# From Suspicion to Affirmation:
# Paul Ricoeur and a Genetic Phenomenology of Ideology

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## Abstract

This paper aims to shed light on the problem besetting ideology as established in the work of Paul Ricoeur. While the term ideology has tended to have negative connotations, Ricoeur argues that ideology also has a positive, integrative function in the realms of social transformation and cultural imagination. Thus, he questions the common connotation of ideology as an exclusively critical or negative term. Following Marx, Weber, and Geertz, Ricoeur argues that ideology can be conceptualized in three ways: distortion, legitimation, and integration. For him, ideology has a function beyond dissimulation and legitimacy: that of maintaining group identity and group integration in society. Ricoeur calls his approach in the lectures a "regressive analysis of meaning," an "attempt to dig under the surface of the apparent meaning to the more fundamental meanings", and a "genetic phenomenology in the sense proposed by Husserl in his Cartesian Mediations" in order to recognize the claim of a concept which is at first sight merely a polemical tool. The first three sections of this paper investigate Ricoeur's account of ideology and his attempts to make the term more "honest" through his three conceptions of it: distortion, legitimation and integration. The conclusion summarizes the major themes articulated in those discussions, and suggests further directions to explore toward the positive conceptualizing of ideology.

> It *was Napoleon who coined the word [ideology] in its negative sense, calling his enemies, the "intellectuals", "ideologues"; this first polemical use of the word by Napoleon, warns all against further abuses of the word. It is quite possible that the mere-pejorative use of ideology requires some "Napoleon"—real or potential—to transform a descriptive term into a polemical weapon.* (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 45)
> *This perhaps warns us that there is always some Napoleon in us who designates the other as ideologue. (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 4)*

*It is one of the minor ironies of modern intellectual history that the term "ideology" has itself become thoroughly ideologized.* (Geertz, 1973, p.1)

## I. Introduction

Despite an abundance of scholarly theorizing, no one has conceptualized "ideology" in a way that is agreeable to everyone. In fact, most scholars of philosophy, political and social thought use the term according to their own unique definition. A basic understanding of this word includes the notion of a set of beliefs or ideas shared by a particular group of people. Ideology has many different definitions from a simple "system of beliefs" to a theory that advocates social change. Regardless of the semantic approach a scholar takes to this word, it is important to understand how the positive conceptualizing of ideology, presented by Paul Ricoeur, can become useful for the analysis of social, cultural and political issues.

*Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* which is one of the main sources of this research, was first delivered at the University of Chicago in the fall of 1975 and the passage of time has little reduced its importance: "The lectures are of significant interest because of the figures they discuss, the themes they address and the contributions they make to Ricoeur's larger corpus" (Ricoeur 1986, p. ix, Editor's Introduction). Moreover, Ricoeur's approach on ideology is exactly matched with conceptual concerns; for the most part of his lectures, Ricoeur discusses ideology not as phenomenon but as concept. Readers who seek detailed analyses of specific ideologies will be disappointed. Ricoeur repeatedly states, for example, that he is not interested in whether Marx was accurate historically about the role of industry at the beginning of capitalism; his focus is the epistemological structure of Marx's work (Ricoeur, 1986, p. xi, Editor's Introduction).

Additionally, while the term ideology has tended to have negative connotations, Ricoeur argues that ideology also has a positive, integrative function in the realms of social transformation and cultural imagination. Ricoeur writes that "the organizing

hypothesis is that the very conjunction of these two opposite sides or complementary functions typifies what could be called social and cultural imagination" (Ricoeur 1986, p. 2). Ricoeur's proposal is, accordingly, to rethink the problem until it is possible to find a positive sense and a wider point of view. Ricoeur discusses ideology and the critique of ideology at great length in an attempt to get at a notion of social imagination that accounts for social innovation and change comparable to that of metaphoric innovation in language.

Ricoeur analyzed theoretical works on ideology and developed a conceptual framework that articulates the multiple functions of ideology. Ricoeur's contribution includes not only his careful reading of theorists like Marx, Weber, and Geertz, but also his emphasis on the positive or affirmative functions of ideology. Ricoeur thus questions the common use of the term ideology as exclusively critical or negative (Ricoeur.1986, pp. 254-66).[1] Based on his reading of other theorists, Ricoeur argues that ideology has three functions: distorting, legitimating and integrating.

In Ricoeur's discussion of ideology, we are no longer considering ideology as distortion or an attempt to fill a gap in a system of authority and legitimacy, but as a profoundly positive, integrative formation that inculcates our sense of an ordered universe and an ordered society. The general sense of meaning that we gain through our culture helps to make life more endurable and rewarding, on an existential level, and gives us our very language and thoughts, on a hermeneutical level. Here I, following Ricoeur, will highlight the functions of ideology: first, the reality dissimulation; second, the legitimacy of authority; and third, the social integration.

## I. Ideology as Reality Dissimulation

The first conception of ideology can be grasped from Marxism and in polemical discourse. For Ricoeur, Marx is one of the three great "masters of suspicion",[2] but while Ricoeur is well known for his interpretation of Freud, the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* marks his first systematic analysis of Marx, who is the subject of five of the eighteen lectures. In the works of Marx with the main

heading German Ideology, the term "Ideology" is used about fifty times, but no normative, descriptive, or real definition is given. Most of the occurrences are such that little can be inferred with a high degree of certainty as to which connotations were intended by the author. The same holds true of the terms "Ideologue" and "ideologist", the first of which is used about as many times as "Ideology" (Main, 1956, pp. 148-149).

Accordingly, "there is no reason to suspect that Marx wished to make the concept 'ideology' one of his key concepts. The term has no central position in his terminology (Main, 1956, p.149). However, the work of Marx has had an enormous impact on the study of ideology. It has been argued that it was with Marx that the concept of ideology came of age, only later to be thoroughly contested, as we will see. History-of-Ideas scholars identify Marx's work on ideology as "the storm centre" of the Sociology of Knowledge. Yet, a uniform theory of ideology is not defined and may not exist in Marx's work. Scholars must instead cull from Marx's writings the sometimes contradictory references to ideology in order to develop a theoretical understanding. Marx's theory of ideology is located primarily in *The German Ideology* and the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, but the work on alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* also provide important insights.

Marx and Engels, asserts Raymond (1985), "in their critique of the thought of their radical German contemporaries, concentrated on its abstraction from the real processes of history" (p. 155). Ideas, they said purposely of the ruling ideas of an era:

> are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. Failure to realize this produced ideology: an upside-down version of reality. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the

retina does from their physical life process. (Marx, 1968, p. 47, quoted in Raymond, 1985, p.156)

For Ricoeur:

> Marx's text on the fetishism of commodities is crucial for a theory of ideology, because it shows that in bourgeois society ideology does not function merely or even mainly as a social form which institutionalizes political domination. Instead, its most important function is to stabilize class antagonism through the legal institution of the free labor contract. By concealing productive activity in a commodity form, ideology operates at the level of the market. For my own part, I draw the conclusion that in the capitalistic era the major ideology is no longer a religious ideology but a market ideology. To speak like Bacon, we may say that ideology now takes the form of a market idol. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 230)

Ricoeur claims that *The German Ideology* is the culmination of Marx's progression on this topic. Because Ricoeur's interest in Marx and Marxism is methodological rather than historical, his analysis stops with *The German Ideology*. For Ricoeur, this text is the foundation for all Marx's specifically Marxist works. Ricoeur wants to develop a model that relates to reality, and this model is located in the Marx of *The German Ideology*. Ricoeur writes:

> In *The German Ideology* we have a Marxist and no longer a pre-Marxist text. Because of this, it is extremely important to locate precisely the text's conceptual framework. Even for those like Althusser who tend to discard the writing of the early Marx, this is a text of transition. We may say, then, *The German Ideology* is at least a text of transition, if not the basis for all Marx's properly Marxist writings. (Ricoeur,1986, p. 69)

In *The German Ideology*, Marx comes to define reality by praxis-productive human activity, and thus ideology by its opposition to praxis. *The German Ideology* Marx opposes is that of Feuerbach

and the other Young Hegelians. Feuerbach's own methodological inversion had recaptured as human activity what previously had been viewed as the power of divine, but this human activity was still a product of consciousness or thought. Marx himself undertakes another reversal—another methodological inversion—to establish that the real source of human activity is praxis not consciousness.

The Young Hegelians, and Marx himself as late as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, had treated consciousness as the center of human activity and as such the reference point for all existence. But in *The German Ideology*, Marx criticizes the idealistic overtones of this emphasis and replaces consciousness with the living individual. Ricoeur argues that Marx's position is a challenge not only to the idealism of the Young Hegelians but also to another extreme prominent in later Marxism that sees anonymous structural forces—class, capital—as the active agents in history. While a structuralist reading of *The German Ideology* is possible, Ricoeur advocates a more comprehensive perspective. In particular, Marx's great discovery in *The German Ideology*, says Ricoeur, is the complex notion of individuals in their material conditions. Real individuals and material conditions are conjoined (Ricoeur,1986, p. xii).

Marx's concept of ideology calls into question the autonomy granted to the products of consciousness. Ricoeur quotes Marx at length on how ideology is the imaginary, the "reflexes" and "echoes" of the real process of life:

> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.

> Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking, and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. (Marx, 1968, p. 47)

According to Ricoeur, as Thomson (1984) articulates:

> The Marxist concept of ideology is linked not to domination in general, but to class domination; and it justifies class domination by virtue of a distortion which inverts the order of reality and ideas and conceals certain features of the social world. While Ricoeur is cautious about some of the claims associated with the Marxist concept, he nevertheless regards it as a valuable contribution to an analysis of the form and function of ideology in modern societies." (Thompson, 1984, p.187)

Ideas when separated from the real life process, the everyday world of human labor, take on the form of an autonomous reality which in a loose sense of the word might be called idealism. This for Ricoeur is the Marxist concept of ideology and gets its purely negative connotation because it obscures the real life process and replaces it with what one or another class says or conceives it to be. The conclusion Ricoeur draws from this is that "No critique of ideas may by itself dissolve the illusion. Only praxis may undo what praxis has done. In that sense, the end of ideology is identical with the suppression of the social process which has generated it" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 50).

For Ricoeur, Marxist ideology is an inverted image of reality; metaphorically speaking, it is "distortion as reversal":

> When we read *The German Ideology*, we asked how we can make sense of Marx's assertion that a ruling class is expressed by ruling ideas, ideas which become the ruling

> ideas of an epoch. We recognized at this stage the concept of ideology was systematic distortion, and we saw that in order to approach this first concept, we had to take into account a concept of interest—class interest—apply an attitude of suspicion, and proceed to a causal dismantlement of these distortions. Here the paradigmatic model was the relation between superstructure and infrastructure. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 254)

It is from this characterization of ideology as distortion that the rest of Ricoeur's arguments proceed. Ricoeur calls his approach in the lectures a "genetic phenomenology," a "regressive analysis of meaning," an "attempt to dig under the surface of the apparent meaning to the more fundamental meanings":

> My claim is that this approach is not an ideal typical analysis but rather a genetic phenomenology in the sense proposed by Husserl in his *Cartesian Mediations*…the effort is to recognize the claim of a concept which is at first sight merely polemical tool. I attempt to make the concept more honest. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 311)

Marx's concept of ideology as distortion defines ideology at a surface level. For Ricoeur, the problem of ideology is finally not a choice between false and true but a deliberation over the relation between representation (Vorstellung) and praxis:

> The concept of ideology may be large enough to cover not only distortions but all representations, all *Vorstellungen*. Ideology may sometimes be a neutral concept…therefore; the term ideology has no necessarily negative overtone. It is merely contrasted to what is real, actual, *wirklich*. We can see how close this is to distortion, since not to be real is possibility of being distorted. Nevertheless, the difference between these two moments must be preserved. If we preserve this difference, we realize that we cannot exclude the possibility that distortion is ideology in an adequate form. This leads to the question whether there could be a

> language of real life which would be the first ideology, the
> most simple ideology…the concept of the language of real
> life is fundamental to our analysis. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 311)

Distortion is the proper characterization of ideology when representations claim autonomy, but the concept of ideology is predicated more basically on its simply being representation. Thus, distortion is one of the levels within this model and not, as Marx would have it, the model of ideology itself. Ricoeur attempts to determine whether the relationship between representation and practice is one of opposition or conjunction. He argues against Marx for the latter, claiming that representation is so basic as to be a constitutive dimension of the realm of praxis. The conjunction of ideology and praxis will redefine our conceptions of both.

The implications of this argument become fully evident only at the end of the ideology lectures, when Ricoeur discusses Clifford Geertz. The basis for this argument, Ricoeur claims, lies in Marx:

> In concord with Geertz here, I myself shall graft the entire
> analysis of ideology on this concession—on what will at
> least become a concession in Marxist language—that there
> is a language of real life which exists before all distortions,
> a symbolic structure of action that is absolutely primitive
> and ineluctable. (Ricoeur ,1986, p. 77)

At the same point in *The German Ideology* where Marx offers his most trenchant definition of ideology as distortion, he also allows that there may be a "language of real life" that exists prior to distortion: "The production of ideas of conception of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material intercourse of men, the language of real life" (Marx, 1968, p. 47). The language of real life, Ricoeur observes, is discourse of praxis; it is not language itself—linguistic representation—but the symbolic structure of action.

Ricoeur's argument is that the structure of action is inextricably symbolic, and that it is only on the basis of this symbolic structure that we can understand either the nature of ideology as distortion or the meaning of ideology in general. Ricoeur's purpose, then,

is not to deny the legitimacy of Marx's concept of ideology as distortion but rather to relate it to ideology's other function. Ricoeur comments:

> I am interested...in the range of possibilities preserved by Marx's analysis, a range extending from the language of real life to radical distortion. I emphasize that the concept of ideology covers this full range. Also of interest is that which ideology is being related to, what Marx calls the actual real life-process; this is the ultimate point of reference. Human beings are always the point of reference, but they are human beings under historical conditions. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 79)

The rest of Ricoeur's discussions about Marx's conception of ideology pursue this argument in detail, but the basis for the analysis lies in Marx's interpretation of ideology as distortion, that is the contrast between things as they appear in ideas and as they really are, between representation and praxis. Before Ricoeur can move to the deeper levels of the meaning of ideology, however, he must confront a more recent interpretation that still considers ideology to be distortion, this time as opposed not to reality but to science. Ricoeur finds the best expression of this perspective in later Marxism, in particular in the structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser:

> If the dividing line, at least in the young Marx, is between praxis and ideology, the dividing line later is between science and ideology. Ideology becomes the contrary of science and not the counterpart of real life. The importance of this stance may be related to the constitution of the Marxist corpus as itself a scientific body, or as at least claiming to be such. It offers a contrary to ideology. For the young Marx, this contrary did not exist and so ideology was opposed to real life. When Marxism itself becomes a corpus, however, then it provides the contrary to ideology. The change will mark the main shift in the history of ideology as a concept. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 102)

Ricoeur (1986) goes on to note three reservations concerning

Marxist ideology:

(1) At the base of social reality is a "symbolic constitution of social entities" and it is just because that exists that the Marxist concept of ideology can be understood as a second level distortion of this symbolic constitution.

(2) Marxism itself may become a distortion of reality if it is used by an irresponsible party as a means of self-justification.

(3) Since ideology does not end until some future classless society, its end is merely eschatological (Bien, 1995, p. 303).

In this context, it is not surprising that ideologies tend to distort our understanding of human and social reality as theorists since Marx and Engels have recognized(Ricoeur, 1986, p. 21).

## III. Ideology as Legitimacy of Authority

The second concept of ideology is as an attempt to legitimate systems of social power arising from an inevitable discrepancy or gap between the *claim to* and *belief in* that legitimacy. In this second stage, the ideal types of claims play the same role as the superstructures in the first stage. Ricoeur articulates the "legitimating" function by drawing on the work of Max Weber concerning the ways in which political and bureaucratic authority are made legitimate within groups and organizations on the basis of Charismatic, Traditional, and Rational-Legal grounds (Ricoeur, 1986, Lectures 11 and 12).

Examining the changing form and nature of modes of authority in society, Weber sought to analyze the basis on which individuals or groups claimed the right to legitimate rule and the consequent compliance of the majority of the individuals in the society to that rule. He distinguished between three types of authority—charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal—and analyzed the type of ideological legitimacy developed in each. Charismatic authority rests on "devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordered by him" (Weber, 1947, p. 328). Charismatic leaders, Ricoeur says "are believed to be the voice of God, sent by God" (Ricoeur 1986, p. 186). This type of authority was seen to emerge in times of crisis in which the leader

would mobilize followers to bring about social change. It differs from other forms of authority because the basis of legitimation lies in the person rather than in a system of traditional practices or rational law. Stability is fragile in this type of authority for a leader must continually demonstrate his or her ability to hold legitimacy. In the event of the death of the leader, the disciples either disband or convert charismatic beliefs and practices into traditional or legal arrangements. Parsons (cited in Weber, 1947, p. 66) notes that because charismatic authority is a revolutionary force, tending to upset the stability of institutionalized orders, it cannot itself become the basis of a stabilized order without undergoing profound structural changes. As a result of these changes it tends to become transformed into either the rational-legal or traditional type.

Traditional authority rests on "an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them" (Weber, 1947, p. 328). This type of authority "will play a significant role in the system of legitimacy to the extent that leaders are obeyed because of their traditional status" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 186). Traditional authority presupposes some type of advanced social organization. It differs from charismatic authority because the basis of legitimation lies in the sanctity of age-old rules and practices. The person or persons exercising authority in this type are designated according to traditionally-transmitted rules. The organized group exercising authority is, in the simplest case, primarily based on relations of personal loyalty, cultivated through a common process of education (Weber, 1947, p. 341). "Obedience is not owed to enacted rules, but to the person who occupies a position of authority by tradition or who has been chosen for such a position on a traditional basis," says Weber (1947, p. 341). He notes that this latter sphere of traditional prerogative rests primarily on the fact that the obligations of obedience on the basis of personal loyalty are essentially unlimited (p. 341).

The third type of social action that Weber defines is "a rationality of ends. In the system of legitimacy it will have more affinity with the

bureaucratic type of legal authority, which is supported by rules" (Ricoeur 1986, p. 186). Rational-legal authority rests upon "a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (Weber, 1947, p. 328). It is this type of authority that Weber saw as characteristic of the modern Western world. In rational-legal authority, obedience is not owed to anybody personally but to enacted rules and regulations which specify to whom and to what rule people owe obedience. Submission under legal authority is based upon an impersonal bond to the generally defined and functional "duty of office".

The official duty...is fixed by rationally established norms, by enactments, decrees, and regulations, in such a manner that the legitimacy of the authority becomes the legality of the general rule, which is purposely thought out, enacted, and announced with formal correctness (Weber, 1946, p. 299). Weber notes that the person in authority also obeys rules when giving an order, namely "the law," or "rules and regulations" which represent abstract norms (Weber, 1953, p. 7). As becomes increasingly apparent, for Weber bureaucracy is the purest type of rational-legal authority (Weber, 1953, p. 8).

It was from this understanding of the characteristics of all three types of legitimate authority that Weber developed his well known theory of the state. Weber defined the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1946, p. 78). He believed that while a stable state will not use coercion routinely, the claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force "is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous organization" (Weber, 1947, p. 156).

For every type of leadership, there existed a corresponding ideological apparatus that served to ensure the compliance and acceptance of the majority of the population to its rule. Weber's discussion of the three types of authority reveals that in no type of rule was social order maintained by coercion alone. While the types of authority characteristic of pre-modern societies were more likely

to use force or coercion, Weber described a process of historical development that has radically transformed society's system of domination. He described how society has moved away from a system of social order based on rule by the strongest, to a modern system of domination that maintains order through a complex balance of coercion and consent. Indeed, Weber's characterization of the three types of authority reveals that the more successfully a leader or leadership is in ensuring the consent of the population to its rule, the more stable and enduring that system of authority will be.

Under Weber's theory of legitimacy, the "ruling groups" within modern organizations attempt to establish legitimacy by providing reasons for their authority that are designed to generate beliefs in the validity of their authority among the subordinate groups in the organization. It is at such a level that ideology receives its legitimation of authority's function:

> No society can exist without the organization of its members and an authority that upholds that organization. But in order to stay in power, the authority must demand more respect and conformity from its members than any individual would want to give. No authority can satisfy all of the demands of the community, so it must use persuasive methods to gain public support. (Steeves, 2000, p. 223)

Ricoeur writes that even the worst of tyrannies "has never been the brute and mute exercise of force. Tyranny makes its way by seduction, persuasion, and flattery" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 93).

Some persuasion is necessary in order for society to exist. Ideologies allow an authority to convince the public that its rule is necessary in spite of the objections that some people might have to that authority. But, Ricoeur notes, there will inevitably be gaps between the reasons given for authority and the beliefs of others in this authority due to misunderstandings, criticisms of the reasons given, and claims made by or for competing authorities. The legitimating function of ideology fills these gaps by generating persuasive symbols and

meanings for a group's actions that provide grounds besides reason, such as tradition or charisma, that help persuade subordinate groups to accept the ruling group's authority. Ricoeur writes:

> I wonder if the function of ideology here is not to fill up what we could call a credibility gap. By this I mean the unavoidable excess of the claim over against the belief. In this sense , I should be tempted to speak of the attempt to fill this gap as a case of overvalue, to borrow a term that Marx used to characterize the surplus of value provided by labor and diverted by the owners of capital. It is not the case that any authority always claims more than what we can offer in terms of a belief? If this is the case, could we not say that the main function of a system of ideology is to reinforce the *belief* in the legitimacy of the given systems of authority in such a way that it meets the claim to legitimacy? Ideology would be the system of justification capable of filling up the gap of political overvalues. (Ricoeur 1991, p. 315)

Ricoeur's second theory of ideology stresses the notion of domination. Any social group has not only the mass of citizens but also some form of governing elite which has the need to employ force. In order to employ force over a period of time, authority is needed and with authority its legitimization. It is here that ideology enters the picture for ideology serves an interpretive role in supporting the claims of the hierarchical aspect of the social order and in shoring up the belief of the citizens (Bien, 1995, p. 302).

Between belief and claim lies what Ricoeur calls an "over value" on the claim to legitimate authority. That is, in addition to the interpretive role just mentioned, ideology also acts as justification for this "over value." The fact that it serves both roles is precisely "why we cannot start with a merely negative or pejorative conception of ideology. We have rather to concern ourselves with a superimposition of function which makes of ideology an overdetermined concept"(Ricoeur, 1978, p. 49).

To sum up, the second concept of ideology moves from functioning

as distortion to functioning as legitimation. For Ricoeur, the question of legitimacy is impossible to remove in social life, because no social order operates by force alone. Every social order in some sense seeks the assent of those it rules, and this assent to the governing power is what legitimates its rule. Two factors are involved here, then: the claim to legitimacy by the ruling authority, and the belief in the order's legitimacy granted by its subjects. The dynamics of this interaction can only be comprehended within a motivational framework, and this is what Weber helps to unfold. While Weber raises the role of claim and belief, he does not address what from Ricoeur's perspective is the most significant aspect of their interrelation—the discrepancy between them. Ideology assumes its "function as legitimation to compensate for this discrepancy" (Ricoeur 1986, pp. xvi-xvii). For this reason, Ricoeur looks for another conception of ideology:

> We were led to ask what is implied in the notions of ruling class and ruling idea. Our answer was the problem of authority. This uncovered the second concept of ideology, ideology as legitimation. Here we introduced a discussion of Max Weber, since the paradigmatic case was no longer a class interest but the claim to legitimacy made by all forms of authority. Our focus was the gap within a group between a leader's claim to authority and the members' belief in this authority. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 254)

Weber's analysis of the legitimation of authority "reveals a third, mediating role for ideology. The legitimation function of ideology is the connecting link between the Marxist concept of ideology as distortion and the integrative concept of ideology found in Geertz" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 14.)

## IV. Ideology as Social Integration

Ricoeur's correlation of ideology and praxis is finally completed when he describes the concept of ideology at its third level: ideology as integration. Ricoeur argues that the third conception of ideology refers to the way in which ideas and beliefs can be understood as part of the

culture of a social group, that is, as the way in which the members of different groups gain their sense of identity through seeing the world from a particular perspective (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 225.)

At this stage in Ricoeur's discussion of ideology, we are no longer considering ideology as distortion or as an attempt to fill a gap in a system of authority and legitimacy, but as a profoundly positive, integrative formation that inculcates our sense of an ordered universe and an ordered society. The general sense of meaning that we gain through our culture helps to make life more endurable and rewarding, on an existential level, and gives us our very language and thoughts, on a hermeneutical level. Ricoeur explores this function of ideology with the help of Clifford Geertz's classic, *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973). [3]

Clifford Geertz notes that ideology is usually employed by scholars as a "thoroughly evaluative (that is, pejorative)" term. Most commonly, the notion of ideology is associated with one of the classical political ideologies: one of the well organized, action-oriented belief systems characteristic of modern politics, for example, conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism, fascism. What is unique about these belief systems is they contain both an empirical claim about the nature of social reality (a theory of society) and normative claims about how society should be organized. The word has, in fact, been thought of historically as a form of "radical intellectual depravity," even in fairly sophisticated intellectual contexts (Geertz, 1973, p.197).  ·

Geertz suggests an alternative conception of ideology based on its integrative function, that is, molding individuals as part of a social group or citizenry.

According to Geertz, writes Ricoeur, "Marxist and non-Marxist sociologists have in common an attention only to the determination of ideology, that is, to what causes and promotes it. What these sociologists avoid asking, however, is how ideology operates. They do not ask how ideology functions, they do not question how a social interest, for example, can be expressed in a thought, an image, or a

conception of life. The deciphering of whatever strange alchemy there may be in the transformation of an interest into an idea is for Geertz, then, the problem evaded or overlooked by Marxists and non-Marxists alike" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 10). Accordingly:

> It is to build a third concept of ideology as integration or identity that we finally resort to Geertz. At this stage, we reach the level of symbolization, something that can be distorted and something within which lies the process of legitimation. Here the main attitude is not at all suspicion nor even the value-free but conversation… In conversation we have an interpretive attitude. If we speak of ideology in negative terms as distortion, then we use the tool or weapon of suspicion. If, however, we want to recognize a group's values on the basis of its self-understanding of these values, then we must welcome these values in a positive way, and this is to converse. (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. 254-255)

To understand how ideology performs this integrative function, Geertz transposes cultural anthropology into the realm of ideology:

> This attitude is linked to a conceptual framework which is not causal or structural or even motivational but rather semiotic. What particularly interests me in Geertz is that he tries to deal with by the instruments of modern semiotics…. Because culture is understood as a semiotic process, the concept of symbolic action is central for Geertz. (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. 255-256)

Geertz , therefore, has a semiotic concept of culture, "believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Cultures, as "webs of significance," must necessarily be interpreted as one would read a text. As Ricoeur explicates above under the terminology of prejudgment, for Geertz as well, we always begin with our own constructs of signification. "What we [anthropologists] call our

data," writes Geertz, "are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to. . ." (Geertz 1973, p. 9).

Ricoeur finds in Geertz confirmation of his own emphasis on the symbolic structure of action. All social action is already symbolically mediated, and it is ideology that plays this mediating role in the social realm:

> The notion of symbolic action may therefore be deceiving in the context that Geertz intends. I prefer to speak of action as symbolically mediated. This seems less ambiguous than the term "symbolic action," because symbolic action is not an action which we undertake but one which we replace by signs. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 256)

Ideology is integrative at this stage; it preserves social identity. At this deepest level, then, ideology is not distortion but integration. It is, in fact, only on the basis of ideology's integrative function that its legitimating and distorting functions may appear. "Only because the structure of human social life is already symbolic can it be distorted" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. xix). Distortion would not be possible without this prior symbolic function. Ideology becomes distortive at the point when the integrative function becomes frozen, when it becomes rhetorical in the bad sense, when schematization and rationalization prevail. Ideology operates at the turning point between the integrative function and resistance (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 266).

Ricoeur leads us to a nonpejorative concept of ideology; ideology as symbolic mediation is constitutive of social science. In this sense, ideology, by creating and maintaining influential symbols and images, establishes meaning for human actions, and creates identities for both individuals and groups. Ricoeur argues that:

> perhaps only by attention to the cultural process of symbolic formulation may we avoid giving ourselves over to the pejorative description of ideology merely as bias over simplification, emotive language, and adaption [adaptation?] to public prejudice, descriptions all taken

> not from Marxists but from American sociologists…The concept of symbolic action is notable because it emphasizes description of social processes more by tropes—stylistic figures—than by labels. Geertz warns that if we do not master the rhetoric of public discourse, then we cannot articulate the expressive power and rhetoric force of social symbols. (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 11)

In other words, ideology has become a necessary component of modern society for the integration of individuals and groups with themselves and with their worlds. Ideology in this sense consists of much more than conscious political or religious beliefs: it includes shared perceptions, beliefs and meanings that may be conscious or tacit, and it serves its integrating function by employing rhetorical devices that infuse human action with symbolic meanings, such as narrative, metaphor, ambiguity, hyperbole and other stylistic or ritualistic behaviour like the re-enactment and celebration of a group's origins. Ideology thus motivates individuals, helps them make sense of their lives, and helps them adjust to change.

The integrating role leads inexorably to two other functions of ideology: the legitimation of authority in groups and organizations, and the construction of perceptions, beliefs, and meanings that disguise political interests and distort our understanding of social practices. Ricoeur claims that ideology is linked to the necessity for a social group to provide an image of itself and to keep this image alive. The group's act of self-realization—such as that of the American Revolution or the Bolsheviks in Russia or the Sandanistas in Nicaragua—can never be repeated, so it is up to symbolic ritual representations to maintain the group's awareness of its status, separateness, or origins. This, for Ricoeur, is the same function myth held for earlier societies, a process of romanticization and idealization of the past in order to retain a present-day cohesion of the group (Ricoeur, cited in Williams 1988, p. 111).

The purpose of ideology in such cases is to preserve these events and ideas as a basis for the people's ancestors who in turn interpret them and understand themselves and their origins in terms of them. Ideology

thus serves as grounding for their present understanding without being something only of the present. But such an understanding of the concept of ideology can contain within its positive stance certain negative connotations. Justification and rationalization can come to replace conviction as the gap between the past and the present grows wider, and ideology can become "an argumentative device which tends to prove to the members of a group that they are right to be what they are" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 46).

In becoming a justification or an apology, ideology may have to simplify and schematicize reality with the result that to remain socially efficacious thought reduces its complexity to the more manageable level of opinion. Such a move, while being pragmatic, need not automatically be accused of fraud:

> As a code of interpretation, an ideology is something out of which we think, rather than something that we think. It works….behind our back. We do not have it in front of us, as an object of thought…all critique is partial—we speak from somewhere, from where we stand. And this *standort* remains the *where* and cannot become the *what* of our thoughts. In that way, a certain lack of transparence is a condition for the production of social messages. (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 47)

What may well take place as a counterpart of this nontransparence is a sort of inertia arising out of the temporality of social phenomena. As no society can be fully pluralistic, such inertia blocks the novel and accepts only what it can appreciate within its own limits of tolerance. "From the intolerable to intolerance, the shift is easy. The intolerable begins when novelty threatens the capacity for a group to identify itself, to situate itself. That means that the initial energy has a limited capacity. A certain amount of *blindness* and *closedness*—of ideological blindness and narrowness! —unavoidably belongs to this spontaneous self-hermeneutics at work in any social group" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 48).

Ricoeur also cites a second, related insight of Geertz's analysis, that

is, ideology can be profitably compared to the rhetorical devices of discourse:

> There is a further implication of Geertz's analysis which is I think the most significant part of his article, and that is the possibility of comparing an ideology with the rhetorical devices of discourse. This may be the point where Geertz goes the farthest. In the earlier part of his article, Geertz criticizes the more usual theories of ideology—ideology as the presentation of certain interests, ideology as the product of certain sociopsychological strains—for always assuming something that they do not understand: how the release of a strain becomes a symbol or how an interest is expressed in an idea. He claims that most sociologists take for granted what it means to say that an interest is expressed by something else. How do interests become expressed, though? (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 257)

As we saw earlier, Ricoeur uses Weber's motivational model to consider how the interests of the ruling class can be transformed into society's ruling ideas. The relation between interests and ideas is motivational, not causal. In Geertz, the emphasis is no longer on the motives themselves but on how they become expressed in signs. There is a need, Ricoeur quotes Geertz's "Ideology as a Cultural System," to analyze "how symbols symbolize, how they function to mediate meanings" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 257). In this situation, Ricoeur contends, a positive meaning of rhetoric joins the integrative meaning of ideology, because ideology is "the rhetoric of basic communication." Just as with ideology, rhetorical devices cannot be excluded from language; they are instead an intrinsic part of language. Symbolic mediation is foundational both to social action and to language (Ricoeur 1978, p. xx).

On the basis of his analysis of ideology, Ricoeur emphasizes three points. First, by transforming how the concept of ideology is constructed, we stress the symbolic mediation of action, the fact that there is no social action which is not already symbolically mediated. Therefore, we can no longer say that ideology is merely

a kind of superstructure. The distinction between superstructure and infrastructure completely disappears, because symbols belong already to the infrastructure, to the basic constitution of human being. Second is the correlation established between ideology and rhetoric. In some ways Habermas prepared us for this connection, since he discussed the problem of ideology in terms of communication or ex-communication. Now the correlation is more positive, though, because ideology is not the distortion of communication but the rhetoric of basic communication. Third, he questions where we are allowed to speak of ideologies outside the situation of distortion with reference only to the basic function of integration. Can we speak of the ideologies of non-modern cultures, if that ever existed? Is there ideology where there is no conflict of ideologies? I think that integration without confrontation is pre-ideological.

Nevertheless, Ricoeur argues that it is still most important that among the conditions for the possibility of having a distorted function is a legitimating function and under that legitimating function an integrating function (Ricoeur, 1986, pp. 258-259).

The important point about Ricoeur's argument is that each of us belongs to a variety of different groups, so our ideas, beliefs, and concerns are influenced from several directions at once. In other words, our identity is complex and 'multiple'. (We may be a political Conservative and a Buddhist and a gardener and a parent and middle class and a keen mountaineer.) For Ricoeur, ideology's function is to "legitimate a system of authority" on every level ( Ricoeur, 1986, p.17). Ideology functions in order to maintain a particular (historically patriarchal, Eurocentric) system of domination and identity.

This in turn, means that our 'ideology' is not a single force which traps our thinking within a narrow set of constraints but a rather loose structure, containing tensions, gaps, and contradictions. It is not like an enclosing prison wall, but an entangling mesh, with holes in it. Thus, Ricoeur, drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, concludes his study of ideology by noting that "ideology is a system of resistance; it resists recognition of where we are, who we are, and

so on" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 241).

## V. Conclusion

To sum up, Ricoeur's starting point is "the role of ideology as distortion as expressed in the writings of the young Marx":

> This inquiry is shared by sections from the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, and *The German Ideology*...In turning to Max Weber and parts of his *Economy and Society*, my chief consideration is the role of ideology in the legitimation of a system of authority. The ideology section of the lectures ends with an analysis of ideology's integrative function. Here I rely on Geertz, principally his article *Ideology as a Cultural System*. (Ricoeur, 1978, pp. 14-15)

Based on this analysis of the integrating, legitimating, and distorting functions of ideology, Ricoeur argues that the ultimate function of ideology is the conservative one of preserving some sort of institutional order. In other words, ideology works by creating identities for individuals and groups "that mirror the order," although this integrating and legitimating work is accompanied by ideology's distortion of reality. Ideology, then, is most important when it serves existing authority, by constructing identities that resonate with this authority, by helping to legitimate the authority, and by disguising or distorting aspects of reality that might be used to criticize existing authority.

If ideology is essential for social cohesion, and if there is no way to get outside of the realm of potentially distortive interpretations of reality, then an ideology critique must be found within the very symbolic medium by which individuals within a particular society understand themselves as a group. Ricoeur finds such a critique by extending the symbolic medium to include not only potentially distortive but also enlightening utopias. By allowing the society to have access to fanciful stories about alternative forms of social integration, the social scientist is able to criticize current ideologies without the need to show how such alternatives are completely

beyond the possibility of distortion.

The hermeneutics of suspicion from the tradition of the great masters Marx, Nietzsche and Freud has to be transcended with Ricoeur's hermeneutics of affirmation. Instead of insisting on the distorting aspects of social knowledge, we have to unravel its hidden potentialities or its capacity to create "myths for a positive symbolizing project" (Kearney, 1991, p. 67). According to Demeterio (2001), "The movement from the hermeneutics of suspicion to the hermeneutics of affirmation necessitates a movement from the critique of ideologies to an affirmative approach," (p. 3) thus permitting a positive engagement with ideology.

### Endnotes

1. Clifford Geertz similarly questions the common use of the terms ideology and utopia as being exclusively negative. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System", in The Interpretation of Cultures193-233 (1973).

2. Ricoeur has long named Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche the three great "masters of suspicions". He writes "Fundamentally, the Genealogy of Morals in Nietzsche's sense, the theory of ideologies in the Marxist sense, and the theory of ideals and illusions in Freud's sense represent three convergent procedures of demystification. Yet there is perhaps something they have even more in common, an underlying relationship that goes even deeper. All three being with suspicion concerning the illusions of consciousness and then proceed to employ the stratagem of deciphering; all three, however, far from being detractors of concerning aim at extending it". Paul Ricoeur, (1970) Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation. New Haven and London, Yale University press.P.34

3. Geertz's conception of ideology is very important for Ricoeur. He explains: "I must say I am very impressed with an essay by Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System", which appears in his book, The interpretation of cultures. I first read this essay after having written on ideology myself, and I am thus greatly interested in the conjunction of our thought" (Ricoeur, 1986, p. 15.).

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