




# IDEOLOGIES, FAITH, AND PRAXIS

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## INTRODUCTION

 'Ideology' and 'praxis' are complex and difficult words. So is faith's relationship with them. We start with ideology.<sup>1</sup> When the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) first used the word *ideologie* at the time of the French revolution, he merely intended it to mean "the science of ideas", something distinct from abstract metaphysics or speculative theology. Acknowledging John Lock and Condillac as his sources, De Tracy also admired Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) proclamation of science not only as explanatory but also as productive of "fruits and works". Bacon is known for the adage: "knowledge is power". This only means that science should not be knowledge "for its own sake", like Aristotle's *episteme*, but has to prove itself in the level of practical usefulness. Beyond speculation, this new "science of ideas" – ideology – is also prescriptive and programmatic: it is intended to "improve the life of men on earth." This positive, or at least neutral, meaning of ideology has persisted in our present uses. Today, ideology is broadly defined as: (a) a comprehensive and coherent explanatory theory of the world; (b) general program for political organization; (c) which entails struggle

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<sup>1</sup> For this, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), 153-157. See also Terry Eagleton, *Ideology. An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991); Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Harvest Book, 1936); Emmett Kennedy, "Ideology from Destutt de Tracy to Marx," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979): 353-368.



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to achieve the program; (d) recruits committed loyal adherents and; (e) accords special leadership role to intellectuals.<sup>2</sup>

Ideology began to acquire pejorative connotation in Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) who called his political opponents 'ideologues' – those Enlightenment thinkers who possess revolutionary ideas of equality and democracy. These modern *philosophes*, Destutt de Tracy among them, "misled people by elevating them to a sovereignty which they were not capable of exercising."<sup>3</sup> It is this conservative evaluation of progressive and 'revolutionary' ideologies from the guardians of the *status quo* that endures up to our times. Any philosophical, political or religious establishment always names its position as *orthodox* and classifies its other as *ideological*.

Ironically, it is this derogative connotation that reaches Karl Marx who equates it with "false consciousness".<sup>4</sup> According to Marx, the upside-down version of reality is nothing but an abstraction of life from its actual material historical processes. In short, ideology is a set of ideas of the ruling classes which is illusionary – an inversion of reality like a *camera oscura*<sup>5</sup> product as it is of their own asymmetrical social locations. The ruling class in its control of the material production also exercises power over the production of ideas, culture, religion and morality, i.e., the *ideology* of the ruling classes, whose role is to mystify the truth of our social economic relations. Thus, the famous adage: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Cranston, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "ideology," in <http://www.compilerpress.ca/Competitiveness/Anno/Anno%20Cranston%20Ideology%20EB%202003.html> (accessed 08.10.2014).

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 154.

<sup>4</sup> There has been a debate whether Marx really equated ideology with "false consciousness". But if the word could not be located in the Marxist corpus as recent researches show, Marx can still be credited for an understanding of ideology as distorted, partial and illusory knowledge – one that does not present the real understanding of the world. For this debate, see John Plamenatz, *Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1970); J. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1983); Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1965), 37.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique to Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 1.



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But Raymond Williams also observes that Marx's use of the term is ambivalent. In the following paragraph, he hints at its neutral meaning:

The distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production... and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic and philosophic – in short, *ideological* – forms *in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.*<sup>7</sup> [italics mine]

Beyond ideology as illusion, Marx insinuates at specific constellation of ideas arising from significant changes in economic production which makes it possible for people to “become conscious of the conflict and fight it out.” This direction leads subsequent Marxist thinkers to envision a “proletarian ideology” (as contrasted to the false consciousness of the “bourgeois ideology”) and its necessary attendant structures which truly represent the interests of the masses. In this context, ideology is not illusion; it is in fact necessary.

Nearer to home, this debate also plays itself out in the theological field. Beyond the conservative Roman critique of ideology as misguided,<sup>8</sup> liberation theologians, like Juan Luis Segundo, in contrast thinks that Christian “faith without ideology is, in fact, dead.”<sup>9</sup> Elaborating James 2: 14-17, Segundo argues that our faith is only meaningful “insofar as it is converted into a different way of acting... Indeed nothing can really be called faith unless it is reflected in a consistent pattern of action, in deeds designed to flesh out specific values in history.”<sup>10</sup> We are, thus, back to where we started – De Tracy's neutral meaning.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”* (1984) in [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html) (accessed 08.11.2014).

<sup>9</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*, vol. 1: Faith and Ideologies (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), 126.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



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Since, against T. S. Eliot, we cannot “purify the dialect of the tribe”,<sup>11</sup> our task is to take stock of these contradictory significations and discern where these multiple meanings continue to operate in our contemporary uses. These words (and their connotations) are not only repositories of past meanings but also condensed social practices which in turn are fertile sites of present historical and cultural struggles that continue to shape our social life.

Thus, in our present collection, we read Robert Garcia’s personal account of his ambivalent relationship with the communist ideology. On the one hand, he acknowledges indebtedness to the movement as the “source of much of my current knowledge, my realizations, my way of thinking, and my behavior (good or bad), including my idiosyncrasies.” For all its shortcomings, he still believes that it plays a significant role in the shaping of society. On the other hand, he does not mince words in exposing his hard objections on their ‘undeclared’ ideological position, tactical political alliances inconsistent with communist ideals, and violation of the human rights of cadres of which he himself was a victim. His critique echoes Marx’s unmasking of “false consciousness” and social inversions directed not at capitalism but at the communist movement itself.

Diego Quejada’s analysis of Abesamis’s *Third Look at Jesus* betrays this same complex relationship. Even as Abesamis did not belong to the national democratic movement and was critical of it in his work and practice, he had the “national democratic agenda” of the 1970s and 1980s as horizon of his works and praxis. In short, at that specific point in our history, the national democratic movement whose context Abesamis located his discourse was also considered by many Christians as the necessary and most viable *ideological* worldview and platform to bring about the coming of God’s Kingdom.

The critique of ideology as illusion is not only directed at the left but also to the opposite end of the social spectrum – as shown in Johan Verstraeten’s critique of the institutional-ideological understanding of the Catholic social thought. Without the input

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<sup>11</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (II.4) in <http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/gidding1.html> (accessed 08.10.2014).



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from the more critical and imaginative social movements, Catholic social teaching merely becomes an official and papal social doctrine – a top-down imposition of Roman ideology into the local churches. What Verstraeten fights for is the inclusion of other voices from the ground (e.g., local episcopal conferences, critical Catholic movements, individual Catholics working in secular social movements, grassroots communities, etc.) in the discernment and interpretation of the social doctrine of the Church in our times.

This brings us to another dimension in the theoretical discussion: the relationship between science and ideology. In the Marxist tradition, ideology's pejorative meaning of being abstract and illusory persists in its enthronement of *science* as the summit of knowledge production and action. Thus, in Engels's interpretation of Marx's philosophy as "scientific socialism" (as opposed to utopian socialism), human consciousness becomes scientific only when it becomes aware of the real life conditions of its own motives and actions. The praxis thus of 'conscientized masses' is *scientific* because they understand these objective conditions; the knowledge and action of others outside this elite circle belong to the realm of *ideology*. Expanded into general discourse, science is generally seen to be founded on hard and objective facts; ideology, on mere common knowledge and useless speculative thinking.

In the ironic twist of fate, the *praxis* of vanguardist communism which paraded itself as *scientific* came to be later considered as dogmatist and doctrinaire, inflexible and rigid, closed in on itself and detached from the people, thus, *ideological*. Enrique Batangan's personal trajectory from the totalizing ideology of Maoism to popular education was brought about by the willingness of these critical and plural social movements "to listen to stories drawn from the everyday life", the people's experience of coping up with poverty and helplessness, their local knowledges and indigenous sources of resistance. What he argues for is the inclusion of the everyday and the quotidian into theorizing as it significantly changes the direction of our way of doing theology and being Church. Victoria Narciso-Apuan also foregrounds the real voices of the most vulnerable – and also most neglected – sector after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption: the *Ayatas* of Pampanga. Their everyday lives point to an ambivalent future: a legal recognition of their identity versus the loss of the



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arable land and the displacement that went with it; broader networking with other *Ayta* communities versus government neglect and intensive militarization; influx of external support groups versus the encroachment of mining companies, and so on. It is only in listening to the *Ayta* voices that a brighter future can be carved out with them.

What is forwarded in this discourse of “everyday life” – and this is the running thread in all the articles in this collection – is that *science* (philosophy, politics, theology, and pastoral praxis), if it wants to be true to itself, has to take serious account not only of authorities, experts, and vanguards but also of ordinary voices, local strategies, and everyday practices from the rough grounds. Once neglected, both discourse and praxis – be it philosophical, theological, or political – regresses to be dogmatist and ideological.

The articles in this collection are the first harvests of the social fora sponsored by SVST’s Resource Center for Social Concerns (RCSC). St. Vincent School of Theology has always been aware that theology only survives and thrives when it converses with voices other than itself. With this conviction in mind, we have invited members of social movements – those who also dream about and work for social transformation – to open conversations. These articles were once delivered in these gatherings, open as they were to critique and comments from our audience coming from all sides of the philosophical, ideological, and religious spectrum (e.g., professed Christians and avowed atheists; leftists, rightists, and centrists; academics, grassroots groups and community organizers; laity, religious, and clergy). We are grateful to the family of Willie and Marilen Abesamis for their support of the Carlos Abesamis Lecture Series where two of the articles come from. Our gratitude goes to Enrique “Pete” Batangan, RCSC’s Coordinator, the SVST Student Council and staff who take great care in the planning and execution of each forum.

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