

**I**  
**The Ideological Formation  
of Human Subjects**

## **1. The General Dialectic of Ideology**

The operation of ideology in human life basically involves the constitution and patterning of how human beings live their lives as conscious, reflecting initiators of acts in a structured, meaningful world. Ideology operates as discourse, addressing or, as Althusser puts it, interpellating human beings as subjects.

Before setting out to explore how ideology operates in the formation of human subjects and of forms of subjectivity, a note of clarification will be needed concerning the relationship of these processes to those of personality formation. The subjectivity of a person, his/her acting as a particular subject in a particular context, should be distinguished from his/her personality or character structure. Personality and subjectivity each have their specificity, and they have both an autonomy from and effects upon each other.

'Personality' or 'character structure' is being used here as a broad and loose designation of the results of psychodynamic processes studied by psychoanalysis and competing psychological theories. These processes operate upon a material — the libidinal energies and desires of pre-subject infants — and through largely unconscious

mechanisms outside the competence of social science and historiography. Personality formation more or less coincides in time with the first subject-formation of human beings, and ideological interpellations constitute an important part of it. But the personality has a temporality of its own, with crucial stages of psychic development and enduring effects depending on how these stages were passed.

A person acts out, lives his/her personality as a subject, in different forms of subjectivity, which nevertheless do not exhaust it. Under certain conditions the two may even come into tension or conflict. The forms of human subjectivity are constituted by intersections of the psychic and the social, and may be seen as the outer, more conscious, and more socially changeable aspects of the person.

Althusser has presented the basic functioning of all ideology as a quadruple system involving: '1. the interpellation of "individuals" as subjects; 2. their subjection to the Subject; 3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; 4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen — "So be it"'<sup>17</sup>

He illustrates this system by reference to Jewish and Christian religious ideology, where God (Yahweh) is the Subject with a capital S. This schema appears to me deficient in one crucial respect. It allows no room for any dialectic of ideology. However, such a dialectic is already indicated by the basic ambiguity of the word 'subject', both in French and in English, as Althusser himself suggests without bringing the point clearly into focus. The dialectical character of all ideology may be seen as indicated by the opposite senses of the same word 'subject' in the expressions 'the subject of king *X* (or the social order *Y*)' and 'the

subjects of history'. In the former sense 'subjects' refers to people who are subjugated under a particular force or order, in the latter to the makers or creators of something.

While retaining the couplet interpellation-recognition, I would suggest that 'subjection-guarantee' be replaced with *subjection-qualification*. The formation of humans by every ideology, conservative or revolutionary, oppressive or emancipatory, according to whatever criteria, involves a process simultaneously of subjection and of qualification. The amorphous libido and manifold potentialities of human infants are subjected to a particular order that allows or favours certain drives and capacities, and prohibits or disfavours others. At the same time, through the same process, new members become qualified to take up and perform (a particular part of) the repertoire of roles given in the society into which they are born, including the role of possible agents of social change. The ambiguity of the words 'qualify' and 'qualification' should also be noted. Although qualified by ideological interpellations, subjects also become qualified to 'qualify' these in return, in the sense of specifying them and modifying their range of application.

The reproduction of any social organization, be it an exploitative society or a revolutionary party, entails a basic correspondence between subjection and qualification. Those who have been subjected to a particular patterning of their capacities, to a particular discipline, qualify for the given roles and are capable of carrying them out. But there is always an inherent possibility that a contradiction may develop between the two. New kinds of qualification may be required and provided, new skills that clash with the traditional forms of subjection. Or, conversely, new forms of subjection may develop that clash with the provision of still-needed qualifications. The effects of a contradiction between subjection and qualification are opposition and revolt or underperformance and withdrawal.

The double process of subjection and qualification involves interpellation by, and recognition in, a central Subject — be it God, Father, Reason, Class, or something more diffuse — that patterns the super-ego of the subjects and provides them with ego-ideals. Given the societal and political orientation of this essay, I will not deal with all the psychoanalytic and linguistic aspects of these processes,<sup>18</sup> but will instead turn to the basic social functioning of subjection-qualification. This involves *three fundamental modes of ideological interpellation*. Ideologies subject and qualify subjects by telling them, relating them to, and making them recognize:

1. *what exists*, and its corollary, what does not exist: that is, who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like. In this way we acquire a sense of identity, becoming conscious of what is real and true; the visibility of the world is thereby structured by the distribution of spotlights, shadows, and darkness.
2. *what is good*, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable, and its opposites. In this way our desires become structured and norm-alized.
3. *what is possible* and impossible; our sense of the mutability of our being-in-the-world and the consequences of change are hereby patterned, and our hopes, ambitions, and fears given shape.

These modes of interpellation have important temporal and spatial dimensions. Thus, interpellations of what exists include both ideologies of what *has existed* and a timing of the present as part of a (backward or forward) trend, a cycle or an infinite immobility. 'What is possible' may range from the endlessness of mere conceivability to the presence of actuality. In the case of ideologies of what is good and right it may be space rather than time that is crucial. Something may be good and just everywhere, somewhere, here, or elsewhere.

The totality of these three modes of interpellation constitute the elementary structure of ideological subjection-qualification, but in any given discourse or discursive strategy they may be allocated different weight and prominence. Viewed from the standpoint of their functioning in social conservation or change, the three modes of interpellation form a logical chain of significance.

Three successive lines of defence of a given order can be established. First, it can be argued that certain features of this order exist while others do not: for example, affluence, equality, and freedom, but not poverty, exploitation, and oppression. (The features selected usually depend on prevailing ideologies of what is just.) Second, if this line of defence no longer holds, and the existence of negative features has to be admitted, it can be argued that what exists is nevertheless just, for example, because the poor and the powerless are misfits and failures who deserve what they get and have only themselves to blame. Third, even the existence of injustice may (have to) be admitted, but then it can be argued that a more just order is not possible, or at least not now. Corresponding to this logic of conservation, there is also a logic of change. In order to become committed to changing something, one must first get to know that it exists, then make up one's mind whether it is good that it exists. And before deciding to do something about a bad state of affairs, one must first be convinced that there is some chance of actually changing it. The time-scale, of course, is crucial to estimates and conceptions of possibility.

These three interpellations and their reception tend to be empirically intertwined, but the unravelling of their internal logic highlights some important flaws and omissions in the traditional approach to ideologies and power. The liberal approach to the study of political ideologies, including the preoccupation with 'consensus' and 'legitimation', has

usually concentrated exclusively on the second mode of interpellation, conceptions of the good society, form of government or regime, ignoring the patterning of knowledge and ignorance, and of ambitions, hopes, and fears. The traditional Marxist concern with 'class consciousness' has tended to focus exclusively on the first two aspects of the ideological formation, neglecting the third. But it is, of course, quite possible to be a highly class-conscious member of an exploited class without seeing any concrete possibility of putting an end to one's exploitation. The formation of subjects of class struggle involves, as far as members of exploited classes are concerned, a process of subjection-qualification such that the tasks of producing surplus labour are performed and the existence of class rule is recognized together with its unjust character and the possibility of resisting it. On the part of members of the exploiting class, the formation of class-struggle subjects requires a subjection-qualification to performing the tasks of exploitation, a recognition that this is the right thing to do and that it can be defended.

## 2. Subjectivity and Role: a Brief Digression on Role Theory

We started this chapter with a note on the relationship between the subject and forms of subjectivity, and personality. We will continue it by briefly spelling out how the concepts used here relate to another concept, that of 'role'. Whereas the question of personality took us to the border of psychology and psychoanalysis, 'role' leads us to sociology and social psychology.

Definitions of 'role' abound in the academic disciplines of sociology and social psychology. Generally, however, it refers to the behaviour normatively expected of persons

occupying a particular social position.<sup>19</sup> It is a key concept in Parsonian and much post-Parsonian sociology. The social-psychological focus on personal behaviour and interpersonal relations in terms of role-definitions and role-enactment usually goes under the name of role theory. On at least some occasions when forms of subjectivity have here been talked about a mainstream sociologist or a social-psychologist would probably have talked about roles. What is the rationale for the introduction of a new concept in this essay?

Three reasons are of prime importance. First, the sociological concept of role is embedded in a particular conception of society, an idealist and personalist view, in which social behaviour is seen as exclusively normatively defined and social relations as interpersonal relations only. What is lost here is class and the materiality of economic relations and technology. Role-theorists talk of occupational but not of class roles, and rightly so, since there is no normative definition of classes in capitalist society, no normative definition of surplus labour and surplus-labour extraction. Only outside the sociological problematic of ideological community may we talk of class 'roles', defined by specific relations of production and functioning on the basis of particular forces of production. Second, the 'role'-problematic is one of given individuals responding to given social demands. Its orientation, therefore, is basically static. Inherent in the double sense of 'subject', on the other hand, is the always present possibility of transcendence of social and personal givens. For example, we can talk of subjects of class struggle and subjects of social change, but hardly of 'roles' in the same context. Third, the 'role'-problematic is profoundly non-dialectical. It focuses on role-definitions, role-learning, role-performance and external conflicts — between personality and role-expectations or between different possible roles of the same individual. The

problematic of subject and forms of subjectivity, by contrast, highlights the intrinsic unity *and* possible conflict of the opposite processes of subjection and qualification.

### 3. The Ideological Universe: the Dimensions of Human Subjectivity

If we are to progress towards a firm and systematic understanding of the relationship between class and ideology, and, more broadly, of what determines the generation and articulation of ideologies, then we must try to draw a structural map of the universe of ideologies as a whole. In view of the enormous variety of ideologies, past and present this may seem an utterly impossible attempt, doomed to inglorious failure. Nevertheless, the risk will be taken. Of course, any attempt to structure the ideological universe can be made only at a very high level of abstraction. But insofar as it can be shown to be exhaustive, it may enable us to locate the problem of class ideology in a systematic and comprehensive framework.

We have defined the operation of ideology in terms of the constitution of human subjectivity, and it follows then that to search for the structure of the ideological universe is to seek the dimensions of human subjectivity. At the most general level, it appears that two such dimensions of man's being-in-the-world as a conscious subject can be distinguished. These may in turn be ordered along two axes, one referring to 'being', the other to 'in-the-world'. Thus, 'being' a human subject is something *existential* — being a sexed individual at a particular point of one's life cycle related to other sexed individuals of different generations at a certain point of their life cycle ('existential' seems more adequate than 'biological' to designate the first aspect of being, since we are concerned with its subjectively

meaningful side). It is also something *historical* — being a person who exists only in certain human societies at a particular point in human history, say a shaman, tax farmer, blacksmith, or footballer. Being 'in the world' is both *inclusive* (being a member of a meaningful world) and *positional* (having a particular place in the world in relation to other members of it, having a particular gender and age, occupation, ethnicity, and so on).

My thesis is that these four dimensions make up the fundamental forms of human subjectivity, and that the universe of ideologies is exhaustively structured by the four main types of interpellation that constitute these four forms of subjectivity. We may illustrate the structure of the ideological universe by means of the following simple four-fold table.

#### The Universe of Ideological Interpellations

Subjectivities of 'in-the-world'	Subjectivities of 'being'	
	<i>Existential</i>	<i>Historical</i>
<i>Inclusive</i>	1	2
<i>Positional</i>	3	4

Since no words of sufficient generality seem available, the four main types of ideology are provisionally designated only by numbers. The next task, then, is to remove the cover of anonymity from these numbers: to concretize their synonyms, the inclusive-existential, the inclusive-historical, the positional-existential and the positional-historical.

1. *Inclusive-Existential Ideologies*. This type of ideological discourse provides meanings related to being a member of the world, i.e., the meaning of life, suffering, death, the cosmos, and the natural order. It concerns what life is, what

is good and bad in life, what is possible in human existence, and whether there is a life after bodily death. The most common forms of discourse treating these questions are mythologies, religions, and secular moral discourse. They can vary greatly, not only in content but also in elaboration, from the grand mythological and religious systems to the very diffuse and often tacit conceptions of a life-purpose provided in the secularized societies of contemporary advanced capitalism.

2. *Inclusive-Historical Ideologies.* Through these, human beings are constituted as conscious members of historical social worlds. These social worlds are indefinite in number and variety, and it is only for purposes of illustration that we might mention the forms of tribe, village, ethnicity, state, nation, church. Bourgeois political theory usually concentrates on such entities, addressing the members (citizens) of the state, in contrast to the positional address to the prince typical of feudal ideologists. Bourgeois political theory tells the citizens what the state is, what is good and bad politics and what is politically possible or impossible. Virtually anything can define membership in a social world. Furthermore, definitions and demarcations of social worlds overlap, compete, and clash with one another. Medieval European political history, for instance, was to a large extent a history of the competition between the overlapping social worlds of dynastic states and the Church. It should also be noted that membership of one social world not only conflicts with membership in others, but also coexists with them in varying hierarchies of domination and subordination. For instance, one may be, simultaneously, a conscious US citizen, a Catholic, an Italian, a member of the working class, a resident of a particular neighbourhood, and a member of a particular kin group.

Since inclusive ideologies define membership in a meaningful world and thereby draw a line of demarcation

between membership and non-membership, they are also ideologies of *exclusion*. 'Excluded' here may refer, for example, to a life devoid of meaning (however defined), estrangement from God, not-belonging to the tribe, ethnicity, nation, state, and so on.

3. *Positional-Existential Ideologies.* A positional ideology subjects one to, and qualifies one for, a particular position in the world of which one is a member. The most significant positions of the existential world, the most important aspects of the structure of givens in human existence, are those delineated by the Self-Others and the two-genders distinctions and by the life-cycle of childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. Positional-existential ideologies, then, constitute subject-forms of individuality, (fe)maleness, of age and ageing. Hereby they tell one who one is in contrast with others, what is good and what is possible for one.

4. *Positional-Historical Ideologies.* Human beings also occupy positions in historical social worlds. Historical-positional ideologies form the members of a family in a structure of families and lineages, the inhabitants of a particular locality in a wider pattern of social geography, the occupants of a particular educational status, the practitioners of particular occupations and of particular lifestyles, the incumbents of positions of political power (and the place of those without it), the members of different classes. Positions may be differentiated and linked in terms of difference only, in terms of hierarchical grading along a single continuum of criteria, of complementarity, competition, and frontal conflict.

Three important aspects of the ideological universe should be noted. First, the distinctions made above are analytical. They do not represent ideologies as they concretely appear and are labelled in everyday language.

These may exhibit more than one of the four dimensions, either at the same time or in different contexts. A religious ideology, for instance, is not only an inclusive-existential ideology. In a multi-religious or a partly secularized society it also operates as a historical-positional ideology. Nationalism may be both an inclusive- and a positional-historical ideology, in the latter form constituting subjects of a position within an international system; the main accent of a given nationalist ideology may lie on one or the other. Inversely, in some tendencies of the labour movement, particularly revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism, 'class' becomes more an inclusive than a positional ideology. The adversary is seen not so much as occupying a position of domination within a particular mode of production, as an alien, superfluous body outside the class of producers. In this perspective the revolution is seen more as a displacement or deportation of alien parasites than as a transformation of society. As one prominent Spanish Anarchist put it, 'after the revolution . . . the workers will have to do the same as they did the day before'.<sup>20</sup> Second, I would claim that the types of ideology identified are exhaustive and irreducible. One implication of this, particularly important for Marxists to keep in mind, is that the ideological universe is never reducible to class ideologies. Even in the most class-polarized and class-conscious societies, the other fundamental forms of human subjectivity coexist with class subjectivities. Inescapably, the sex- and age-specificities of human individuals are ideologically constituted by existential-positional ideologies. And the meaning of a person's life and world is an existential question not wholly answerable by reference to the relations of production, but rather addressed by the inclusive-existential ideologies of religion and secular morality.

It will also have to be kept in mind that positional ideologies by definition always refer to positions within a

broader world, held in common with incumbents of other positions. A class, for instance, forms part both of a common mode of production together with its opposite exploiting or exploited class and/or (the latter in the case of the petty bourgeoisie and patriarchal peasants, each supporting a non-exploitative mode of production) exists within a historical social formation composed of several classes. It is, then, natural — and not an aberration of underdeveloped class consciousness — that class ideologies coexist with inclusive-historical ideologies, constituting the subjects of the contradictory totality of an exploitative mode of production and/or social formation.

Third, the irreducible multidimensionality of ideologies means that a crucial aspect of ideological struggles and of ideological relations of force is the articulation of a given type of ideology with others. The efficacy of a given religion, for example, will have to be understood in its articulation, explicit or implicit, with historical ideologies, positional and inclusive. In the labour movement the strategic conception of the ideological class struggle over the articulation of class with other kinds of ideology was elaborated by Kollontai and Reich with reference to existential ideologies, and it was Gramsci above all who explored the articulations of inclusive national ideologies.

#### **4. Ego- and Alter-Ideologies**

There is a further aspect of ideologies and their operation that writers on ideology have rarely paid attention to. Positional ideologies have an intrinsically dual character: in one's subjection-to-and-qualification-for a particular position, one becomes aware of the difference between oneself and the others. Now, this distinction is particularly relevant insofar as the ideology of dominating subjects is concerned,



since 'domination' designates precisely a particular and crucial relationship to the Other. Male-chauvinist sexist ideology should thus be seen as both an ego-ideology of maleness and an alter-ideology of femaleness. (This duality is inherent in every gender-specific subjectivity and is not necessarily sexist.) The same is true of positional-historical ideology. The ideology of a ruling bourgeoisie, for example, should be analysed both as an ego-ideology, forming the subjects of the bourgeoisie itself, and as an alter-ideology, dominating or striving to dominate the formation of other class subjects. In isolated primitive communities the inclusive ideologies tended to have no alter-dimension, what was outside their own world being chaos or nothingness. In more developed and interrelated social worlds, however, inclusive ideologies also have an alter-component in the 'infidels', the 'heathens', the 'aliens', and so on.

Alter-ideologies refer to the ideological dimension of the form in which one relates to the Other: to perceptions of the Other and of one's relationship to him/her. In relationships of power and domination, the alter-ideology of the dominating subjects is translated into attempts to mould the dominated according to the rulers' image of them, and into resistance to the opposition of the ruled. It is in this way that domination is ensured. The alter-ideology of the dominated, on the other hand, while also involving a perception and evaluation of the differences between ego and alter, tends towards resistance to the Other rather than towards forming him or her. This difference is inscribed in the asymmetry of domination.

Students of race or ethnic relations and of sexism have long recognized this duality in ideologies, though often without explicitly theorizing it. Much less attention has been paid to it in class analysis, but it is essential to an understanding of the ideological constitution of the subjects of class struggle and class collaboration.

## II

# The Historical Materialism of Ideologies