

# New Waves in Political Philosophy

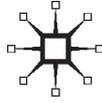
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# Contents

<i>Foreword to The New Waves in Philosophy Series</i>	vi
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xv
1 Feminism and the Subject of Politics <i>Amy Allen</i>	1
2 Liberty and Its Circumstances: A Functional Approach <i>Lena Halldenius</i>	19
3 Human Needs and Political Judgment <i>Lawrence Hamilton</i>	40
4 Rethinking Ideology <i>Rahel Jaeggi</i>	63
5 Making Nonsense of Loyalty to Country <i>Simon Keller</i>	87
6 Finding Theoretical Concepts in the Real World: The Case of the Precariat <i>Mika LaVaque-Manty</i>	105
7 Reflexive Democracy as Popular Sovereignty <i>Kevin Olson</i>	125
8 Democratic Legitimacy without Collective Rationality <i>Fabienne Peter</i>	143
9 The Political Philosophy of Social Suffering <i>Emmanuel Renault</i>	158
10 The Subject of Multiculturalism: Culture, Religion, Language, Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race? <i>Sarah Song</i>	177
11 The Aesthetic of Freedom <i>Ajume H. Wingo</i>	198
<i>Index</i>	221

# 4

## Rethinking Ideology

*Rahel Jaeggi*

In this chapter, I try to make a case for the revitalization of the critique of ideology as a form of social critique. Although this concept cannot be solely attributed to Marxism, it did reach a certain “maturity”<sup>1</sup> in Marx’s writings, and it has been embraced by the various traditions of “Western Marxism” up until contemporary Critical Theory. Today, the conjunctural tide has turned against it. Does this mean, however, that there are no more ideologies – or merely that there is no more ideology critique? I build my case for a reconstruction of the critique of ideology on the following diagnosis: One, I believe that there still are certain social circumstances, certain forms of social domination that require a critique of ideology. Two, to regain and develop the concept of ideology critique, we must not only reopen the question of how exactly a critique of ideology works – even at the peak of its popularity, this was frequently anything but clear, as is often the case with popular theorems – but also critically reconstruct some of its basic assumptions. It is, then, a matter of both bringing the critique of ideology into the present and of finding a new understanding of it.

I will begin by working out the specific character of ideology critique. After (1) a short approximative introduction of the concept, I will (2) focus on dissolving two paradoxes that are characteristic of the method of ideology critique: ideologies are, as Adorno knew, at once both true and false, and they also seem to be simultaneously normative and non-normative. By (3) consistently linking ideology critique to the approach of immanent critique following Hegel, it is possible to understand both those paradoxes. In the course of this, it (4) becomes clear both that the approach of ideology critique has its own normative dimension and what some of its problems might be.

One reason why the project of renewing the critique of ideology might indeed be “worth the trouble,” contrary to Richard Rorty’s opinion,<sup>2</sup> is that it would allow us to see some very acute problems of the current debate about forms of social critique in a new light. I propose that, as a specific type of immanent critique, the critique of ideology actually goes beyond the

often discussed but not very productive alternative of external and internal critique. Namely, it opposes attempts to determine the standards of critique “externally” (and thus avoids the Hegelian critique of the morality of the “mere ought”), yet on the other hand, it is not wholly dependent on the ethical and moral resources of a given community either: it possesses a certain transgressive moment regarding those resources. Linked to this trait is a second aspect: the critique of ideology is interestingly positioned between the “anti-normative” positions in political philosophy, and those positions one might correspondingly call “normative.” In the face of the signs of strain and exhaustion that this conflict currently exhibits, the critique of ideology might be reconstructed as a position that lays claim to a different kind of normativity, beyond those two alternatives. My thesis is that this possibility is due to the fact that ideology critique (as a type of immanent critique) is nurtured by a specific link between analysis and critique that has been ripped apart in both the normative and the anti-normative approach.

### **What is the critique of ideology?**

What, then, is the *critique of ideology*?<sup>3</sup> At first glance it seems really simple: the critique of ideology criticizes ideologies. But what are *ideologies*? This question, too, initially seems easy to answer: ideologies are ideas, but they are not just some disconnected ideas one might have or not have; rather, they are ideas that (necessarily or at any rate systematically) exist and evolve under particular conditions. Ideologies are systems of beliefs, but they have practical consequences. They have a practical effect and are themselves effects of a certain social practice.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it seems that ideologies have an odd status: the claim that something is an “ideology” means more than just an assertion that it is wrong or a mistake; but on the other hand, being mistaken is part of the nature of an ideology. A person under the influence of an ideology is not just subject to a wrong state of affairs but is also “in the grip” of a false interpretation of this state of affairs. To come at it from a different angle: ideologies constitute our relation to the world and thus determine the horizons of our interpretation of the world, or the framework in which we understand both ourselves and the social conditions, and also the way we operate within these conditions. If ideologies, as this view suggests, are the means by which the predominant situation is instilled “in the hearts and minds of the individuals” (as W.F. Haug phrased it, with a mild pathos<sup>5</sup>), then the *critique* of ideology uncovers or decodes the conditions that allow this domination to prevail.

### **Four aspects of the critique of ideology**

In the particular tradition of critique I would like to examine here, and when used in the particular sense in which I am interested (viz. ideology as

denoting something negative, that is, a pejorative use of the term, and the critique of ideology as an attempt to overcome that negative situation<sup>6</sup>), critique of ideology refers to a very specific type of critique.<sup>7</sup> Four aspects are characteristic for this type.

First, the critique of ideology is a *critique of domination*. However, it uses what one might call a “deep” approach. To criticize ideology, according to this particular understanding, is to attack what one might call mechanisms of “decontestation” or “deproblematization,”<sup>8</sup> that is, mechanisms that create the impression that a social situation as well as a person’s relation to him- or herself cannot be challenged or questioned. This includes phenomena of naturalization – something socially “made” is imagined to be something naturally or irreducibly “given” – but also processes such as the generalization of the particular, which features so prominently in Marx’s analysis of the legitimizing mechanism of civil society. Thus, the critique of ideology is a critique of domination as a critique of this kind of *decontestation* or *deproblematization*, and conversely, the decoding of these mechanisms as mechanisms of domination.

Second, a critique of ideology sets out the inner inconsistencies of a given situation from the *internal contradictions* or self-contradictions. Thus, it does not immediately counter something that is wrong with what is “right” and it does not apply an external standard to a given situation; instead (in a more complicated sense that I will explore at a later point) it makes use of the standards provided by that given situation.

Third, the critique of ideology (according to this tradition) is always based on a form of the *hermeneutics of suspicion*, as Paul Ricoeur puts it. Where it uncovers distortions in the individuals’ understanding of the world and themselves, as well as in the self-understanding of social entities, it operates with certain reservations regarding the self-interpretation of social entities and individuals, and also regarding the individuals’ *prima facie* interests.

Fourth, a further characteristic of the method of ideology critique is the link between *analysis* and *critique*. The idea is to criticize a state of affairs by analyzing it – in the sense that the analysis is not just an instrumental precondition of critique, but itself a part of the critical process.

### **On the topicality of the critique of ideology**

There are many indications that the presence of the “ideological element” or of “ideological” forms of domination is as strong as ever in today’s societies. The presumption that domination today has an immediate effect or impact – in other words, that it is not ideologically mediated – is, in my view, unsupportable.<sup>9</sup> In the European discussions about the restructuring of the systems of social security, for example, the loss of security and the

precarization of living arrangements (frequently criticized as neo-liberal) prevails (partly) by evoking ideals such as autonomy and creativity – ideals that are hard to dismiss out of hand, even though it is quite probable that those very ideals are currently used to justify processes of exclusion. And even though one might find word creations such as “Ich-AG” (Me LLC) (in the context of the labor market reforms that are known in Germany as “Hartz IV”<sup>10</sup>) not just euphemistic but even openly cynical in light of the often miserable forms of existence marked by a lack of security, they have been publicly elevated into a model one should imitate, this does not change the fact that these word creations also derive their ideological power from their link to ideas such as independence, self-reliance, and initiative; those are ideas that are shared even by members of our society who have nothing to gain from a loss of the forms of security provided by the social systems. Looking at these phenomena and others like it, one might claim that the current state of affairs practically begs for a critique of ideology.

Yet in the realm of theory, the “difficulties with the critique of ideology” are predominant for a number of reasons. Haven’t we lost truth or an unmasked reality as the point of reference a critique needs to unmask something as “mere ideology”? And if the critique of ideology strives to overcome domination by dissolving false images of the self and the world, on what basis – that is, from what position – can it achieve this?<sup>11</sup> The seemingly insurmountable asymmetry appearing between the critics of ideology and those “blinded by ideology”<sup>12</sup> and the paternalistic ramifications that go along with it is not the only problem; along with the very process of ideology critique, the question whether such a critique can be a critique *sui generis*, or whether it is dependent on normative standards that need to be established externally, is again open to debate.

### **The paradoxes of the critique of ideology**

I would like to start my argument with two claims. The *first* is Adorno’s remark that in ideologies, “truth and untruth are always entwined.”<sup>13</sup> The *second* is Anton Leist’s (critical) observation that the “myth of the critique of ideology” is its claim to be a “non-moralizing or non-normative critique” “that is nevertheless normatively significant.”<sup>14</sup> At first glance, both characterizations, if they are true, are apt to further obscure the problems of the critique of ideology: after all, according to the prevalent understanding, to claim that something can be both true and false is just as paradoxical as laying claim to a position that is ostensibly critical without being normative. However, the point and the productivity of the critique of ideology are hidden in exactly this seemingly paradoxical structure.

### The first paradox: The interpenetration of true and false

Let us turn to the first paradox, the interpenetration of true and false. How can an ideology be at once true and false? Is it, in fact, true and false in one and the same respect – and how would that be possible? And furthermore, if ideologies are supposed to be *simultaneously* true and false, might one not claim just as convincingly (or even more so) that they are *neither* true nor false? This would mean that in the case of ideologies, we are dealing not just with a peculiar interpenetration, but also with a peculiar inadequacy of the criterion of truth. (In that case, however, it would be far from clear how a critique of ideology could be carried out.) Let us start by asking which circumstance Adorno had in mind when he suggested this paradox.

### Freedom and equality as ideology

Consider a famous (but complex) example for the critique of ideology,<sup>15</sup> namely, Marx's assertion of the ideological character of the ideals of freedom and equality as they appear in capitalist civil society. The ideology of freedom and equality, as Marx understands it, is, in fact, simultaneously true and false (according to Marx's own interpretation). The natural law idea of freedom and equality evoked by capitalist civil society as its true organizational principle does on the one hand conform to the reality of civil society. The capitalistic contract of employment is concluded between (formally, i.e., legally) free and equal parties. After all, these are independent contract parties confronting each other, and, in a certain sense, they interact as free and equal: the employee is not a bondsman and there are no feudal law status restrictions. On the other hand, however, the reality of capitalist work relations seems to contradict these norms. Most employees are, in fact, *forced* to enter into such relations (on pain of starvation); furthermore, the existing material *inequality* developing between the parties of the contract is, according to Marx's analysis, not accidental but systematically induced.

One might answer: There you go! To talk about something being simultaneously true and false is at best an effective rhetorical figure, but if we disregard this aspect, this paradox is easy to solve. The ideas of freedom and equality are "true" in just one respect – in relation to the legal and political status of those concerned. In that regard, they adequately describe the reality they are supposed to describe. However, there is a second respect we can distinguish from this one, one we might call the aspect of material realization. In that respect, it would be clearly wrong to claim that freedom and equality have already been established in civil society.

To complicate this further, an additional fact has to be taken into account: according to Marx, the ideology of freedom and equality *itself is a factor* in the production of the coercion and the inequality mentioned above. To be instrumental to the reversal of the very ideas it embodies is

part of the *productive impact* of this ideology, it is part of its effect. The normative ideals are, therefore, not merely, not yet completely realized; rather, their realization has been reversed: the pattern of their reversal and inversion is written into the ideas themselves. Not only are freedom and equality not just “mere ideas,” they are ideas that had an impact on society and have informed or left their imprint on the social institutions. Their effect itself – and Marx believes this to be not an accidental but a necessary effect – undermines these ideals in the course of their own realization. (How can this be? If, as Jon Elster summarizes the Marxian analysis, in capitalism “exploitation is the generation of economic injustice through free market transactions,”<sup>16</sup> then the labor contract, as a precondition for the market exchange, is at once the embodiment of freedom and equality as well as a means of generating inequality. Here, there is not just talk of freedom and equality – “talking freedom” – without them being realized, but the way they are (and have to be) realized under the conditions of capitalist production produces as an effect a new, if hidden, way of being unfree and exploited.)

This systematic inconsistency between certain ideas and the social practice they inform is summarized in the phrase “*necessary false consciousness*.” This phrase has more layers than one might think at first glance. (1) On the one hand, the consciousness is false (as tradition has it), since it contains a false interpretation and understanding of reality. (2) However, if the consciousness is to be “necessary” as well, then this must be because it simultaneously corresponds to reality, after all. (3) Third, it is, in fact, not simply false on the one hand, and necessary on the other, but both at once: necessarily false. The consciousness is necessarily false because it cannot be anything but false; not because it necessarily deludes itself (i.e. not because there is a cognitive deficiency), but because it corresponds to a wrong reality. Therefore, it is not merely a false consciousness, but a *socially induced* false consciousness.<sup>17</sup> (This is why ideologies cannot be understood as conscious deceptions. Even if some social actors profit from ideologies in a variety of ways, an ideological structure is still something that affects all sides.)

### **Towards a solution of the paradox**

We have now made sense of the (seeming) paradox of the critique of ideology:

- Ideologies are simultaneously true and false, insofar as they correspond at once adequately and inadequately to “reality” (whatever that might be and however one might construe this relation of correspondence). Since they are socially induced, they are not merely an error or a cognitive mistake; in a certain sense, they are mistakes with better reasons, because they are grounded in the properties and conditions of reality.

- Ideologies are also simultaneously true and false, inasmuch as the norms they are attached to have an unrealized truth content.

After all, a critic of ideology does not criticize the ideals of freedom and equality themselves, but their deficient realization. However, the fact that the norm is not realized (this fact has ramifications for the critique's relation to its "standard" and I will return to it at a later point) has consequences for its truth content, as well. Thus, the ideology's "element of truth" (the ideal of equality) does not simply stay true under conditions that keep its realization deficient (or inversed). It is affected, as it were, by its "entanglement" with the element of untruth (Adorno). So what did we learn from this discussion of the first paradox? The entanglement of true and false that Adorno noticed made us realize that we are dealing with a very complex (and mutually constitutive) relation between norms and practices. This has the following ramifications for the critique of ideology:

1. It must criticize both the false understanding of a situation or state of affairs (in a society) and the properties and conditions of this situation itself. Ideologies are not only simultaneously true and false, they are also (as stressed by Raymond Geuss) always *simultaneously an epistemic and a normative problem*. Ideology critique reveals that we *misunderstand* something (the conditions and the state of society) *and* that it *is* wrong.<sup>18</sup>

The critique of ideology, strictly speaking, does not directly criticize an ideology, but rather a practice that is maintained via this ideology or constituted by it. Thus, it attempts not just the rectification of the epistemic mistakes, but the – "emancipatory" – alteration of the situation. And it holds that one is important for the other. That is why to undertake such a critique, one must have not only "courage, compassion, and a good eye," as Walzer claims one needs for social critique, but a good theory as well.<sup>19</sup>

2. Although the critique of ideology cannot consist of merely exposing mistakes and untruths in the customary sense – attempting to replace a wrong understanding by the right one – it does not per se consist of a normative conception of the right actions, either. It is the ferment of a *practical process of transformation* that pertains to both (social) reality and its interpretation; in its course, both social reality and its interpretation must change. But how does the critique of ideology guide our actions, or how does it relate to the practical question of what I or we should do?

**The second paradox: "A non-normative critique that is normatively significant"**

This brings us to the second of the above-mentioned paradoxes: the critique of ideology claims to be "a non-normative critique that is normatively

significant.” It is exactly this claim that Anton Leist criticizes as the “myth of the critique of ideology” and thus as a mistaken, if tempting, self-understanding.

But in what sense is the critique of ideology actually “non-normative and still normatively significant,” that is, critical? Or better yet: in what sense does it actually claim to be both?

The first part of the claim seems easy enough to prove. The critique of ideology is not normative, inasmuch as it makes no assertions as to how something *should be* (e.g. how one should construe social institutions to make them right or just, or in what way institutions are bad or unjust) but merely analyzes the *properties* and *conditions* of the social institutions and practices it encounters. Wherever someone undertakes a critique of ideology, he or she starts by collecting clues. They uncover links, show inherent contradictions, decode mechanisms that help cover up those contradictions, and analyze interests or functions of domination. In other words, they show that a situation is not what it is alleged to be: that certain norms are different *in function* than one would think at first glance, or that their *genesis* or their *effect* is different from what one might have expected.

In our example taken from Marx, then, ideology critique *analyzes* in what sense the free and equal exchange in the mode of surplus value production (this is the task of Marx’s value theory) *systematically* produces inequality, or, in what sense “civic” freedom systematically leads to a lack of freedom.<sup>20</sup> It *establishes the link* between the normative ideals of freedom and equality and the actual properties and conditions of the institutions that claim to be guided by these ideals. It *decodes* the mechanisms that make it possible for private property and contracts to appear as something natural instead of something historically/socially made, it points out that the particular interests of a certain class are passed off as the interests of the general public and asks *cui bono*, by showing, for example, how the ideological understanding of the freedom of contract puts one of the contract parties at an advantage.<sup>21</sup> The critique of ideology gathers indications and clues – proceeding according to the logic of following up on a *suspicion*. However, it does not establish norms (as its critics point out) and neither does it refer to normative standards<sup>22</sup> – at least not explicitly. It would, therefore, neither explicitly argue that a failure to realize freedom and equality would be bad (to stay with our example), nor does it provide a reason why freedom and equality should be normatively distinguished at all.

It is more difficult to make good on the second part of the claim and to answer the question of how the critique of ideology can be critical in spite of this, since, after all, a critique cannot merely consist of stating what something *is* like; it must also involve a position on how it *should be* or *should not be*. It is at the very least unclear what can actually

normatively follow from its analyses/decodings/exposures – and how it would follow. Is the obscuration of the function, effect, or origin of a social practice or institution really a problem unless that function or effect is objectionable? Isn't it true that answering ideology critique's question "who benefits from a certain worldview?" acquires a critical edge only if one assumes that this benefit is in some sense harmful or wrong?<sup>23</sup>

### **Is the normativity of the critique of ideology parasitic?**

It seems as if the objection that the critique of ideology misunderstands itself pans out. It could be brought to the following point: on the normative level, the critique of ideology is a *parasitic undertaking*, dependent on normative standards it cannot generate by itself.<sup>24</sup> This would imply a "division of labor": a normative theory in the strong sense provides the norms, and the critique of ideology helps to uncover instances of noncompliance. In other words, the critique of ideology with its characteristic methods of decoding and unmasking would in the end be merely a "provider of material" or an *additional rhetorical element* for the "actual" task of critique. Consequently, the critique of ideology would be a form of critique that might be significant in the field of practice, but it would not be a normatively independent form of critique.<sup>25</sup> This would mean to separate "analysis" and "critique" just as it is traditionally done; the analysis would be up to the critique of ideology; the real critical work, however, would be beyond its scope. And the critical standards would then follow in one way or the other "externally" from a neutral position as moral philosophers construe it or from a presupposed objective theory of the good life. Although this might be even a respectable "division of labor," it in any case contradicts the self-understanding of the critique of ideology. After all, its claim of independence rests on its assertion that it is at once both *analysis as critique* (and not just a *description* of the status quo) and *critique as analysis* (and not just an *appeal* addressed to the status quo).

### **The critique of ideology – liquefaction or transformation?**

Does this mean that ideology critique is in some way an aggressive embracing of a "naturalistic fallacy", of the idea that from the fact that something is it somehow follows that it ought to be? As a matter of fact, the possibility of ideology critique (and the idea of a unity of analysis and critique) relies on the assumption that *description and evaluation intermingle*. The critique of ideology claims to be simultaneously a different *understanding* and a different

*evaluation* of social conditions and situations. The reason why this link is plausible according to ideology critique is the fact that the object of its criticism, namely ideology, is always already both an understanding and an evaluation. Ideologies are normative *as* ways of understanding the world. As worldviews, they determine the limits of possible actions and thereby – in a very profound sense – what one is to do. They stake out the field of possible actions, and this staking out, determining, and limiting of possibilities is itself a normative matter – a fact to which the critique of ideology draws attention. Ideology critique, then, is not least of all a matter of unmasking the normative character of certain descriptions.<sup>26</sup>

This may suggest that the critique of ideology is characterized by something one might tentatively call “*second order* normativity”: a normativity that consists of making the constructed and perspectival character of certain assertions explicit. It thus operates by effecting a kind of “liquefaction” of the status quo, or by giving an “indication of changeability”<sup>27</sup> for the practices and institutions of society – or by reversing the earlier mentioned mechanisms of “*decontestation*.” This approach is “normatively significant,” inasmuch as it creates new possibilities for action and thus the conditions necessary for asking “practical questions” in the first place. By first of all showcasing that which is normative as something normative, the critique of ideology strips it off its coercive power.

Yet it has to be more than that. After all, every way of understanding the world is (especially from the viewpoint of ideology critique) perspectival, “constructed,” and establishing norms in the sense described above, since there can be no (social) reality without a determining of the field of interpretation and possibility. To show this, however, is in itself not yet to criticize it. To merely observe that the status quo is “constructed,” open to questions and generally changeable, does not by itself generate any criteria for deciding whether and why certain institutions and certain understandings of social reality are wrong and should, therefore, be changed.<sup>28</sup> The critique of ideology would remain negative in the sense that it could criticize the social practices and institutional arrangements only for restricting the field of possibilities in general. This, however, would mean criticizing *every single particular* social practice or institution for being what they are, rather than criticizing *certain* social practices as wrong. In this way, the “liquefaction of the status quo” by ideology critique would undermine its own relevance. It would lead to a *total generalization* of the suspicion of ideology that has already been a problem for Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge.<sup>29</sup> If the critique of ideology is to remain a critique of false consciousness and of wrong social practices, rather than merely paying attention to a feature every understanding of the world shares, it must be able to differentiate between an adequate definition of the field of interpretations and possibilities and definitions that are problematic or inadequate. This, however, means that the critique of ideology must point to the difference between a

necessary imprint and a distortion, which the traditions of ideology theory from Althusser to Butler does not, since it tends to understand every formation as inevitable and yet also as restrictive. To put it differently, the normativity of ideology critique must be conceptualized in a “stronger” way. To assert itself as an undertaking with a distinctive normativity, it must take on not only the “liquefaction,” but also a transformational transcending of the status quo towards a new – better – situation.<sup>30</sup>

### Towards a solution of the paradox

The critique of ideology is thus confronted with the specific problem of claiming to be the ferment of such a transcending transformation, without being able to refer to a given external standard or, moreover, to a preexisting positive alternative to the practices it is to criticize.<sup>31</sup> At this point, however, we can understand how this problem is to be solved: as a unity of analysis and critique, the critique of ideology does not use any external standard but instead develops standards based on the very situation it criticizes. The critique evolves in a process the analysis set in motion (in a sense that makes the analysis more than just a mere precondition of critique). Such a critique is at once *determinate* and *negative*: in contrast to the “liquefaction positions” discounted above, it criticizes particular social practices as deficient; but it does this following a pattern of determinate negation (or of a “dialectic process of development”), or, in other words, according to a principle that is crucial for the Hegelian variant of immanent critique: the right follows from a “sublating” overcoming of the wrong.

Thus, the following solution to the paradox of the “not itself normative, but normatively significant method of critique”<sup>32</sup> can be formulated as follows: the critique of ideology is “normatively significant,” but it is not *normativistic*. The phrase “normativistic” was introduced by Michael Theunissen, and it signifies that *external normative standards* are introduced against which reality is measured – it is measured against an “abstract ought.” Since the critique of ideology evaluates existing reality according to standards immanent to this reality, it remains *normatively significant* without using a normativist approach. The implicit normativity of ideology critique then does not, in fact, require a standard lying outside its process of critique in order to stay faithful to its own self-understanding; this does not mean that it loses its critical-normative character. The critique of ideology generates the standards needed to overcome a particular reality from the given norms and the given reality.

However, this means that the analysis itself takes on a normative and no longer only an instrumental character. After all, the normative standards of such a critique cannot be established independent of the correct understanding of reality – and reality, here, is a very exacting phenomenon that cannot be discerned by merely “looking at it.” The contradictions that start it off are not simply given; instead, immanent critique is very much “a

method of forging links,"<sup>33</sup> and the recognition and the existence of such links is a condition for recognizing those contradictions: they first become accessible through analysis. The implicit *normativity* of the social practices and institutions targeted by ideology critique is not necessarily obvious, either. Therefore (and for this very reason), to make analytical distinctions and to make critical-normative judgments – analysis and critique – are two aspects of the same process for the critique of ideology as an immanent critique. (Returning to the paradox, this means that the normative and the non-normative components are inseparably entwined: the descriptive turns normative, and the normative descriptive.)

### **The critique of ideology as immanent critique**

In which sense does the critique of ideology proceed as an “immanent” critique – and if it does, what are the consequences for the standards of truth and rightness of the ideology critique? To answer this question, I widen my focus for a moment, since there are very different versions of understanding the “immanence” of critical standards. The easiest and most obvious one is probably the version that holds that certain ideals and norms may be part of a particular community but are not *de facto* realized in this community (its most prominent theoretical proponent is Michael Walzer,<sup>34</sup> but it is also very common in everyday critical practice). Thus, one might accuse the United States of betraying values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom – the fundamental values of the American constitution – not only in its actual foreign policy, but also in its social policy.<sup>35</sup> (This is a model of patriotism one might find in a movie directed by Oliver Stone; he puts the now discarded ideals of a better America up against a corrupted political reality.) In this approach, the reality of certain practices and institutions is measured up against the “discarded” ideals of the very people who run those practices and institutions. This is a type of critique that is certainly frequently and sometimes effectively employed; and it has the advantage of being able to latch on to already existing normative expectations. But its disadvantages are just as obvious: it is tied to the existing norms of a community and, therefore, inherently particularist (and moreover, it imagines this community as a closed circle).<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, immanent critique as I understand it (and as I want to distinguish it from the version of internal critique I just described) tries for more. As Axel Honneth argued for what he calls the “left Hegelian” version of immanent critique – as opposed to the “hermeneutic” version – or (as he has it) “reconstructive critique,” ideology critique relies on not just actual but also justified norms. However, I would further propose (at least for the version that is relevant to the critique of ideology) that although it starts off as an immanent approach, it is less concerned with the *reconstruction* or the realization of normative potentials, and more with a transformation of the status quo driven by the immanent problems and contradictions of a particular social

constellation. Immanent critique, then, does not confront, as Marx put it, “reality with a prefabricated ideal,” and it does not just extricate such an ideal from it but instead develops it from the contradictory “dynamic of reality” itself. This – in a certain sense “negativist” – version of immanent critique is, I would suggest, the foundation of the critique of ideology.

### What is immanent critique?

To put it briefly: There are five traits that are characteristic for this type of *immanent critique*.

*One:* Immanent critique takes norms that are *inherent to an existing (social) situation* as its starting point. But these norms are not just any values that we or “we as a community” have, contingently or traditionally. Immanent critique takes up norms that are in a certain way *constitutive* for particular social practices and their institutional setting. And it holds that the fact that these norms exist in the first place is not a contingency: the norms in question are – in a way that will have to be elaborated – not just factually given, but justified and *reasonable* as well.

*Two:* Immanent critique obviously does not follow the typical argumentation pattern of internal (or hermeneutic-reconstructive) critique, namely, to claim that a community has lost touch with its ideals (the Oliver Stone model of patriotism). The link between norms and reality in the situation it attempts to criticize is not perceived as dissolved or weak; instead, it is seen as *inverted* or *turned in on itself*. The norms (as in the above-mentioned case, the values of freedom and equality that are constitutive for civil society) are effective, but as *effective factors* they have become inconsistent or deficient.

*Three:* Immanent critique, therefore, focuses on the *internal inconsistency* of reality itself and of the norms that constitute it. The institutional reality of a society can be “internally inconsistent” in the sense that it constitutively embodies competing and contradictory claims and norms that cannot be realized consistently or that will necessarily turn against their original purpose upon being realized. (In our example, this applied to the norms of freedom and equality. Currently one can observe how in certain social processes, responsibility is simultaneously attributed and undermined; in others, society demands creativity but at the same time generates and encourages conformity)

Along with this comes the – problematic – idea that this is not a contingent contradiction, but instead one that is somehow stringent, a *necessary contradiction*.<sup>37</sup> According to this assumption, the reasons for why these norms cannot be realized without inconsistencies derive from the very character of these norms as well as from the properties and conditions of the practices and institutions in question. (This means that the Oliver Stone plea for moral purification is useless in such cases.)

*Four:* Immanent critique is also *transformative*. It attempts not so much to revitalize as to transform an existing order or the current norms and ideals. The goal is not to reestablish a once working congruence between norm and reality; instead, immanent critique is driven by the necessity to overcome a contradictory situation and to turn it into something new.

*Five:* This necessary transformation, however, involves both the deficient reality and the norms themselves, and this is important.<sup>38</sup> The norms themselves are affected by the fact that they are not realized in the existing situation. Immanent critique, then, is simultaneously a critique of a reality that is deficient according to certain norms (it does not conform to these norms) and a critique of those norms themselves. This means that immanent critique not only criticizes a deficient reality according to a standard of norms, but also vice versa – and the ramifications of this are often forgotten. The inconsistent reality (a reality in which the norms can be realized only inconsistently) requires *a transformation of both reality and the norms*, rather than a simple adjustment of reality in accordance with the ideals (either to recapture or to realize a potential).<sup>39</sup>

In our example – the analysis of capitalist civil society from the perspective of ideology critique – the contradictions between the natural law norms of equality and social reality can be solved only through a new economic and social organizational structure, but in the course of this solution, the concepts of freedom and equality are transformed towards (in this case) a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of freedom as “positive freedom” and as a “material understanding of equality.” Thus, the critical standard is changed in the course of the critique (or better, it both changes and stays the same).

### **The normativity of the process**

The normative basis or the normative point of reference of ideology critique, therefore, lies in the normativity and the rationality of the process it set into motion. Normative rightness (and also epistemic truth) is not “something out there”; instead it first evolves only in the course of a process we can understand as a problem-solving process in the widest sense.

This dynamic (dynamic-transformative) character of immanent critique leads up to a crucial point: the transformation that is guided by immanent critique must be understood as a *process of evolution and learning*.<sup>40</sup> Three aspects are of essential importance for this process of experience:

1. The contradictions that give rise to immanent critique are not logical contradictions, but *practical contradictions*. Consequently, they are not “unthinkable”; rather, they lead to *crises*, to experiences of deficiency or failing. A (social) reality that is in this way *determined by crises* is – as both

Hegel and Marx agree – not just morally wrong but also in a certain sense not “working.”

2. Immanent critique as a ferment of such a process of experience is not *destructive*; it is *constructive* or affirmative. The “new” is always already a result of the transformation of the “old” which is “sublated” in it (in the three senses of the term – negated, preserved, and transposed) to a higher level. A short Hegelian turn of phrase for this would be that it realizes itself in the mode of *determinate negation*.
3. The experience of crises and their overcoming is sublated in this process of experience, and that is exactly why such a *process of experience* can be understood as *progress* – as a process of change for the better (although, at this point, not in a very strong sense).

The validity claims of ideology critique (as well as those of immanent critique) are, therefore, based on the idea that the conclusion of the process of critique, or the result of the transformation it guides, is an adequate solution to a crisis that is simultaneously systematically necessary (i.e. already present in the conditions and properties of the situation) and productive (i.e. in possession of the means for its own solution). The truth or the rational ground of ideology critique thus depends on some kind of “historical index,” or on the rationality of a process of learning and experiencing that must be understood as a history of solving and overcoming deficiencies and crises: as a process of problem solving. And vice versa, the focus on contradictions and crises means that the criterion “not working” becomes a criterion of both epistemic and normative wrongness, and the assumption that the existence of a practical contradiction implies some sort of practical obstacle.<sup>41</sup> Ideology, then, is what does not “do justice” to reality and blocks our social practices (or, as Karl Mannheim puts it, ideology “can’t catch up to reality”).

### Difficulties with the critique of ideology

Although in this chapter I have, of course, deliberately rephrased the Hegelian model in a pragmatist spirit, at this exact point (if not earlier), the “difficulties with the critique of ideology” resurface. For how can such a development (and thus the transformational process mediated by immanent critique) be understood as an overcoming of the status quo for something better, if one does not want to propose a final telos of history, or of the progress in question? And how can one claim that this development is driven by “crises,” while the observation of historical developments suggests that crises (and their solutions) are not “objectively given” but are themselves dependent on interpretations, processes of self-understanding, and the chains and links of actions they inspire? It seems that we managed to only shift the problem that the critique of ideology has with its normative

points of reference. (This problem is connected to the pragmatist approach.) The answer even to the question of what a practical contradiction or a crisis actually is, and what a “solution” might be, is not self-evident. Does material inequality stand in “contradiction” to legal equality? Is the fact that, according to Hegel, civil society is “in spite of all its riches not rich enough” to solve the urgent problem of poverty and exclusion a “crisis” of this social formation? What is it that is “not working” in these situations, since so much of it actually works? I can offer only a few remarks pointing towards answers to these problems:

*One:* The question of how to decide what should count as “working” or as a “problem” suggests an ambivalence in the notion of “inherent norms.” It could be a matter of norms in the *functional* sense or of *ethical* norms. In the first sense, norms merely state that a certain way of acting is “good for” the existence of a certain social practice, that is, functionally necessary for it. In the second case, compliance with the norm is related to an ethical validity claim according to which the practice in question is a “good practice” in a comprehensive (or absolute) sense.

The concept I am discussing seems to sidestep such distinctions. It takes up norms that are apparently simultaneously norms of functioning and of the good. Regarding the social processes in question, “working” means not just running smoothly, but always also “doing a good job” in both a functional and an ethical sense. A “practical contradiction” is then characterized by the fact that the obstacles or crises that are part of it are normatively problematic in both senses: something does not work (well), and the way it works is not good. This odd linking of normative (in a stricter sense, or, ethical-normative) and functional considerations takes into account that in the social sphere nothing can function in a way that is completely independent from the good. Conversely and controversially, the good is rooted in the working or functioning of society, or in the functional requirements of society. This is not the place for a more detailed discussion of this argument. However, it offers a clue in the quest for criteria that apply to the problems as well as to the solutions: according to this notion, problems are always partly normative problems; and normative problems, conversely, are always partly problems of dysfunctionality. To localize problems, one would, therefore, have to come from both sides and hope for an alignment.

*Two:* This process that is the basis of the immanent movement (of ideology critique) should not be understood as a process with a definite end, but as a *fallible* and “open-ended” development towards something better than a given situation. Therefore, one criterion for judging something to be “better than a given situation” is its capability to help solve the problems and crises that came up. A solution includes (to take up a thought of A. MacIntyre) a

way to understand how the crisis in question came about and a plausible story or interpretation that manages to make the solution understandable as a solution of the problem. In the course of this, it is possible that one can no longer decide strictly speaking whether this interpretation is “constructed” or whether it corresponds to “reality” (and it is possible that this distinction will turn out to be not all that important).

*Third*, if the critique of ideology is, like immanent critique, a “a method of forging links,” then we should give this practice of forging links a quasi “*constructivist-performative*” turn: the links as well as the contradictions that constitute the principle that guides the movement of this critique are simultaneously “given” and “made.” This means that the analysis of ideology critique will neither simply “discover” the inconsistent constellations of social reality nor will it freely construct them. Even if these contradictions do not have the imperative power that they are sometimes afforded in the context of ideology critique, they are still the result of practical problems. They are at least partly dependent on interpretation, but they still – like symptoms – somehow “announce” themselves, that is, they cause practical consequences and shifts. In its analysis and evaluation, the critique of ideology can, therefore, rely neither on imperative “last reasons” nor on an interpretation that is definite and independent from the agents’ perspective. It will always simultaneously both analyze and generate problems and contradictions. To avoid being arbitrary, this approach depends on a certain “reflective or interpretive equilibrium” and on aligning the subjective (agents’) and the objective perspective. However, if one follows my suggestion and understands (social) reality as something that will put up some resistance, even though it is not “given,” then we give up on all criteria.<sup>42</sup>

*Four*, the critique of ideology must expect the *contradictions to multiply*. Today, critique can no longer be a matter of unmasking the one, or the central contradiction of capitalist society; rather it has to address pluralistic, multiplying, and sometimes colliding contradictions. As a consequence, one has to face the persistence of such conflicts and contradictions, or the collisions that lead to contradictions. The critique of ideology is, therefore, not committed to a romantic ideal of harmony consistency, or to the idea of finally overcoming all conflicts; rather, it downright depends on these conflicts and inconsistencies. However, in contrast to positions that perpetuate inconsistencies as such, it understands them as motivating elements, however temporary, that urge us to overcome them.

## Conclusion

My concluding thoughts center on one objective: I want to tentatively open up a field for ideology critique that is in a certain respect another in-between space. In my understanding, ideology critique stands not only between the

two notions of social reality as “given” and as “made”; above all, it also stands, as an immanent critique in the sense I have described, between objectivism and subjectivism, that is, between purely objective and purely subjective validity claims. This, in conclusion, brings me back to the point that seems to be chiefly responsible for the frequent “difficulties with the critique of ideology”: the problem of asymmetry, the seemingly unavoidably asymmetric relation between those who are subject to an ideology and the viewpoint of critique or of the critics who recognize it as ideology.

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred affirmatively to Ricoeur’s talk of “the hermeneutics of suspicion” because I think that such a notion must on the one hand break with the privilege of interpretation of those concerned – the element of suspicion. After all, the search for hidden connections of interests and functions is of special importance wherever these connections are not directly obvious and cannot be immediately articulated. To point out the mechanisms of “decontestation” and naturalization obviously requires a break with a perception of oneself and the world that has become second nature. On the other hand, however, such a hermeneutics of suspicion would still be hermeneutics.<sup>43</sup> It attempts to reconstruct the perspective of those concerned, to understand what they understand, to reconstruct the problems that occurred not in an external and objective way but as the agents experience them. However, it not only effects a “purification” of sorts, cleaning the subjective viewpoint of distortion and manipulations<sup>44</sup> (this notion faces the problem of having to work out how to distinguish manipulations from imprinting); the way it approaches the problems and crises of a situation also makes it the ferment of a process in which there is no “outside” and no external criterion, but only the continuation of a process that, similar to the psychoanalytical process, would not be possible without the participation of the very position it criticizes (and its protagonists). The critique of ideology, therefore, does not stand “outside” of the constellation it criticizes as ideology; the critic is not separated from the ideology he or she criticizes (and the persons subject to it) but is “part of the always already ongoing social process of self-understanding.”<sup>45</sup> This process, however, is challengingly understood as part of the (self-)dissolution of a constellation of delusion and deception. The critique of ideology is not something that stands outside of social reality that is regarded as a constellation of delusion and deception; it is the instance that confronts us with the problems and contradictions of this reality in a way that is at the same time a ferment of their transformation. The critique of ideology has an odd status in this; it is in a certain sense at once active and passive. Inasmuch as it always also aims for the jolting and jarring performative-practical effect of ideology critique, it is, like its object, simultaneously theory and (as theory) practice.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore and in addition to its method of immanent critique, the critique of ideology is also, like every process of emancipation, a “process known only to its participants.” Why ideology critique?

Why do we need a critique of ideology? What is so special about it? Ideology critique not only allows us to see *other phenomena* by unearthing, for example, relations of domination when they are inconspicuous and almost invisible; it also lets us *look at* phenomena that are obvious examples of injustice or domination *in another way*. And last but not least, it does not target (individual) wrong actions, but rather constellations *as* constellations. Therefore, the critique of ideology is eminently suitable for a critique of “structural domination” and for a structural critique of domination.

Translated by Eva Engels

## Notes

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1. As J. Larrain puts it, see J. Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology*, London 1979.
2. See Richard Rorty, “Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View,” in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London 1995, p. 232.
3. I understand the critique of ideology here in a broad sense as a method of critical thinking. It achieved a certain “maturity” in Marx’s writing, as J. Larrain (*The Concept of Ideology*, London 1979) remarked, but it is not the exclusive property of Marxism. Herbert Schnädelbach offers a brief but very helpful introduction to the critique of ideology in his essay “Was ist Ideologiekritik? Versuch einer Begriffsklärung” in *Das Argument* 50/1969. For a comprehensive presentation and an energetic case in favor of keeping the critique of ideology alive, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, London and New York (Verso) 1994. Raymond Geuss developed the clearest analytical explication of the concept of ideology and a helpful grid to categorize the various concepts of ideology, or the various aspects of the concept of ideology, in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, Cambridge 1981.
4. This is why ideologies are hidden not only within systems of ideas, but also in practices and forms of habitus. And this is also the reason why there are practical critiques of ideology, or ideology-critical practices, by a variety of writers from Guy Debord to Judith Butler, or, more accurately, from the disruptive actions of the Situationist Internationale to contemporary “queer” attempts to sidestep the binary pattern of male and female. Althusser’s productivity is not in the least because of having argued that ideologies are a question of “lived relations.” And it is obvious that one can understand Bourdieu’s analysis of *habitus* and *doxa* as regards its actual content as a contribution to the critique of ideology, even though Bourdieu distances himself from the vocabulary linked to the concept of ideology. (See the interview with Bourdieu in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London and New York (Verso) 1994.)
5. Projekt Ideologietheorie (eds): *Die Camera Obscura der Ideologie*, Berlin (Argument Verlag) 1984, p. 21.
6. See for the neutral or even affirmative conceptions of ideology, the very helpful typology in Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*.
7. This renders the question of whether the critique of ideology is a specific mode of critique or whether it has a specific object, namely ideology, obsolete. Ideology critique is a form of critique that is characterized by understanding or decoding

its object as ideology. You cannot tell whether something is an ideology, or ideological, before a critique of ideology occurs.

8. In the German original: "Verselbstverständlichung" or "Selbstverständlichmachung."
9. Adorno already voiced this suspicion in the face of the "transparency" of social relations within the framework of organized capitalism. (See Adorno/Walter Dirks: *Soziologische Exkurse*, Frankfurt a.M. 1956, p. 170.) However, as long as one assumes that societies are (partly) kept together in a normative way, that there is something like individual or collective "self-understandings" and that they play a role in the constitution of society, they can always turn out to be "ideological." Of course, this is not the place to make a case for these assumptions. Furthermore, the thesis that ideology critique has not disappeared but has become ubiquitous would prove that the critique of ideology is superfluous under our current conditions. One might argue that to relate certain ideas back to hidden interests and functions has become the default repertoire of social self-reflection, but that the hoped for "enlightening effect" has been missing. This would not only mean that social consciousness became cynical (a fear that Habermas voiced in the new preface to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*); it would also mean that it has become cynical due to ideology critique itself. However, I think not only that this description of the state of affairs is only superficially accurate but also that the ubiquitous version I just pointed to is merely a deficient version of the critique of ideology.
10. One might argue along similar lines concerning "workfare" programs in the United States.
11. It is the very logic of a hermeneutics of suspicion and the talk of false consciousness that is suspected to insulate against criticism and to block out contrary evidences. The most striking example for such a strategy of insulation may be the passage in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which the "master of suspicion" Sigmund Freud interprets the dream of a patient that just does not seem to fit his thesis about dreams as wish fulfillments, as a fulfillment of the patients wish to prove Freud wrong.
12. For an attempt to renew the critique of ideology in a way that is not depending on this aspect and tries to overcome the problems of the asymmetry between the internal perspective of those affected and the external perspective of the critic of ideology, see Robin Celikates: "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique: On the Critique of Ideology after the Pragmatic Turn," in *Constellations*, Volume 13, No 1, 2006. See also the discussion of this question in Eagleton, *Ideology*.
13. T.W. Adorno, "Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre," in *Soziologische Schriften I, Gesammelte Schriften 8*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1972, p. 465 ("das Wahre und das Unwahre immer miteinander verschränkt").
14. Anton Leist, "Schwierigkeiten mit der Ideologiekritik," in Angehrn/Lohmann (eds), *Ethik und Marx*, Stuttgart (Athenäum) 1986.
15. I will treat Marx's critique of capitalism taken as a whole as ideology critique, which means that I am not primarily referring to the all in all insufficient passages in which he himself methodically explicates the vocabulary of ideology. Also, I use Marx's ideology critique as an example for *argumentation patterns*; therefore, I won't discuss whether the substantive claims are true or not.
16. See Jon Elster, "Exploring Exploitation," in *Journal of Peace Research*, 15 (1978).
17. The phrasing "false consciousness" has been under attack from various sides (from Althusser to Zizek, theorists tried to overcome this exact aspect of ideology critique). But the reproaches that object to localizing the "wrongness" of ideology

“in consciousness,” and those who see an outdated (*viz.* representationalist) epistemology at work, overlook that in this phrase “consciousness” is quite ambivalent. It is almost misleading to speak of consciousness, since this consciousness, constituted by society and itself having a practical effect, is no longer consciousness in the traditional opposition to “being” (or “superstructure” in contrast to “base”) but is instead a structure in which the two are intertwined: a complicated network of norms, ideas, and practices affecting one another. Furthermore, ideology’s odd status between truth and untruth suggests that the concept of ideology introduces an understanding of true and false that does not conform to the traditional representationalist model. Thus, it is not at all understood that there is a true reality in the sense of a nonconstructed, not conceptually constituted reality waiting behind the false and distorting one.

18. The critique of ideology does not simply discuss both; it is based on the not undisputed claim that there is a systematic link between the false understanding and the wrongness of the situation (the normative wrongness of the facts and the epistemic wrongness of their interpretation). Reality itself seems to be wrong in a way that makes the wrong understanding all too likely and, consequently, the fact that we misunderstand it is in a way an indication of the wrongness of the situation.
19. See Michael Walzer, “Mut, Mitleid und ein gutes Auge,” in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 48 (2000) 5.
20. It is important to realize that the critique of ideology is not something that adds to our knowledge of the world; rather, it is an approach that helps us to see what we “know” about the world in a new light. Therefore, I would suggest that Marx’s theory of value does not just have the status of an “external” objective theory but is also inherently designed as a critique of ideology. Such a nonscientific understanding, one that other interpretations and also other aspects of the work of Marx and Engels may, of course, contradict, goes along with the realization that the object of “political economy” is not independent of the way it is perceived.
21. The *Historisch-Kritisches-Wörterbuch des Marxismus* identifies the question “who stands to benefit from a particular worldview?” as the “core question of the critique of ideology.” However, to reduce it to this question would lead to a much-abbreviated understanding of ideology critique.
22. The meta-standard of consistency is an exception. However, the critique of ideology does not provide even an independent argument for the question why contradictions should be avoided.
23. Of course, one might argue that to showcase a contradiction is itself a normative intervention. However, the critique of ideology cannot be a matter of uncovering contradictions *per se*. Ideology critique’s decoding includes a negative view of the effects of this inconsistency. This becomes obvious if one imagines a society in which inequality is officially embraced and preached, yet a luxuriant equal distribution is practiced as a matter of fact – granted, this is very hard to imagine. A critic of ideology might find this situation odd. Still, his or her analysis would probably lack the caustic tone that characterizes ideology critique. This is partly due to the fact that one would wish to preserve the actual situation, even though one might want to gently dissolve the self-delusion, whereas in the inverse case, one would try to destroy the delusion to change the existing situation. Moreover, every contradiction can be dissolved in two directions and, therefore, it is not immediately clear if the norms or the practice that does not correspond to it should be modified.
24. Raymond Geuss discusses a similar objection, but with a positive bend for the project of ideology critique: given that an ideology serves a particular function and has a particular genesis – wouldn’t we still need an additional argument to

- show that it is normatively wrong? If a particular ideology serves to uphold a form of domination, then, to show that this has practical-normative ramifications, one must argue that (this) domination is wrong.
25. See for a parallel problem concerning the status of genealogy as critique the contributions by Geuss, Owen and Saar in Honneth/Saar (eds), *Michel Foucault. Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption*, Frankfurter Foucault-Konferenz 2001, Frankfurt a.M. 2003.
  26. This is very carefully phrased and should for now only pertain to certain areas – namely the areas that are relevant to the critique of ideology. However, one could, of course, generalize the assertion that the evaluative and descriptive components of our understanding of the world cannot be separated.
  27. As Ruth Sonderegger argues in “Wie diszipliniert ist (Ideologie-)Kritik? Zwischen Philosophie, Soziologie und Kunst,” in Rahel Jaeggi and Tilo Wesche (eds), *Was ist Kritik?*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008 (in print).
  28. These questions can be cleared up only when working with the contrasting model of “genealogy as critique,” a method that Martin Saar explicates (see *Genealogie als Kritik*, Frankfurt a.M. 2007). Genealogy, inasmuch as it can be understood as critique, is after all in a way a contrasting model, or maybe a successor model, of the critique of ideology that still shares some of its features and “inherits” some of its elements.
  29. According to Žižek, it can also be found in the “quick slick postmodern solution” that “everything is ideology.”
  30. This is another occurrence of the problem Mannheim raised, the problem of overcoming the totally generalized concept of ideology – everything is ideology and, therefore, as necessary as it is unremarkable, in other words, not an object of critique – towards an “evaluative-dynamic concept of ideology.”
  31. How this relation between critique and practice presents itself for the critique of ideology (in contrast to other forms of critique) would be a good topic for another essay. The phrases “medium” or “catalyst” should suffice to suggest that the critique is supposed to have “a practical effect” as critique, that is, to be effective *as* critique, and that it is part of the transformational process (in contrast to being merely an instruction, or else in contrast to a model based on the relation between legislation and execution), but on the other side it should, of course, not be identical with practice and replace it.
  32. Leist, “Schwierigkeiten mit der Ideologiekritik,” p. 59.
  33. Or at least that is my argument in Jaeggi, “*Zur Kritik von Lebensformen*” (unpublished manuscript).
  34. See Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Harvard University Press, 1987) and “Mut, Mitleid und ein gutes Auge.”
  35. An even simpler argumentative pattern of a similar type would, of course, be accusing someone of “mere lip service.” One might, for example, accuse a human resources manager of wearing gender equality/justice like a fashionable badge on his or her sleeve, whereas at the same time massively obstructing the careers of women. But this type of critique does not cut very “deep,” since it is more a matter of a deception than of discarding one’s ideals; and it is not really immanent either, inasmuch as the deception is strategically and deliberately employed.
  36. Moreover, in case of doubt it falls back on additional normative arguments. In view of our changing and pluralizing social reality, the direction that should be taken by the requested alignment of ideal and reality is in no way self-evident. Should we give up on the norms/ideals or change our practices? One might relish

the possibility of evoking the ideal of charity in the face of restrictions on the right of asylum; but in other cases – consider the catholic moral codes concerning sexuality – one might take the change in factual habits as an occasion to demand an adjustment in the other direction. Moreover, it is unclear which of various possible ideals should be validated as the point of reference. For a more comprehensive discussion of the different types and the normative structure of internal and immanent critique, see my forthcoming habilitation.

37. Although this is not the place to examine the problematic nature of this figure of thought in detail, I would like to remark that this seems to suggest that the controversial institutions and social practices embody principles that contradict each other, yet are simultaneously constitutive for the existence of those institutions and practices. See, for examples, the current research program of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and the contributions in Axel Honneth (ed.), *Befreiung aus der Mündigkeit - Paradoxien kapitalistischer Modernisierung*, Frankfurt a.M. (Campus) 2002. Owing to easily understandable research-related reasons, the authors shift the focus from “contradictions” to “paradoxes.”
38. Not only can there be no restorative referring to the “no more” of the norm’s validity; even the simple understanding of a “not yet” valid norm is thus impossible, since norms are now understood not as glimpses of truth shining through, untouched by reality; instead, they are a ferment and a dynamic developmental element.
39. The way I understand it, the relation between ideal and realization in the process of immanent critique is rather complicated. If the realization of the ideals evoked by immanent critique simultaneously involves their transformation, then this realization is not a static actualization of a potential that was already present, but an augmenting, enriching movement. What is to be realized is first generated in the process of realization itself. Such a “performative-constructivist” interpretation of the philosophical motif of potential and realization suggests that there can never be a perfect correspondence between potential and realization, but that the motivational link between them is nevertheless significant.
40. The “*path of the phenomenology of spirit*” is such a process of experience, since it is a process that is enriched by the experience of deficiencies and crises; and psychoanalysis, too, can be understood as such a process, if one understands its progress as “a dialectic of change.” See Gottfried Fischer, *Dialektik der Veränderung in Psychoanalyse und Psychotherapie*.
41. This is not all that far from the “evaluative-dynamic concept of ideology” that makes the following claim possible: “From this perspective a consciousness is false and ideological is a consciousness from this perspective, if its kind of orientation hasn’t caught up to the new reality and therefore covers it up with outdated categories” (Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie*, p. 85).
42. With regard to his rejection of ideology critique Rorty observes: “When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace.” One might answer that the critique of ideology may not be able to ground this decision in imperative “last reasons,” or in a definite interpretation of social reality that is independent of the agents. It can, however, analyze problems and contradictions as such in a way that showcases the practical consequences and shifts that are due to their ideological obscuration as very problematic.
43. Compare for a slightly different interpretation in Robin Celikates, *Gesellschaftskritik als soziale Praxis*, unpublished PhD thesis, Bremen 2008.

44. Such a concept of ideology critique is both suggested in Raymond Geuss's work (but he does not stop at this) and presented in positions that regard ideology as an irrational distortion of preferences, but for very different theoretical reasons. (See, for example, Jon Elster, in "Belief, Bias and Ideology," in Martin Hollis/Steven Lukes (eds), *Rationality and Relativism*, Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press 1997, pp. 123–49.
45. Celikates, *Gesellschaftskritik als soziale Praxis*.
46. A model for change through ideology critique would, therefore, aim not at enlightenment in the idealist sense of a revision of a conviction, but at a practical effect that relies on the fact that ideologies themselves are practical. This idea is present in Marxism, but it was re-buried under the silly opposition of idealism and materialism.