human history at all. The mature consciousness which in retrospect comprehends the necessity of this lengthy process of "pre-history" will not be an ideological one: it will be shared by all men, and will mark mankind's understanding of its own past.

Marx preserved the original motive of his thinking (together with the conception of history he had inherited from Hegel) by refusing to recognize the dilemma inherent in the principle that modes of thought are to be understood as "expressions" of changing social circumstances. He took it for granted that, though consciousness is conditioned by existence, it can also rise above existence and become a means of transcending the alienation which sets the historical process in motion. The *truth* about man is one and the same for all stages of history, even though every stage produces its own *illusions*. This truth is likewise the criterion for the practical activity which seeks to overcome man's alienation from his "true" being. The concept of ideology illumines the historical circumstance that men are not in possession of the true consciousness which – if they had it – would enable them to understand the totality of the world and their own place in it. Marx regarded his theory as a step towards the attainment of such a consciousness. The unity of mankind, and the universality of truth, were as real to him as they were to Hegel, and it was left to his disciples to destroy the coherence of this thought by abandoning its unspoken assumptions and transforming his doctrine into a variant of positivism.

#### FROM METAPHYSICS TO POSITIVISM

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the dissolution of rationalist metaphysics and the rise of positivism, which from a particular school of thought in France transformed itself into the general method of the natural and social sciences. In this atmosphere, sociology took shape as the application of positivist principles – themselves rooted in the world-view of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment – to the study of institutions. Comte's *philosophie positive* in part still reflected its founder's link with the early socialist critique of society.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 323 ff.

With Herbert Spencer this antagonism turned into its opposite, though the original motive broke through again in Spencer's rebellious ex-pupils who renounced his individualist approach and developed the Fabian amalgam of Benthamite utilitarianism and socialism.<sup>42</sup> With the Fabian school indeed, British sociology, after a lengthy interval of liberal individualism, returned to its positivist and quasi-socialist origins. In France a parallel development is associated with the name of Durkheim. In both cases the "objective" study of social institutions gradually transcended the individualist framework. If Comte (who had derived his basic ideas from Saint-Simon) converted socialism into sociology, his French and British pupils reverted to the "ideology" he had spurned. They then discovered in piecemeal fashion that the "laws" of history left room for conscious activity which, to be effective, had to be grounded in the study of institutions. The "religion of humanity", which for them increasingly took the place of the official religion, required active participation. This activism did not contradict the scientific credo, for it was held that society's growing complexity demanded public intervention. Such action, then, was justified not simply on humanitarian grounds – though crass poverty and misery furnished an adequate motive – but on the grounds of rational obligation.

Comte's positivism did indeed raise the problem of "value judgments", for science merely described the facts, leaving it to the individual to judge them in accordance with his moral standards. But precisely because "value judgments" were excluded from science, they were free. Comte's moral neutrality left the field open for action guided by the desire for improvement of a social order judged imperfect in terms of inherited (secular or religious) morality. It even contained a normative element in the idea of a universal order transcending national differences. His evolutionary doctrine, however determinist in retrospect (or in prospect), had room for the kind of humanitarian impulse that transformed itself into a critique of the established order when it encountered concrete social problems such as poverty or unemployment. British evolutionary socialism was able to merge with empirical sociology because both shared the conviction that the study of "objective facts" would enable society to overcome the latent irrationalities embedded in the established order. The problem of "ideology" was not experienced as such, since it was taken for granted that all reasonable people were agreed on fundamentals. Similarly the phenomenon of class was not seen as a theoretical problem, but rather as a practical obstacle to the attainment of a moral consensus. Classes were undesirable because they barred the way to a community in which personal values could be genuinely shared. In this respect the working class had no advantage: it too possessed no more than a limited perspective which stood in need of being transcended.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship* (London and New York, 1926), 112 f, 123 ff. The study of Fabian origins in recent years has done much to clarify the manner in which the Comtean impulse reached these late Victorian intellectuals by way of J. S. Mill and the novels of George Eliot.

While society was split into classes – whether mutually antagonistic or merely indifferent to each other – it lacked that unity which would enable individuals to meet on a common human footing. Hence classes were immoral, as well as being historically outmoded, since their existence was no longer justifiable on grounds of necessity. Any sectional standpoint was in principle as undesirable as any other, though the working class might temporarily benefit from a favorable prejudice, on the grounds of having in the past been made to carry a burden which ought in future to be equitably shared. Insofar as there was a problem of “false consciousness”, it arose from these historic limitations, which were shared by all. Scientific insight into this state of affairs was also the means of transcending it: to begin with in thought, and increasingly – through moral and political action – in practice.<sup>43</sup>

These attitudes ultimately went back to the Enlightenment view of human progress as intellectual progress. This had been the standpoint of the *idéologues* and their successors, notably the Saint-Simonians. If Comte had removed the socialist component from sociology, he had retained the notion that the growth of positive knowledge was beneficial because it enabled men to understand the “laws” of social evolution. From there it was a short step to the conclusion that knowledge of the laws would make it possible to refashion society in accordance with moral values. In France this step was taken by Durkheim, whose public posture could be regarded as an uneasy balance between the positivism of Comte and the socialism of Marx.<sup>44</sup> But what was the source of the moral values? According to Durkheim they came to the individual from society: not a mere natural totality, but the concrete embodiment of ideal norms. Then how had the norms become embodied in social conduct? If the question was an historical one, it led to an examination of the manner in which different societies had organized themselves at different times around certain regulative principles. But no investigation of this kind could get beyond the factual statement that particular obligations had at one time or another been accepted as binding. If a crisis arose because the moral consensus broke down, the individuals forming society were faced with the need to establish a new consensus, but it was not explained on what grounds they were to make a choice. Durkheim was no relativist, but he got out of the difficulty only by hypostatizing “society” into an entity superior to its members. When confronted with

<sup>43</sup> For the above cf. above all the writings of the Fabian school. The counterpart of this evolutionary socialism was an economic doctrine which – unlike the labour theory of value – proceeded from the marginal utility stress on the contribution made by each individual to the sum total of social wealth and wellbeing. Socialism is here defined as a state of affairs where – economic inequality having been eliminated – everyone will be recompensed in accordance with his freely chosen performance: in technical language, wages and prices will correspond to marginal utilities. Cf. Henry Smith, *The Economics of Socialism Reconsidered* (Oxford, 1962), *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Socialism and Saint-Simon*, ed. Alvin W. Gouldner (London, 1959), x ff., 90 ff; cf. also Morris Ginsberg, *Essays in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London, 1956), I, 41 ff.

the resulting difficulties he fell back on the notion of conscience. At this point he might have had to overstep the boundary of science and acknowledge the existence of a problem of moral conduct, which in turn involved the problem of philosophy in general. This, however, would have entailed an explicit recognition that the whole train of thought led beyond the area mapped out by the *philosophie positive*. In practice Durkheim was obliged to treat his own values as moral absolutes, though the paradoxity of this procedure seems to have worried him. The same may be said of Max Weber.<sup>45</sup>

#### THE ROMANTIC REVOLT

Mention of Weber raises the question why positivism encountered so much more resistance in late nineteenth-century Germany than in the West. Although this is properly an historical topic, it leads back to philosophy, for what stood in the way of a more rapid assimilation of positivist concepts was the German metaphysical tradition. Since this had been given its final formulation by Hegel, it might have been supposed that the traditional philosophical standpoint would be championed by the Marxists, inasmuch as they considered themselves to be in the Hegelian succession. Marxism, however, had itself been given a positivist interpretation by Engels. In consequence there was no real confrontation at all. What happened rather was that – idealist metaphysics having been discarded – the heritage of classical philosophy was shared out between positivism and vitalism, with the Marxists *de facto* ranged on the positivist side. The romantic opposition, as in France, took up the cudgels against rationalism in general, though in the German setting a writer like Nietzsche exercised an influence to which there was no parallel in France. In principle the resulting cleavage was a general European phenomenon, but only in Germany was the anti-rational trend strong enough to impose itself temporarily as the dominant one; in the end it even succeeded in promoting a political upheaval.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Karl Löwith, "Max Weber und Karl Marx", in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Stuttgart, 1960), especially 30 ff; so far as Weber ever clarified his standpoint he may be said to have done so in his "Der Sinn der Wertfreiheit", and "Wissenschaft als Beruf", both in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (2nd ed., Tübingen, 1951), 475 ff. and 566 ff. Cf. also *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (London, 1947), *passim*. For a more recent discussion see W. G. Runciman, "Karl Marx and Max Weber", in his *Social Science and Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1963).

<sup>46</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* (New York, 1958), *passim*. For Gerth and Mills (*op. cit.*, 61 ff) Weber represents a synthesis of the Marxian and the Nietzschean approach to the problem of ideology, i.e., the problem of relating ideas back to their (social or psychological) roots. This seems to credit Nietzsche with rather more intellectual penetration than he actually possessed. In any event the popularly effective counterpoint to his position was furnished by Engels and his successors. In political terms this corresponded to the polarization of German intellectual life into Social-Democratic and National-Socialist versions of post-liberal thinking.

It would be misleading to treat this situation in terms of a straight conflict between rationalism and irrationalism. The classical rationalist position had in fact been abandoned by the Marxists as much as by everyone else. Even for the academically influential neo-Kantians, philosophy figured merely as the "beyond" of science. What remained after this intellectual debacle was the clash between positivism and vitalism, and since philosophy no longer supplied any guiding ideas, the debate took place at the level of sociological, or psychological, deflation of general concepts. Nietzsche's vulgarization of Schopenhauer (who cannot be described as an irrationalist) had its counterpart in Engels's popularization of Hegel. Both were writing for the general public, but Nietzsche had the advantage of addressing himself to readers already predisposed by a century of literary romanticism to come down on the irrationalist side. In the struggle for influence over the educated public, which opened in the 1890's and came to a momentous climax in the 1930's, the Nietzscheans gained ground at the expense of the *soi-disant* Marxists in the degree to which they were able to pose as heirs and defenders of a peculiarly German tradition. Yet the extremes met over the issue of replacing religion by "religious atheism": both Engels and Nietzsche believed in "eternal recurrence". (For that matter, Engels had enough affection for the world of the Edda to satisfy the tastes of a whole army of Nordic enthusiasts.)<sup>47</sup>

If one abstracts from the not very successful neo-Kantian revival, which remained an academic affair, the situation briefly sketched here remained unchanged until the first faint stirrings of the neo-Hegelian renaissance on the eve of 1914. Around 1880 it really must have seemed to educated Germans that philosophy was dead. Not surprisingly this was the moment when the debunking of universal concepts attained its peak. So far as Nietzsche was concerned, this was largely a matter of radicalizing the thinking of Schopenhauer, who for all his scepticism about the role of the intellect had still left unchallenged the principle that true cognition of the world is possible. Schopenhauer retained the distinction between objective (that is, disinterested) and erroneous (because

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche's elaboration of the concept of eternal recurrence is too well known to require citation. For Engels's surprisingly similar (though quite independently developed) attitude, see the Introduction to his *Dialektik der Natur*, MEGA (Moscow, 1935); cf. Marx-Engels *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1951), II, 57 ff. especially 72-73: "It is an eternal cycle in which matter moves, a cycle that certainly only completes its orbit in periods of time for which our terrestrial year is no adequate measure, a cycle in which the time of highest development, the time of organic life, and still more that of the life of beings conscious of themselves and of nature, is just as scantily meted out as the space in which life and self-consciousness come into operation; a cycle in which every finite mode of existence of matter... is equally transient, and wherein nothing is eternal but eternally changing, eternally moving matter... But however often, and however relentlessly, this cycle is completed in time and space, however many millions of suns and earths may come into being and go out of being... we have the certainty that matter remains eternally the same in all its transformations, that none of its attributes can ever be lost, and... that with the same iron necessity with which it will again exterminate on the earth its highest creation, the thinking mind, it must somewhere else and at another time once more engender it."

interested and subjective) thinking. His target was intellectual corruption, not the intellect as such. When he said that people's judgments were "mostly corrupt and merely an expression in favor of their party or class"<sup>48</sup> he was being cynical about his contemporaries, without therefore giving way to despair about the capacity of the mind to reach valid conclusions. This step was taken by Nietzsche who debased Schopenhauer's sceptical pessimism into a destructive nihilism. The essential coarseness of Nietzsche's mind is concealed by a style modelled on that of his master, and by a declamatory pathos that employs the phraseology of the Enlightenment for the purpose of wrecking the already shaken belief in reason.

We live only through illusions... The foundations of everything great and alive rest upon illusion. The pathos of truth leads to destruction.<sup>49</sup>

From this irrationalism it was only a short step to the biological vitalism of the Third Reich and its ideologists. Nietzsche's critique of religion – ostensibly a revival of the eighteenth-century tradition – issues in a subjectivism no less anthropocentric than theology itself. The characterization of the world as "senseless" merely inverts the theological claim that the universe exists for the purpose of manifesting a providential concern for man. Since Nietzsche has "seen through" this illusion, he appeals for a faith centered upon the "will to power" – a biological metaphor. The critique of ideology is reduced to the destruction of religious idols (and the fabrication of new ones). The residual link with the eighteenth-century tradition is retained only in externals, such as the French title of Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung*: a work originally translated (at the suggestion of its author) as *Crépuscule des idoles*.<sup>50</sup> In all essential respects he turned his back on the rationalist tradition. The principal "idol" he set out to smash was the belief in reason.

If there can be no valid perception of universals it is pointless to inquire into the meaning of history. What remains is "the eternal flux of all things", "perpetual change": the trivial notion that everything has its moment in time. "There are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths."<sup>51</sup> Here too Nietzsche encounters Engels.<sup>52</sup> The chief difference is that his tone is hysterical,

<sup>48</sup> *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hübscher (Leipzig, 1937-41), V, 479; cf. Barth, 199.

<sup>49</sup> *Gesammelte Werke* (Munich, 1923-29), VI, 17, 74.

<sup>50</sup> *Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck*, ed. Oehler and Bernoulli (Leipzig, 1916), 453.

<sup>51</sup> *Werke*, XI, 154.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Ludwig Feuerbach*, in *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1951), II, 351: "The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes... this... thought has... so thoroughly permeated ordinary consciousness that... it is now scarcely ever contradicted... If... investigation always proceeds from this standpoint, the demand for final solutions and eternal truths ceases once for all... one no longer permits oneself to be imposed upon by the antitheses... between true and false, good and bad... necessary and accidental. One knows that these antitheses have only a relative validity." (This, however, does not prevent Engels from asserting in the very same passage

whereas that of Engels is complacent – a distant foreshadowing of political cleavages yet to come. Neither man was able to salvage the classical heritage invoked in their respective writings.

The critique of ideology, when delivered from such a standpoint, reduces itself to what is called *unmasking*. Nietzsche is tireless in stripping the “mask” from respectability, from bourgeois morality, from idealist metaphysics, and of course from Christianity. History for him is a masquerade: not in the Hegelian sense that its logic reveals itself through transitory events and personalities, but in the sense that men drape their “real” biological drives and goals in idealist costumes. All thought is ideological; its unconscious function is to serve the life process. In contrast to this cynicism, Engels – who unlike Nietzsche retained the rationalist vocabulary, along with a proper respect for the classical tradition (whose meaning he had forgotten) – holds that *almost* all thinking is ideological; he takes a cheerful view of the matter, in as much as historical causality can be understood and guided.

Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, in that each person follows his own consciously desired end, and it is precisely the resultant of these many wills operating in different directions... that constitutes history... The will is determined by passion or deliberation, but the levers which immediately determine passion or deliberation are of very different kinds.

... the philosophy of history, particularly as represented by Hegel, recognizes that the ostensible and also the really operating motives of men who act in history are by no means the ultimate causes of historical events; that behind these motives there are other motive powers which have to be discovered. But it does not seek these powers in history itself, it imports them rather from outside, from philosophical ideology, into history.<sup>53</sup>

Behind the historical shadow-play there is a realm of “real” causation which can be understood. It is thus possible to grasp the logic of the process, but since it rolls on endlessly, one cannot assign any ultimate meaning to it. Matter being eternal, and its endless motion the only “law” of which we can be certain, history is reduced to the status of a singularity within the domain of nature. “Dialectical materialism” and romantic vitalism concur in the belief that Reality is Process, though the former retains a hankering for the rationality which was once the principal theme of philosophy. This at least provides a criterion for distinguishing between “objective” and “ideological” thinking. For Nietzsche the distinction is meaningless: all thought is a species of poetry, and the real Being of the world remains irreducible to discursive reasoning.

---

that throughout all these relative processes “a progressive development asserts itself in the end”).)

<sup>53</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *S. W.*, II, 354-5.

## THE LOGIC OF SCIENCE

At this level a serious analysis of the problem of ideology was not possible. Its restatement around 1900 was due to Max Weber, who had benefited from the neo-Kantian revival. For Weber, who had assimilated the historical relativism of Dilthey, science was both autonomous and morally neutral. At the same time the implications of this standpoint were no longer veiled by metaphysical remnants. In particular it was not possible for Weber to be complacent about the overall progressive direction of history. As he saw it, there was no guarantee that the rationalization of existence would promote the aims traditionally enshrined in philosophy. Matters were, if anything, getting worse – at any rate from the standpoint of one who valued personal freedom. This pessimistic outlook made it possible for Weber to divorce normative judgments from factual statements in a more radical fashion than Dilthey had done. Positivism acquired a Stoical cast: it underpinned the “freely chosen” standpoint of a thinker who saw himself defending a lost cause.<sup>54</sup>

Weber is important for our theme because his approach involved a sharpened distinction between the two meanings of “ideology”. The term – as has been shown – can signify both the consciousness of an epoch and the “false consciousness” of men unaware of their true role. What a culture thinks about itself may be “ideological” in one sense without being so in the other; thus for example if the Middle Ages developed thought-forms which “reflected” the feudal-hierarchical structure of society, the official ideology might nonetheless serve as an accurate guide to that particular reality, just because it was mirrored in the categories. This is the sense in which the term is commonly employed both by Marx (though not by the epigoni) and by Weber. Plainly on this assumption there need be no question of “unmasking” anyone or anything. On the other hand, thinking may be “ideological” in the narrower sense of distorting, rather than reflecting, the reality it describes. Thus for Marx economics was either “scientific” or “ideological”, depending on whether or not it gave an objective account of the socio-economic process. Ricardo in his eyes was none the less scientific for being bourgeois. Marx, however, also retained the notion that thought-forms impose their own limitations, so that, for example, Ricardo (or any other economist employing his concepts) was limited by his inability to transcend the mental framework proper to the bourgeois epoch: social categories cannot be transcended in thought until they have (in principle at least) been questioned in practice. In tacitly retaining this approach, Weber fell heir to the problem of accounting for the role of “ideology”: not as the conscious or unconscious distortion of reality in the interest of some group, but

<sup>54</sup> Löwith (*op. cit.*, *passim*) develops this theme through an analysis of Weber’s relationship both to the historical Marx and to the “vulgar Marxism” of the epigoni; cf. also Runciman, 43 ff. The subsequent development of Weber’s critique of modern society and its ideologies is linked with the name of Schumpeter; cf. in particular the latter’s *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London and New York, 1950).

as the intellectual reflex of determinate social processes. Unlike Marx, for whom history as a whole exemplified a hidden rationality, he relativized sociology by severing it from philosophy: every culture has its own norms and values which enter into the perception of what is called "reality". Its norms are binding only upon those who accept them, though this does not invalidate them, since it is their fate to be "objective" and "subjective" at the same time. There is no way of transcending this situation, for the growth of rationality leads only to an awareness that it is not possible to ground value judgments in a universally accepted doctrine of human nature.

At this point the critique of ideology – originally a philosophical theme – turns into relativism. History and sociology combine to make it appear that consciousness cannot transcend its time horizon, since the concepts imposed upon the raw material of experience are themselves historical. Something like this had been suggested by Hegel, and following him by Marx, but they were saved from relativism by the belief that both the nature of man and the logic of history can still be grasped in an act of intellectual intuition. With Dilthey and Weber, the subjectivism already inherent in the neo-Kantian interpretation of the categories as empty forms imposed upon an unknown and unknowable material leads away from the notion of truth as universal. Now that reason has lost its status as a concrete universal, history is no longer seen as an intelligible totality held together in the last resort by the fact that it is one and the same for all men. What remains when this faith has been discarded is the subjective freedom of each individual to act according to reason, *his* reason; a freedom necessarily limited by the right of all others to do the same. Men act from freely chosen standpoints which are ultimately incompatible, on the basis of convictions which in the final analysis cannot be rationally justified. In this perspective the "ideological" character of thinking ceases to be a problem. It is accepted as an aspect of a situation which – since it cannot be altered or transcended – must be stoically endured.

#### THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

The preceding section was concerned with the manner in which the ideology problem was formulated between, roughly speaking, 1860 and 1920. The dates are not chosen at random, just as it is not a matter of accident that the earlier debate had run from the French Revolution to the 1848 upheaval.<sup>55</sup> In both cases we are dealing with a social transformation which found its intellectual counterpart in a distinctive manner of conceiving the role of ideas. This would

<sup>55</sup> Marx's *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, with the well-known Preface stating the "materialist conception of history", appeared in 1859; Weber's lecture on "Wissenschaft als Beruf" was delivered in 1919: a date which may be regarded as the effective end of the historical epoch that had given rise to both positivism and "orthodox Marxism".

probably be agreed even by critics of "historicism", and for the rest it may be suggested that a statement such as the foregoing does not commit one to anything beyond the bare assertion that there must be *some* correspondence between the collective experience of a culture and the way in which this experience is generalized in thought. It does not follow that either Marxism or positivism are to be understood as the "ideological reflex" of their age, though on the trivialized interpretation of "historical materialism" which we owe to its orthodox exponents such a conclusion might seem to impose itself. From the standpoint here chosen the matter appears somewhat differently.

It has already been suggested that Weber did not really "turn Marx upside down" (e.g., in asserting that Protestantism was a key factor in the rise of capitalism), but rather developed a "bourgeois" counterpart to the Marxian theory of history. It is true that in one important respect he went beyond Marx, in that his sociology concerned "industrial society" as such; it thus became relevant, during the following generation, for capitalism and socialism alike. But while this topic is of the first importance for contemporary sociologists, it is somewhat tangential to our problem. In any case it is possible to share Weber's pessimism about the future of freedom in an increasingly rationalized and bureaucratized world, without therefore accepting the neo-Kantian divorce between factual and value judgments as an ultimate datum for the reflective consciousness. The same applies to his notion that all possible standpoints are relative, not merely to the position of their holder (hardly a shattering revelation), but to the rationale of the process (if it can be discovered) which has transformed the naive hopes and aspirations of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment into our current disenchantment. Talk of "process" involves the assumption that history does have a discernible logic, but since this was not denied by Weber we are not moving outside his frame of reference in asking how far the "sociology of knowledge" is able to clarify the ideology problem.

Although the step from *Wissenschaftslehre* to *Wissenssoziologie* was taken by Karl Mannheim, one is, I think, justified in treating Mannheim's work as an epilogue to that of Weber. It is no longer a secret that an important link between them was provided by George Lukács, notably in *History and Class-consciousness*: a work which for many years led an underground existence before being recognized as the influence it was. Here both Mannheim's derivation from Weber, and his dependence on the early Lukács, are taken for granted, and the question is asked how far the concept of ideology was clarified by this belated fusion of the Marxist and the positivist standpoint.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> For the following cf. Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik* (Berlin, 1923); Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, 1936; 2nd ed. 1960); and *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, ed. Kecskemeti (London, 1953); Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Boston, 1957). The last-mentioned work is virtually a critique of Mannheim, who appears in it as the incarnation of "holistic" thinking and "historicism", and it is questionable how far its generalizations are appropriate to other targets.

If Weber could be described as a “bourgeois Marx”, Mannheim appeared to the *cognoscenti* (that is, to those aware of his background, and of the somewhat tenuous link between his circle and the Budapest Marxists who staffed the brief Soviet experiment in 1919) as a “bourgeois Lukács” – not perhaps quite fairly, since he regarded himself as a Socialist, and in his later writings even made something of a fetish of economic planning.<sup>57</sup> None of this concerns us here; our topic is furnished by the manner in which he and Lukács – starting from a parallel awareness of the dilemma raised by the radical historicism of Dilthey and the resigned relativism of Weber – conceived the problem of ideology. Mannheim’s exposition of the subject in *Ideology and Utopia* (first published in 1929) may be taken as read. The same cannot be said of Lukács, notwithstanding his current prominence as a purveyor of more or less orthodox Marxism-Leninism.<sup>58</sup> In 1923, when *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* appeared – to be promptly disowned by its author when it encountered the inevitable critical barrage from Moscow – it was rightly regarded as a challenge to “orthodox Marxism” and positivism alike. Lukács in fact had revived the Hegelian conception of history and fused it with Lenin’s revolutionary activism into an explosive mixture – far more explosive than the authorized version to which Communism was already committed, for Lukács really went through with the notion that the proletariat was the “identical subject-object of the socio-historical process”.<sup>59</sup> Not only was it the class destined to make an end of bourgeois society: its coming triumph signalled the *practical* resolution of *theoretical* problems insoluble from a bourgeois standpoint, including the Kantian problem.<sup>60</sup> And this conclusion was developed not in the usual philistine manner, which virtually negated the very existence of philosophy, but through an analysis of logical and epistemological concepts which sought to establish their essentially historical character. Lukács in 1923 not merely revived the Hegelian dialectic: in his own fashion he did what Hegel had done in the *Phenomenology* when he treated the categories as manifestations of Spirit.<sup>61</sup> With this intellectual *tour de force* – a unique achievement, whose level was never remotely recovered by its own author: in his later years a pedestrian exponent of Marxist-Leninist scholasticism – the “heritage of classical German philosophy”, vainly invoked by Engels in his platitudinous essay on Feuerbach, seemed in fact to have been secured for the Marxist school.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. his *Mensch und Gesellschaft im Zeitalter des Umbaus* (Leiden, 1935); *Diagnosis of Our Time* (London, 1943).

<sup>58</sup> No reference is intended here to Lukács’s writings on art, notably the two massive volumes on aesthetics (*Die Eigenart des Aesthetischen* [Neuwied, 1963]) recently published as part of the Collected Works now being edited in West Germany.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.*, 134 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately this cannot be demonstrated in detail. For the rest it must suffice to mention the evident influence of Lukács on the work of H. Marcuse.

## LUKACS AND MANNHEIM

From our present standpoint it is plain enough that this was a mirage, and not only because history refused to follow the road mapped out by the theorist. Writing almost a decade before the re-discovery of Marx's "*Paris Manuscripts*", Lukács had intuitively fixed upon the alienation and restitution of man as the pivotal point in the Marxian world-view.<sup>62</sup> This gave him the meta-historical standpoint he needed to gain a critical view of the whole process. But while he thus eluded the relativism inherent in the orthodox approach, he involved himself in a different dilemma: a standpoint outside empirical history is a metaphysical standpoint, and while this is no criticism of Hegelian (or any other) philosophy, it becomes problematic for a Marxist. Thus when confronted with orthodox indignation, Lukács was unable to maintain his position. To do so he would have had to acknowledge that the category of "totality", which played the key role in his thinking, transcended not merely the artificially fore-shortened positivist world-view, but any conceivable standpoint compatible with what is called science. Lukács had seen well enough that empiricism can never attain to an intellectual grasp of the "concrete totality" of history. What he failed to see – or shrank from admitting to himself when it was suggested to him – was that the empiricism of science is the only possible standpoint for a thinker who is determined to get on without the help of metaphysics. His own "wager" on the revolution – though in the circumstances of the day not an irrational one – contained an element of romantic subjectivism which he refused to acknowledge. From a purely theoretical viewpoint there was no particular reason why the proletariat – rather than the intelligentsia or some other group – should have been seen as the "identical subject-object" of history. In fact, if it was a question of establishing a standpoint transcending the class struggle (not that Lukács had any such intention), the intelligentsia had a better claim.

This, as we know, was Mannheim's solution, but before coming to it, let us see how the role of consciousness is to be understood on Lukács's assumptions. As he is the only Marxist to have written an entire book on the subject, it may be as well to consider what he has to say. Starting from the Hegelian-Marxian view of history as a concrete totality of seemingly unrelated circumstances, he begins by criticizing the manner in which empiricism has made a fetish of science as the correct description of those frozen structures that confront the individual as "social reality".<sup>63</sup> The dialectical method, which restores

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the lengthy essay "Die Verdinglichung und das Bewusstsein des Proletariats" (*op. cit.*, 94 ff.) which presents a critique of idealist philosophy in conceptual terms derived from Hegel (and incidentally dismisses Engels's criticism of Kant as the absurdity it is).

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.*, 22 ff. In addition to the sociological method oriented to Comte and Spencer, Lukács also condemns those Marxists who had gone back to Kant. For in doing so they had ignored the fact that "Marx's critique of Hegel is... the direct continuation and development of Hegel's own critique of Kant and Fichte" (31).

the intelligibility of the process, also discloses the ideological character of those pseudo-empirical and "scientific" forms of thought which present the typical antinomies of declining late-bourgeois culture – e.g., the conflict between the individual and society – as though they necessarily pertained to every stage of history. The Marxian dialectic is able to perform this role because (unlike Hegel's idealist dialectic, with its retrospective attention fixed upon the past) it transcends both the *status quo* and the categories which are its intellectual counterpart. These categories reflect a particular reality whose meaning is concealed from the individual by the bourgeois mode of thought, which latter finds its apotheosis in the cult of positive science. All the typical dilemmas of modern life – the cleavage between theory and practice, form and content, science and metaphysics, and so forth – arise from this situation. The sharpest conflict is that between the progressive rationalization of particular aspects of existence and the mounting irrationality of the whole. The overcoming of this split – not merely in theory but in practice – is the task of *consciousness*: specifically the consciousness that transcends the bourgeois era, namely Marxism. With history moving towards a climax involving the fate of mankind,<sup>64</sup> the growing antagonism between the ruling class and the proletariat (which latter is compelled, for the sake of self-preservation, to fight for the attainment of ends not necessarily present *as such* to each of its individual members) assumes the aspect of a race between "blind" necessity and conscious purpose. For the automatism of the historical process, on which "vulgar Marxism" before 1914 had relied for the attainment of its ends, is quite capable of promoting a universal catastrophe.<sup>65</sup> The transition from the "realm of necessity" to the "realm of freedom" is not itself a necessary step. On the contrary, it is precisely during this critical transitional period that the blind automatism of the existing reified structures takes on the character of a fateful drift which can only be stemmed by the revolt of the exploited class. The latter, for all its empirical shortcomings, is the historical incorporation of mankind's will to escape from self-destruction. Its consciousness, which transcends the fixed categories of a society in process of dissolution, coincides with the "true" consciousness of mankind. This self-awareness is not a "scientific one", for *science is itself an illusion* – the last and greatest of bourgeois illusions, and one which, if not overcome, must unfailingly promote the catastrophe of humanity. The conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat thus involves the fate of mankind. But the empirical proletariat is itself subjected to the ideological confusions and crises typical of bourgeois society in the era of its decomposition, and therefore – here Lukács takes leave of classical Marxism and adopts the Leninist standpoint – it requires the leadership of a revolutionary *party* which incarnates the consciousness of the epoch.<sup>66</sup> In the end, therefore, the consciousness on

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.*, 82.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Op. cit.*, 261 ff, 276 ff, 298 ff.

which literally everything depends is once more that of a group of individuals, for of course the party itself has to be *led*. In his later years Lukács showed himself ready to face the implications of this dialectic: if Reason could be located in a group, it could also find its temporary embodiment in an individual who had substituted himself for the group.

What made this analysis seem both convincing and overwhelmingly urgent was the author's intellectual distinction. In the early 'twenties, prophets of doom abounded in Central Europe; one more or less would have made no difference. What distinguished Lukács was the firmness with which he placed his message within the context of classical German philosophy. His analysis of Kantian and neo-Kantian thinking – lengthily developed<sup>67</sup> in the intricately allusive style he had adopted from his pre-war teachers in Heidelberg – employed the Hegelian-Marxist vocabulary with telling effect, to the end of demonstrating that the crisis of contemporary thought heralded the imminent catastrophe of the society which had given birth to this very philosophy. He had indeed guessed correctly, though he erred in supposing that “the revolution” would prove him right. What actually happened was that the European crisis gave rise to the rival totalitarianisms of Communism and Fascism. His own side, moreover, repudiated him, and this although he had worked out the appropriate philosophical rationale of Leninism. The apocalyptic vision of a crisis in which the fate of mankind was in the balance had its effect upon the intellectual elite of European Marxism; but it appalled the new Muscovite orthodoxy, already committed to its own brand of scientism, and it was useless as a means of promoting revolutionary optimism among the masses. It therefore remained an underground doctrine, and its author a licensed heretic who in the end repudiated his own insights in favour of a refurbished “dialectical materialism”. This necessarily entailed a commonplace transcript theory of perception, in the place of the dialectical theory of cognition put forward in the 1923 work. With this return to orthodoxy, the problem of ideology once more assumed subordinate status: there was a true consciousness (that of the working class, or rather of “its” party) and a false one (that of the “class enemy”), but *both had the same structure*. It was simply a question of replacing “bourgeois science” by “socialist science”, or – even more absurdly – “bourgeois ideology” by “proletarian ideology”. That “science” itself represents an “ideological” manner of thinking which of its nature cannot yield an adequate report of the world – this truly startling and genuinely “revolutionary” notion, which Lukács had extracted from Hegel, disappeared from view. Its own author came to renounce it. It was after all a good deal easier to stick to the time-honoured notion that science tells us all we need to know, provided it is not distorted by “reactionary” class interests. This had been the message of orthodox Marxism, as formulated by Engels, Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Lenin himself (though Lenin's *practice* was

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 122 ff.

wildly at variance with it and demanded a wholly different theory of cognition). In returning to this tradition, Lukács was not merely playing safe, but in all probability also satisfying a deep-seated psychological craving for spiritual certainty: the heretic had found peace in the haven of a new secular church.<sup>68</sup>

In the light of the foregoing, Mannheim's work appears as, so to speak, the dialectical counterpart to Lukács's abortive break-out. *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) was the positivist's rejoinder to *History and Class-Consciousness* (1923). Mannheim (who in 1919 had steered clear of Lukács's political commitments) adapted what he could use for his own purpose, which was frankly "theoretical" in the contemplative sense condemned by Lukács, for whom theory was meaningless if not joined to a particular practice. *Ideology and Utopia* is full of passages which reflect its author's awareness of the issues Lukács had stirred up a few years earlier. In particular, Mannheim's analysis of the manner in which ideological notions are formed rests upon the philosophy of consciousness developed by Kant and his successors.<sup>69</sup> Thus for him too consciousness does not simply "reflect" the world of experience, but on the contrary helps to shape it.<sup>70</sup> The notion of "false consciousness" (ideology in the precise or narrow sense) is linked to the discussion of Kant and Hegel. The traditional Marxist standpoint is dismissed as untenable, in that it tries to exempt itself from the verdict inherent in its own approach: socialism too must be treated as an ideology.

With the emergence of the general formulation of the total conception of ideology, the simple theory of ideology develops into the sociology of knowledge. What was once the intellectual armament of a party is transformed into a method of research in social and intellectual history generally.<sup>71</sup>

As with Comte a century earlier, socialism turns into sociology, but this time the problem of relativism is frankly faced.

Once we recognize that all historical knowledge is relational knowledge, and can only be formulated with reference to the position of the observer, we are faced once more with the task of discriminating between what is true and what is false... The question then arises: which social standpoint *vis-à-vis* of history offers the best chance for reaching an optimum of truth?<sup>72</sup>

We are back with Max Weber. In fact Mannheim's position can be defined

<sup>68</sup> Though in his quasi-philosophical writings he never quite managed to shake off his youthful concern with the role of the mind and the irreducible character of spiritual experience. Unfortunately this topic, which is of importance for an appreciation of Lukács's work on esthetics, cannot be developed here.

<sup>69</sup> *Op. cit.*, 57 ff.

<sup>70</sup> 58. "This does not imply that the subject merely reflects the structural pattern of the external world, but rather that, in the course of his experience with the world, he spontaneously evolves the principles of organization that enable him to understand it."

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

very precisely as an amalgam (doubtless he regarded it as a synthesis) of Weber and Lukács. What was new and original was the answer he gave to his own question: the optimal standpoint is that occupied by the social group which specializes in forming general concepts – the intelligentsia.

By linking the sociology of knowledge to the position of a definite stratum in society, Mannheim had anchored the exercise of freedom in the group interest of the intellectuals.<sup>73</sup> This was a step beyond Weber, for whom the problem of cognition was bound up with the role of the lonely thinker confronting the world. Mannheim's concern with group thinking does not, however, meet the objection that only a particular "historic" class at a particular moment of time can reshape the historical situation. The world of the individual is always a "given" one, in that it is experienced as a totality which the critical intellect cannot significantly alter. A group is still made up of individuals whose minds are engaged with various aspects of experience and whose differing standpoints will probably cancel out. This play of opinion and mutual cancellation of "prejudices" is in fact regarded by Mannheim as essential to the emergence of an adequate scientific standpoint.

The task of a study of ideology which tries to be free from value-judgments is to understand the narrowness of each individual point of view and the interplay between these distinctive attitudes in the total social process.<sup>74</sup>

Yet the reference to the "total social process" seems to presuppose a different and more philosophical viewpoint. On the assumptions made by Mannheim *qua* sociologist, there is no good reason why he should casually invoke the totality of history when it suits him. In fact when he does so he is employing language which makes sense only on the (Hegelian) supposition that the Whole determines its parts, and that the logic of history must be understood before one can proceed to the business of empirical investigation.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Op. cit.*, 143: "... the intellectuals are still able to arrive at a total orientation even when they have joined a party. Should the capacity to acquire a broader point of view be considered merely as a liability? Does it not rather present a mission? Only he who really has the choice has an interest in seeing the whole of the social and political structure. Only in that period of time and that stage of investigation which is dedicated to deliberation is the sociological and logical locus of the development of a synthetic perspective to be sought... We owe the possibility of mutual interpenetration and understanding of existing currents of thought to the presence of such a relatively unattached middle stratum..."

<sup>74</sup> *Op. cit.*, 72. Cf. also further on: "The prevailing philosophic view which cautiously admits that the content of conduct has been historically determined, but which at the same time insists upon the retention of eternal forms of value... is no longer tenable."

<sup>75</sup> *Op. cit.*, 83. "The study of intellectual history can and must be pursued in a manner which will see in the sequence and coexistence of phenomena more than mere accidental relationships, and will seek to discover in the totality of the historical complex the role, significance, and meaning of each component element." The inconsistency inherent in such utterances (for which Mannheim might indeed have invoked the authority of Dilthey and Troeltsch) exposed their author to the charge that, for all his sceptical airs, he was really an historicist at heart; cf. Popper, *op. cit.*, 80.

## THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The problem of history is the problem of consciousness. It was Hegel who first pointed this out, and his successors – including Marx, who inverted his logic but did not replace it by a radically different manner of thought – continued to pose the question he had raised: how could the rationality of history be perceived by the intellect, given the fact that men are both inside and outside the historical process? The subsidiary problem of “false consciousness” arose from the awareness that the various possible standpoints were inadequate as well as incompatible. Meantime the analysis of cognition had led to the search for the “identical subject-object” of history: a universal whose activity was synonymous with the disclosure of history’s peculiar logic. The pursuit of this aim over the past two centuries is not simply to be understood as a dispassionate search for objective truth, though belief in a *ratio* common to all men was inherent in the attempt to discern an historical logic. The intellectual effort was itself a factor in that theoretical and practical unification of the world which is now proceeding under our eyes. The mounting concern over the phenomenon of “false consciousness” was an index to the awareness that the future of civilization – if not the existence of mankind – may come to depend on the attainment of a “true consciousness” in which individuals and groups belonging to the most varied societies and cultures can share. From the standpoint here chosen it may thus be suggested that the attempt to discern a logic of history was more than an idle play with concepts: it responded to a practical purpose which in our own age has become more urgent as the globe shrinks, and historically divergent and disparate cultures press against one another. Because these pressures are experienced as ideological conflicts among people holding different and incompatible aims in view, it remains the task of the critical intellect to evolve modes of thought which will enable men to recognize the common purpose underlying their divergencies.

In this perspective, the transformation undergone by the concept of ideology appears as an index to the tension between the actual historical process and a critical consciousness nourished by the traditions of classical rationalism. In its original eighteenth-century form, the concept represented an implicit critique of society from the standpoint of early liberalism: a standpoint which was itself “historical” in that it took for granted (and therefore treated as “natural”) the social relations proper to a particular phase of European history.<sup>76</sup> This naive certainty disappeared during and after the French Revolution. The

<sup>76</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis: Sozialphilosophische Studien* (Neuwied, 1963), *passim*. For a recent defence of the positivist standpoint cf. Arnold Gehlen, *Studien zur Anthropologie und Soziologie* (Neuwied, 1963), *passim*. For a critique of positivism from a neo-Hegelian viewpoint cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, 1964), *passim*. For a critical view of the neo-Marxist position cf. Morris Watnick, “Relativism and Class Consciousness: Georg Lukács”, in *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (London and New York, 1962), 142 ff.

latter marked a turning-point in that the critique of existing (traditional but decaying, hence plainly irrational) institutions could no longer be delivered in the name of apparently self-evident principles. For the new institutions, which claimed to be in accordance with reason, turned out to be rational only in terms of the particular historical purpose they served: the emancipation of the "third estate" could not forever be equated with the attainment of a natural order conceived as the embodiment of absolute reason. Hence the fleeting balance attained around 1800 gave way to a deepening scepticism about the very "ideology" whose original proponents had set out to trace the natural history of ideas. In Hegel's philosophy, which arose directly from the urge to comprehend the meaning of the Revolution, there already appears in germ the notion that forms of consciousness are relative to changing historical situations. The universality of the whole has to be reconstructed, as it were, from the entire sequence of historical fossils – the latter comprising *inter alia* the conscious (subjective) aims of the individuals who occupy the foreground. These aims now appear as unconscious means of realizing a hidden purpose; they have become "ideological" in a sense not intended by the original *idéologues*.

This is the concept of ideology which Marx inherited from Hegel. It served him as a means of discrediting the universal claims of the liberal ideology he encountered in his passage from philosophy to politics. At the same time he retained the rationalist faith in an objective logic of the historical process – now understood as the process of man's self-creation. To Marx, as to any Hegelian, the actual world of empirical perception was only an imperfect realization – at times indeed a caricature – of the real or rational world, in which man's essential nature (his rationality) will have overcome the reified existence he leads while the surrounding object-world is not perceived as the product of his own creativity. The attainment of this liberated state is the work of history, whose dialectic is not disclosed by empirical perception, but by critical (philosophical) reflection upon the totality of the process. An understanding fixed upon isolated aspects of this totality necessarily falls short of the goal of philosophical reason. It is *ideological* at a second remove, in that it mistakes the reified structures of immediate experience for permanent constituents of reality. It treats, for example, war, poverty, class distinctions, and so on, as permanent features of history, instead of viewing them as temporary objectifications of mankind's gradual and painfully slow emergence from the realm of nature. So understood the concept of ideology recovers its ancient pathos: it is now employed to demonstrate the transitoriness of those arrangements which – irrational in themselves – nonetheless serve the rationality of the whole.

It is only with the loss of this dimension that "ideology" ceases to denote *false consciousness*. It now becomes synonymous with any kind of consciousness that can relate itself to the ongoing activity of a class or group effective enough to make some sort of practical difference. This is the ideology concept of

contemporary positivism. Its limited practical relevance ought not to veil its incompatibility with the intellectual tradition (ultimately rooted in classical metaphysics) that is intended when one speaks of the philosophy of history. This philosophy arose from a complex of theoretical and practical problems, of which the original *idéologues*, and their eighteenth-century forerunners, took note in sketching a rudimentary model of world history. Essentially what concerned them was the growth of rationality and the imposition of conscious control upon “natural” chaos. The pragmatic character of this enterprise was never wholly obscured by its theoretical language. It was from the first an attempt to impose an ideal order upon the world, by making an appeal to man’s “nature”. Its success or failure was and is bound up with the power of Reason to see through the veil of ideology to the enduring realities of human existence. An understanding of what is involved in the concept of ideology is thus at the same time an exercise in that historical imagination which enables us to see our predecessors as men engaged in an enterprise whose outcome still concerns us. In Hegelian language we may say that – the final category retaining and preserving within itself the content of all the previous ones – the unification and pacification of the world (if it can be achieved) will demonstrate that history is indeed a concrete universal. For it is only at this level that what is called world history becomes synonymous with mankind’s collective emergence from the state of nature. Whatever their residual differences, this is a perspective which liberalism and Marxism have in common.

*Columbia University*