

MARX AND IDEOLOGY

BARRETT, M. 1992 *THE POLITICS OF TRUTH: FROM MARX TO FOUCAULT*. STANFORD:
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An overview of Barrett's argument

IDEOLOGY

- Concept
 - Ideas?
 - Values?
 - Beliefs

- 'Economics of untruth' Marxisms account of ideology
- 'the relation that goes on between peoples heads and their place in the conditions of production'.

- Different interpretations of Marx
- ‘Marx mobilised [...] an approach to ideology that has caught the imaginations of generations of people with a critical perspective on Capitalist society.’

- Could critique ideas and arguments
- Or recognise the social world has changed
- Is the argument that people suffering from brainwashing of a capitalist ideology patronising or enlightening?
- Barrett argues that we need to think about how political subjectivity is construed and operates

- Is ideology an illusion or a distortion
- Is it economically determined
- Barrett states we need to understand the historical development of the term
- The German Ideology - Marx (1846)

POWERFUL METAPHOR?

- Ideology is presented as pure illusion - an optical illusion
- Gives the example of the camera obscura which makes things appear upside down
- Ideology potentially the reverse or opposite of material reality
- False consciousness gained traction from this metaphor
- Barrett notes that false consciousness is a post-Marx concept, associated with Engels

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

- Material conditions can specify real or true conditions
- Ideology mystifies by reversal
- 'False consciousness' is the mirror image of what 'political consciousness' should be

- Ideological phenomena are determined by material causes
- Ideology is presented as a distorted or inadequate view of the world
- Demystification of religion
- Commodity fetishism (as outlined in *Das Capital*)

- Marx critiques religion
 - Critical approach to belief systems and ideational structures through which people apprehend their social worlds
- Mystification can be unmasked by knowledge

- In German Ideology
 - Ideas of the ruling class in every epoch are the ruling ideas
 - Ruling material force is the ruling intellectual force
 - Material and mental production: if you rule one you rule the other

- “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships”
- Marx
- Relates ideology to social class
- Ruling class ideas are the ruling ideas
- Ruling class rule control the means of ideological production

PROCESSES OF SUBJECTIFICATION

- Spender's critique: by controlling language and media, and gatekeeping publishing and criticism
Men control 'the means of mental production'
- Interests are those of men rather than capital
- Patriarchy
- Spender applies Marx's point to a different rule group - based on gender not class

OPPRESSIVE REGIMES

- How does our recognition of structural inequalities reshape our understanding of the ruling class?
- Racism/sexism? Other oppressive regimes

BIAS

- Parekh: argues that for Marx ideology is systematically biased towards a social group
 - Be it class
 - Nation
 - Profession
 - Race
- Therefore, it is wrong to 'define it as a body of ideas biased towards a class'

- The German Ideology 1845-46
- Legal, political, religious, aesthetic philosophic - ideological forms
- 'Material transformation of the economic conditions of production can be determined with the precision of natural science'
- The struggle: identify the ideological forms in which people become conscious of the conflict

- Base and superstructure relationship
 - Change of the economic foundation will transform the immense superstructure
 - Struggle (revolution)
 - Distinction between ideology and knowledge (the latter framed as science)

- The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - these are the foundations
- The legal and political superstructure rise from it
- Social consciousness corresponds with the economic structure
- Barrett points out the relationship here is still grey (p. 13)

- Base and superstructure used as a metaphor
- Stuart Hall
 - Three rather than two levels
 - Base: material production
 - Second level of civil society and state
 - Third consciousness, philosophy religion etc

- Ideology a reflection of economically given reality
- Once the proletariat become conscious then they will fight
 - Class struggle
- Argues Marx is an epistemological realist

- By *Capital* Marx drops the word 'ideology'
- Though Barrett and others argue the piece contains 'his most elaborate and sophisticated arguments about ideology'
- Theory of commodity fetishism is the theory of ideology in capitalist society
 - Analysis of reification not description of consumerism
- Articulates how relation constituted by humans come to appear as relations between things

IDEOLOGY AS DECEPTION

- Deception
- For Marx ideology is 'a defective perception of clearly perceptible facts'
- Mepham argues ideology is the forms of social relationships that are directly acquainted in experience (commodities, values, wages, money) that are deceptive

- Foucault's rejection of truth for 'regimes of truth'
- Gramsci sees ideology as a matter for struggle - a struggle in which intellectuals and ideologues = long term battles for popular support in the socialist project
- Gramsci insists on human political agency

- Gramsci's understanding of hegemony as a struggle for consent leads him to propose a theory of the role of intellectuals
- Intellectuals have a broader political significance
- Gramsci argues that we can distinguish between traditional and organic intellectuals
- Former (traditional) are the voices of the ruling bloc
- latter speak for progressive class forces in their struggle against hegemonic domination

GRAMSCI

Hegemony, the dominance of one group over another, often supported by legitimating norms and ideas. Inhibits the dissemination of alternative ideas.

- Gramsci sees winning of hegemony as something that must take place as a precondition to a revolutionary seizure of power
- Ideological struggle politically effective and significant in its own right
- Theory of intellectual work that is far removed from the usual 'historicist' assumptions

- Gramsci's work raises the following issues:
 - What is the relationship between hegemony and ideology
 - Is ideology a specifically political concept
 - Hegemony a broader cultural concept
 - Is ideology or hegemony explicitly tied to class analysis or also relevant to other political conflicts and movements

- John Thompson' view on how ideology should be defined
- Argues language as the principle medium of ideology
- “To study ideology is to study the ways in which meaning (signification) serves to sustain relations of dominance.”

- Thompson Studies in the Theory of Ideology
 - Three main processes / modalities can be identified in the way ideology operates
 - Legitimation - appeal for legitimacy on traditional, rational, or charismatic grounds
 - Dissimulation - seldom intentional concealment of relations of domination in ways that are themselves often concealed

- 'Reification representing a transitory, historical state of affairs as if it were permanent, natural outside of time' p30
- These points are used to sketch out a position on ideology
- In terms of conception of society and in terms of domination and language

- Thompson shifts away from a classical Marxist model from class to a general theory of domination