

Sociology 298 Lecture 11
Class Analysis of Ideology
March 20, 2002

I. Introduction: WHAT IS IDEOLOGY?

1. Multiple uses of the term “Ideology”:

There is a deep problem in the use of the word “ideology”. Several common associations:

- ! ideology as false ideas: ideology as the other of science
- ! ideology as systematized gestalts of beliefs: ideological vs chaotic ways of thinking
- ! ideology as a multidimensional concept mapping all socially-relevant aspects of subjectivity

I do not have a fully elaborated proposal for the linkage between the terminological conventions and the conceptual field we are exploring. This will create more ambiguities than in some of our other discussions. But I will try to use the following convention:

An Ideology = the reference is to a system of beliefs: ideology describes cognitive categories of various sorts.

Ideological practices = reference is to the process of producing beliefs incorporated within subjectivity

2. Ideology and Other Aspects of Social Relations/Practices

2.1 The concept of “Practice”

Practice in general = a specific way of thinking about human action. Human action can be analyzed in terms of the categories of meaning it embodies – this is Weber’s problem of social action as “meaningful action”. Meaningful action is, for example, distinguished from pure “habit”.

“Practice” understands activities in terms of how they transform the world within which they occur. “Transformation” always involves an actor acting upon some sort of raw material using some means of transformation (or means of production) to generate some transformation of that raw material.

2.2 *Ideology as a practice, contrasted with political and economic practice.*

economic practice = process of producing use values through the transformation of nature as a raw material.

political practice = process of producing social relations through the transformation of social action as a raw material.

ideological practice = process of producing conscious dimensions of subjectivity through the transformation of individual lived experience (raw material) into beliefs.
Ideology = cognitive: content of thinking.

cultural practices = process of producing the *nonconscious* dimensions of subjectivity: personality, dispositions

theoretical practice = process of producing knowledge of social relations through the transformation of ideology as a raw material.

[Perhaps we can give specificity to **religious practices** in these terms: practices which produce existential meaningfulness, meaning-in-life: Marxism could constitute a religious practice in such terms. This might also underwrite a contrast between spiritual practice and religious practice -- religion as alienated spirituality]

Ideological practice is thus a social process through which (conscious) subjectivity is formed through the real activities of people engaged in social relations in which what happens to them -- experiences -- are transformed into cognitive products.

Example: Michael Burawoy's analysis of the labor process. His argument = workers participate in their own exploitation actively -- that is, they consent to their own exploitation -- not by virtue of subjective orientation which they bring to the shop floor from outside (through socialization, etc.) but because of the forms of subjectivity that are produced through the forms of competition and conflict on the shop floor itself. The heart of his analysis is thus the actual social process through which given forms of subjective orientations are produced and reproduced through the daily practices within the labor process.

2.3 Type vs Dimension of practice:

- (1). Ideology in this sense should be seen as a **dimension** of practices rather than simply a type of practice.
- (2). When the ideological aspect of a practice is its central intentional goal, we can speak of **an** ideological practice: One can “do” ideology. Education is an ideological practice in this sense: the central task is transforming subjectivity, especially the cognitive aspects of subjectivity.
- (3). Ideology is a contradictory practice: the forms of subjectivity produced by ideological practices are never wholly integrative of capitalism, never purely functional. In Burawoy’s analysis while consent is produced, so is resistance/solidarity. The problem is to understand the material conditions for each and the balance between them.

2.4 Ideology, Culture, Consciousness, Subjectivity

I think it is useful to draw a contrast between ideology and culture by saying:

ideology ⇒ **cognitive aspects of consciousness** and
culture ⇒ **noncognitive aspects of subjectivity**.

The basic idea can be illustrated if we look at gendered aspects of ideological and cultural practices:

Patriarchal ideology = beliefs in the naturalness of the sexual division of labor, in the desirability of men doing aggressive competitive jobs and women, nurturing, emotional work

Patriarchal culture = socialization of masculine and feminine attributes of personality differentially in men and women so that men are dispositionally more aggressive and women more nurturing

Bourgeois ideology --> belief in the efficiency and of private enterprise and the justice of distributions generated by markets

Bourgeois culture --> unconscious dispositions, habits, personality structures conditioned to participate effectively in markets and competition

A given, concrete practice -- disciplining a child, reading a book, etc. -- may contain both ideological and cultural aspects, of course.

2.5 Contradictions of ideological and cultural practices

Fundamental issue for the transformation of social relations = **contradictions between ideological and cultural practices**: many men believe in nonaggressive nurturance (ideology) even though they have been socialized as aggressive, non-nurturant personalities (culture):

Changing ideas can lead to changes in behavior which result in changes in dispositions.

This kind of contradiction is at the heart of Therborn's analysis of ideology.

II. Therborn's Analysis

1. Basic Definitions:

Goran Therborn takes off from Althusser's central conceptualization of ideology as a **subject-producing practice** (Althusser referred to this as the way ideology interpellates social subjects, which essentially means hails them as subjects or identifies them as subjects).

Therborn's project is essentially to take the generic notion that ideology transforms individuals into subjects and develop it in ways that make possible the concrete historical investigation of ideology. While much of his analysis revolves around clarifying a host of conceptual distinctions -- and thus it reads a little like a dictionary in places -- the discussion is filled with more substantive theoretical propositions and analyses. The analysis revolves around four main objectives:

1. To generate a set of concepts which make possible the **historical investigation of ideology**. This implies moving from the level of abstraction of what Althusser called "ideology in general" to the level of "ideologies" but doing so in a way that draws on the more general conceptual framework.
2. **To expand the concept of ideology to encompass nonclass subjectivities/subjects.** Throughout the analysis Therborn is very insistent upon the importance of grasping the process of the formation of sexual subjectivity as well as class subjectivity (and various other kinds of subjectivity). He sees people as being multiple subjects, interpellated in many different relations with a multiplicity of subjectivities. The problem is to understand the specificity and interconnectedness of these subjectivities, not to collapse them into a unified class subjectivity.
3. To give an account of the **content and specific forms of interpellation** (subject-formation) rather than treat it as a homogeneous, unified process. This implies

decomposing the general claims about the effects of ideology into a number of intersecting components of subjectivity.

4. To provide a way of grasping the **fundamentally contradictory character of the process of subject-formation**, rather than treating contradictions as simple “disturbances” (as does Althusser). This is essential if the analysis is to avoid the functionalist pitfalls that Althusser sometimes approaches. People are interpellated both as subjects of the ruling class ideology and as countersubjects.

It is impossible to carefully go through all of the steps of his exposition in this section, so I will emphasize the third and fourth of these objectives, although some mention will be made of the others as well.

Before going any further, it would be good to state Therborn’s formal definition of ideology:

ideology = “The operation of ideology in human life involves, fundamentally, constituting and patterning how human beings live their lives as **conscious, reflecting initiators of acts** in a universe of meaning....In this sense, ideology constitutes human beings as subjects.”

And elsewhere he states that to study the ideological aspect of a practice is

“to focus on the way it operates in the formation and transformation of human subjectivity”

This is similar to Althusser’s definition, but is somewhat more exhaustive in its specification of the formation/transformation of subjectivity in general, and it posits a more active image of human action in seeing the problem of subjectivity as the patterning of subjectivity of human beings as “conscious, reflecting initiators of acts in a universe of meaning.”

To embark on such an investigation, Therborn proposes a whole series of new concepts and conceptual distinctions. These concepts then form the basis for some general claims about how Marxists should study ideology, ideological struggle and ideological transformation.

2. Central conceptual point: “Modes of Interpellation”

2.1. *meaning of interpellation*: Therborn specifies the Althusserian concept of interpellation in a new and much more precise way as a dual process of *subjection* and *qualification*: subjection implies forming the subjectivity of individuals under a general model of subjectivity, subjecting them to a given standard; qualification implies the suitability of such subjectivity for specific roles (positions within relations) in society.

! **Subjection** thus refers to the effects of ideology on individual subjectivity;

! **Qualification** refers to the effects of such subjectivity on the individual's insertion into social relations.

If the analysis was purely functionalist in character, then there would be a perfect coincidence between these two aspects of interpellation: it would be the requirements of qualification which would homeostatically dictate the forms of subjection. But Therborn insists that the correspondence between these two aspects of interpellation is not by any means guaranteed, that the correspondence itself is a result of struggle, and that a variety of forms of noncorrespondence/contradiction can occur. This is of great importance for understanding the role of ideology in social change rather than simply in social reproduction.

2.2. *modes of interpellation*. The subjection-qualification of individuals involves three interconnected forms of interpellation. "Ideologies," Therborn writes subject and qualify subjects by telling them, and relating them to and making them recognize:

a. what exists b. what is good c. what is possible

These are characterized as three successive lines of defense of a given social order. The investigation of an ideology, then, involves analyzing how the subjective recognition of each of these is formed/transformed, what their content, is, etc.

Comments:

1. what exists: answers to this question play a big part in the notion of ideology as "false" beliefs, or ideology as "mystification", since you can have incorrect beliefs about what exists. The truth or falsity of the content of beliefs, however, is a question of theoretical practice – the process by which knowledge is produced. Ideological practices are simply the practices that transform lived experience into cognitive aspects of subjectivity. An example from ideologies of nature:

you sit on a hillside at watch the sun set: the sun moves, this is your lived experience. the translation of that experience into a set of cognitive beliefs about the relative motion of the sun and earth is ideological practice. The transformation of those beliefs into knowledge is theoretical practice.

2. what is good: under the rubric "what is good" two sorts of subjectivities are included: the *cognitive belief* in what is good, and the *motivational orientation* of what is good. Thus, it is not entirely clear whether the bourgeois value in competitiveness is being treated mainly as a value/norm or as a personality/character structure, or both. As I indicated, I think it is useful to distinguish ideological and cultural practices precisely in these terms: subjection/qualification thus involves both the creation of a set of **beliefs** and **dispositions** (compare this to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as a cultural embedded pattern of

dispositions). This distinction is especially important for understanding the kinds of contradictions which make progressive change possible: the distinction between the character-structure and cognitive-structure aspect of values/norms reveals potential contradictions between the kind of people we are and the kind of people we'd like to be. This is important, for example, in struggles over sexism/male domination on the left, in which men genuinely believe that it is bad to be competitive/aggressive in discussions, but have difficulty in not acting that way.

3. what is possible: politically this element of ideology often is the pivotal one. People may fully perceive the oppressive realities of capitalism and morally condemn them, but feel that nothing can be done.

2.3. *Class interpellations*

There are many aspects to the answers to these questions. To be subjected to a gender ideology and become qualified to function within gender relations we learn answers to the questions what is good, what exists and what is possible as they relate to gender and gender-relevant social processes. To be subjected to a class ideology and become qualified to function within class relations we learn answers to these same questions as they relate to class and class-relevant social processes. Part of what a class analysis of ideology involves, then, is revealing this class content to the ways people answer these questions.

2.4 *The tasks of the study of ideology*

Ideological practices → incorporation into subjectivity of sets of beliefs. The study of ideology, then, involves several tasks:

- the internal study of Ideology: studying the character of the beliefs themselves and the nature of the articulation of these beliefs into configurations
- the process by which ideological practices generate subjectivities
- the effects of these configurations on practices, especially collective actions
- the functionality and contradictions in Ideology: how patterns of ideology reproduce and undermine social relations

2.5 *Ideological Hegemony*

This is an extraordinarily interesting topic, really rich in theoretical and political implications, which we will not be able to pursue here. (It takes an entire session in the longer class). But I want to sketch a the core issue:

The crucial contrast is between ideological *domination* and ideological *hegemony*:

ideological domination = the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. This is a diagnosis about the content of the beliefs that make up the belief system of actors: these ideas reflect the interests of the dominant class.

ideological hegemony = the ideas that are articulated within ideology include oppositional ideas, ideas that come out of popular struggles, but they are linked to other ideas in such a way as to neutralize their threatening character. Democracy is the best example: belief in the desirability of democracy is an essential element of bourgeois ideology. This is an element that came from popular struggles, not from the capitalist class. In early capitalism no one thought that democracy could stably fit into bourgeois ideology, but it has because of the way it has been linked to the rule of law and private property. This successful incorporation of oppositional ideas is what turns a dominant ideology into a hegemonic one. It is what gives the defenders of the hegemonic ideology moral stature – what Gramsci calls “moral and intellectual leadership”.

Implication: ideological struggle = on the terrain of ideology over the articulation of these elements rather than between paradigmatic ideologies

3 Material Matrix of Ideology: understanding the process of formation of subjectivity

3.1. *Affirmations & Sanctions*

These interpellations do not occur simply because of the pronouncement of the words reflecting these ideologies. Interpellation -- the formation and transformation of subjectivities -- is the result of a systematic process of *affirmations* and *sanctions*.

Affirmations: In affirming practices, “if an interpellated subject acts in accordance with the dictates of the ideological discourse, then the outcomes predicted by the ideology occurs.”

Sanctions: Sanctioning practices constitute the punishments invoked for contravention of the dictates of ideological discourse.

3.2. *Discursive and nondiscursive practices*

This distinction between discursive and nondiscursive practices is not so obscure, even though every discursive act necessarily has a nondiscursive side to it. As Therborn says, “there is some difference between being pronounced ‘dead’ by a hostile critic and being assassinated.” The point at hand is that **ideologies are affirmed and sanctioned not just by words, but by nondiscursive practices** which back up/reinforce the discursive practices of ideology. (Note Therborn’s interesting discussions of excommunication as a form of sanction involving both discursive sanctions--being pronounced excommunicated--and nondiscursive sanctions--being denied various things or being burnt at the stake, etc.).

One crucial consequence of this analysis = going beyond the simple force/consent dichotomy as the basis of ruling class domination: all force presupposes consent at least in the sense of forms of subjectivity which make the application of force effective, and all forms of ideological interpellation presuppose a system of sanctions/affirmations which include elements of coercion.

3.3. *The Class Analysis of the Material Matrix of ideology*

Class analysis of ideology does not stop at simply unmasking the beliefs – revealing the class content of interpellations. A central issue is also understanding the class character of the affirmations and sanctions, discursive and nondiscursive practices that back up these ideological elements, that reinforce them, that instill them. The central idea is that these ideas are internalized into subjectivities not simply because the content is proclaimed, but because it is embedded in affirmations and sanctions, and these need to be understood. An excellent example of this is Bowles and Gintis early book on *Education in America*.

4 The Analysis of Contradictions and Transformations of Ideology

These diverse concepts which decode the complexity of ideology and establish the social processes which affirm/sanction ideology provides the basis for Therborn's account of the transformation of ideologies, the contradictions of ideology and ideological class struggle. The starting point of this analysis is what could be termed an *intergenerational perspective* on ideology, which is then linked to a specific set of theses about contradictions and transformation.

4.1. *Intergenerational perspective on ideology* *Transformations of ideologies always presuppose an existing ideology*: people are transformed from one kind of subject to another, not from being nonsubjects into subjects. To explain change, then, we must understand why a given form of subjectivity is not simply passed on from one generation to another:

“A parental generation will always mould its children according to its own form of subjectivity; and if ecological, demographic, socio-economic and any intersocietal relationships remain the same, the younger generation will face exactly the same affirmations and sanctions of the existing ideologies as the parental one. It follows that the explanation of the generation of ideologies will have to start from processes of change in the structure of a given society.... It is these changes then which constitute the material determination of the rise of ideologies.”

Contrast to idealist view which “assumes that just through the power of ideological imagination each new generation of humans can emancipate themselves from ideological formation by their parents, even though facing exactly the same situations as the latter” (=affirmations and sanctions).

4.2. Key idea = Changes in social structures change the forms of sanctions/affirmations.

The emergence of capitalism means that capitalist-subjectivity begins to be affirmed/rewarded; stagnation means that certain subjectivities cease to be affirmed in ways that they once were; late capitalism undermines the relational/material affirmations of the “work ethic;” etc. A brilliant study of this is Richard Bernacki’s book, *The Fabrication of Labour*. He tries to explain the different belief systems of German and British textile workers about the nature of work. The central argument is that the British worker – but not the German worker – had spent several generations as an independent craft worker producing for a market between the demise of feudal production and the rise of capitalist factory production. In the German case, the demise of feudalism overlapped the rise of capitalism. The result is that in the British case enough time had passed for new sets of ideas and understandings about work and labor to emerge and consolidate, whereas in Germany the working class brought with them feudal beliefs into the factory. These were, of course, transformed by capitalism, but the resulting belief systems were different because the raw material in Germany was different from Britain.

4.3. Contradictions & the temporality of change

These arguments open the way for the systematic accounts of ideological contradictions. Several possibilities:

- a. structural change in modes of production change the matrix of material affirmations and sanctions. This means that old subjectivities no longer constitute the basis for qualification into roles/relations.
- b. class struggle over affirmations/sanctions can set up competing systems of interpellation, competing “material matrices.” Unions impose sanctions on certain kinds of competitiveness among workers, thus counteracting the affirmations of the market. Result = **clashing subjectivities based on clashing affirmations/sanctions**. (i.e., coexistence of antagonistic class-alter ideologies.) These are examples how conscious, motivated practice can establish the material framework for the transformation of subjectivities by producing contradictions (or intensifying them).
- c. The different interpellations of the same individual may contradict each other: the different/multiple subjectivities may not be congruent with each other. For example: the forms of subjectivity of women within bourgeois/patriarchal sex-gender interpellations are not congruent with the form of interpellation of women as graduate students within competitive bourgeois academic relations. The former demands passivity, gentleness, the latter demands aggressiveness, assertiveness, competitiveness. Such contradiction can motivate a variety of responses: struggles to change the affirmations/sanctions in the academic relations; rejection of the female subjectivity of the sex-gender system (women “act like men”); struggles to transform the sex-gender relations of affirmation/sanction.

d. **Fundamental importance of temporality of change:** the speed of social change as such becomes crucial. If change is very slow, then smooth adjustments are possible (for example, if changes that require new subjectivities take several generations to accomplish); if change is much more rapid -- many dramatic changes within a single generation -- then subjective reconstitution becomes problematic. Life-cycle perspective on the operation of ideology.