

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Regarding the letter to the Editor published in *IPQ*. Vol. No. 4, Oct. 1995 by Prof. A. Aklujkar with reference to my review in *IPQ*. Vol. No. XXI, No. 1, Jan. 1994 of the *Proceedings of the International Conference on Bhartṛhari*, I have to give the following reply :

There are three paragraphs in the letter to the Editor by Prof. Aklujkar.

In the first paragraph, he says, "One cannot avoid the impression that he has a personal score to settle (at least) with the editors of the volume he was asked to review". Sir, you may kindly note that in my review I have discussed only the issues in *Vākyapadīya* and not any person. It would have been a great contribution to learning if a scholar like Aklujkar were to discuss the issues I have raised rather than discussing my mental states.

The second paragraph of the letter refers to the first paragraph of my review on p. 91. There I have been discussing the relationship between concept and theory. Concepts and meanings are relevant only in the context of a theory where they are put in use. Without the context of a theory nothing follows from the discussion of meaning and concept. I have only said in the same paragraph: "concepts are discussed, not the issues". In my review I have been expressing my fears that even a great man might not succeed in choosing the main concepts in *Vākyapadīya* for his dissertation without referring to the theory of meaning in *Vākyapadīya*. Prof. Aklujkar has not taken note of it.

I come to the third paragraph where he speaks of my review giving one wrong impression which he wants to correct. He thinks that my review gives him undue credit for organizing the seminar and editing the proceedings. In this connection, I would like to point out that there are only two references in my review regarding the editorship and organization of the seminar. 1) The very first line of the review where I speak of "Bhate, Saroja and Bronkhorst, Johannes (editors)". 2) The other reference is on p. 94 (*IPQ*, Vol. XXI, No. 1), at the beginning of the last paragraph : "The introducer (Aklujkar), the organizers and editors (Prof. S. Bhate and Bronkhorst) do not seem to have succeeded even in mentioning the issues raised and discussed in *VP*." Sir, I have not given the impression that Prof. Aklujkar is the organizer of the Seminar and the editor of the Proceedings. Prof. Aklujkar is a world renowned scholar but he should not read something where it is not.

Poona.

J. Ouseparampil

30th Dec. 1995.

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INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY

Vol. XXIII

Number 1 and 2 : January and April 1996

Page No.

HERBERT HERRING	: Cartesian And Kantian Revolutions in Philosophy	1
VRINDA DALMIA	: The Benefit of Doubt	19
S. V. BOKIL	: Development of Solipsism after Rene Descartes - I	37
S. K. OOKERJEE	: Descartes, Berkeley and the External World	77
N. G. KULKARNI	: Descartes' Philosophy of Mind : Its Contemporary Understanding	95
R. C. PRADHAN	: Descartes and Wittgenstein : Two Philosophical Models of Mind	119
BJOY H. BORUAH	: Recalcitrant Quasi-Cartesianism in Recent Philosophy of Mind	141
SURYAPRABHA SHASHIDHARAN	: Descartes' Bequeathal and the Future of Philosophy	151
ASHOK R. KELKAR	: Ergo Sum : Descartes in an Oblique Light	165
STEPHEN GAUKROGER	: The Role of Ontological Argument	169
ARINDAM CHAKRABORTI	: On Not Dying	181
PROBAL DASGUPTA	: Cartesian Linguistics Wins in Three Moves	187
SHARAD DESHPANDE	: Juxtaposing Descartes and Wittgenstein The Simple the Clear and the Distinct	201
R. S. DALVI	: Metaphorics of Seeing	215
ABBE DE LANION	: Meditations on Metaphysics	233

Number 3 and 4 : July and October 1996.

Page No.

ALPANA CHAKRABORTY	:	A Critical Analysis of John Locke's Criterion of Personal Identity	349
SARAL JHINGRAN	:	An Inquiry Into Ethical Relativism in Hindu Thought	363
TENNYSON SAMRAJ	:	On Being Equally Free and Unequally Restricted	379
RINITA MAZUMDAR	:	Inference : Heuristic vs. Naturalistic Model	395
A. D. NAIK	:	Belief and Knowledge	411
FRED ABLONDI	:	Schlick, Altruism and Psychological Hedonism	417
JEAN L. MERCIER	:	For A Minimal Theory of Truth	429
M. VENKATALAKSHMI	:	Epistemology of Mysticism	439
ARUNDHATI SARDESAI	:	Epistemology of J. Krishnamurti	455
ARCHANA BARUA	:	A Note on - Euthanasia and the Contemporary Debate	467
DISCUSSIONS			
CHANDIDAS BHATTACHARYA	:	I Linguistic Solipsism	473
LAXMINARAYAN LENKA	:	II Linguistic Solipsism	474
RANJAN K GHOSH	:	III Professor Prasad on Working Out A Lead From Swami Vivekananda : Some Reflections	476

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CONTENTS
(STUDENT SUPPLEMENT)

JULY-OCT. 1996.

- PARTHASARATHI MONDAL : The Subject in the 'Last' Foucault :
Prolegomenon to A Reconsideration
of Mental Distress and Well Being 507
- SANJEEV M. P. : A Critique of Althusserian Concept
of Ideology 519
-

THE SUBJECT IN THE 'LAST' FOUCAULT : PROLEGOMENON TO A RECONSIDERATION OF MENTAL DISTRESS AND WELL BEING*

PARTHASARATHI MONDAL

In recent times, some independent-minded thinkers and practitioners (especially in the West) within and without the field of mental distress analysis have actively sought alternatives to bio-medical psychiatry, which has been charged as being a "pseudoscience".¹ The proponents of alternatives deriving their inspiration from, say orthodox and liberal interpretations of Marxism and Critical Theory, come to mind easily.

One common trend among these alternatives has been the shifts in emphasis from the individual subject - the person - to the 'social' and 'political' in the search for locating causes of mental illness and finding adequate responses to them. This has led to some deep insights which hold out the promise of a more humane and systemic approach to mental distress and mental well-being. At the same time however it has made the business of understanding the subject more difficult. Most of these alternatives are not quite able to address the puzzle as to why under similar circumstances some persons express mental distress whilst others do not.

Engaging this core issue therefore requires a more basic treatment of the individual person. The subject can certainly be understood more deeply within the context of mental distress and well-being, but mental distress analysis could also gain much by a more wholesale theoretical integration of the personal and the social as is to be found in attempts looking out for the general tensions of the human. The latter is also perhaps the better option as "Psychology can never tell the truth about madness because it is madness that holds the truth of psychology".²

* I am grateful to Drs. Rajeev Bhargava and Santosh K. Sahu (Jawaharlal Nehru University) for their comments on this paper. Thanks are also very much due to Ashton and Mark (Colchester) and Avaneendra (Warangal).

What is therefore needed is a study of the basic fractures within the structures of the subject. It may be held that an analysis of mental distress would do well to presuppose a discussion on the problems of the subject.

In is one such attempt - conducted more at the periphery of a strict examination of mental distress - that this paper seeks to briefly outline. One of the most original efforts at understanding the subject has been that of Michel Foucault³. Amongst the many contemporary thinkers in the West engaging the problem of the subject, Foucault has been able to hint in a novel way at the more basic crises of the person.

Critical Theory⁴ says that rather than see the identical self as an ontological truth, it would be more correct to see it as a mechanism built voluntarily over centuries in order to exert control over the forces of nature. The desire to have control over the external world also necessitates a control over the subject's internal impulse to spontaneity, leading to the identical self. In recent times - Critical Theory adds - even this partial self-identical subjectivity is under assault from instrumental rationality. However, it is much against framing as alternative of non-subjectivity which would lead to the destruction of civilization. The way out is to think of a subjectivity which is superior to the one of instrumental rationality and yet allowing spontaneity.

Contemporary Critical Theorists have sought to overcome the contradictions of such an alternative (which could lead only to the self-identical subject) by broadening the determiners of subjectivity from instrumental rationality to communicative action. Communicative action calls for debate between subjects before any course of action is decided. This ensures that the spontaneity of the subject remains without developing a tendency towards totalizing identities. In contrast,⁵ Foucault holds that it would be advisable to relinquish the entire Critical Theory attempt to somehow save and retain a primordial, pure and spontaneous subject because such a subject has never existed but is a construction of historically specific power relations after all. According to Foucault, such recognition has a liberative effect and it is sought to be supplemented by the notion of 'aesthetic subjectivity'.

In Marxism,⁶ the subject is seen as essentially a labouring individual who is at once personal and social :

"Labour is in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature

participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls, the material reactions between himself and Nature ... By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature".⁷

The main problem for Marxism is that a particular social system, viz capitalism is preventing this activity-oriented subject from relaxing his full potential or selfhood. Foucault's contention is that Marxism suffers from the 'repressive-hypothesis', that is, from the illusionary idea that there is an essential self of man which has to be unearthed and released. Foucault's examination of the history of sexuality in the West has rather revealed a forever decentered subject. Foucault also takes issue with the classically-inspired consciousness-based model implicit in the repressive-hypothesis approach.⁸

Foucault though (in retrospect) of his 'problematization' of the subject in the following manner : -

"I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years My objective instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. My work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects The first is modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences : for example, the objectivizing of the speaking subject in *grammaire generale*, philology, and linguistics. Or again, in this first mode, the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labours, in the analysis of wealth and of economics. Or, a third example, the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history of biology ... In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call "dividing practices". The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the "good boys" ... Finally, I have sought to study - it is my current work - the way a human being turns him a herself into a subject. For example, I have chosen the domain of sexuality - how men have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of 'sexuality'."⁹

However, it is in his tentative thinking after he wrote the three volume on the history of sexuality that Foucault seeks to "Outline this problem (i.e., of the subject) in its generality."¹⁰ In these works he displays the newness of his approach to the problem of selfhood by studying "the hermeneutics of the

subject".¹¹ It is cautionary to an extent to recognize that this is not the first major retrospection which Foucault does. For instance, he reinterprets his earlier work on mental illness as being actually concerned with power.¹² But these retrospections seem to be in accordions with his strategy of critique, of transforming oneself :

That's the reason also why, when people say, "Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else", my answer is, "Well, do you think I have worked like that all these years to say the same thing and not be changed?"¹³

It is the examination of the work of this turning inwards which leads Foucault to his more mature stage of making the issue of subject problematic. It becomes more problematic in the sense that the earlier studies on subjectivity could be said to have been conducted in a fashion which had made external the relationship between the subject and the social. In other words, with some exceptions, it could be said that the subject in Foucault's earlier works was an effect of the social. But latter studies herald the internal relationship between the subject and the social by looking at how the person acts in a manner in which he himself is the object of these acts, the domain in which they are performed, the tools and instruments used, and the subject which acts."¹⁴

Foucault contends that it is not possible to talk of the individual person as the subject in the senses it has been talked about so far, *viz* as the subject being the fundamental condition for the possibility of *human* existence. When discussing the person it is necessary to distinguish between the subject and self-consciousness / experience and to take into account the relationship between the subject, self-consciousness / experience and the social :

"It is experience which is the rationalization of a process, itself provisional which results in a subject, or rather, in subjects. I will call subjectivization the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject, or more precisely, of subjectivity which is of course only one of the given possibilities of organization of a self-consciousness."¹⁵

This understanding of the subject comes as Foucault's critique of the position on the subject held by phenomenology and existentialism : of the tendency to construct, *a priori*, the subject as the fundamental condition of human existence. The individual who is traditionally called the subject should be located within the sphere of modes of subjectivization or the games of truth

which encapsulate all human relations. The games are" ... an ensemble of procedures which lead to a certain result, which can be considered in function of its principles and its rules of procedures, as valid or not, as winner or loser",¹⁶ in which the subject necessarily has to recognize itself as its own truth.

The subject plays these games of truth in order to "... direct the behaviour of another",¹⁷ that is, to try and govern others by influencing their behaviour. Hence, it can be held that the individual's subjectivity formed (in the sense of its acquiring a form) by that field of human relations called the social, and by the 'other'.

What does such a position on subjectivity imply? It implies for instance that the moment the person locates himself in any game of truth his subjectivity is partially defined by the nature of the game which he is intent on playing, because the games are not something which are entirely invented by the individual but "... patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group."¹⁸ Moreover, this particular subjectivity differs according to the differences in the games of truth in which the individual is located. An individual thus can be, say, a political subject or a sexual subject depending on whether he is playing the game of truth of politics or the game of truth of sexuality.

Such a person however is not entirely hemmed in by his socially-influenced partial subjectivity. Within any game of truth, the individual always has the possibility of maneuvering himself actively and lending a certain 'personal' stamp to the game. Here, it is tempting to read Foucault as saying that insofar as the aim of playing the games of truth is to influence the behaviour of the other, our individual has to generate and organize something from within himself (which cannot be part of his other, i.e., of the other individuals or his social subjectivity) in order to *change* or *move* the behaviour of the other.

From such a contention it is a small step to contend that this personal active principle within the individual is not completely appropriated by the social subjectivity or the other, and thus can be called the essence of the human subject or better still - the individual as the subject itself. In other words, no matter what the characteristics of the games of truth, of the social and the other, the subject (as this active principle) is always present and necessary.

However, there are a couple of possible refutations of such a reading of

Foucault's understanding. The *prima facie* refutation is that such a pure or essential subject can be thought of only if the very important corollary of the person directing the conduct of the other is ignored. As a matter of fact, it cannot. This means that the person locates himself in the games of truth where one of his principal aims is to influence the other. Thus, the other is always and forever stamped on the so-called pure subject-force for this subject to be identified as a separate entity. And, the moment he is located within a game of truth his subjectivity is partially defined by the nature of the game. Hence, it is possible to contend that (according to Foucault) it is impossible to conceive of the subject as an independent entity within the individual (i.e. independent of the 'partial subjectifiers' of the other and the social), thus making the individual identical with the subject. Therefore, individual subjectivity is contextual (because of the partial subjectivization of the games-ensembles) and qualified (by the other). Moreover, the other's subjectivity itself - through the same process as the individual - is contextualized and qualified so that the contextuality and qualification of our individual becomes multiplied *ad infinitum*.

This refutation however can be held to be more external and historic-psychological than internal and logical. The internal and logical refutation is attempted by Foucault through the two moves of (i) raising the issue of power and freedom in this context, and (ii) effecting a preparation of the subject as self-consciousness / experience. The issue of power and freedom arises when it is asked as to what is the reason for the person to influence the behaviour of the other in the games of truth. As Foucault seems to revolve so much around this 'need' in persons to change the other it is important to know the reasons for it. Apparently, in Western societies the

"... games can be extremely numerous and thus the temptation to determine the conduct of others is that much greater. However, the more the people are free in respect of each other, the greater the temptation on both sides to determine the conduct of others. The more open the game, the more attractive and fascinating it is."¹⁹

The more person is free the more he is tempted to influence the other. Why this temptation? A person is free if he is able to exert a sense of control over the force of desire which is accepted as a natural and necessary given. However, the person's control must not exceed the limits of moderation both ways. That is, he cannot let desire swamp him and he cannot swamp desire through complete abstinence. Therefore, the temptation here is to either get

totally swamped by desire or control desire to the point of its extinction. Neither of these positions show a free person.

This was arrived at by Foucault by effecting an inversion of the Weberian theme of the relationship between subjectivity, asceticism and truth :

“Max Weber posed the question : If one wants to behave rationally and regulate one’s action according to true principles, what part of one’s self should be renounced? What is the ascetic price of reason? To what kind of asceticism should one submit? I posed the opposite question : How have certain kinds of interdictions required the price of certain kinds of knowledge about oneself? What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce anything?”²⁰

This inversion is based on the ‘discovery’ Foucault makes (and the importance he attaches to it) of the momentous distinction between the Greco-Roman discourse of ‘taking care of oneself’ and the Delphic (and contemporary Western as well) discourse of ‘knowing oneself’.²¹ The contemporary construction of selfhood is based on a scientific understanding of what the self is in relationship to desire, whereas the Greco-Roman construction is based - reminiscent of Nietzsche’s position²² - on an attempt to impart on selfhood a constantly evolving style of living and character-formation. In pointing out different notions of subjectivity in the history of the West itself, Foucault is contending that the dominant notion of the unifying subject is not a transcendental truth. Furthermore, he goes beyond this empirico-historical point to sketch certain theoretical conditions.

Firstly, he says that the different notion of the non-unifying subject (despite the obvious emphasis and relative autonomy of it) can be seen only in relation to the unifying subject. Secondly, (a) he does not state that either of these notions of the subject are ontological truths in the historic-transcendental sense of the term, and (b) he does not posit any of these two conceptualizations as desirable alternatives of selfhood.

By going to great lengths to picturize historical notions of a non-unifying subject, Foucault undermines the transcendental ‘truth’ of the unifying subject. Hence, it is not possible to say that the unifying subject is ontologically true. Moreover, by calling the non-unifying subject an ‘effect’ of ‘subjectivization’ as much as the unifying subject, he is not allowing himself to consider the non-unifying subject as ontologically true either. Also, there is a persistent

concern not to glorify any one of these notions. Foucault's sarcasm at the Christian notion comes out without much difficulty. And despite the emphasis on the Greek and Greco-Roman understandings he still thinks that the Greeks were in "... a profound error."²³

Foucault is implicitly making the third important point that it is not only not unproblematic but also immaterial to decide whether these notions of the subject are ontologically and historically true or not. Rather, it is much more pertinent to realize the crucial role and nature of 'critique' in this context.

Critique enables one to develop a relationship to one's self which is one of creative activity and not one geared towards the excavation of an 'essential' self. Such a critical exercise is more true to historical experience too. As the study of the history of sexuality shows, the Western subject (as sought to be defined by sexuality down the ages) is not so much identical as governed by a set of practices which constitute a veritable art or aesthetic of existence.²⁴ These practices were designed for the aesthetic transformation of the subject rather than for the liberative expression of some essential and unifying selfhood. Using his own methodology as an example here, Foucault contends that in order to make a critique of the unifying subject it is necessary to *assume* the ontological truth of such a subject, if only to critically demolish it.

He can be perceived as making this point about the assumption because of the first two inter-related theoretical moves above; - he insists that the non-unifying subject can be seen only in relation to the unifying subject. In other words, the counterfactual cannot operate as a critical counterfactual unless and until it is seen in relation to the factual. Secondly, neither of these factual or counterfactual is ontologically true in a strict logical sense. Therefore, these intertwined moves mean that a critique in this context, in order to be a critique, cannot rely on statements of ontological truths but that, in order to demolish contested notion, it must assume the ontological truth of such a notion.

The important requirement for critique is thus the assumption of ontological truth and not the ontological truth itself. Furthermore, it is in the necessity of this assumption that the power of critique lies. For, in emphasizing on the necessity of the assumption and making the ontological truth itself irrelevant to the argument, critique verily creates the condition of the destruction of that which it erects, that is, it fulfils its purpose.

Roughly, it could be said that critique conceptualized thus at least grants its object of criticism a certain space, in the sense that such an allowance is integral to the very logic of critique. It is not only this allowance (thus avoiding the booby-trap of the ontological truth itself) which makes critique a pass to superior subjectivity. It is that in the more elementary sense of being non-totalizing (hence considerate and not domineering) and self-critical.

Such a self-critical and non-totalizing subject poses a challenge to one of the central tenets of mental distress analysis, *viz* that a fragmented self is one of the main symptoms and causes of mental distress. To accept Foucault's position even as a starter would mean contending that an at once self-creative and self-destructive subject need not necessarily imply a mentally distressed individual. To be sure, such a person might actually be more mentally sound (because freer) subject than a unifying one (which could be more totalizing and repressive). The stylizing subject might be transforming himself through procedures of engaging the world which may not be consistent (or unifying) over space and time, thus giving the impression of a mentally distressed person. On the other hand, the individual who does violence to complexities, varieties and opportunities by trying to gather a unity through abstraction may well appear to be sane, rational and mentally healthy. When therefore Foucault is laying bare the actualities underlying all these processes, his conceptualization of the subject has the poetenial of significantly changing some of the prevailing understandings in mental distress analysis.

However, what appears as a difficulty with such Foucaultian position is best kept in sight. As critique has to assume the ontological truth of the dominant notion of the subject and not talk of the ontological truth itself, the foundations of such a subject appear firm at the beginning but betray weaknesses later. The foundations are apparently firm because it is not said that the subject is always and for all times false. No. For moment it is given a (albeit assumptive) truth value. But this momentary ground seems to be conceded if only to whisk the carpet under the feet of such a subject. The assumptive imputation (and not the ontological truth itself) appear to make the foundations of the subject weak. This weakness seems to be located in the heart of critique. Therefore, critique is likely to contain the seeds of destruction of the subject to which it gives momentary birth.²⁵

The above doubt notwithstanding gaining a comprehensive apprehension

of the aesthetically technological individual's structures and the fault-lines therein would be profitable for mental distress analysis. A better illumination of the intricacies of the general tensions of the human is likely to lead to a more adequate response to the common lacunae in psychiatric alternatives, viz an explanation of why, under similar circumstances, some persons express mental distress whilst others do not. A broad guideline for this quest could be Foucault's perennial question : "What are we and what could we be? What forms of new subjectivity can we create that will not originate in subjection?"²⁶ Also, in attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to take into account the more serious commentaries on Foucault from the Postmodern, Poststructural and Frankfurt schools of thought.

NOTES

1. Thomas S. Szasz (1984) *The Myth of Mental Illness : Foundations of the Theory of Personal Conduct*, London : Granada, p. 17.
2. Michel Foucault cited in Alan Sheridan (1984) *Michel Foucault : The Will to Truth*, London Tavistock, p. 8.
3. Here, it must not be assumed that Foucault takes subservient the social to the personal, for after an elaborate analysis of the subject he is found developing a "political technology of individuals" in contrast to the more individualistic "technological of the self". See Michel Foucault (1988) 'The Political Technology of Individuals' in Luther H. Martin *et al.* (eds.) *Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, London : Tavistock, pp. 145-62.
4. See Peter Dews (1987) *Logics of Disintegration : Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London : Verso, pp. 150-61.
5. One of the comprehensive contrastive studies of Foucault and Critical Theory. in relation to the issue of the subject, is that of Peter Miller (1987) *Domination and Power*, London : Routledge
6. For a more detailed examination of the Marxist selfhood and subjectivity, see Lucien Seve (1978) *Man in Marxist Theory and the Psychology of Personality* Sussex : Harvester.

7. Karl Marx (1986) *Capital : A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1* Moscow : Progress, p. 173.
8. See Michel Foucault in Colin Gordon (ed.) (1980) *Power / Knowledge : Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972- 1977*. New York : Pantheon, p. 58.
9. Michel Foucault (1982) 'The Subject and Power' as *Afterword* in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1982) *Michel Foucault : Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Hemel Hempstead : Harvester, p. 208. It needs to be noted that Foucault begins the problematization of the subject even earlier than what he mentions here. It is evident in an early literary work in which he speaks appreciatively of the author Raymond Roussel's discovery of an absence of 'being' in words which are supposed to most completely envelope meaning. See Michel Foucault (1987) *Death and the Labyrinth : The World of Raymond Roussel*, London : Athlone.
10. Michel Foucault (1984a) 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom' in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.) (1988) *The Final Foucault*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, p. 1. The sketch made in this paper is mainly based on a selective study of these writings and discussions of the 'last' Foucault. The attempt is limited by the fact that many of his writings of this period are in typescript form, and are mostly protected.
11. This is the title of Foucault's 1981-81 lectures at the College de France.
12. For this retrospection (and for retrospection on other areas) see the valuable collection of interviews with Michel Foucault in Gordon, 1980.
13. Michel Foucault (1983) 'The Minimalist Self' in Lawrence D.Kritzman (ed.) *Michel Foucault : Politics, Philosophy, Culture - Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, New York : Routledge, p. 14.
14. Cf. Graham Burchell *et al.* (eds.) (1991) *The Foucault Effect : Studies in Governmentality*. Hemel Hempstead : Harvester, p. 134.
15. Michel Foucault (1984b) 'The Return of Morality' in Kritzman, 1983, p. 253.
16. Foucault, 1984a, p. 16.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
18. *Ibid.*

19. Foucault, 1984a, p. 20.
20. Michel Foucault (1988) 'Technologies of the Self' in Martin, 1988, p. 17.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 19-22
22. Friedrich Nietzsche (1974) *The Gay Science*, New York : Vintage, p. 232.
23. Michel Foucault cited in Mark Poster (1986) 'Foucault and the Tyranny of Greece' in David Couzens Hoy (ed.) *Foucault : A Critical Reader*, Oxford : Basil Blackwell, p. 210. This avoidance of the Platonic interpretation without taking the Delphic as his own, enables Foucault to ensure that his position is not merely the one of his times. See Peter De Bolla ((1989) *The Discourse of the Sublime : Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, Oxford : Basil Blackwell, p. 5.
24. Cf. the following three-volume work by Foucault : - *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 : An Introduction*, New York : Random House, 1978; *The Use of Pleasure*, London : Allen Lane, 1988; *The Care of the Self*, London : Allen Lane, 1988. It is worth the while to notice the subtle shifts, from a 'counterrepressive-hypothesis' to an aesthetics of being, in Foucault's positions on subjectivity within these volumes on sexuality. See for instance Foucault's interview ('On the Genealogy of Ethics : An Overview of Work in Progress') in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983, pp. 229-52.
25. To an extent, Foucault has been able to locate this duality at the *epistemological* plane of Western thought in his early work, *The Order of Things* (New York, Vintage, 1970).
26. Michel Foucault cited in William R. Hackman (1982) 'The Foucault Conference', *Telos*, 51, p. 196.

A CRITIQUE OF ALTHUSSERIAN CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

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There are infinite aspects for our knowledge, experience, life etc. Any aspect of this can be elaborated in detail. At many times we would be compelled to do so in order to deepen our understanding. Althusser writes about ideology. (It is an aspect of ruling classes art of ruling). It says how people are compelled to accept the perspective of ruling classes/state as their own perspective as the most relevant perspective in the contemporary world in a class society where 1.5 crore people are dying in poverty each year. Such an analysis is worthy. But all studies in this dimension should be very careful in at least two points.

1. It should be very careful of generalisations of the findings of this particular aspect.
2. It should consider it historically.

Otherwise such analyses are liable to end in the quite opposite (of what is intended). Althusser doesn't take enough care to avoid this fate. That is why a criticism is relevant. Althusser's essays on ideology are often read as a contribution to Marxian thought. But they are not.

This paper, first of all is trying to examine Althusser's concept of ideology and knowledge; then the nature of "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"¹, in it's existing form. After this, 'ideology' is compared to the position of historical materialism. 'Ideology' is then assessed in the last part of the paper.

1. Ideology and Knowledge

What is ideology?

Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence². In order to maintain the state power a reproduction of

working classe's submission to the rules of established order is needed³. It is needed for the agents of oppression and exploitation. If repressive state apparatus functions 'by violence' ideological state apparatus functions 'by ideology'⁴.

Generally it seems to be correct. Althusser includes, Church, educational institutions, family etc. in the ideological state apparatus. According to Althusser parliamentary democracy also belongs to the political ideological state apparatus.

But whether the ideologies with which these apparatuses work are purely imaginary or pure dream or pure illusion⁵. Modern education opens a continent of knowledge which allows any person to read and write and understand the complex nature of state and state apparatuses. Rather than a regime of feudal monarchy, 'Democracy' allows a better role for individuals for involving in political process, trade unions; allows a more democratic role for workers. That much these ideologies and ideological apparatuses are real, progressive and accessible. There is no doubt that in a *stable* situation under *reactionary* rule all these are contributive to the maintenance of reactionary power. As far as this situation is concerned Althusser's arguments have validity but this does not alter the situation.

What we see in Althusser⁶ is presented as Marx's comments. But the comments cannot be used to form a general concept, because it is contextual. Therefore the entire responsibility goes to Althusser, not to Marx. We shall take *German Ideology*. Marx says that the whole body of it's enquiries has actually sprung from a definite philosophical system, that of Hegel⁷. What we can understand from this? Is Hegel's philosophical system a pure dream? Marx's answer is negative. In *Capital*, Marx says that he openly avowed himself the pupil of that mighty thinker and coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to Hegel⁸. He further clears that the mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present it's general from of working in comprehensive and conscious manner. It further shows that Marx never conceived Hegel's system as a pure illusion or merely a system of imaginary relations.

Let us return to Althusser. Ben Brewster who had translated *Reading Capital* says some thing about ideology and knowledge in his glossary. This glossary was prepared with the full account of Althusser. According to Althusser, ideology precedes the science that is produced making an epistemological break (Of course in *Essays on Ideology* Althusser makes a change for the concept of

'epistemological break' and says that in Marx philosophical revolution preceded epistemological break with it⁹), but it survives along side science as an essential element of every social formation including a socialist and even communist society¹⁰. Terry Eagleton also explains Althusserian concept of knowledge in the same way. For Althusser knowledge in the strict sense means *Scientific* knowledge; the kind of knowledge of say, capitalism which Marx's *Capital* rather than Dickens's *Hard Times* allows us¹¹. Frederick Jameson also seems to have same idea about Althusser's 'knowledge'¹².

Let us examine Marx's own contributions. At the time of French Revolution Marx expected a European revolution in the immediate future. Marx's *Capital* itself did not see the major political function of European capital -- the development of its imperialist features. We can bring numerous such examples. All these indicate that the so-called scientific work and knowledge are not free from imaginary concepts about the relation between people and definite historical epoch in which they live. This proves that the strict Althusserian dichotomy of science and ideology is wrong.

Then what is left? We can't see any ideology and science in strict sense. There is some ideology in science and some science in ideology. Then an ideology which is a pure illusion or purely imaginary and a science which is devoid of all traces of illusion are existing only as a pure abstraction, an imaginary reality of the existing; and exists only in Althusserian systems. An ideology stands exclusively for the ruling ideas of the ruling classes¹³ if and only if it is defined so.

2. Contradictions in Ideology

Dialectics admits the universality of contradiction, but according to Pierry Macherey Althusser's ideology is beyond contradictions.¹⁴ There can be ideological contradiction only if we put ideology in contradiction with itself. Macherey is not absolutely wrong in interpreting Althusser. But ideology can also mean that either a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group or the general process of the production of meaning and ideas. Althusser is also not ignorant of this (1971, 158). Even in the first sense (Raymond Williams admits that Marx and Engels used ideology in this sense also). There are contradictions in all relations which ideology has. Here we see three of such contradictions.

2.1 Historically each ideology plays a right and wrong role

Protestant religious ideology of Martin Luther and Calvin played a progressive role in peasant uprisings against feudal monarchy. It co-incided with the uprisings of the new age.¹⁵ Even today the religious ideology of Liberation theology works against ruling ideologies and Imperialists and bourgeois democrats in Nicaragua.

There is no doubt the capitalist ideology is another ideological apparatus which enslaves the masses. But bourgeois ideology pitilessly torn asunder the motely feudal ties that bound man to his natural superiors; it has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour of chivalrous enthusiasm of philistine sentimentalism. Thus without any hesitation Marx and Engels declared that bourgeoisie (and bourgeois ideology) played a most revolutionary role in history¹⁶. There is no need for more examples.

When we say that protestant religious ideology is a reactionary ideology it only means that dominating aspect of that ideology is against the progress of humanity today. But in sixteenth century dominating aspect of Calvin's or Luther's ideology was against the reactionary power of Catholic Church and feudal Monarchy. When the era of feudalism ceased to exist and protestant church did not accept any other progressive ideas, it became reactionary.

This is equally applicable to capitalism and its ideology.

Suppose we accept the ideology of religion and bourgeois politics as imaginary and as exclusively serving the ruling classes; then the major issues mentioned above would be avoided.

2.2 There are Contradictions in a particular Ideology

"Every thing is a unity of opposites", this is a fundamental concept of dialectical materialism. This is equally applicable to both reactionary and revolutionary ideologies. This is because no knowledge cannot escape from the contradictions of a society in which it is produced and practiced. According to Pierre Macherey ideology can sustain a contradictory debate, for ideology exists precisely in order to efface all trace of contradiction.¹⁷ No ideology can escape from contradiction. If any such ideology exists it would be only an abstraction of one aspect of (without any connection with history) real ideology.

The best example is Hegel. We have already seen what Marx said about Hegelian system in *German Ideology* and what he later said about him in *Capital*. Now we shall consider another ideological aspect. According to Engels, no proposition has earned more gratitude from narrow-minded governments and wrath from equally narrow minded liberals than Hegel's famous statement : all that is real is rational; and all that is rational is real¹⁸. At the time of Frederick William III it was applauded as a blatant sanctification of the existing order of things, the philosophical benediction upon despotism, the police state, arbitrary justice, and censorship. But in 1789 the French monarchy had become so unreal, that is to say, so robbed of all necessity, so irrational that it had to be destroyed by the Great Revolution. Thus the Hegelian proposition turns into its opposite through Hegelian dialectics itself : All that is real in the sphere of human history becomes irrational in the course of time, and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality.¹⁹

This contradictory development can also be applied to Christianity. It even now suffers a split from liberation theologians.

This is equally applicable to revolutionary ideology also. When Kerensky's government was overthrown, Bolsheviks stood for a revolutionary power. But as soon as the power gained Lenin found that every thing was not so revolutionary. The workers were building a new society without themselves having become a new people, or cleansed of the filth of the old world; they were standing up to their knees in that truth. Lenin thought that they could only dream of clearing the filth way at once.²⁰ Soviet society defeated foreign aggression but failed to defeat this ideological aggression which first appeared as an opposite in revolutionary ideology of Bolsheviks.

2.3 All ideologies are Destined to death

Everything which is born will also die. Ideologies will die in two senses. First they change according to the needs of different societies. Secondly they cannot protect any reactionary rule for ever.

Althusser discovers that ideology's reality is external to it. Althusser rigorously maintains this position.²¹ Since it's reality is outside, history is also outside of it. It has no history, it is omnipresent in it's immutable form through

out history.²² But it has a material existence.²³ Can you find any phenomena which have it's own history in strict sense? Can we say anything which has a relative autonomy, and has no history? As we have found in the beginning there cannot any pale empty inverted system of ideas which interpellates individuals as subjects in strict sense.

Althusser's twisting of language is so bad that it makes Althusser's language too complicated. Althusser could not deny the reality of ideology eventhough it is outside of it. Anything that has a reality (outside/inside) and has a material existence must have connections with history and makes some influence on the world and historical epoch in which it exists.

Althusser seems to have carried away by the flow of his language and lost all logical sense in this thrill.

Anything that generates in history will transform into some thing else or it will die; and ideology is not an exception to this.

First, ideology of German Junkers is different from ideology of Fascism; ideology of social democracy is different from ideology of bourgeois democracy. Even the ideology of Indian parliamentary democracy is different from that of American democracy. Thus different ideologies are historically determined (and also influences history), different ideologies corresponds a definite mode of production and will be changed in the coming era. The change of it is not determined by interests of the ruling classes but by class struggle.

Secondly, eventhough the function of the ideological investment is to bring about the hegenonic position of the dominant classes, resistance is nevertheless written into the structure of all discourse. From the beginning borgeois ideology made all attempts to prevent the influence of Marxism but failed to achieve this. Modern neocolonial ideology is trying to distract the attention from it's real dynamics; but inspite of it's electronic medias heaps of theories, literature it becomes more and more helpless.

Macherey says that literary discourse is a parody, as a contestation of language rather than a representation of reality.²⁴ He is wrong. All great works would be a mutiny against reactionary ideologies. If ideology is plunged into every pore of social life, all aspects of social life are equally capable of producing a resistance to it -- that much they are real. Even some sections among the ruling classes are capable of producing a resistance to it -- that much they are

real. Even some sections among the ruling classes are capable of making a resistance to rule and ruling ideology by their contemplation of the situation of the classes which are down trodden.

The unity (coincidence, identity, equal action) of opposites is conditional, temporary, transitory and relative. The struggle of mutually exclusive opposites is absolute, just as development and motion are absolute.²⁵ The chance for coming of an ideology for a particular period, the possibility of an ideology for a particular period, the possibility of an ideology to serve a definite class interest, possibility of an ideology to have a certain effect in a particular period to have some effect in another period are based on several conditions. They exist only for a certain time, and always tend to change their nature and are related to a number of ideologies and realities. But the struggle between opposites, that is intended purpose of an ideology and it's capacity for serving that purpose, is *Absolute*. Althusser does not see this fundamental aspect.

3. Clarifying Comments on Ideology

3.1 Ideology / Consciousness / Culture

Marxists never conceived ideology as Althusser maintains. However they are well aware of the problem of consciousness. Influence of the culture of reactionary ruling classes evades political consciousness. What is meant by this is that the most revolutionary classes and even communist revolutionaries can be influenced by the ideas of the classes which they try to defeat.

Marx's *Eighteenth Brumier of Louis Bonaparte* is strikingly clear on this point. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.²⁶ At the time of revolution people conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes. This often plays a bad role in revolution. The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw it's poetry from the past, but only from future.²⁷ Proletarian revolutions like those of the nineteenth century, criticized themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts. That is how we can fight against ideas of imaginary relationships which again and again filtrate into our consciousness.

Nowadays it is very interesting to see how Marx defined the dictatorship of the proletariat. Dictatorship of the proletariat aims at the abolition of all relations of production on which they rest, at the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production and at the *revolutionizing of all ideas that result from these social relations.*²⁸

However Marx never thought that this can be achieved by one stroke. That is why Marx said that men make their own history not just as they please but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.

Macherey thinks that the writer and critic submit to the same myth of language.²⁹ Althusser thought that criticism of ideology will also involve ideology. If eternal means omnipresent, trans-historical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, Althusser dares to accept Freud's expression word for word and writes : ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious.³⁰ However Marx thought that if there is no class contradictions then illusory ideas are not needed to enforce among the masses for their submission before the rule. Each significant step of class struggle is an important step towards this. Even though there will be illusions and imaginary relations with the existing world, it would be fundamentally different from reactionary ideology of class society. It is because of this historical perspective he supported Abraham Lincoln and criticized Otto Luning, Herman Putman, Karl Grun etc. for their criticisms against bourgeois opposition in Germany.

Lenin did not seem to have paid enough attention to this problem of culture before revolution. However he has given supreme importance to the problem after October revolution. He thought that the task of raising the cultural level was one of the most urgent problem confronting them. They need a culture to fight against 'red type' and bribery. 'Red type' and bribery is clearly an ideological product of a class society. Lenin considers this as an ulcer which no military victories and no political reforms can heal but only by raising the' cultural level.³¹

Perhaps there would be no political genius who was so concerned about culture like Mao. His post revolutionary works are extremely important in this matter.

Although bourgeoisie had been overthrown in China, Mao thought, it

was still using old ideas, culture, customs and habits of exploiting classes to corrupt masses, capture their minds and were endeavour to stage a comeback.³² So the cultural revolution aimed to revolutionize people's ideology.³³ However it seemed to him extremely difficult. Later Mao revealed that the people from whom he wanted to develop a new leadership weren't free from bourgeois ideology. This idea can also see in Mao's "Yenan Speeches on Art and Literature." But this has nothing to do with containment strategy of ideology of the concept that every criticism itself is ideological. Because Mao never considered this difficult situation as an ultimate fate, but could overcome through repeated struggles, however prolonging it may be.

3.2 Two aspects of Knowledge

Ben Brewster reveals us that ideology survives along side science as an essential element of every social formation including a socialist and even communist society.³⁴ This raises a question. Do the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence exist in socialism? The answer is 'Yes'. 'Because man can never have complete knowledge. Man can have real knowledge but can't have all the real knowledge.

Man's faculty of knowing is limited both externally and internally or objectively and subjectively. Subjectively his brain have a limited capacity and objectively he can build his knowledge only upon the foundation which has been given to him. This given knowledge is limited and decrepeted in various ways.

There is a third limitation which exists in a class society which mostly affects the knowledge provided by social sciences. A minority has to distort truths about social reality in order to maintain their power. This is the realm of Althusserian 'ideology' which is a device of Ideological State Apparatus. If any particular class does not want to impose their rule upon majority, they would not need to distort social reality. Even though the limitations maintained above will exist in a classless society; the third would not exist in it. In this sense reactionary ideology (ideology proper) would not exist in a classless society in order to reproduce the submission of the working class before the established order. Traces may survive but it would be fundamentally different from ruling ideology of a class society.

3.3 Ideology and Historical Materialism

Ideology is widely applauded for its theory of subject formation.

There is no practice except by and in an ideology and there is no ideology except by the subject and for the subjects; ideology interpellates individuals as subjects. Subjects desigrate for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence or he recognises him and his position under the laws of a class society as his own and real.³⁵

Marx made it clear in his famous Preface to *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*. In social production of life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total and these relations of production constitutes the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.³⁶

This is how Marx made the positioning of the individual subject on the world to which we are necessarily restricted. Where does Marx differ from Althusser? For Marx, the human beings are not slaves of the above mentioned real basis. At certain stage of their *development*, material productive forces of society, come into conflict with the existing relations of production. Marx writes that legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic in short *ideological* forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.³⁷ In the third thesis on Feuerbach, Marx speaks about *revolutionary practice*³⁸ and criticises Feuerbach's materialism for forgetting that it is men that change the circumstances.

It is correct that the ideas of the ruling classes are the ruling ideas³⁹ and the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. Althusser is talkative only about this aspect and keeps mum about how men fight it out against this in revolutionary practice which is the living spirit of historical materialism. Althusser presents this partial aspect, subjective formation and ideological interpellation, as a sole reality. It may be argued that Althusser is presenting only one aspect of social reality but that presentation itself is beyond agreeable limits and utterly biased.

Conclusion

Althusser's notion of ideology is too abstract and too biased which neglects creative aspects of human thinking. In appearance it makes an image of a closed, invincible fort from which man can never escape. It is well-known that how specific are these ideas in Macherey and how it influenced Foucault's 'episteme'. It may be widely acceptable to the pessimistic mood of neo-colonial world and suffice for intellectual fancy of academicians but severely deformed from the view of conscious social practice.

Frederich Jameson says that Althusser has the great merit of stressing the gap between the local positioning of individual subject and totality of class structures in which he or she is situated, a gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking as 'experience'. Jameson forgets that before a hundred years historical materialism had stressed it. It (Historical Materialism)' also warned the possible attempts of reactionary ideology to span⁴⁰ or co-ordinate it by means of conscious and unconscious representations. Still, it taught how it could be overcome through revolutionary practice. But, Alas! what Althusser has made is an horror story about such gaps and ideologies' possible attempts to measure it; ultimately this would be helpful to reactionary ideology itself.

NOTES

1. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 162.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.* p., 133.
4. *Ibid.* p., 143.
5. *Ibid.* p., 159.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *On Historical Materialism*, p. 15.

8. *Capital*, p. 26.
9. *Essay on Ideology*, p. 104.
10. *Reading Capital*, p. 314.
11. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, p. 18.
12. *Post Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 52.
13. *Creativity and Freedom in Marxian Perspective*, p. 62.
14. *A Theory of Literary Production*, pp. 130-131.
15. Marx, Engels, *Selected Works*, p. 105.
16. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 105.
17. *A Theory of Literary Production*, pp. 30-31.
18. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 158.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 359.
20. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 424-425.
21. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 159.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
24. *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 61.
25. Mao Tse - Tung, *Selected Works*, Vol 5, p. 366.
26. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 127.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 401.
28. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 127.
29. *A Theory of Literary Production*, p. 62.

30. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 161 and *Reading Capital*, p. 314.
31. *Lenin, Collected Works*, Vol. 33. p. 63.
32. *Mao Papers*, p. 117.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.
34. *Reading Capital*, p. 314.
35. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 170.
36. *On Historical Materialism*, p. 134.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
39. *German Ideology*, p. 67.
40. *Post Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 416.

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6. Frederic Jameson, *Post Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London : Verso, 1991).
7. V. I. Lenin *Collected Works*, Vol. 33 (Moscow : Progress Publishers 1965).

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