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SOURCES OF IDEOLOGY AS PROBLEM AND CONCEPT DURING THE RISE OF MODERN POLITICAL CONFLICT

Abstract. The article discusses the historical emergence of ideology – firstly, as a specific problem, and secondly, as a rhetorical figure and concept – from the perspective of semantical turbulences and paradoxes that this process involved. Although it is still being debated whether something like a theoretical concept of ideology actually exists, some scholars claiming that it mixes contradictory meanings and intuitions, the following account hopefully sheds new light on the early stages of its development. This is achieved by disclosing a certain logic behind the process that led to the gradual elevation of this category to the rank of a staple in discourse and cognition in the twentieth century. For this purpose, the discussion focuses first on the context in the which the problem was originally formulated, and second – on the later circumstances of its elaboration.

Keywords: ideology, history of ideology, servitude volontaire, marxism, hegelian left.

This article discusses the historical emergence of ideology – firstly, as a specific problem, and secondly, as a rhetorical figure and concept – from the perspective of semantical turbulences and paradoxes that this process involved. Although it is still being debated whether something like a theoretical concept of ideology actually exists, some scholars claiming that it mixes contradictory meanings and intuitions, the following account hopefully sheds new light on the early stages of its development. This is achieved by disclosing a certain logic behind the process that led to the gradual elevation of this category to the rank of a staple in discourse and cognition in the twentieth century. For this purpose, the discussion focuses first on the context in the which the *problem* was originally formulated, and second – on the later circumstances of its elaboration. However, it does not cover the mature phase of development of this issue, which it entered in the twentieth century, especially in the second half.¹

As regards the former, crucial process, the hypothesis is that the concept's *longue durée* began to crystallize and achieve autonomy already six hundred ago – much earlier than is usually assumed in classical accounts, which distilled it from the question of religion at the time when the Hegelian Left flourished. Nineteenth- and even eighteenth-century thinkers actually inherited the question of ideology from the early modern period when it emerged as specific enough to captivate intellectuals like Niccolò Machiavelli and Étienne de La Boétie, followed by Francis Bacon and Spinoza. During the French Revolution, the concept gained momentum and was discursively captured using a newly-coined term that quickly acquired multiple layers of contradictory associations, and has since been a widespread cognitive category in politics, cultural reflection and scientific practice.

1. Prehistory

Starting with the sources of themes that had taken root in intellectual imagination three centuries before the term was formulated, historians primarily note the intuitions expressed by Francis Bacon in his theory of idols, primarily the sub-variants *tribus* and *specus*. Later, in his political theory of affects Spinoza considers human subjugation in the context of the difference between *imaginatio* and *ratio*. However, even before he elaborated these ideas, La Boétie and Machiavelli identified a certain mysterious form of agency in the world of politics. The former worked from the perspective of a critical, engaged commentator, while the latter – that of a pragmatic advisor concerned primarily with the instrumental dimension.²

The period of the discussed concept's nascence, or its prehistory, extends from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century, and comprises several overlapping contexts. At that time, what is now habitually referred to using the petrified category of ideology was still being recognized and reflexively mapped. Notably, the matter was political right from the beginning due to its close connection with ideals of freedom. This was accurately captured by La Boétie in the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (1574), where he outlined the elusive phenomenon of peoples, societies and nations consenting to the practice of violence on the part of tyrants who actually have insufficient means to implement force thoroughly.

But O good Lord! What strange phenomenon is this? What name shall we give it? What is the nature of this misfortune? What vice is it, or, rather, what degradation? To see an endless multitude of people not merely obeying,

but driven to servility? Not ruled, but tyrannized over? These wretches have no wealth, no kin, nor wife nor children, not even life itself that they can call their own. They suffer plundering, wantonness, cruelty, not from an army, not from a barbarian horde, on account of whom they must shed their blood and sacrifice their lives, but from a single man; not from a Hercules nor from a Samson, but from a single little man. Too frequently this same little man is the most cowardly and effeminate in the nation, a stranger to the powder of battle and hesitant on the sands of the tournament; not only without energy to direct men by force, but with hardly enough virility to bed with a common woman! Shall we call subjection to such a leader cowardice? Shall we say that those who serve him are cowardly and faint-hearted? If two, if three, if four, do not defend themselves from the one, we might call that circumstance surprising but nevertheless conceivable. In such a case one might be justified in suspecting a lack of courage. But if a hundred, if a thousand endure the caprice of a single man, should we not rather say that they lack not the courage but the desire to rise against him, and that such an attitude indicates indifference rather than cowardice? When not a hundred, not a thousand men, but a hundred provinces, a thousand cities, a million men, refuse to assail a single man from whom the kindest treatment received is the infliction of serfdom and slavery, what shall we call that?³

The paradox of *la servitude volontaire*, or voluntary servitude, demanded adequate elucidation and thus set the course for the entire history of ideology from Rousseau to Marx and Gramsci. Already the first of these thinkers noted the peculiar agency of culture in relation to the economic basis of existence.

Indeed, after the initial long period of inception, the first breakthrough was made by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who conducted a synthesis of the question of ideology in the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1752). Importantly, it was not a historiographic account, but a pamphlet, just like the earlier *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), which won him broad recognition. Both essays are in fact critical interventions in the public sphere.

Rousseau broached an issue formulated two centuries earlier as the paradox of voluntary servitude, or a peculiar habit that “accustoms the people to enslavement.”⁴ In the context of this tradition, the innovative character of his essay is connected with the outsider status of its author in the intellectual landscape of the Enlightenment. Rousseau placed the question of voluntary, invisible and peculiarly immaterial servitude on the historical plane of fate endured by civilization. He argues that people tend to “naturally denaturalize”⁵ and that human existence is historical, or human nature is essentially objectified due to civilization’s expansive dynamic. This

did not dovetail with the Enlightenment mainstream, which was dominated by the belief in the concurrence of historical providence and the rational goal of human nature, as was binding for Kant.⁶ In this sense, Rousseau went beyond the framework of the Enlightenment, thus foreshadowing the modern nature-culture debate, which began with Sigmund Freud and was substantially elaborated in the twentieth century by the Frankfurt School. This movement importantly tied the question with ideology, focusing on the false naturalization of contingent history as well as on repression of nature and the subsequent return of the repressed, including repressive de-sublimation.

While La Boétie identified the problem, Machiavelli, Bacon and Spinoza anticipated the later critical lens of purely political and relatively positivist character. Long before the French Revolution much had been written on the subject of the impact that people's social ideas have on their condition and ability to act, as well as on the ways of utilizing this influence. These elaborations concern people's self-image and sense of place in the world relative to the ways in which these notions justify or weaken the interests of oligarchy, clergy and tyrants, or – conversely – how this situation necessitates forming risky alliances.

Rousseau was the first thinker to focus in this context on the new experience of time as a denaturalized present. Later, Kant would follow in his footsteps, denaturalizing cognition, morality and art.⁷ Rousseau did not unmask reality as a departure from natural harmony. His goal did not consist in denouncing degeneration, as was already fervently practiced in fear of the new or for the purpose of unveiling former privileges and abuses. On the contrary, the essay's ending describes reality – for the first time in history – as transient and in suspension, graspable only in its naked contingency, or when constituted in the Hegelian sense. Rousseau criticized the social reality of absolute monarchy in France on the ground of an untimely hypothesis that human nature has become a product of history, embedding itself in language, social roles and systems of value to such an extent that it modified itself.

As one of Enlightenment's foundational texts, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* does not impose a vision of golden age or perfect community, which humanity ought to reinstate. The whole narrative about Paleolithic communities, agrarian revolution and the genesis of what later came to be called ideology is interestingly developed in the convention of a pamphlet. It caricatures the idea of social contract by referring to a local plutocrat who calls for the formation of a state apparatus in the name of common safety.

With this view, after having represented to his neighbours the horror of a situation which armed every man against the rest, and made their possessions as burdensome to them as their wants, and in which no safety could be expected either in riches or in poverty, he readily devised plausible arguments to make them close with his design. "Let us join," said he, "to guard the weak from oppression, to restrain the ambitious, and secure to every man the possession of what belongs to him: let us institute rules of justice and peace, to which all without exception may be obliged to conform; rules that may in some measure make amends for the caprices of fortune, by subjecting equally the powerful and the weak to the observance of reciprocal obligations. Let us, in a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, collect them in a supreme power which may govern us by wise laws, protect and defend all the members of the association, repulse their common enemies, and maintain eternal harmony among us."

Far fewer words to this purpose would have been enough to impose on men so barbarous and easily seduced; especially as they had too many disputes among themselves to do without arbitrators, and too much ambition and avarice to go long without masters.⁸

In this humorous perspective, the outcomes of labor division and state genesis reveal persisting themes that have recurred throughout centuries in criticism of historically dominant ideologies. The philosopher draws on these consequences to depict the present as non-absolute – a denaturalized product of human civilization conditioned for thousands of years by the natural environment that has set the boundary conditions for human life on Earth.

Rousseau opened a new, historical perspective on the present, which was later legitimized and popularized by Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of history and art, where he fleshed out this view by focusing his dialectical thinking on deep historicity. This approach was then supplemented by Nietzsche with a genealogical perspective, and elaborated by Marx who made the category of historical present into a point of departure for a real critique of ideology. These key openings in modern philosophical historicism set the horizon of social sciences and history writing from Durkheim to Weber and Koselleck. The paradox of natural denaturalization revealed the contingency of all historical reality without denying its inertly objectified existence in social institutions.

Hegel and Marx further elaborated the concept of historical present, while Nietzsche drew conclusions from their work in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ultimately formulating the historical hypothesis concerning European nihilism. Aiming to strategically enshrine this common experience, Marx and Engels chose the term ideology, adopting it from the language

of politics. This led to the emergence of philosophical historicism in its model, nineteenth-century version: a precise blow dealt to humanity's naïve narcissism.⁹

After recurring for three centuries, the question of ideology *avant la lettre* met with adequate intellectual response in the nineteenth century, facilitating the identification of the problem in more general terms. The concept of ideology aptly explicates historical existence and new modes of experiencing meaning, as well as the force and presence of politics in the current world of human action, and in possible futures. Consequently, a real question was outlined in theory and thus became readily accessible to social thought.

Around the Spring of Nations, intellectuals began to widely speculate about the schematism and predictability of human beliefs. This was augmented by the fact that since its birth the modern public sphere suffered from a deficit of coordinates for moral, historical and aesthetic valuations. This was already the case during the French Revolution, when the term ideology only began its career behind the scenes, as it were, while the unnamed problem simultaneously emerged into full view, at least owing to the sheer force of political events. Soon, ideology would enter the intellectual mainstream and complicate matters further.

2. Sources of the category

Upon closer inspection of the discussed term's genesis, it emerges that ideology has been of ill repute since the day it was baptized, or occurred in the symbolic sphere rather than intellectual. It was the influential politician known as Napoleon Bonaparte who can be credited with shaping the linguistic pragmatics of ideology in a way that proved to be fraught with consequences.

Ideology was established as a signifier in purely accidental manner after Bonaparte entered a polemic with his former leftist allies from the world of education, referring to the first institutional theoreticians of ideology as ideologues. Therefore, the meaning of the word in this form was shaped by the conflict between the Emperor and the intellectuals. This tentative use of the word pragmatically consolidated Napoleon's actual intention, namely that ideology equals *les ideologues* or *les phraseurs idéologues*.¹⁰ In this way, he indeed semantically baptized the category by employing a neologism forged earlier by the first theoretician of ideology and mentor of *les ideologues*, Destutt de Tracy. Moreover, Bonaparte did so in a way that is characteristic for those wielding power – by contemptuously using projective

identification, or what was known to Roman rhetoricians as the *tu quoque* technique.¹¹ Only then was the system of associations formed around ideology, providing this term with enough substance to saturate it as signifier, both in theoretical discourse and everyday language.

When ideology was incorporated in the linguistic tissue, it was tied to its origin: the figure of an ideologue, or someone who legitimizes the improbable. In adjectival form, the ideological became synonymous with the demagogical: empty, fantasized, divorced from reality, turned upside down, etc. Consequently, the term opposes truth understood in purely intellectual terms, pitting it against lived truth, one that is pragmatic and experienced.

Despite the crudeness of the Emperor's baptism, it has opened a whole new area of strategic thinking about ideology that became characteristic for Marxism. It was specifically elaborated by Gramsci in the theory of hegemony, which juxtaposes ideology as intellectually disconnected and abstract, with ideology understood as embodied and rooted in common sense, folklore and institutional practice.¹² Already in *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels discuss the division of labor in intellectual production (Hegelian Left vs "die konzeptiven Ideologen"), a key role was played by Napoleon's pragmatism.¹³ It was expressed in the polemical opposition between disconnected truths about the essence of humanity, as professed by critics of religion, and the strategic theory of historical present developed by the two thinkers.

In this sense, Bonaparte provided Marx and Engels with the category they were looking for in 1845 during their debate with the Hegelian Left.¹⁴ Thus, they transferred this polemical figure into the intellectual mainstream. In this way, however, Marx and Engels not only operationalized an efficient intellectual tool, but also handed a powerful argument to conservatives, whose position remains largely premised on the reactive pragmatics of *tu quoque*: "you are a religion, too." As a result, the meaning of ideology shifted from its original, literal sense into a warning or pragmatic caution against something harmful.¹⁵ In this perspective, it would denote irrational or disconnected notions as well as the political forces that need to be combated or at least managed.

3. Petrification of the category

The late modern period created a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, a tradition of thinking ideology *avant la lettre* was already established and ripe with conclusions that are clearly unrelated to Napoleon's

simplistic formula. The problem of ideology was first recognized, as Reinhart Koselleck put it in modern terms, in relation to temporalization and democratization, or the ideological mechanism of distributing meaning. In fact, these questions were discerned already during the Enlightenment, then by Hegel and his disciples, and finally in modern critical thought. On the other hand, however, Napoleon's projection created another strain that was subsequently legitimized by Marx. As exemplified by Edmund Burke and his numerous continuators, this projection facilitated easy adaptation in conservative thought, which still bases on the understanding of ideology as disconnected doctrine opposed to the natural course of life.

The actual recognition did not fit well the Victorian notion of ideology¹⁶, especially because prior to the above-mentioned semantic baptism the problem consisted for centuries in something entirely different. It was only historical awareness that paved the way for an explication of the issue. The irrationality experienced in contact with a reality different from one's own would not arise, as was the case in the new mode of cognition, out of identifying an intruder in the field of view framed by one's unconscious, political vision of the world. Since La Boétie, the question has always consisted in grasping the relationship between the external power wielded by one over the other, and its efficacy as an authority internalized in people's minds. In other words, it is a question about the degree and form of voluntary subservience, one that is difficult to explicate precisely because of its spiritual character. The measure of this mystery was the insufficiency of real violence. As the case of Bacon shows, already in the sixteenth century the question of voluntary enslavement was interpreted from the angle of habits and behavioral patterns that limit the human ability to perceive their own interest as well as to comprehend freedom, happiness and justice.

To sum up, in the nineteenth century, the history of the concept was necessarily complicated, while at the beginning of the twentieth it became permanently split. The question, first publicized by Rousseau, was additionally embodied politically in the famous revolutionary upheaval. Around the Spring of Nations, the problem was baptized by Marx as ideology, although this does not entail that he hampered its understanding. It was only after he addressed it together with Engels that the second baptism was performed, semantically reformulating the issue as a problem dissimilar from the one voiced by Napoleon. At the same time, even though it would manifest in different phenomena, its essence remained unchanged for over three centuries. From the perspective of Bonaparte, the classical question raised

by La Boétie was rather inconvenient, as confirmed by the former's keen dismissal expressed in his final closure of the signifier "ideology" during the debate with intellectuals.

For this reason, Marx and Engels faced the challenge to pierce through Napoleon's simple projective identification and reforge it in philosophical and theoretical terms in a way reminiscent of situationist *detournement*: we, the intellectuals, are not ideology – "your intellectuals" are (or others who can be described as "die konzeptiven Ideologen."

The clash between Napoleon and Marx left a self-contradictory legacy to the mainly bourgeois intellectuals. After all, their experience of reality confirmed both positions: on the one hand, a proliferation of conflict-ridden patterns of thinking politically, and on the other – a clear dependence of political and economic power on institutionalized spiritual violence perpetuated by opinion-forming elites, religious institutions and economic experts.

When Marx and Engels intercepted the Emperor's sarcastic epithet, the new term automatically became a scandal. When ideology was defined from the position of power as a foolish invention of intellectuals, and then redefined as a creative elaboration on the paradox of voluntary subservience, the term emerged as a deliberate provocation that violates social mores and the purity of ideas. When described as an illusory reality that obfuscates the intellectual reign of classes which hold real power, ideology immediately posed mortal danger to the truths of religion sanctified by custom, not just in morality but especially in politics and economy. Their heteronomy would be brought forth by the signifier of ideology, demanding that heavenly notions promulgated in this way be interpreted in the earthly context. Thus, ideology would undermine the autonomy of specific areas in experience and spiritual life, starting with the fundamental fusion of economic rationality and religious thought in works ranging from Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to Walter Benjamin's "Capitalism as Religion." The magical formula of ideology made thinking easier insofar as it facilitated grasping the relationship between abstract philosophical truth and its conventional, institutional muzzle, or the entanglement of cultural dogmas in political circumstances. Conversely, it helped to recognize how social consciousness and practice are shaped by the random and contingent fruits of philosophical and political thinking. From yet another perspective, the concept would help to identify the particularism inherent in cultural codes that lay claim to universal validity. All in all, Marxism acted as midwife to a concept that complicated multiple dimensions, and made it potentially subversive.

Perhaps if it had not been for Marxism, the ambiguous figure of ideology would be marginalized in the manner characteristic for the nineteenth century. As intellectual shorthand, it would circulate behind the scenes, where it was first developed as a term reserved for specialists in political management. What turned the tide was the need for an experiential category that would express in a single term the universally felt contradictions of everyday life over and above political divisions.

After the djinn of ideology was let out of the bottle, the consequences were various. Sometimes rifts emerged between moralistic discourse and immoral practice, along with its mundane basis. At other times, connections would be discerned between the degree of doctrinairism and one's intellectual culture. As Koselleck put it, ideology credibly explained the world to people "[a]fter unprecedented numbers of the lower strata consciously entered the speech community of those using political language."¹⁷ Consequently, a new fundamental category in perceiving the world was formed, covering politics, science, and everyday practice.

Since the time when the discussed category was rapidly consolidated by Marxism, ideology in the strongest sense has come to denote primarily the influence of politics on people's minds. Thus, it would determine what they are able to discern, both individually and collectively, actively and passively. The answer to the classic question why people do not rebel against subservience, and even desire it for themselves and others, became readily available: they are simply overpowered by ideology, habit or manipulation. Thanks to the determination of Marxism, the question of ideology was brought to the fore in the modern public opinion, entering the first stage of generalization. The second was inaugurated later by the Frankfurt School.¹⁸

The category of ideology has been thus consolidated in hybrid form, one part comprised by Napoleon's projective identification and the other by the unsettling insights from Enlightenment thinkers and their predecessors, who recognized and problematized intangible enslavement. Bonaparte supplemented this question with the conditional statement about the persistence of harmful ideas. In this light, the hybrid category emerges as a random and artificial amalgamation. However, its inertial force made the discussed assembly of divergent intuitions into the chief yet inadvertent side effect of Marx's influence on early social thought in the twentieth century. In this form it took root in intellectual culture and became petrified in the adjectival sense, both in critical reflection and as a simple label. Ultimately, this hybridity led to a paradoxical situation where, even within Marxism, the reception of this question was split and unfolded in two chronologies: one positivistic and the other critical.

4. Marx and Engel's new argument, and the time travel of *The German Ideology*

A significant role was played in this process by the fact that *The German Ideology* travelled through time in a peculiar manner. The text was published ninety years after it was written, disappearing in the meantime from the horizon of perception.

Marx's historical success as the main conceptual authority, at least in philosophy, paradoxically stems from his later occasional remarks about ideology. His triumph in implementing the term within social sciences is thus rooted solely in the *realism* characteristic for his explication of the problem in terms of class conflict. In the eyes of scholars, Marx was the first to achieve rational objectivization of ideology in his famous program of historical materialism, where he defines the discussed category in the following way:

In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.¹⁹

Already in 1859 Marx and Engels took a keen interest in the historical conditions underlying the production of such forms. In practice, they focused on the victorious expansion of modern capitalism, a system based on a entirely different hierarchy of values than the one at the foundation of feudalism. Capitalism introduced a new cycle of production as well as new modes of subjugation and subjectification. In a perspective narrowed down to historical thinking, the concept of ideology provided an impulse for the development of the already budding disciplines of sociology, anthropology and modern historiography.²⁰

This is the root of Marx's success as a scientific authority in the twentieth century. To a lesser degree, he elevated the Emperor's epithet to the rank of a philosophical concept that could meet the requirements of dialectics, as outlined in *The German Ideology*, where he brings to an end the prehistory of ideology as a concept. In fact, change in this area was in the air at the time. The text was written in a period when a burgeoning intellectual market of ideas formed around the question of exposing the relationship between people's consciousness and their sociopolitical existence. The achievement of this work is that it subverted the way in which the problem was formulated, demonstrating its tautological character.

The argument developed by Marx and Engels can be summarized in the following way: if ideology is cast in the role of a subjective factor in the formulation of political conflict, the situation resembles that of a “valiant fellow” who “had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed of the idea of gravity.”²¹ Not only does this explication fail to grasp the root cause, but it also introduces a new factor that serves merely to evade the problem.

In practice, a given ideological phenomenon seems to be invariably perceived from the angle of one’s own knowledge. It is only a translation into a new metaphysical principle, namely to ideology conceived as religious alienation. Such a principle would be connected with ways of seeing the world, individual consciousness, horizons of action, etc. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it emerges as a new version of what is already well known: that people are confronting a worldview that contradicts their own. The conflict is thus formally shifted to “ideology” understood as one’s subjective notions, historical consciousness, etc. Alternatively, as was the case in the twentieth century, the incongruence is attributed to a given culture or social class, along with their historical problems and entanglements regarded as the driving force behind the political present. And since almost every situation in politics as well as in personal and social life points to ideological phenomena and conditions, typical criticisms of ideology have the tendency to tautologically project these conditions onto anything that contradicts one’s own frame of reference and is regarded as nature or norm. Critics of ideology would thus communicate only within their own information bubble, as it were, at the same time letting the real causes slip away.²²

Therefore, in order to avoid futile language games in critical theory and practice, it becomes necessary to outline new theoretical starting conditions for the formulation of the problem. This requires to assume that the ideological illusion is always an attempt to resolve some conflict, for example class struggle according to Marxism, and to invest in it (cf. point four in Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*). In other words, criticism of ideology always confronts existing subjectifications of conflict. Within these parameters, the struggle can always be superficially ended, while the means to achieve this goal become part of the problem. For this reason, critics of ideology must accept the fact that at the onset they are themselves merely ideologues because there is no privileged perspective that would facilitate seeing the problem from a bird’s eye view.

This diagnosis was formulated as the groundbreaking, negative message of *The German Ideology*. Fortunately, this conclusion proved to be more fruitful than Bonaparte’s pathological formula, and resonated with

the public sphere in the second half of the twentieth century. From historical and symbolic perspectives, Marx and Engels referred in their work to Napoleon in the same way the Emperor did in reference to *les ideologues*, namely by utilizing the formula *tu quoque* ("your intellectuals, not mine").²³ However, they focused on those intellectuals who were busy normalizing existing power relations: "die konzeptiven Ideologen" who proliferated excessively in the twentieth century.²⁴ In this way, Marx and Engels turned the edge of criticism against their own intellectual formation, exposing it as both too traditional and too idealistic.

In this sense, Napoleon's pragmatism was intercepted by Marx and Engels in order to caricature themselves and their colleagues from the Hegelian Left, who practiced ideological criticism *avant la lettre*. This allowed the two authors to demonstrate the causal relation between the ideas prevailing in German society and its political fate. The very title of the work, which identifies a specifically German ideology, ties the subject of the authors' critical practice *avant la lettre* with a neologism they turned against the critics, depicting the iconoclastic detractors of "Germans" as "sheep."

These innocent and childlike fancies are the kernel of the modern Young-Hegelian philosophy, which not only is received by the German public with horror and awe, but is announced by our philosophic heroes with the solemn consciousness of its cataclysmic dangerousness and criminal ruthlessness. The first volume of the present publication has the aim of uncloaking these sheep, who take themselves and are taken for wolves; of showing how their bleating merely imitates in a philosophic form the conceptions of the German middle class; how the boasting of these philosophic commentators only mirrors the wretchedness of the real conditions in Germany. It is its aim to debunk and discredit the philosophic struggle with the shadows of reality, which appeals to the dreamy and muddled German nation.²⁵

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From that moment, the question of ideology developed in fascinating ways. The two classics kept revisiting the original problem defined by La Boétie and Rousseau, arguing that the longer it persists, the more subtle and thus unbelievable the forms in which class rule disguises itself as universality. This is specifically expressed in the famous claim about reign being "dressed as generality" by *die konzeptiven Ideologen* through mass media, which articulate the interests of the ruling classes.

The problem is that *The German Ideology* contains only a tentative program meant for the local context. To this end, Marx and Engels intercepted the unfortunate epithet and unintentionally propelled the career

of the “vulgar” notion of ideology as a superficial illusion, or a mere reflection of real life. Thus, they promulgated the view that all content needs to be assessed from the perspective of the external influences that lie at its foundation.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, their key concern was to develop an accurate account of the historical situation, one liberated from the specters of the previous century and thus tailored to the standard of Hegel’s historical clear-headedness. For this reason, they regarded ideology as a provisional figure employed to “display the question for themselves.” Accordingly, the figure then moved into the background, returning in their later works only occasionally and in adjectival form.²⁶

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European intellectual culture has thus bred a spectacular, materialist explication of ideology in terms of classes and historical revolutions at the level of superstructures. For a long time, it was separated from *The German Ideology*, which revealed the problem’s treacherous, double-edged dialectics, or the erroneous subjectification of voluntary subservience, ultimately disclosing the fundamentally mistaken notion of this phenomenon in discursive and critical practice.²⁷

As luck would have it, *The German Ideology* was retrieved from Moscow archives and published as late as in 1932, which constitutes perhaps the weirdest precedent in the European history of ideas. This is mainly because the work’s contents would already live a life of their own, as confirmed by Antoni Gramsci, György Lukacs, Rosa Luxemburg, and many others. Still, the text truly impacted the image of the category released from the djinni lamp by Marx and Engels only in the second half of the twentieth century.

Most probably, if it had not been for *The German Ideology*, no greatly deepened problematization of ideology would develop in the late twentieth century. One distinguished scholar, Jorge Larraín, aptly wondered “what would have happened to the concept if *The German Ideology* had never been published.” “Can it be reasonably argued,” he asks in *Marxism and Ideology*, “that the scattered and rare references to the term in other works would have sufficed to develop the concept?” Quite tellingly, he immediately answers his own question by saying “I do not think so.”²⁸ Here is the paradox of a concept that appeared twice – first in the adjectival form of illusory obviousness, and only later in all its polemical complexity, which made it permanently problematic.

NOTES

¹ Already in the 1980s, Étienne Balibar openly addressed the question of “vacillation of ideology in Marxism,” which “consistently manifests itself in terms of eclipses, antithetical deviations, or displacements of problematics”; in: Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas. Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88. In turn, Slavoj Žižek employs the figure of “spectre” in his cross-sectional text about ideology; in: Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction. The Spectre of Ideology,” in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 1994), 1–33. Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, humorously described the theory of ideology as a Marxist mousetrap: “How many ambitious ideologues have left their textual bones behind in the fruitless attempt to discover, not merely a better one, but the thing itself!”; see”; in: Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 315.

² Mateusz Falkowski observes that the text by La Boétie ought to be situated in the “transition from dissipating feudalism, through so-called Renaissance administrative monarchies, to early modern states, spearheaded by Baroque absolutism”; Falkowski also notes that the short treatise differs from Machiavelli’s earlier *Prince* (1513) by adopting a different perspective insofar as “La Boétie crucially wrote from the angle of subjects, not that of power. This means that, on the one hand, subjects themselves become the focus, while on the other – that their angle is used to consider the superiors”; in: Mateusz Falkowski, “Jak możliwa (do pomyślenia) jest dobrowolna niewola? O nowożytnych formach rządzenia, ideologii i spektaklu władzy,” *Civitas* 26 (2020): 102.

³ Étienne de la Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, trans. Harry Kurz (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2008), 42.

⁴ Étienne de la Boétie, *The Politics of Obedience*, 21. Some scholars have already discussed Rousseau’s reception of this work; cf. David Munnich, “Rousseau and the Voluntary Servitude?” *Storia del Pensiero Politico* 5 (2016): 203–220; André Charrak, Laurent Gerbier, “Nature, Condition, Imagination. Note sur La Boétie et Rousseau,” *Cahiers La Boétie* 4 (2015): 165–175). This can be easily discerned already in the structure of argumentation in *The Social Contract*.

⁵ In a chapter on “Hegel and Rousseau,” Bronisław Baczko notes that the diagnosis about the historicity of the human condition formulated by the latter was later summarized in these words by Émile Durkheim in *Montesquieu et Rousseau comme précurseurs de la sociologie* [(Paris: Librairie Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1953), 134]; according to Baczko, “this process has shaped all characteristics that define the specificity of humanity as a species: the capability for progress and, most importantly, ‘the recognition of freedom’”. The ahistorical convention of the natural state and the pseudo-historical speculation about the origins of society thus serves to formulate a methodological directive that carries tremendous consequences for the entirety of social sciences: humans – individual and as a species – are the product of a process where the initiator and the social product of their action are interrelated and condition one another [...]. In its actual course, history is both the realization of possibilities inherent in ‘nature’, and their negation”; in: Bronisław Baczko, *Człowiek i światopoglądy* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1965), 125ff.

⁶ Cf. especially: Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim,” trans. Allen W. Wood, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, eds. Günter Zöller, Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107–120.

⁷ Bronisław Baczko, *Człowiek i światopoglądy*, 48–51 and 160ff.

⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (1913), online: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Discourse_on_the-Origin_of_Inequality_Among_Men.

⁹ Fredric Jameson adds the invention of ideology to the Freudian list of major blows to humanity’s naïve narcissism, which includes the unconscious and the discoveries made by Copernicus and Darwin; in: Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 318.

¹⁰ Cf. Jan Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology. The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 15ff.

¹¹ The logic of the rhetorical device described by Romans as *tu quoque* is aptly rendered by a well-known joke from the Cold War concerning the visit of American delegation in USSR, where diplomats meet an artificial intelligence which knows answers to all questions. An inconvenient question made by one American regarding the economic situation in USSR meets with the following response from the machine: and you beat up black people. In today's Poland, this figure is encountered in the colloquial and frequently overused retort "maybe you!"

¹² Cf. Michał Wróblewski, *Hegemonia i władza. Filozofia polityczna Antonia Gramsciego i jej współczesne kontynuacje* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2016), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

¹³ The question of anthropological difference (defined by the division of labor into physical and spiritual) was already addressed in the context of the difference between high and low art by Friedrich Schiller in the paper "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" (1795–1796). In his introduction to Marx, Balibar identifies this even in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Later, it was foregrounded by Alfred Sohn-Rethel, and then by Pierre Bourdieu.

¹⁴ The question of Napoleon's pragmatism is developed by Karl Mannheim in *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1979), 64. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology. Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets*, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/index.htm>.

¹⁵ In this context, special relevance is held by Karl Mannheim's considerations on the differences between two types of conservatism and Marxism in: *Ideology and Utopia*, 97–104.

¹⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," trans. Michaela Richter, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6.1 (2011): 7ff.

¹⁷ Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," 11.

¹⁸ Naturally, the Frankfurt School did so to paradigmatically counter the petrified, positivist category of ideology, beginning with Max Horkheimer's critical review of Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* ("Ein neuer Ideologiebegriff?" *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung*, 15. Jahrgang, Leipzig 1930).

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (1977), online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>.

²⁰ In sociology, this influence extends from Weber's theory of conflict to Bourdieu's reflexive sociology. Just like anthropology, European historiography relied on retardation. It was probably only the polemic between Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jean-Paul Sartre in the former's *The Savage Mind* that established a plane for discussion. Cf. also Krzysztof Świrek, *Teorie ideologii na przecięciu marksizmu i psychoanalizy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018, 90ff). A cross-sectional perspective of historical sciences was developed by Enzo Traverso in: "Marx, History, and Historians: a Relationship in Need of Reinvention," trans. Cadenza Academic Translations, *Actuel Marx* 50.2 (2011): 153–165.

²¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, "Preface" to *The German Ideology*, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/preface.htm>.

²² This is significantly supported by the fourth thesis on Feuerbach, which addresses the rejection of the “secular basis” as the real cause of how it imaginatively “detaches from itself and establishes as an independent realm in the clouds”; in: Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Theses On Feuerbach*, trans. W. Lough, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>.

²³ Cf. note 16.

²⁴ This is symbolized by Edward Barnays, inventor of “public relations” and “social engineering.”

²⁵ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, “Preface” to *The German Ideology*.

²⁶ Cf. Étienne Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, 88–102, and further on “the failure of Engels’s epistemological project” (107ff).

²⁷ This error was later exposed in many ways by different thinkers: from Sohn-Rethel (*Geistige und körperliche Arbeit. Zur Epistemologie der abendländischen Geschichte* [Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp 1970]), who remained within Marxsim, to Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu.

²⁸ Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 17. It was especially Louis Althusser who would not have access to a bigger picture in order to speak out against *The German Ideology*, instead basing his theory of ideology on *Capital*.