

## I

## IDEALISM

Idealism has two main modern senses: (i) its original philosophical sense, in which, though with many variations of definition, ideas are held to underlie or to form all reality; (ii) its wider modern sense of a way of thinking in which some higher or better state is projected as a way of judging conduct or of indicating action. One of the critical difficulties of sense (ii) is that, especially in some of its derived words, it is used, often loosely, for both praise and blame.

Idealism has been used in English from IC18, from *fw idealisme*, F, and especially *Idealismus*, G. It was preceded in this original philosophical sense by *idealist*, from eC18. The crucial reference back is to Greek thought, especially to Plato, and *idea* in this sense was present in English from mC15, though until IC16 its more common form was *idee*. The *rw*, *idea*, Gk, is from the verb 'to see', and has a range of meanings from appearance and form to the Platonic type or model. *Idea* (i) – ideal type, is common from C15; (ii) – figure, from C16; (iii) – thought or belief, from C17. A general noun for sense (iii), such as *ideation* or *ideology*, did not develop until eC19, after the increasingly specialized uses of *idealism*.

The specific philosophical use has a predominant reference to German classical philosophy in IC18 and eC19, though with reference back not only to Plato but to such English philosophers as Berkeley. But in essentially the same period there was a complicated reversal of meaning in relation to art and social thought. *Idealism* in philosophy, in all its important variations, supposed ideas to be fundamental, whether these were the divine or universal *Idea* or *Ideas*, or the constitutive ideas of human consciousness. It was clearly from the reference to human consciousness that the reversal began. *Idealism* and *idealist* began to be used, from IC18 and especially eC19, to indicate not so much consciousness as a fundamental and

formative activity but a special kind of consciousness, imaginatively conferring certain properties on an object (as opposed to the main sense of philosophical idealism, in which an object necessarily derived its properties from consciousness). The new verb *idealize*, from eC19, described, especially in its early uses, the processes of ART (q.v.). Its extension to a more general process of imaginative elevation was not common before mC19, when it also began to acquire the unfavourable implication of an accompanying falsification (*idealization*). The unfavourable senses of *idealism* and *idealist* were also C19 developments; by 1884 there was the now characteristic 'mere idealist'.

The subsequent complexities of meaning can be indicated by a pairing of opposites. There is *idealism* contrasted with MATERIALISM (q.v.): basically a philosophical opposition but in C20 especially extended, by the broadening of each term, to a distinction which is really that between altruism and selfishness: a distinction which whatever its other merits has nothing to do with the philosophical argument though it is often, in social polemic, confused with it. Then there is *idealism* contrasted with *realism*: again originally a philosophical distinction, and having some related development to describe types and processes of art, but in common use, from IC19 and especially in our own time, to indicate a contrast which is really that between impractical and practical, especially in the derived *idealistic* and REALISTIC (q.v.). Then there is also *idealism* as a positive social or moral sense contrasted either with self-seeking or indifference or with a general narrowness of outlook. Since all these current uses coexist with a continuing and important philosophical argument, itself now quite exceptionally complicated, *idealism* is obviously a word which needs the closest scrutiny whenever it is used.

See IDEOLOGY, MATERIALISM, NATURALISM, PHILOSOPHY, REALISM

## IDEOLOGY

*Ideology* first appeared in English in 1796, as a direct translation of the new French word *idéologie* which had been proposed in that year

by the rationalist philosopher Destutt de Tracy. Taylor (1796): 'Tracy read a paper and proposed to call the philosophy of mind, ideology'. Taylor (1797): '... ideology, or the science of ideas, in order to distinguish it from the ancient metaphysics'. In this scientific sense, ideology was used in epistemology and linguistic theory until IC19.

A different sense, initiating the main modern meaning, was popularized by Napoleon Bonaparte. In an attack on the proponents of democracy – 'who misled the people by elevating them to a sovereignty which they were incapable of exercising' – he attacked the principles of the Enlightenment as 'ideology'.

It is to the doctrine of the ideologues – to this diffuse metaphysics, which in a contrived manner seeks to find the primary causes and on this foundation would erect the legislation of peoples, instead of adapting the laws to a knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history – to which one must attribute all the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful France.

This use reverberated throughout C19. It is still very common in conservative criticism of any social policy which is in part or in whole derived from social theory *in a conscious way*. It is especially used of democratic or socialist policies, and indeed, following Napoleon's use, ideologist was often in C19 generally equivalent to *revolutionary*. But ideology and ideologist and ideological also acquired, by a process of broadening from Napoleon's attack, a sense of abstract, impractical or fanatical theory. It is interesting in view of the later history of the word to read Scott (*Napoleon*, vi, 251): 'ideology, by which nickname the French ruler used to distinguish every species of theory, which, resting in no respect upon the basis of self-interest, could, he thought, prevail with none save hot-brained boys and crazed enthusiasts' (1827). Carlyle, aware of this use, tried to counter it: 'does the British reader... call this unpleasant doctrine of ours ideology?' (*Chartism*, vi, 148; 1839).

There is then some direct continuity between the pejorative sense of ideology, as it had been used in eC19 by conservative thinkers, and the pejorative sense popularized by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845–7) and subsequently. Scott had distinguished ideology as theory 'resting in no respect upon the basis of self-interest', though Napoleon's alternative had actually been the

(suitably vague) 'knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history'. Marx and Engels, in their critique of the thought of their radical German contemporaries, concentrated on its abstraction from the real processes of history. Ideas, as they said specifically of the ruling ideas of an epoch, '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. (*German Ideology*, 47)

Or as Engels put it later:

Every ideology... once it has arisen develops in connection with the given concept-material, and develops this material further; otherwise it would cease to be ideology, that is, occupation with thoughts as with independent entities, developing independently and subject only to their own laws. That the material life-conditions of the persons inside whose heads this thought process goes on in the last resort determine the course of this process remains of necessity unknown to these persons, for otherwise there would be an end to all ideology. (*F Feuerbach*, 65–6)

Or again:

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously indeed but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or his predecessors'. (*Letter to Mehring*, 1893)

Ideology is then abstract and false thought, in a sense directly related to the original conservative use but with the alternative – knowledge of real material conditions and relationships – differently stated. Marx and Engels then used this idea critically. The 'thinkers' of a ruling class were 'its active conceiving ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of

livelihood' (*German Ideology*, 65). Or again: 'the official representatives of French democracy were steeped in republican ideology to such an extent that it was only some weeks later that they began to have an inkling of the significance of the June fighting' (*Class Struggles in France*, 1850). This sense of ideology as illusion, false consciousness, unreality, upside-down reality, is predominant in their work. Engels believed that the 'higher ideologies' – philosophy and religion – were more removed from material interests than the direct ideologies of politics and law, but the connection, though complicated, was still decisive (*Feuerbach*, 277). They were 'realms of ideology which soar still higher in the air... various false conceptions of nature, of man's own being, of spirits, magic forces, etc....' (*Letter to Schmidt*, 1890). This sense has persisted.

Yet there is another, apparently more neutral sense of ideology in some parts of Marx's writing, notable in the well-known passage in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Philosophy* (1859):

The distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production... and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological – forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.\*

This is clearly related to part of the earlier sense: the ideological forms are expressions of (changes in) economic conditions of production. But they are seen here as the forms in which men become conscious of the conflict arising from conditions and changes of condition in economic production. This sense is very difficult to reconcile with the sense of ideology as mere illusion.

In fact, in the last century, this sense of ideology as the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group, has been at least as widely used as the sense of ideology as illusion. Moreover, each sense has been used, at times very confusingly, within the Marxist tradition. There is clearly no sense of illusion or false consciousness in a passage such as this from Lenin:

\*Marx's German reads: ... kurz, ideologischen Formen, worin sich die Menschen diesen Konflikts bewusst werden...

Socialism, insofar as it is the ideology of struggle of the proletarian class, undergoes the general conditions of birth, development and consolidation of an ideology, that is to say it is founded on all the material of human knowledge, it presupposes a high level of science, demands scientific work, etc.... In the class struggle of the proletariat which develops spontaneously, as an elemental force, on the basis of capitalist relations, socialism is introduced by the ideologists. (*Letter to the Federation of the North*)

Thus there is now 'proletarian ideology' or 'bourgeois ideology', and so on, and ideology in each case is the system of ideas appropriate to that class. One ideology can be claimed as correct and progressive as against another ideology. It is of course possible to add that the other ideology, representing the class enemy, is, while a true expression of their interests, false to any general human interest, and something of the earlier sense of illusion or false consciousness can then be loosely associated with what is primarily a description of the class character of certain ideas. But this relatively neutral sense of ideology, which usually needs to be qualified by an adjective describing the class or social group which it represents or serves, has in fact become common in many kinds of argument. At the same time, within Marxism but also elsewhere, there has been a standard distinction between ideology and SCIENCE (q.v.), in order to retain the sense of illusory or merely abstract thought. This develops the distinction suggested by Engels, in which ideology would end when men realized their real life-conditions and therefore their real motives, after which their consciousness would become genuinely scientific because they would then be in contact with reality (cf. Suvin). This attempted distinction between Marxism as science and other social thought as ideology has of course been controversial, not least among Marxists. In a very much broader area of the 'social sciences', comparable distinctions between ideology (speculative systems) and science (demonstrated facts) are commonplace.

Meanwhile, in popular argument, ideology is still mainly used in the sense given by Napoleon. Sensible people rely on EXPERIENCE (q.v.), or have a philosophy; silly people rely on ideology. In this sense ideology, now as in Napoleon, is mainly a term of abuse.

See DOCTRINAIRE, EXPERIENCE, IDEALISM, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE