

**Towards an Alternative Theory of Political Ideology**

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## **Abstract**

The principle concern which will guide the following discussion is to outline the basics of an alternative theory of political ideology. I take as my point of departure the idea that political ideology can be known only if one has first identified its inherent structure. Both Ian Adams and Louis Althusser have advocated variations of this view. After explicating the theories developed by Adams and Althusser, I then interrogate the concept of “structure” in order to establish several conditions which must hold true of any structure. I then proceed to determine whether or not the theories developed by Adams and Althusser can accommodate the implications which follow from their use of the concept “structure.” Finally, in the last chapter I draw on several aspects of Lacanian thought while exploring the possibility that political ideology may be better understood as a manifestation of a collective attempt to structure the social world.

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## Introduction

The problem of ideology has a relatively short history. Most generally agree that the term was first introduced in the early nineteenth century by the French noble and scholar Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy. In his book on political ideologies, Leon Baradat explains that, for de Tracy, “ideology was a study of the process of forming ideas, a ‘science of ideas’, if you will” (Baradat 2003, 6). As a “science of ideas,” ideology was to be a psychologically oriented discipline which looked at how ideas are formed through the subject’s interaction with his or her environment. However, Napoleon would soon utilize the term “ideology” in an altogether different manner: in order to undermine the views and positions of his politico-intellectual opponents, Napoleon branded them “ideologists.” In this sense, an ideologist is not simply someone who espouses false beliefs; an ideologist is someone who does not realize that the beliefs they are espousing and acting in accordance with are fundamentally wrong. The term then acquired negative connotations precisely because of the fact that Napoleon was able to convince his supporters that his opponents (the ideologists) were dangerous, as they were advocating the implementation of a socio-political framework which was divorced from political reality. In political, philosophical and popular discourse “ideologist” has continued to be used as a way to denigrate someone who espouses (and acts according to) false beliefs, while “ideology” is used in reference to the set of false beliefs which an ideologist is under the sway of. Generally speaking, then, the meaning and logic of the concept “ideology” has not changed.

Perhaps it is partly because ideology continues to be closely connected with the

false, illusory, distorted and deceptive that a number of thinkers, who are markedly distinct in terms of their intellectual and cultural backgrounds, have sought to provide a more comprehensive explanation as to the precise nature of ideology. But there has been no consensus in this regard, and the problem of ideology is still very much open. That being said, most thinkers seem to be agreed that because ideology – in whatever of its instantiations or however one construes the phenomenon – is a social phenomenon, it inevitably has epistemological, ethical, and ontological dimensions. For this reason, ideology is not a narrowly intellectual problem insofar as it is thought to bear on the way in which one acts; pertains to the ideas, attitudes and opinions one has about one's self, others, and the world in general; and may very well be, *precisely because of what it is*, “transparent” to those it affects. This is especially clear when it comes to the problem of *political* ideology, a problem which is amplified by all of the politics invested in the term itself.

Nowhere has the politics of ideology become more apparent – at least, since the end of the Cold War – than in the controversy swirling around an idea proposed by Francis Fukuyama. As the Soviet Union was collapsing, and just a few months prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, Fukuyama published an essay entitled “The End of History?” In this essay Fukuyama suggests that the end of the Cold War was a particularly meaningful event insofar as it could be interpreted as an indication that “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western Liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989, 4). I will not be defending the legitimacy,

validity, or likelihood of Fukuyama's view. But even if it is not the case that "we have reached the endpoint of our ideological evolution," and thus, according to Fukuyama, "the end of history," is it still possible that political ideologies are manifestations of a collective attempt to establish a "final form of human government"? I contend that exploring this possibility – which is markedly distinct from what Fukuyama is suggesting, and will become more evidently so throughout the course of the following discussion – may reveal a great deal of insight about what political ideologies are.

As I have already mentioned, though, there are many thinkers who have introduced theories of ideology. In the first section of this thesis I will outline a theory of political ideology which is presented by Ian Adams in *The Logic of Political Belief*. In this text Adams argues that political ideologies – such as Liberalism, Anarchism, Fascism, Communism, etc. – share a common and distinctive "formal" structure. This formal structure is comprised of components which, together, constitute a theoretical or ideational framework. The specific focus of this section will be to show how, according to Adams, political ideologies "have" this formal structure, and to explain what this means for our understanding of what political ideologies are. I will not be primarily concerned, in this section, with refuting Adams' overall theory. However, this does not mean that I will not be raising any problems whatsoever. Those worries that I do introduce will be resolved, though, in a manner which is consistent with Adams' own line of argument: in effect, the goal is to provide as strong an explication of his theory as is possible.

In the second section I will then turn to a consideration of Louis Althusser's theory of ideology. Because Althusser had engaged with the problem of ideology

throughout many of his works, and because his views on ideology had changed over time, I will attempt to provide only a general outline of Althusser's thought on ideology. By no means will this be anything like a complete account. Rather, I will focus specifically on explicating two terms which, to my mind at least, appear to be central to Althusser's work on ideology. These are "structure," and "function." I will first look at two works wherein Althusser explores the problem of ideologies, which are also referred to as "ideological formations." The first of these two works is an essay entitled "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle," which was first published in 1965 in a collection of essays called *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*. Althusser then continues to develop his thought on ideological formations in *For Marx*, which was published in 1966. After looking at Althusser's theory of ideologies I will then focus on his theory of ideology "in general," a theory Althusser had introduced in an essay entitled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." I believe that Althusser's theory of ideology "in general" complements his earlier work on ideologies: it is in this light that both theories can be understood and read in such a way that a number of problems peculiar to one may be resolved through recourse to the other, with the result being not two distinct theories but a single, coherent theory.

There are a number of interesting similarities between the theories proposed by Adams and Althusser. For both authors the concept of "structure" serves an especially important dual function. I have already briefly touched on Adams' notion of the formal structure of political ideology. Althusser's mirror-structure of ideology "in general" may be thought of in terms of a relation between the subject and a composite image of the

subject, of what the subject is supposed to be. As we will see, this image is created for the subject by other subjects, which in turn “adopts” the image so as to recognize itself in the midst of other subjects. For Althusser, this mirror-structure just is the primordial structure of every ideological formation. On the one hand, it is because ideology has a distinctive structure that ideology is ontologically distinct. In each case the structure of ideology is the fundamental condition for the very possibility of ideology. On the other hand, it is because ideology has a distinctive structure – which, as we will see, neither changes through time nor does it vary from one ideological formation to the next – that ideology can be known “objectively,” that is, non-ideologically. The idea is as follows: one can ensure that one is engaging in a “non-ideological” analysis of ideology if one focuses on that which cannot be subject to ideological distortion. The structure of ideology (whether one has in mind the formal structure or the mirror-structure) is not susceptible to ideological distortion precisely because it is that which sustains ideology. There is no doubt that both aspects of the problem – the ontological and the epistemological – are thoroughly intertwined. However, I suggest that one reason why they are so intertwined is due precisely to the dual function of the concept “structure.”

In section three I contend that both Adams and Althusser have invoked the concept “structure” without ensuring that their respective theories can effectively accommodate the implications of its use. During the first part of this section I will interrogate the *concept* “structure” in order to establish a number of conditions which are presupposed and entailed by any use of the *term* “structure.” On the basis of these conditions – which will be presented in the form of propositions – I will then attempt to determine whether or not Adams’ and Althusser’s use of the term “structure” is

consistent with what is implied by the concept. This is what I will do in the second and third parts of this section. If it cannot be maintained that either the formal structure or the mirror-structure actually exists, then we need to develop an alternative theory of political ideology.

In the final section I will present the very basics of an alternative theory of political ideology. By drawing on the thought of Jacques Lacan and those who have already looked at how Lacanian thought can contribute to our thinking on various socio-political problems, I will argue that political ideology may be understood in terms of a collective attempt to structure the social world. Despite the fact that this will always and only be an attempt (that is to say, for reasons that will be discussed in section four, the social world will never be structured), there is nevertheless good reason to suppose that a structured social world would, in this case, occur concurrently with the emergence of a final form of human government. This is, clearly, a departure from the view that political ideology has some kind of structure since, as a manifestation of an *attempt* to structure the social world, political ideology is a structuring. Furthermore, although the thesis I am proposing is not premised on the idea that “ideology is intelligible only through its structure,” it is nevertheless consistent with a number of the propositions which will be introduced and considered in section three. After presenting this alternative theory of political ideology I will then briefly suggest two possibilities which remain open for further examination.

## Chapter 1

In *The Logic of Political Belief* Ian Adams attempts to demonstrate that a close analysis of political ideology reveals a distinctive “formal” structure which is common to all political ideologies. There are several reasons why Adams’ “structural” theory represents a compelling approach to the study of political ideology. What is perhaps most interesting is that the structure Adams believes he has discovered is not subject to historical change, that is to say: any given political ideology will retain the exact same formal structure throughout the entire duration of its historical existence. For this reason, the formal structure is ontologically distinct from what one might call the “content” of a political ideology – such as ideas, concepts and beliefs – insofar as the structure itself persists unaffected by all of the determinate historical changes, modifications and transformations which occur throughout the history of any given political ideology. Despite this, however, the form and content nevertheless coincide. Consequently, the formal structure functions as a “ground” which, in conjunction with the use of an effective methodology, ensures that an “objective” knowledge of political ideologies is possible: provided that one has correctly identified the formal structure, one may then proceed to isolate the ideas, concepts and beliefs which are coincidental with the structural elements comprising the structure. Thus, one may assess the “content” of any given political ideology in a manner which is not distorted by the pervasive influence of “ideological” ideas, concepts, and beliefs. In the third section of this thesis I will attempt to determine whether or not we should accept the notion of a formal structure of political ideology. However, before doing so I intend to outline Adams’ “structural” theory of

political ideology. In the following discussion I will also raise several points which, though they may not have been explicitly considered by Adams, are nevertheless implicit and follow directly from the conclusions he arrives at during the course of his analysis.

I would like to begin by quoting a brief statement which appears close to the end of Adams' book in order to offer the reader a preliminary indication as to what the author means by "political ideology." According to Adams, it is best

to think of ideologies in terms of traditions of thought, each composed of a number of variations or positions, rather than a fixed core of essential doctrine. An ideological tradition has more in common with a tradition of painting or novel-writing than with the development of an academic discipline, in that different positions may be linked to others in the tradition by a variety of connections in a highly complex pattern (Adams 1989, 123).

One may be inclined to question Adams' distinction between ideological traditions – which are here equated with traditions of thought – and academic disciplines on the grounds that academic disciplines are also traditions of thought that consist of a number of positions which "may be linked to others in the tradition by a variety of connections in a highly complex pattern." As we will see, Adams does attempt to provide what he believes to be valid reasons as to why we should retain the distinction between ideologies and academic disciplines. However, for now it will suffice to say that the "traditions of thought" Adams has in mind are traditions of political thought, such as Liberalism, Fascism, Conservatism, Anarchism, or Marxism.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, we may also note that

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to briefly address two points concerning the passage I have just quoted. First, although Adams frequently uses the term "ideology" without indicating that what he has in mind is political ideology, this rarely presents a problem for the reader as any other use of the term "ideology" in Adams' text clearly occurs in quite specific contexts involving, for instance, an analysis of already existing theories of ideology (see Chapter One), or the possibility of other kinds of ideology (see pages 130-133). Adams' reference to "ideologies" in the passage I have just quoted does not occur within such a context, and is therefore best understood as a rather loose reference to political ideology. When the term "ideology" is present in any additional passages that are cited in my discussion of Adams' theory the term should be taken to designate political ideology. Second, Adams is suggesting that ideologies may be thought of "in

Adams is clearly interested in drawing a distinction between “tradition” and “position.” When explaining the various implications that drawing such a distinction has for an analysis of political ideology, Adams argues that it is the problematic nature of the connections which link together positions within a tradition that justifies the use of a methodological approach which, he believes, is more effective for an analysis of political ideology than are most, if not all previous approaches. Rather than look at the tradition as a whole, Adams will focus primarily on the individual position and will attempt to elucidate, on the basis of his analysis, the formal structure of political ideology. In order to better appreciate why Adams will take the individual position as his unit of analysis we need to briefly consider what exactly Adams has in mind when invoking the term “position.”

Insofar as Adams invites us to think of political ideologies as traditions of political thought (traditions which are comprised of many individual positions), “position” may be best understood as the thought expressed by a particular thinker who is attempting to address any number of problems that generally tend to centre upon the political order. These could include arguments intended to demonstrate the superiority of a certain form of government, providing a justification for a set of beliefs pertaining to the legitimate use of state power, or a consideration of the extent to which the law may legitimately infringe upon individual liberty. A “position” will come to be characterized as “Liberal” if the thought expressed by the thinker is similar in a number of important respects to the thought of other thinkers within the Liberal tradition. But although “each thinker contributes to the tradition...his system of ideas is autonomous, with its own set

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terms of traditions of thought.” By “traditions of thought” he means traditions of “political” thought, such as those that I have just mentioned. For this reason, in Adams’ text “ideological tradition” is basically synonymous with “tradition of political thought.”

of basic elements – conception of human nature, vocabulary, and the rest – some of which may be shared by other positions within the tradition, while other elements may be incompatible or incommensurable” (Adams 1989, 124).

On the other hand, Adams argues that the identity of a tradition is determined by “a combination of contingent factors, including consciousness of the tradition, use of traditional themes and vocabulary, reference to revered thinkers of the past, the theorist’s own identification with the tradition, and ultimately the recognition of other [thinkers within the tradition]” (Adams 1989, 125). We can see here that many of the “factors” which enable one to differentiate between traditions, and which thereby make it possible for one to identify a specific tradition, are the exact same conditions by virtue of which a position introduced by a particular thinker is thought to “belong” to a certain tradition. For instance, if the “use of traditional themes and vocabulary” is a reliable criterion for establishing the identity of a tradition, this can only be because there are a number of thinkers who utilize a shared vocabulary and evoke similar themes when formulating their ideas.<sup>2</sup> Therefore any theorist who adopts the vocabulary of an already established

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<sup>2</sup> Adams’ reference to “the use of traditional themes and vocabulary” requires clarification. First of all, it is difficult to locate in Adams’ text an example of the “traditional themes” of, for instance, the “Liberal” ideology. That being said, perhaps considering Adams’ discussion of ideological “myths” may help. Much of Adams’ discussion of ideological myths revolves around his claim that ideologies have a “tendency to mythologize the past.” For Adams, an ideological myth is “a story which has significance for the lives of those who believe it to be true” (Adams 1989, 104). Adams is definitely not claiming that every story is a myth, but only those that are believed to be true, because they purport to be true, when in fact they are not. This is problematic for a number of reasons, especially since Adams certainly does not want to maintain that myths have the same status as lies. But if we put this difficulty aside, and consider what he believes to be an example of a myth peculiar to the Liberal ideology, we may be able to appreciate what the author has in mind by “traditional themes.” According to Adams, “Liberals are normally committed to the concept of progress and see history as in some sense a struggle between the forces of darkness and enlightenment, although the concrete enemies change from time to time: the traditional ones are priests and kings as, for example, with Condorcet; for J.S. Mill it is the mass mind; for modern Liberals it is totalitarianism and bureaucracy” (Adams 1989, 105). In this passage Adams is clearly suggesting that one can identify several myths within the Liberal tradition. Although he has not attempted to argue that all of these myths share a common theme, I do believe that this is a reasonable conclusion to make. Indeed, it is presupposed by the idea that all of these “myths” may be understood as various manifestations of an attempt to imbue historical events with a significance which is in large part determined by a belief in the

tradition while engaging with the major themes of that tradition may then be regarded by others as “belonging” to the tradition. Indeed, this appears to be one of the ways that “different positions may be linked to others in the tradition by a variety of connections in a highly complex pattern.”

Interestingly enough, it is the *incompatibility* of the basic elements peculiar to each position, with other positions within a tradition, which leads Adams to claim that “traditions are vague and elusive entities, whose exact content and boundaries are uncertain and controversial” (Adams 1989, 124). For Adams this remains a problem largely because of the difficulties one faces when attempting to characterize the thought of some thinkers as that which is, for example, “Liberal.” Is Jean-Jacques Rousseau a Liberal thinker, a Socialist thinker, or neither? How is Rousseau’s “position” commensurate with other positions within the Liberal tradition, if indeed it is? If one is interested in drawing the boundaries that are to delineate a tradition of political thought – so as to clearly establish the identity of the tradition and, by extension, to determine who is and who is not to be included within that tradition – Rousseau is but one example of a thinker whose thought stubbornly resists most attempts to incorporate it into a single tradition. And since there are many other thinkers whose thought proves equally difficult in this regard, one simply cannot draw the *precise and definitive* boundaries of a tradition.

Because the boundaries of a tradition are indeterminate, “at least some of the

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traditional Liberal *theme* of progress as involving a historical “struggle between the forces of darkness and enlightenment.” Secondly, when Adams refers to the “traditional vocabulary” of an ideological tradition he acknowledges that many of the terms and concepts which comprise the traditional vocabulary of a single tradition of political thought are not specific to that tradition. For instance, “democracy” is used in a positive sense by Marxists, Liberals, and Anarchists. However, the important point is not that both Marxists and Liberals invoke the term “democracy,” but that they mean different things by it. “Democracy” is a term which, depending on the specific tradition one is considering, will signify or designate a concept(ion) of democracy that differs from those found within other traditions. In the context of Adams’ discussion “traditional vocabulary” refers to a set of terms which have a fairly precise meaning only with regard to how they are used within a specific tradition.

problems of analysing ideology have arisen from taking the tradition, or some conception of the essence of the tradition, as the appropriate unit of analysis” (Adams 1989, 124).

Adams argues that the various problems one is confronted with when examining the tradition as a whole represents one reason why “it is only in analysing the individual position that the structure and logic of ideology will be clearly revealed...” (Adams 1989, 124). Even though there may be ongoing disputes concerning who is and who is not a Liberal thinker, this does not in any meaningful way detract from what Adams believes is the value of the methodological approach he utilizes: for it is possible to identify thinkers who have introduced “Liberal” positions despite the fact that one cannot establish the precise boundaries of the Liberal tradition. While it may be difficult to convincingly argue that Rousseau is a Liberal thinker, it is widely acknowledged that John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Herbert Spencer, and Adam Smith are several of the “revered thinkers of the past” who together form what might be thought of as the basis of the Liberal tradition: each of these thinkers introduced positions which, at a very basic level, share common ideas and avail themselves of a shared terminology when formulating their ideas.

When Adams begins the chapter of his text concerned with elucidating his theory of the structure of political ideology, he claims that “there is perhaps a certain obviousness about the suggestion that conceptions of human nature are at the heart of ideology” (Adams 1989, 89). But how does Adams substantiate this claim? Adams points out that there have been various thinkers who have convincingly argued that conceptions of human nature are central to *political theory*.<sup>3</sup> Adams then maintains that the authors he considers have not established a substantial link “between conceptions of human nature

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<sup>3</sup> The thinkers and texts Adams is referring to are: Martin Hollis, *Models of Man*, Cambridge 1977; J.R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman, eds., *Human Nature in Politics*, New York 1977; and I. Forbes and S. Smith, eds., *Politics and Human Nature*, New York 1983.

and ideology as such” (Adams 1989, 90). This is primarily because “it is far from common to equate ideology with traditional political theory” (Adams 1989, 89). For precisely this reason we can understand why there has not been a significant link established between conceptions of human nature and political ideology: the thinkers Adams has considered do not equate political ideology with traditional political theory. However, since Adams *does* equate political ideology with traditional political theory, and since he basically agrees with the assertion that conceptions of human nature are at the heart of traditional *political theory*, “we have, then, the suggestion that theories of human nature have a crucial role in [political] ideology” (Adams 1989, 90).

In what sense, though, are conceptions of human nature central to political thought, and thus, to political ideology? In keeping with his intention of taking the individual position as his unit of analysis, Adams insists that if one surveys a tradition of political thought one will find that a number of thinkers, and especially the “revered thinkers of the past” – such as Mill, Locke, and Bentham – have each developed positions which are ultimately dependent upon some basic conception of human nature (Adams 1989, 92-93). To take but one example, in *On Liberty* Mill writes: “Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly as the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop on all sides...” In no way does this passage represent a complete picture of Mill’s conception of human nature, but it does express a justification for the following *ethical* claim. According to Mill, “If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience his own mode of laying out his existence is the best,” because “he who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation”

(Mill 1998, 65-66). On the basis of his account of human nature Mill formulates ethical principles which are used to evaluate governmental and educational institutions, as well as the institution of the family and the workplace environment. Mill is then able to explain why certain aspects of these “domains” of human experience are undesirable, while also offering some theoretical guidelines and ethical touchstones which provide us with a general orientation for future change.

If Adams is correct to suggest that “theories of human nature have a crucial role in ideology,” and when we recall that Adams believes the best analysis of political ideology is one that takes the individual position as its unit of analysis, it is not too difficult to recognize the basic steps that Adams’ argument takes. Although Adams has not explicitly acknowledged as much he has clearly developed his argument by claiming that, first, since the positions introduced by all of the “revered thinkers of the past” either overtly or implicitly rely on some basic conception of human nature, then, second, “theories of human nature (*must*) have a crucial role in ideology.”

But there is a problem that stems directly from the way that Adams develops his argument. When Adams maintains that every position which “belongs” to a specific tradition of political thought ultimately relies on some basic conception of human nature, he nevertheless refers to “ideological man,” “conception of man,” and “account of human nature” – all of which are used interchangeably – in the *singular*, and he does so while also referring to (political) ideology in the *singular*.<sup>4</sup> Are we to conclude that Adams is

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<sup>4</sup> Adams’ use of the term “ideological man” – when referring to any conception of essential human nature – is clearly gender specific. There are many reasons as to why this is problematic. Although Adams may not have intended to refer exclusively to “men,” as is evident when he explicitly equates “ideological man” with “conception of *human* nature,” I will refrain from using the term “ideological man.” Instead, I will simply use the term “human nature.” By this I mean a conception of human nature whereby human nature is formulated in such a way that it is thought to designate characteristics, attributes, or qualities which together are constitutive of an *essential* human nature. As we will see, this is consistent with Adams’

committed to the view that there are not *many* conceptions of human nature which are central to a specific political ideology, but that there is *just one*?<sup>5</sup>

When Adams attempts to draw a distinction between “tradition” and “position” he does so by first considering a point raised by G.F. Gaus who, in his book *The Modern Liberal Theory of Man*, argued that all “modern Liberals” – Gaus examines the work of J.S. Mill, T.H Green, L.T Hobhouse, John Dewey, Bernard Bosanquet and John Rawls – share a particular theory of human nature. Adams objects to Gaus’ claim by pointing out that “there may be something to be said for linking these thinkers in terms of certain shared features of their thought, but to insist that they all share the same conception of man is to overstate the case greatly” (Adams 1989, 121). And on just the next page Adams makes a much stronger claim: “To say, therefore, that Mill and Green have the same concept of man is absurd” (Adams 1989, 122). Perhaps this is the reason why one cannot find a description of what, for instance, a “Liberal” conception of human nature is anywhere in Adams’ text. Indeed, the conspicuous absence of any account of a “Liberal” conception of human nature appears to support the possibility that Adams does not believe there is one, which is clearly what he suggests in the passages I have just quoted.

But this is a problem, for Adams’ theory concerning the formal structure of political ideology requires that there be a single conception of human nature peculiar to every political ideology, which, in contrast to the absence of any such account in Adams’ text, may explain why he refers to “account of human nature” in the singular while

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use of the term “ideological man.” However, in order to remain faithful to Adams’ text I will quote passages as they appear in his work.

<sup>5</sup> That it is reasonable to form this conclusion is supported by several assertions Adams makes regarding the centrality of human nature in political ideology. For example: “*The ideology’s conception of man* therefore shapes and unifies the entire system of ideas [my italics]”, “Ideologies have to have such a concept of man...”, “ideology takes its starting point as man so defined...”, and “the ideology’s account of human nature...” (Adams 1989, 98-99).

discussing “*the* ideology’s account of human nature.” Adams argues that “ideological man is the lynchpin of the ideological structure...” (Adams 1989, 103). By this he simply means that the structural centre is always an archetypal conception of human nature which determines and regulates the additional structural elements. Hence, without such a conception of human nature the ideological structure, and thereby also political ideology, could not exist. “If it were possible (which it is not) to subtract from *an* ideology *its conception of man*, then what would be left would just be a collection of elements, which, despite a certain consistency, would not touch each other and could not form a whole [my italics]” (Adams 1989, 138). Clearly, then, if a political ideology, a *tradition* of political thought, has a formal structure, and the structural centre is a conception of human nature, it would make absolutely no sense for Adams to claim that a specific political ideology has many different conceptions of human nature as its structural centre, as this would entail that there are many structural centers (which basically means that there are none). Therefore, insofar as the “lynchpin” of the ideological structure is a conception of human nature, it would seem as though the theory Adams is proposing requires him to accept that there is indeed a single conception of human nature which is shared by all of the thinkers who are thought to “belong” to a tradition.

I believe that this problem cannot, without difficulty, be resolved. That being said, I will nevertheless attempt to provide what could be simply a tentative solution to the problem at hand. Perhaps Adams might respond to the problem I have raised by arguing that despite the differences between the conceptions of human nature developed by Locke and Mill, their respective theories in this regard are so *fundamentally* alike that the significance of any differences is marginal. It is not that “Mill and Green have the *same*

concept of man,” they just have a *similar* conception of human nature. According to this line of reasoning all “Liberals” share a very similar, basic conception of human nature, though they may differ as to what *precisely* that could be. To be sure, it is only by making such a concession that Adams can argue that Liberal thinkers, for instance, belong to the same ideological tradition and that this tradition is intelligible through an analysis of its formal structure; a structure which is ultimately held together by *the* structural centre, *a* conception of human nature. For if some conception of human nature really is central to a specific tradition of political thought – which it must be if Adams is to argue that an ideological tradition has a formal structure with a conception of human nature as its structural centre – then surely most of the thinkers within such a tradition must share some basic ideas concerning what is and what is not human nature. How else could such thinkers belong to a tradition, given that an individual position will only belong to a tradition insofar as there are a “variety of loose, *though important*, connections with other positions within the tradition of thought [my italics]” (Adams 1989, 124)? To my mind there does not appear to be any other way that Adams can adequately respond to the problem I have raised.

Due to its operation and function as “lynchpin of the ideological structure,” a conception of human nature *qua* structural centre is not only responsible for “holding together” the ideological structure; it also necessitates the existence of every other structural element. “[A] conception of human nature, a theory of man...gives to ideology its characteristic structure...” (Adams 1989, 138). To appreciate the significance of this point let us now consider what, according to Adams, makes an ideological conception of human nature unique.

In the first section of a chapter entitled “Human Nature And The Structure Of Ideology” Adams attempts to draw a distinction between “ideological” and “non-ideological” conceptions of human nature. Clearly Adams is more interested in the former than he is in the latter. But briefly explaining why he feels it necessary to make such a distinction is important if we are to appreciate why an “ideological” conception of human nature is unique. To begin with, “an ideological concept of man embodies the values of its ideology; it is a pseudo-descriptive concept from which moral prescriptions may be legitimately drawn” (Adams 1989, 91). In contrast, a “non-ideological” conception of human nature is formulated with purely descriptive terms from which no moral prescriptions “may be legitimately drawn.” Here Adams is focusing specifically on what he believes is the “logical” character of the terms and concepts that are utilized by various thinkers when they construct an account of human nature. By doing so Adams hopes to demonstrate that if one takes into consideration the peculiar logical character of such terms, one can thereby establish a precise distinction between “ideological” and “non-ideological” conceptions of human nature.

Adams argues that there are certain concepts “playing a central role in ideology which appear to combine both descriptive and evaluative elements, and this rather odd duality has logical consequences” (Adams 1989, 39). For instance, “‘progress’, ‘alienation’ and ‘master race’ seem to be quite definitely descriptive concepts, and yet at the same time are evaluative in the sense that progress involves improvement and so must be a good thing, alienation is necessarily an evil and master races cannot be other than superior” (Adams 1989, 39). One reason why these concepts “seem to be quite definitely descriptive concepts” is because they are often *used* descriptively: in effect, these

concepts are used in such a way that they supposedly denote a fact about the world; an object, act, or state of affairs which, it is thought, may be objectively verified. However, because “progress,” “alienation,” and “master race” are “value-laden” and have a “moral content” they express an implicit moral evaluation of the object, act, or state of affairs which they are supposedly describing.<sup>6</sup> “Description and evaluation are fused in the same concepts, with the effect of turning concepts which retain their descriptive appearance into evaluative ones with no genuine descriptive force” (Adams 1989, 42).

Adams claims that an example of a purely descriptive concept is “killing,” where “killing” refers to a “fact” of the external world, a state of affairs that can be empirically and objectively verified. To verify the truth of a particular descriptive claim requires confirmation acquired through empirical observation. Adams believes that “murder” is a pseudo-descriptive term insofar as “what makes killing a case of murder is not any feature that can be empirically determined, but that the killing was wrongful or unjustified” (Adams 1989, 39). A concept such as “murder” functions in an evaluative manner because it has a “moral content,” and it is the “moral content” of the concept which *necessarily* implies that the act was wrong and that the individual who performed the act is morally culpable. In contrast, though the concept “killing” is used descriptively, it does not *necessarily* require one to acknowledge that any moral wrong has been

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<sup>6</sup> Adams uses “value-laden” and “moral-content” interchangeably: they are synonymous insofar as the author uses both terms to characterize a set of concepts which are utilized by an individual who is endeavouring to “objectively” describe a state of affairs with concepts and terms which *implicitly* identify that which is described as being either good or bad. It is because concepts such as “progress” and “master race” designate a desirable state of affairs, or, on the other hand, a superior (and hence desirable) people, that a moral prescription may be legitimately drawn. For example, progress is to be encouraged, and the “master race” should be accorded various social, political, and economic privileges. According to this logic, one can clearly see that, conversely, anything which inhibits progress should be overcome, and “inferior” races should not be accorded the same privileges as the “master race.” Furthermore, such terms are “value-laden” because they either denote that which is good, and should therefore be valued, or by extension they implicitly refer to that which, in contrast, is bad, and should therefore not be valued.

committed. There are many examples of our general, colloquial use of the terms “murder” and “killing” which provide ample support for the distinction that Adams is attempting to make. For instance, whereas some might be inclined to contend that capital punishment is murder there are certainly others who do not agree. One reason why some may not agree is because they do not believe that any moral wrong has been committed by the state: the state was justified in killing the individual and has not, therefore, committed an act of murder.

Just as Adams believes that some concepts are inherently “value-laden,” that is to say, they have a “moral content” which makes them “pseudo-descriptive,” so too does he believe that an “ideological” conception of human nature is pseudo-descriptive. Adams writes: “the ethical content of ideological conceptions of man...makes them, like all ideological concepts, pseudo-descriptive and non-referring” (Adams 1989, 93). The possibility that ideological conceptions of human nature are “pseudo-descriptive” is especially evident when considering Rousseau’s famous claim: “Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.” Adams points out that, for Rousseau, “freedom is part of man’s essential human nature, in the sense that man must be free to make moral choices and live according to his own rules, otherwise, as happens to be the case in most societies, his humanity is denied and he is effectively a ‘slave’” (Adams 1989, 99). Similarly, Locke “gives us an account of essential man as being possessed of certain natural rights which are an immediate yardstick for evaluating governments, dividing those that respect and protect their citizen’s rights, and are therefore good, from those that deny or threaten those rights and which are therefore tyrannous and bad” (Adams 1989, 99). Because “freedom” and “natural rights” are “pseudo-descriptive” concepts they

supposedly denote a truth about human nature from which “moral prescriptions may be legitimately drawn.” Rousseau is committed to the view that the metaphorical chains which prevent human beings from leading a genuinely free existence should be broken, and on the basis of his natural rights Locke is able to provide a “yardstick for evaluating governments.”

There is, however, an interesting difference between a number of the concepts used to formulate an “ideological” conception of human nature, and on the other hand concepts such as “alienation” or “progress.” Adams suggests that any conception of human nature found within a given political ideology is expressed with terms which entail a particular human essence. What follows is that “ideological man is universal man, not some phenomenon of the present age” (Adams 1989, 104). Adams is pointing out that any “ideological” conception of human nature is presented in absolute terms; that it is an essence not subject to historical change. Because of this, it is atemporal, and is thought to characterize *all* human beings *as they have always been*. For Rousseau, human beings have *always* been born free, and there was a time – Rousseau’s state of nature – when human beings were born free but would never have known what it is like to be confined in “chains.” That which is absolute, in the sense that I just mentioned, is the freedom that every human being is born with. Interestingly enough, the same conditions which make it impossible to objectively verify through empirical observation the truth of Rousseau’s claim that “Man is born free,” or Locke’s belief that human beings possess certain inalienable natural rights, also make it impossible to falsify them. One cannot confirm through empirical observation that human beings are *not* born free, or that human beings *do not* possess a set of inalienable natural rights, though one can certainly

problematize the arguments which are constructed in order to defend and justify such claims.

Insofar as an ideology's account of essential human nature has a "moral content," that is to say, insofar as "ideological man is first of all a bearer of values, the standard of good and bad," Adams argues that this provides an ideology with the requisite basis for an evaluation of the world in terms of what is good and bad for human beings so defined (Adams 1989, 98). And, what is more, because political ideologies consist of a "value-laden" conception of human nature this *necessarily* entails that the world will be evaluated according to the values which are implicit in such an account of human nature. This is why Adams argues that the formal structure of political ideology must have an evaluative component, which may be understood as the second structural element. As we have already seen, Locke believes that natural rights are inherent to human beings and that any gross violation of those rights represents an evil which *must* be abolished. According to Adams, what this reveals is that Locke evaluates "the world in terms of a particular set of values," and these values are derived from "a particular concept of man in which these values are implicit. Such values are what we take to be good for man, what answers to his needs, releases his potentialities or at least enables him to be at his best" (Adams 1989, 98). In effect, one simply cannot posit something like natural rights and then refuse to accept that a violation of one's natural rights is bad. The protection of natural rights is a good precisely because natural rights are themselves good and should be valued as such. Since every position within the Liberal tradition shares a very basic conception of human nature which is formulated with a set of "pseudo-descriptive" concepts and terms, and because this serves as the basis for a moral evaluation of the

world, then, clearly, any evaluation of the world will be conducted within parameters that are established in relation to the values inherent to a “Liberal” account of human nature. One consequence of this is that all Liberal thinkers will evaluate the world in a similar manner, since they hold a similar set of values which are implicit in a common and shared account of human nature.

In addition to an ideological conception of human nature and an evaluative component, the formal structure of political ideology also consists of a unique vision of what Adams refers to as an “ideal society.” This “ideal society” need not be utopian, rather, we may think of an ideal society in terms of a best possible society (Adams 1989, 99). A conception of the ideal society may be understood as the third structural element, which follows directly from the positing of an essential human nature: “the good society is implicit in any ideological notion of man, and may be viewed as a direct development from, and even an extension of, the ideology’s account of human nature” (Adams 1989, 99). The “good society is implicit in any ideological notion of man” because the values implicit in an ideological conception of human nature are the very same values that should underpin social, political, and economic institutions, organizations, and inter-subjective relations. It is not too difficult to see why Locke maintains that a good society is one which first of all acknowledges that the rights to life, liberty and property are possessed by everyone and, furthermore, that a good society *values and protects* these rights. This vision of a good society requires the development of a form of government whereby the people are able to ensure that their rights are not abused, a legal system that respects and protects one’s rights, and an economic system which permits one to exercise these rights in the marketplace. Importantly, Adams argues that any vision of an “ideal

society is one which by definition cannot be improved; or, more accurately, is possessed of a framework that cannot be improved” (Adams 1989, 100). This means that “whether it be the details of relationships or institutions or a broader framework within which change can take place, something has to be fixed and permanent. Given the flux of human history it is evident that for any aspect of society to be unchanging it must speak to some permanent human need or potential aspiration. Or, put another way, it must relate to essential human nature” (Adams 1989, 100).

Interestingly enough, Adams argues that “a conception of man by which we may measure what is good or bad in present society and picture the best possible society for man is not in itself enough, since evaluation or ideas cannot explain anything. Ideological man must also be at the centre of a descriptive and explanatory framework that must explain our present world and show how we might achieve (or preserve) the best possible one” (Adams 1989, 101). A vision of the good society, in conjunction with both a conception of human nature and the evaluative component which stems from it, must be supplemented with another structural element, which Adams believes is indispensable if political ideologies are to provide the individual or group with an understanding of “the relationship between our present world and the ideal” (Adams 1989, 101). This additional structural element is what Adams refers to as the explanatory component.

The explanatory component is interesting insofar as it accounts for why a political ideology must necessarily explain not only how “the present world, with its ills or its blessings,” has come about, i.e. why a number of historical events have transpired and how such events have shaped the present world, but, as Adams has already indicated, a political ideology must also explain how an “ideal” future society may be established on

the basis of what is possible from the standpoint of our present society. I will now quote a passage from Adams' text which reveals the importance that Adams attributes to the explanatory component.

[I]f property and social hierarchy are evils which distort and dehumanize human existence then how can it be that we live in societies which are characterized precisely by property and social hierarchy?; or again, if racial mixing and the non-observance of racial hierarchies are the great obstacles to mankind's advance, then why are such evils unchecked?; or yet again, if the present world is the best of all possible worlds then why are some discontented or bent on its destruction? In other words, how has the present world, with its ills or blessings, come about? (Adams 1989, 101)

Here Adams suggests that any explanation of the past, the present, or the means by which a future "ideal society" can be attained is accompanied by a moral evaluation of the world that is based on the values which stem from an ideology's account of human nature. What follows is that "the world that an ideological theory explains is not the world as such but the world as evaluated, and what is explained is what is deemed significant in terms of the values of the ideology and its version of ideological man" (Adams 1989, 101). This means that any "ideological" explanation of history, of our present society, or of what is required in order to achieve the best possible society, will never be objective or purely factual since any explanation must coincide with the values that are implicit in an "ideological" conception of human nature.

More importantly, historical events will acquire a certain significance within an ideological account of history by virtue of the fact that human nature is not considered to be historically contingent. As has already been discussed, a conception of human nature as it is presented within a political ideology is presented in such a way that it applies to every human being that ever was, which means that historical events are explained

through reference to how they may have been experienced fifteen hundred years ago by human beings so defined. “The result is necessarily an ideological past and not an historical past, being no more an objective account than is the ideological account of the present. The present from an ideological point of view is ‘the condition we are in’, and the past is how we got into this condition; that is, where mankind went wrong or what it did right” (Adams 1989, 104).

According to Adams, since political ideologies profess to explain, on the basis of what is possible from the standpoint of our present condition, how we are to *act* so as to realize a future “ideal society,” we should think of them as so many different “guides to action.” Indeed, Adams goes so far as to insist that “ideology is, if nothing else, a guide to action. It tells us what ideals to strive for and by what means. Its claims to objective knowledge are subordinate to its practical objectives, they are meant to underpin its prescriptions” (Adams 1989, 33). And “it is the value content of ideological description and explanation that makes it possible to infer prescriptions from what purport to be factual accounts of the world” (Adams 1989, 102). The author uses the phrase “practical objectives” in connection with what appears to be at least one of the *functions* of political ideology, i.e. that ideology “tells us what ideals to strive for and by what means.” But any given political ideology can only do so insofar as it is able to legitimize a set of ethical beliefs pertaining to the ideals that we should strive for and the means that are to be employed when doing so. This is made possible due to a peculiar feature of such beliefs: “they do have moral force: they tell us how we should live and what we should strive for” (Adams 1989, 38). By “moral force” Adams simply means that a set of political beliefs is, if believed, able to provide a moral justification which thereby legitimizes a particular

action by privileging a particular set of values. In short, a set of beliefs with a certain degree of moral force are beliefs about what is good, and therefore that a particular object, action, or state of affairs is desirable precisely because it is good.

It is the relationship between what is good and beliefs about what is good which proves especially interesting for Adams. The author argues that “any system of political beliefs constitutes a moral vision, a set of ideals which provide a standard of what is right and what is important in social life, and consequently a yardstick against which the present world, the imperfect world we occupy, may be judged” (Adams 1989, 39).

Whereas morality refers specifically to values, ethics is concerned with how one should act insofar as one feels that it is important to act in accordance with one’s values. Since political ideology has an evaluative component which stems from a conception of human nature, political ideologies must *necessarily* involve ethical principles which prescribe certain actions, and these ethical principles are fashioned after a moral evaluation of already existing political conditions. In effect, there is an ethical component operative within any and every political ideology. The prescriptive, or ethical component, may be understood as the fifth structural element common to all political ideologies.

If Adams is correct, we may therefore conclude that political ideologies are traditions of political thought that offer a guide to both individual and collective action, and must concern themselves primarily with assessing, evaluating, maintaining, or transforming “actions, practices, and institutions” which contribute in some way to the existence, or future existence, of an “ideal” political order. Furthermore, all of this ultimately depends upon the operation and function of an ideological conception of human nature. This is why Adams argues that “the conception of man is both the centre

of the value-system and the centre of the theoretical explanation of the world, the fusion of which is what makes ideology logically special.” Thus, “ideological man is the lynchpin of the ideological structure, ‘a hyphen that joins, a buckle that fastens’ the values and the facts; although in the process the facts become pseudo-facts and disparate elements are transformed into a logically homogenous system of ideas” (Adams 1989, 103).

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 – Introduction

Louis Althusser is credited by many with having introduced a theory of ideology that continues to offer a number of insights, and presents just as many difficulties, for both Marxists and non-Marxists alike. There are, of course, many reasons why this is so. In one of his three lectures on Althusser,<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur suggests that one of several important contributions Althusser has made to Marxist theory can be found in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” or what has become known as the ISA essay. In this essay Althusser points out that Karl Marx had left open the question as to what is “responsible” for ensuring the reproduction of the relations of production in any given social formation. Althusser approaches this problem by arguing that it is ideology which is “responsible” precisely because ideology “interpellates,” or “constitutes” the subjects who are, *or are to become*, implicated in such relationships. According to Althusser, the interpellation of individuals as subjects is one of, if not the most crucial *functions* of ideology, which interestingly enough is sustained by the unique *structure* of ideology.

Michel Pecheux, in *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, as well as Ricoeur both argue that Althusser’s elucidation of the structure and functioning of ideology in the ISA essay necessarily involves what amounts to a theory of subjectivity. This is particularly evident if one considers the specific terms Althusser invokes when explaining what is at stake in, and what is the consequence of, ideological interpellation. Pecheux points out

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<sup>1</sup> When he was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago Ricoeur gave three lectures on Althusser, which were delivered in 1975 along with his lectures on Marx, Mannheim, Weber, Habermas, Geertz, Saint-Simon, and Fourier. These lectures were taped, and from the recordings a transcript was developed which, along with Ricoeur’s own lecture notes, were edited by George H. Taylor in consultation with Ricoeur. The collection of these lectures was published in 1986 under the title *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.

that in Althusser's text one will never find the formulation "ideology interpellates *subjects* as subjects," which suggests that prior to the "emergence" of a subject there is what Pecheux calls a "non-subject" (Pecheux 1982, 106). For Ricoeur, who claims that Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation forces us "to put on the side of ideology what in a sense is the most interesting philosophical problem: how do we become subjects?" this represents an especially unsatisfying prospect (Ricoeur 1986, 148). In effect, the very existence of the subject is a *consequence* of ideological interpellation, which is only successful if it facilitates the recognition of oneself as a subject, as well as the recognition of others as subjects. Althusser maintains that "the ideological recognition function...is one of the two functions of ideology," which in turn guarantees that it is an "'obviousness' that you and I are subjects – and that that does not cause any problems – [which] is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect" (Althusser 1971, 129).

Yet another point of interest is the operation of an important distinction in Althusser's work between ideology *in general*, and ideologies. Depending on the precise context in which the term is used, "ideology" may refer to "the differentiated multiplicity of the ideological instance in the form of a combination...of elements each of which is an ideological formation...in short, *an ideology*" (Pecheux 1982, 102). However, Pecheux then explains that "the determination of the term 'Ideology' [also] operates 'in general', as when one says 'there is no square root except of a positive number', implying that *every* square root is the square root of a positive number" (Pecheux 1982, 102). Each determination of the term "ideology" helps to frame Althusser's analyses, and in such a way that on the one hand he is able to speak of ideological formations as concrete historical realities, whereas on the other hand he is able to speak of ideology as an *omni-*

*historical* phenomenon; a phenomenon without a history of its own. For the time being I will put aside an explanation pertaining to the difference(s) between these two possibilities.

Although Pecheux effectively underscores this distinction it would be a mistake to conclude that such a gesture is meant to indicate that Althusser has formulated two mutually incompatible theories of ideology. And this despite the fact that several other crucial terms which appear in Althusser's essay "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle"<sup>2</sup> have similarly acquired alternative determinations in the ISA essay. In the following discussion I will attempt to provide an explication of Althusser's theory of ideology – which ultimately consists of both a theory pertaining to *ideologies* and a theory of ideology "in general" – that will be guided by a close consideration of the terms "structure" and "function," utilized here as a kind of heuristic device. I hope it will become clear that Althusser's thought on ideology had developed over the course of his work, culminating with a theory of ideology "in general" that complements his earlier work on *ideologies* almost seamlessly. I will therefore begin by looking at Althusser's theory of *ideologies* as it is presented in "Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation," which was published in 1965, and *For Marx*, which was published in 1966. I will then move on to an analysis of Althusser's theory of ideology "in general," a theory Althusser had introduced four years later in the second section of the ISA essay entitled "On Ideology."

## 2.2 – Althusser on Ideologies

In Althusser's essay "Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation" there is a

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<sup>2</sup> Henceforth I will continue to refer to Althusser's essay "Theory, Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle" as "Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation."

section entitled “Ideology” wherein the author contends that it is “necessary to situate and define an important new term: *ideology*,” in order to determine the scope, function and promise of a properly scientific Marxist theory.<sup>3</sup> “This effort of definition is indispensable if it is true...that it is of primary importance for Marxism to define itself unequivocally as a *science* – that is, as a reality distinct from *ideology* [author’s italics]” (Althusser 1990, 23). Althusser’s interest in establishing a precise theoretical and practical distinction between ideology and science will remain a constant concern throughout the entirety of his work. In his lectures Ricoeur explores the various

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<sup>3</sup> For an exceptionally thorough analysis of Althusser’s treatment of the relationship between science and ideology see Ricoeur’s first lecture on Althusser, included in Ricoeur’s *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. Also, the problem of the relationship between science and ideology is dealt with by Althusser in an essay entitled “Lenin and Philosophy,” included in a collection of essays of the same name, as well as in “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation,” especially pages 3-22. In “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” Althusser poses the question “*what is Marxist scientific doctrine?*” to which he responds by saying: “Marxist scientific doctrine presents the specific peculiarity of being composed of two scientific disciplines, united for reasons of principle but actually distinct from one another because their objects are distinct: historical materialism and dialectical materialism. *Historical materialism is the science of history*. We can define it more precisely as the *science of the modes of production*, their specific structure, their constitution, their functioning, and the forms of transition whereby one mode of production passes into another [author’s italics]” (Althusser 1990, 5-6). On page 7 of the same essay Althusser appears to directly equate dialectical materialism, the other “scientific discipline” founded by Marx, with Marxist philosophy. However, “whereas Marx was able to develop historical materialism very considerably, he was not able to do the same for *dialectical materialism*, or *Marxist philosophy*” (Althusser 1990, 7). Indeed, when outlining the development of Marx’s thought Althusser claims that, for Marx, “the foundation of the science of history induced the foundation of a new science [i.e. dialectical materialism]” (Althusser 1990, 10). As Ricoeur points out, dialectical materialism “is a philosophical discipline, a second-order system of concepts ruling the theory itself. It is the theory of the fundamental categories, the categorical structure, in the same way that Freud speaks of metapsychology in relation to the clinical concepts (drives, impulses, cathexes, and so on)” (Ricoeur 1986, 110). While Althusser provides an explanation of *what* a Marxist scientific doctrine is, and why the writings of the “young Marx” are to be thought of as “ideological” as opposed to the scientific philosophy of the “later Marx,” it appears as though the reason *why* Marxist theory is “scientific” ultimately depends upon the fact that Marxism is able to reflect on, account for, and explain the conditions of its own history by focusing almost exclusively on how its history is determined, in a strong sense, by the operation of the “objects” which are shown by Marx to be the “real basis” of human history and social life. In the ISA essay Althusser will suggest that Marxism is “scientific” not only for the aforementioned reasons, but also because, with Althusser’s development of the Marxist theory of ideology, Marxist analysis proceeds in such a way that the (by definition ideological) subject “is completely absent as a ‘subject’ from ‘his’ scientific discourse (for all scientific discourse is by definition a subject-less discourse, there is no ‘Subject of science’ except in an ideology of science)...” (Althusser 1971, 171). In contrast, then, virtually every academic discipline, including philosophy prior to the advent of Marxist philosophy, is “ideological” insofar as they are unable to account for their historical determination by the “real basis.” In the following discussion it will be shown that Althusser sees this as an effect of the function of ideology.

difficulties Althusser had faced when attempting to clearly differentiate the reality of ideology from that of science. Importantly, many of these difficulties revolve around the fact that ideology and science are, for the most part, theorized by and through their opposition to one another.<sup>4</sup> Althusser could not develop science without juxtaposing it to ideology. Hence, ideology and science are in effect “bound” to one another by the necessity of their opposition. Although the present discussion will focus specifically on outlining Althusser’s theory of ideology, I do realize that concentrating on ideology without also considering what Althusser says about the prospect of a fully developed Marxist “science” could, understandably, compel the reader to seek clarification on a number of points. For the sake of brevity I do not see any way around this.

Althusser begins his analysis of ideology by embarking on a “return” to the traditional “principles of the Marxist theory of *ideology*, which form part of the Marxist theory of society.” Althusser argues that “Marx showed that every social formation constitutes an ‘organic totality’, comprised of three essential ‘levels’: the economy, politics, and *ideology* – or ‘*forms of social consciousness*’” (Althusser 1990, 23). These three “levels” determine the subject’s relationships to the material conditions of its existence, and Althusser argues that in each case the definitive character of such relationships manifests itself in *activity*. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between each “level” and the type of activities which are, in turn, governed by a corresponding social structure. Allow me to quote a fairly lengthy passage in order to provide the reader

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<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of his first lecture on Althusser, Ricoeur points out that Althusser is largely responsible for initiating a transformation of the Marxist theory of ideology, which is undertaken by directly relating ideology not to reality but to science. According to Ricoeur, in Althusser’s work “ideology is placed against the background of a different concept, not so much the real practical life-process – the language of *The German Ideology* – but science.” This is one reason why “the shift in the concept of ideology must be measured according to the criteria of scientificity as embodied in Marxist ‘science’” (Ricoeur 1986, 103-104).

with some indication as to what Althusser is suggesting here.

In a given society, people participate in *economic* production whose mechanisms and effects are determined by the *structure of the relations of production*; people participate in *political* activity whose mechanisms and effects are governed by the *structure of class relations* (the *class struggle*, law and the State). These same people participate in other activities – religious, moral, philosophical, etc. – either in an active manner, through conscious practice, or in a passive and mechanical manner, through reflexes, judgements, attitudes, etc. These last activities constitute *ideological activity*; they are sustained by voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious, adherence to an ensemble of representations and beliefs – religious, moral, legal, political, aesthetic, philosophical, etc. – which constitute what is called the ‘level’ of *ideology* [author’s italics] (Althusser 1990, 24).

The reader may notice that Althusser has not, at least in the passage I have just quoted, indicated that the “mechanisms and effects” of “ideological activity” are “governed” by the *structure of ideology*, as he does when referring to structures – the structure of the relations of production and the structure of class relations – which govern the mechanisms and effects of both economic and political activity. However, just two pages later Althusser states: “This is the first essential characteristic of ideology: like all social realities, *it is intelligible only through its structure* [my italics]” (Althusser 1990, 26). If Althusser believes he is required to “define an important new term” (ideology), and if ideology “is intelligible only through its structure,” then clearly we must attempt to determine what, precisely, this structure could be.

We might begin exploring what Althusser has in mind when invoking the term “structure” by asking: “What are the *elements* of the ideological structure?” Ricoeur raises a similar question – “Of what is ideology a system, though?” – after quoting a passage from *For Marx*. In this passage Althusser states:

It will suffice to know very schematically that an ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or

concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society” (Althusser 1969, 231).

Ricoeur’s answer to the question he poses is, not surprisingly, that ideology is “a system of representation” (Ricoeur 1986, 135). But it is interesting to note that Althusser says something very similar in “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” when he insists that

Ideology comprises representations, images, signs, etc., but these elements considered in isolation from each other, do not compose ideology. It is their *systematicity*, their *mode of arrangement and combination*, that gives them their meaning; it is their *structure* that determines their meaning and function [author’s italics] (Althusser 1990, 26).

One can unmistakably identify a number of crucial terms which appear in both passages, and, what is more, they are utilized consistently in a discussion revolving around a similar theme, i.e. ideology as a system of representations. However, in the passage from “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” Althusser appears to be using “systematicity” and “structure” interchangeably. How do we account for this? If Althusser alternates between “structure” and “system” it is because the system he has in mind is necessarily a *structured* system. In this context “system” and “structure” operate tautologically. That is to say, a system is a system if and only if it is structured, which means that the formulation “unstructured system” is a contradiction in terms. Thus, to say that “it is their *systematicity* that gives them their meaning” is the same as saying “it is their *structure* that determines their meaning and function.”

But this brings us to another, closely connected point. When Althusser claims that it is “*their* mode of arrangement and combination that gives them *their* meaning,” that “it is *their* structure that determines *their* meaning and function,” what does “their” refer to? I suggest that “their” designates both ideologies *and* ideological representations. That is

to say, the “meaning and function” of *an* ideology is determined by the “mode of arrangement and combination” of ideological representations. But we may also say that the “meaning and function” of a *specific* ideological *representation* is similarly determined by the “mode of arrangement and combination” of all the other representations peculiar to a given ideological formation. A specific ideological representation – an image, myth, symbol, sign, idea or concept – cannot be considered in isolation because an ideological representation is itself only intelligible through its relation to all the other representations located within the system as a whole. This amounts to saying that an ideological representation can only be recognized *as such* insofar as it has acquired a meaning and function by virtue of its *position* – its “mode of arrangement and combination” – within the system of representations as a whole. Hence, we can see why Althusser could not have affirmed the possibility of a chaotic and disordered set of ideological representations: if this were the case, it would not even be possible to identify ideological representations *as such*.

If it is reasonable to interpret Althusser’s claim in such a way, then to my mind Althusser is faced with two problems which, for now at least, will have to remain unresolved. First, if the meaning of an ideological representation is a function of its position within the system of representations as a whole, how is it that ideological representations *acquire the position* that they hold within the system of representations? To effectively resolve this problem one would have to take into account not only the meaning and function of the representations in question, but also the nature of the *relations between these representations*, for the system must necessarily consist of *both* a certain number of ideological representations as well as the relations between them. But

if we pursue this line of reasoning it would appear as though the position of any given ideological representation must be an *effect* of the “mode of arrangement and combination” of all the representations within an ideological formation. And this brings us to an equally problematic worry: namely, what determines the specific “mode of arrangement and combination” of ideological representations? At issue here is explaining how the various *relations* between representations are established in the first place. For it would clearly be a mistake to conclude that it is the meaning and function of a specific ideological representation that determines its relations to other representations, as it is precisely the opposite which holds true. Let us put this aside for now in order to continue with our analysis.

In addition to being structured each ideological formation may be thought of as a configuration of ideological representations with its own “mode of arrangement and combination,” i.e. its own unique system/structure. This means that there is not one single system, or “mode of arrangement and combination” of ideological representations which is common to *all* ideological formations. One could quite easily find support for this by returning to the passage from *For Marx*, wherein Althusser states that “*an* ideology is a system (*with its own logic and rigour*) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, *depending on the case*) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society [my italics]” (Althusser 1969, 231). I have italicized the indefinite article “an” because it indicates that Althusser has in mind *any given ideological formation*, and “depending on the case,” that is to say, depending on which ideological formation one is considering, the “logic and rigour” of the “arrangement and combination” of ideological representations will constitute a unique system.

Given Althusser's adherence to Marxist theory it is not too difficult to appreciate why he maintains that "an ideology is a system of representations endowed with a historical existence." But this is an interesting claim, for Althusser appears to be suggesting not that ideological representations are endowed with a historical existence – it goes without saying that they certainly are – but that the system *as a whole* has a historical existence. Therefore the system *as a whole* is subject to historical change, which *also* precludes the possibility that every ideological formation is an expression of the same system. Perhaps this claim is rather trivial insofar as it is clear that ideological formations "come and go" precisely because they have a historical existence. But does this not entail that ideological formations, understood as structured systems of ideological representations, are clearly *not* rigid and static? That is to say, if ideological formations are subject to historical change it would appear as though the constellation of ideological representations will never *in principle* remain constant.

I have thus far shown that Althusser thinks of ideologies as systems of representations. There is an important point here that needs to be taken into account, and this has interesting implications for a consideration of Althusser's thought on the function of ideology. When one reads Althusser's essay "Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation" one will notice that according to Althusser ideologies are not just *systems* of representations, they *are* representations. We might rephrase Ricoeur's question in the following way: "Of what are ideologies representations, though?" And, to follow Althusser, we would have to respond by saying that ideologies are so many different *representations of the world*. This is most evident when one considers what Althusser says in the following quote.

It is as if people, in order to exist as conscious, active social beings in the society that conditions all their existence, needed to possess a certain *representation* of their world, a representation which may remain largely unconscious or, on the contrary, be more or less conscious and thought out. Thus, ideology appears as a certain '*representation of the world*' which relates men and women to their conditions of existence, and to each other, in the division of their tasks and the equality or inequality of their lot [author's italics] (Althusser 1990, 25).

But what does Althusser mean, in this context, by "representation"? If a specific ideology is both a system of representations as well as a representation of the world, then we must conclude that a specific ideology is a representation of the world because it consists of a number of ideological representations which together form a coherent and structured framework. This framework relates "men and women to their conditions of existence." But it can only do so insofar as it "permeates all man's activities, including his economic and political practice; it is present in attitudes towards work, towards the agents of production, towards the constraints of production, in the idea that the worker has of the mechanism of production...it governs the conduct of individuals in families and their behaviour towards others, their attitude towards nature, their judgement on the 'meaning of life'..." (Althusser 1990, 25). In short, a specific ideological formation is a representation of the particular mode in which an individual lives his or her world. Thus, a member of the proletariat is able to live her relation to her conditions of existence *as a proletariat*, and is able to live this relation as "truth," as the way things really are. "Ideology is so much present in all the acts and deeds of individuals that it is *indistinguishable from their 'lived experience'*..." (Althusser 1990, 25).

It is in large part for this reason that the first characteristic of ideology, *qua* "representation of the world," is that it is "a deforming and mystifying representation."

[I]deology, as representation of the world and of society, is, by strict

necessity, a *deforming and mystifying* representation of the reality in which men and women have to live, a representation destined to make men and women accept the place and role that the structure of this society imposes upon them, in their *immediate* consciousness and behaviour. We understand, by this, that ideological representation imparts a certain '*representation*' of reality, that it makes *allusion* to the real in a certain way, but that at the same time it bestows only an *illusion* on reality [author's italics] (Althusser 1990, 29).

“Illusory,” “false,” “deforming” and “mystifying” are all terms that Althusser uses in “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” in order to highlight the opposition between the “real,” “objective” social structures – political, economic and ideological structures – which together determine the practices engaged in by individuals during their political, economic, and ideological activities, and on the other hand the “false” or indeed *complete lack of objective* knowledge that these same people have of the “objective social structures” which determine virtually every aspect of their existence. Thus, here the dichotomy between “real”/“objective” and “illusory”/“false” is coextensive with the dichotomy “science”/“ideology”. However, in *For Marx* Althusser makes an interesting terminological shift.

When Althusser attempts a “profound definition of ideology” in *For Marx*, the term “illusion” does not even appear once, but is replaced by “imaginary,” which likewise does not appear in “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation.” I suggest that we may understand this terminological shift as an indication that Althusser is interested in retaining the distinction between the “real” – which can be revealed and studied only by Marxist “science” – and ideology, while at the same time endeavouring to avoid the negative connotations of “illusory” as that which paradoxically designates something which is lacking in reality. In *For Marx* we come across the second characteristic of ideology *qua* representation of the world: ideology is an imaginary

representation of the world which has a reality precisely because it is lived.

In *For Marx* Althusser writes: “So ideology is a matter of the lived relation between men and their world,” and what human beings *live* is an imaginary relation to their world (Althusser 1969, 233). Ricoeur suggests that this may be understood in the following way: “ideology reflects in the form of an imaginary relation something which is already an existing relation, that is, the relation of human beings to their world” (Ricoeur 1986, 136). While human beings may have a real existing relation to their world, or, more precisely, to the material conditions of their existence, *they do not live this relation as such*. “An ideology is both lived *and* imaginary, it is the lived *as* imaginary” (Ricoeur 1986, 136). Since the imaginary relation is lived we should not construe “imaginary” to mean “lacking in reality.” The reality of the imaginary relation is due to the fact that it is lived. We can see here that the mechanisms and effects of ideology do indeed govern ideological activity, as one of the effects of ideology is that individuals will *actively live it as such*.

But why do individuals come to live ideology? The answer to this question will become apparent if we consider what Althusser says about the function of ideology. And the function of ideology is, in turn, closely connected to what Ricoeur has referred to as Althusser’s “positive appreciation of ideology,” which was already alluded to in the passage from “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” cited above. According to Althusser, “ideology has the function of assuring the *bond* among people in the totality of the forms of their existence, the *relation* of individuals to their tasks assigned by the social structure... It can then be seen that ideology is destined to assure the cohesion of the relations of men and women to each other, and of people to their tasks...” (Althusser

1990, 28). The preservation of social cohesion is *the* social function of ideology. And in *For Marx* we see this theme repeatedly emphasized by Althusser. For example: “*it is clear that ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence* [author’s italics]” (Althusser 1969, 235). When commenting on this aspect of Althusser’s theory of ideology Ricoeur contends that, for Althusser, “there will always be ideology, because people have to make sense of their lives. This task is not the province of [Marxist] science, which cannot do everything, but rather the function of ideology” (Ricoeur 1986, 137). As Ricoeur points out, this leads to the possibility that ideology is *also* “the system of means by which we try to adjust our capacity to change to the actual conditions of change in society in general. Therefore, ideology has a certain ethical function; it attempts to make sense of the accidents of life, the painful aspects of existence” (Ricoeur 1986, 139).

The idea that “ideology is destined to assure the cohesion of the relations of men and women to each other” anticipates what will later be argued in the ISA essay: namely, that ideology is “responsible” for ensuring the reproduction of the relations of production. Pecheux draws attention to the fact that “the relations of men and women to each other” *are* the relations of production. “The relations of production are relationships between ‘men’, *in the sense that they are not relationships between things, machines, non-human animals or angels; in this sense and this sense only* [author’s italics]” (Pecheux 1982, 103). Furthermore, a number of the themes and notions we have hitherto considered during this exposition of Althusser’s theory of ideologies will be taken up again during our analysis of Althusser’s theory of ideology “in general.” In particular, one will notice

that in the ISA essay both “structure” and “function” acquire alternative determinations, which is a direct consequence of Althusser’s redetermination of the term “ideology.”

### 2.3 – Althusser on Ideology “In General”

In the section of the ISA essay wherein Althusser is primarily concerned with presenting his theory of ideology “in general,” he begins by qualifying the discussion that is to follow. Althusser writes: “I should like to venture a first and very schematic outline of such a theory. The theses I am about to put forward are certainly not off the cuff, but they cannot be sustained and tested, i.e. confirmed or rejected, except by much thorough study and analysis” (Althusser 1971, 120). After inviting the reader to accept that all he is attempting to do is introduce a very basic and preliminary theory of ideology “in general,” Althusser maintains that “if I am able to put forward the project of a theory of ideology *in general*, and if this theory really is one of the elements on which theories of ideologies depend, that entails an apparently paradoxical proposition which I shall express in the following terms: *ideology has no history*” (Althusser 1971, 121). In order to appreciate what exactly Althusser is proposing here I will attempt to explain the significance of the *difference* between ideologies and ideology “in general.”

The crucial point to bear in mind when thinking about the difference between Althusser’s theory of ideologies and his theory of ideology “in general” is that in the ISA essay Althusser is attempting to solve the problem of what exactly is responsible for ensuring the reproduction of the relations of production. If the relations of production are relations between subjects, then the reproduction of the relations of production *is* the reproduction of the relations between subjects. Therefore any explanation as to how the relations between subjects are reproduced clearly requires one to explain the

(re)production of the *subjects* who are to become “implicated” in such relations.<sup>5</sup> The “subject” is a common denominator which is crucial not only for the very possibility of relations between subjects, but also for all of the various historically determined manifestations of such relations. One can only exist in a relation with another subject, whatever that relation may be, insofar as one is a subject. Therefore, if Althusser needs to account for the (re)production of subjects, then any theory he develops for this purpose would have to be able to explain the (re)production of *every subject that ever was*.

It would obviously have been a waste of time to look for a solution to *this* problem by examining the structure of the relations of production. And our discussion of Althusser’s theory of ideologies could not, *on its own*, provide us with what is needed, as ideologies are in the last instance “determined by the class struggle,” that is to say, “ideologies have a history of their own [author’s italics]” (Althusser 1971, 122). If there is nothing about a particular historically contingent ideological formation which could account for the (re)production of subjects – because there is nothing about a particular ideological formation that could account for the (re)production of every subject that ever was – then Althusser’s theory of ideologies is somewhat lacking. And yet there is! We have already seen that Althusser believes a subject will live its relation to another subject *in* ideology. In the ISA essay Althusser takes this a step further by arguing that a subject will live its relation to another subject *because of* ideology. Therefore, the problem of *why* subjects come to live in ideology is closely connected to the problem of *how* subjects come to live in ideology.

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<sup>5</sup> This is certainly not to be understood as a concern, on the part of Althusser, to explain the biological or technological (re)production of subjects, although, arguably, this is not completely unrelated. For the time being it may suffice to understand the term “subject” as that which designates a speaking being who has been “successfully” integrated into the social formation. Therefore, the problem of how the subject is (re)produced is closely connected to the problem of how the subject becomes a speaking being who is “successfully” integrated into the social formation.

Althusser had already shown that subjects “live” their ideology, and that they have *always* lived their ideology – which is implied by the proposition: ideology, *qua* representation of the world, is “destined to assure the cohesion of the relations of men and women to each other.” For this reason, there must be something common to *every* ideological formation which makes it possible for the subject to “live” in ideology, though is not, *as they are*, subject to historical change. Indeed, Althusser writes:

the peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history, in the sense in which the *Communist Manifesto* defines history as the history of class struggles... (Althusser 1971, 122).

The idea that ideology is, in this sense, omni-historical, is a development of Althusser’s first thesis: “ideology has no history” (Althusser 1971, 121). Perhaps we are now in a better position to appreciate the reason why Pecheux feels it is necessary to highlight the two determinations of the term “ideology”.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, “ideology” may designate a particular ideological formation which has a concrete historical existence and thus a determinate temporal duration, whereas on the other hand “ideology” may also refer to a structure and functioning which is common to all ideological formations – precisely because it is not subject to historical change – and is therefore not relative to any *specific*

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<sup>6</sup> We may recall that in the introduction to this discussion on Althusser’s theory of ideology I had cited Pecheux’s remarks concerning the two determinations of the term “ideology” as it appears in Althusser’s work. According to Pecheux, “ideology” may refer to “the differentiated multiplicity of the ideological instance in the form of a combination...of elements each of which is an ideological formation...in short, *an ideology*” (Pecheux 1982, 102). This is fairly straightforward and does not require any further elaboration. However, Pecheux’s explanation of the second determination of the term “ideology” is more interesting, and is especially relevant insofar as it directly relates to my attempt to clarify Althusser’s use of the expression “ideology ‘in general.’” Pecheux claims that “the determination of the term ‘Ideology’ [also] operates ‘in general’, as when one says ‘there is no square root except of a positive number’, implying that *every* square root is the square root of a positive number” (Pecheux 1982, 102). This claim may be best understood if we think of “positive number” as analogous to “ideological formation,” and “square root” as analogous to the “structure” and “function” of ideology. What Pecheux is attempting to point out, then, is that there is a specific structure and function which is common to every ideological formation. And if it is indeed an ideological formation, it *must* have this structure and function.

ideological formation.

Althusser draws a parallel between the non-historical nature of ideology and the unconscious as it was theorized by Freud. According to Althusser, “our proposition *ideology has no history* can and must (and in a way which has absolutely nothing arbitrary about it, but, quite the reverse, is theoretically necessary, for there is an organic link between the two propositions) be related directly to Freud’s proposition that the unconscious is eternal, i.e. that it has no history” (Althusser 1971, 122). Althusser then reinforces this parallel when he states:

[I]f eternal means, not transcendent to all (temporal) history, but omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable in form throughout the extent of history, I shall adopt Freud’s expression word for word, and write: *ideology is eternal, exactly like the unconscious*. And I add that I find this comparison theoretically justified by the fact that the eternity of the unconscious is not unrelated to the eternity of ideology in general (Althusser 1971, 122).

There are two points I would like to raise in connection to the “transhistorical” nature of ideology. First, although Althusser’s entire theory of ideology “in general” is simply a “first and very schematic outline,” and so perhaps we should not be too critical of him for not clarifying the precise nature of the “organic link” between the Freudian unconscious and the structure and functioning of ideology, Althusser’s insistence on such a link suggests that it is a crucial aspect of his theory. Second, if “ideology is eternal,” this is because its structure and functioning are both “immutable in form throughout the extent of history.” We must therefore recognize that in the ISA essay the terms “structure” and “function” have, in addition to “ideology,” also been determined differently. Let us look closely at what Althusser *now* has in mind regarding the “structure” and “functioning” of ideology, and let us begin with a consideration of the function of ideology.

Althusser's central thesis in the ISA essay is that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971, 128). The interpellation of individuals as subjects is the function of ideology. "[T]he category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology only insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects [author's italics]" (Althusser 1971, 129). Althusser will often use the terms "interpellate" and "constitute" interchangeably. According to Pecheux, "'interpellation' is an 'illustration', an example adapted to a particular mode of exposition, "'concrete" enough to be recognized, but abstract enough to be thinkable and thought, giving rise to a knowledge"' (Pecheux 1982, 105). And, as Ricoeur points out, "the use of the term 'interpellation' is an allusion to the theological concept of call, of being called by God" (Ricoeur 1986, 149), which is exploited by Althusser when he constructs a scenario intended to "illustrate" the operation of ideological interpellation. Althusser considers the Christian religious ideology and explains what happened when God "called" or "hailed" Moses. The point is that when God hailed Moses, Moses *recognized* that "it was really he" who was called. Only by recognizing that it was he who was called could Moses *respond* to God's call. And when Moses responded to God's call, Moses *became* a Christian subject, for Moses also recognized God as the one who had called him. Without being "called" by God, Moses could not have *become* a Christian subject. Thus it is not just the "call" that "constitutes" the subject; it is also the subject's response to the call, which in turn presupposes that the subject has recognized that he or she is the one who was called.

Although the scenario Althusser constructs in order to elucidate the "mechanism" of ideological interpellation effectively draws attention to the three "moments"

comprising the constitution of the subject – hailing, recognition and response – the scenario can nevertheless be somewhat misleading. For Moses was already a subject, though clearly not a Christian subject, prior to being called by God. Moses must have been “interpellated” or “constituted” as a subject many years prior to his encounter with God. Indeed, Althusser pushes this to an extreme when he claims that “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*” (Althusser 1971, 132). Before proceeding any further I would like to briefly consider Althusser’s seemingly paradoxical claim that “individuals are always-already subjects.”

The precise context within which Althusser first introduces this claim includes an equally paradoxical assertion: “That an individual is always-already a subject, even before he is born, is nevertheless the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all” (Althusser 1971, 132). The infant, even before it is born, is already a subject? How do we make sense of this? “[I]f we agree to drop the ‘sentiments’, i.e. the forms of family ideology (paternal/maternal/conjugal/fraternal) in which the unborn child is expected,” writes Althusser, “it is certain in advance that it will bear its Father’s Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is ‘expected’ once it has been conceived” (Althusser 1971, 132). To my mind we cannot, simply on the basis that an infant who has yet to be born will bear its Father’s name and will have an identity all its own, conclude that the unborn infant is, *for-itself*, already a subject. There are two reasons why.

First, the unborn infant has not been interpellated by even the most immediate ideological formation, i.e. the familial ideology. As we have seen, the subject is constituted as such only if it has been interpellated. But if the unborn infant is already a subject, how can we say that the infant has been “hailed” or “called”? How can we say that the infant has recognized themselves as the one who has been “hailed”? And how can we say that the infant has been given the opportunity to respond? Quite simply, we cannot respond positively to any of these questions. And second, if the infant, even at the moment it is born, is already a subject, I do not see how Althusser’s claim that “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” makes any sense, for in this case there is no individual to interpellate. We must, with Pecheux, posit the existence of a “non-subject,” an “individual,” in order to explain how interpellation operates. In this case, the “non-subject” can only be the infant, both before it is born and immediately after it is born. By doing so we can still salvage the relative import of Althusser’s claim that “the infant, even before it is born, is already a subject.”

We must simply recognize that as far as everyone who speaks of the unborn infant is concerned, the infant is a subject, though the infant itself is not *yet* “actually” a subject, for it has not recognized itself as a subject. Even immediately after it is born the infant is not yet a subject, *but is always-already addressed as such by other subjects*, and is therefore always-already *recognized as a subject by others*. The infant is a subject *for-others*. Furthermore, *it is precisely because the infant is always addressed as a subject that it comes to recognize itself as a subject*. This is what Pecheux is getting at when he argues that Althusser’s discussion of ideological interpellation has an advantage in that “the theatre of consciousness (I see, I think, I speak, I see you, I speak to you, etc.) is

observed from behind the scenes, from the place where one can grasp the fact that the subject is spoken *of*, the subject is spoken *to*, before the subject can say: ‘I speak’” (Pecheux 1982, 105-106). For instance, the infant comes to recognize itself as a “boy” because he is always addressed as a “boy.” And a “girl” comes to recognize herself as a “daughter” because she is always addressed as a “daughter.” Both can then *respond* to a parent from such a position, and when the response is uttered, as when either the son or daughter says “yes, father, I will,” they have *also* recognized the “father” or “mother” as a subject.

Although Althusser did not elaborate the following, we may say that “recognition” presupposes three conditions. First, the infant will come to *speak* of themselves as a subject, as a “boy” or a “girl,” and will similarly speak of others as subjects, as “boys” or “girls.” Second, the infant will come to *act* as a subject, as a “boy” or a “girl,” and will similarly act towards others as subjects, as “boys” or “girls.” Lastly, the infant will come to *think* of themselves as a subject, as a “boy” or a “girl,” and will similarly think of others as subjects, as “boys” or “girls.” And all this on condition that those who are already subjects address the infant as a “boy” or a “girl,” act towards the infant in the manner that one acts towards either a “boy” or a “girl,” which, in both cases, presupposes that other subjects recognize the infant as being either a “boy” or a “girl.” I suggest that we may understand Althusser’s claim that “individuals are ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects which they always-already are” (Althusser 1971, 132) in this light. Simply put, by “individual” Althusser means the strictly biological organism divested of any social or cultural “attributes,” i.e. its name, the language it speaks, its gender, its identity, its ideas and hopes, etc. The individual is always “abstract” only from the

standpoint of other subjects: the infant, prior to its birth, will be spoken of as a subject – as a “boy” or a “girl” – and not simply as a purely biological organism.

After presenting the scenario which is intended to demonstrate the mechanism of ideological interpellation, Althusser then makes a rather puzzling claim: “[T]he interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects” (Althusser 1971, 134). In the “scenario” God is this “Unique and central Other Subject”; Subject being written “with a capital S to distinguish it from ordinary subjects, with a small s,” and later on referred to as the “Absolute Subject” (Althusser 1971, 134). However, the “Absolute Subject” is not unique to Christian ideology alone, but is a constitutive element of the structure of ideology “in general,” and thus of every particular ideological formation.

In order to understand what the structure of ideology “in general” is, perhaps it is best to begin by pointing out that in Althusser’s claim: “[T]he interpellation of individuals as subjects presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject,” the term “existence” is put in inverted commas. This suggests that Althusser does not believe that the “Absolute Subject” enjoys the same existence as the subject, which is confirmed by Althusser’s remark that “the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject, is *specular*, i.e. a mirror-structure,<sup>7</sup> and *doubly* specular: this mirror duplication is

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<sup>7</sup> There are several authors who have effectively shown that Althusser’s notion of the mirror-structure was derived from the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and in particular from Lacan’s theory of the mirror-stage. Lacan first introduced this theory in a paper entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” which he delivered in Marienbad during the Fourteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis, in July of 1936. For a detailed analysis of Althusser’s use of this term and the problematic implications it has for his theory of ideology “in general” – which are largely due to the fact that Althusser has divorced the concept from its original

constitutive of ideology, and ensures its functioning” (Althusser 1971, 134-135). I suggest that we think of the Absolute Subject as *speculary*, that is to say, *as an image*. And in order to better grasp the formative power that it has, we could consider what Althusser is suggesting when describing the relationship between the Absolute Subject (in this case God) and the subject (Moses).

And Moses, interpellated-called by his Name, having recognized that it ‘really’ was he who was called by God, recognizes that he is a subject, a subject of God, a subject subjected to God, a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject. The proof: he obeys him, and makes his people obey God’s Commandments (Althusser 1971, 134).

When Althusser says that the subject is “a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject,” he is inviting us to think of the relationship between the Subject and the subject as one based primarily on the infant’s captivation by the Absolute Subject’s authority and power.

This facilitates the infant’s recognition of itself only insofar as the infant submits to the *specular image*, which in turn is expressed and conveyed to the infant by the way that the “father” or “mother” – subjects who do in fact exercise a certain degree of authority and power over the infant – address the infant. This is why Althusser maintains that

[A]ll ideology is centred...the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connection such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him... (Althusser 1971, 135).

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context without providing any justification for doing so – see: Michele Barrett, “Althusser’s Marx, Althusser’s Lacan,” in E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker, eds., *The Althusserian Legacy*, New York 1993; David Macey, “Thinking with Borrowed Concepts: Althusser and Lacan,” in Gregory Elliot, ed., *Althusser: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge Ma 1994; and Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 149-151.

If we return to our previous discussion of the infant-become-subject, we can see that by addressing the infant as either a “boy” or a “girl” the “father” or “mother” does not necessarily incarnate the Absolute Subject of the patriarchal familial ideology – for they are subjects, written with a small s – but *creates* for the infant the Absolute Subject, which is simply an image of the infant that is bestowed on it by the “father” or “mother” when addressing the infant as either a “boy” or a “girl.” Perhaps one reason why the infant is captivated by the image (the Absolute Subject) is simply because the infant does not have any other image of itself by which it is able to recognize itself. The infant-become-subject is subjected to the *image*, in which it can contemplate itself, that the “father” or “mother” has of it. And this is why the Absolute Subject “occupies the unique place of the Centre”: the Absolute Subject will always be an image located at a focal point which fixes the subject’s recognition of itself and others, thereby allowing the infant-become-subject to contemplate itself while at the same time encouraging the subject’s subjection to an image which was never its own.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 – Introduction

We have seen that Ian Adams and Louis Althusser have each sought to explain what ideology is. Although their respective theories are certainly unique – with many of the most pronounced differences resulting from the influence of divergent theoretical and philosophical inspirations – they nevertheless share a number of interesting similarities. The most striking of these is closely connected to the problem of how to formulate a theory of ideology which is not itself ideological. Arguably this problem stems from how the concept “ideology” frames any discourse about it. When the concept is invoked, it is invoked with a term (ideology) which marks a distinction between that which is “actual,” “true,” or “real,” and that which is “illusory,” “false,” or “distorted,” such that one cannot say anything “true” about ideology unless one takes up a position which is not distorted by the very phenomenon that one intends to examine.<sup>1</sup> It is the logic of this imperative which has compelled both Adams and Althusser to identify a “neutral” position from which they can then engage in a sound (that is, non-ideological) analysis of ideology, as

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<sup>1</sup> It is not necessarily the case that Adams and Althusser have utilized the term “ideology” in a manner which is inconsistent with how it has been employed traditionally. Although I do not intend to closely trace the historical uses of the term, nor consider the significance of this for an analysis of *how* the term has come to operate according to the logic sketched out above, I have already suggested that one can certainly see in Napoleon’s attempt to slander and discredit political opponents by branding them “ideologists” one of the first instances of it being used to designate a set of beliefs which are ostensibly distorted, false, or illusory. This raises an interesting question, which will have to remain open. Could the term be *productive* of the distinction that I had mentioned above? That is to say, could it be the case that the term “ideology” not only maintains *by different means* what is ultimately an ancient distinction, but also perpetuates it? If so, does the term maintain the distinction *by perpetuating it*; by re-instituting, creating, or imposing the distinction when inscribed and re-inscribed into a discourse which is already open to this act. If this is so, it would seem as though the term “ideology” not only maintains the distinction by perpetuating it in a manner which is essentially reproductive of the distinction in question, but may also be productive of the very phenomenon which it then purports to designate. This, of course, would have interesting implications for a consideration of that which is then juxtaposed to the ideological insofar as the “non-ideological” may also be produced and sustained through its relation to the ideological and by the circulation of a term which continues to operate in such a way.

this is thought to be the most effective way to guarantee that any conclusions which may be arrived at will be just as objective as is the method according to which they have been deduced. For Althusser, the development and application of a properly scientific Marxist theory holds out such a promise, whereas for Adams one must focus on the individual position and be attentive to the “logical character” of the “pseudo-descriptive” concepts which, as we have seen, necessarily entails a moral evaluation rather than an “objective” description of how things really are.

Because Adams and Althusser believe they have identified a place from which it is possible to engage in a “non-ideological” discourse on ideology, each thinker is confident that their respective discoveries – which in both cases is that of a structure which is thought to be inherent to ideology – are not subject to the difficulties that have plagued the work of other theorists. For Adams, this “formal” structure pertains specifically to political ideologies, i.e. traditions of political thought, while on the other hand Althusser believes he has been able to discern the structure of ideology “in general,” that is to say, a single structure which is common to every ideological formation.<sup>2</sup> With the discovery of a fixed, stable, and invariable structure, both Adams and Althusser have attempted to secure for those interested in the study of ideology a fixed, stable, invariable and *non-ideological* “object.” In both cases it is believed that the structure of ideology has finally become an *object of knowledge*. However, in neither Althusser's nor Adams' texts will one find an analysis of the concept of “structure”: this concept, which

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<sup>2</sup> I should note, briefly, that in the ISA essay, on page 177 of *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Althusser refers to the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” as a “formal” structure. For instance: “As the formal structure of all ideology is always the same...” On the other hand, on page 90 of *The Logic of Political Belief* Adams similarly indicates that the structure of political ideology is a formal structure. Though I do not see any significant difference between Althusser's use of the term “formal” when characterizing the mirror-structure of ideology “in general,” and Adams' use of the same term for the same reasons, for the sake of clarity I will refer only to the structure that Adams has introduced as a “formal” structure.

announces the object that functions as the condition on which any knowledge of ideology depends – insofar as it serves as the primordial object of that knowledge – is taken for granted and is never put into question.

If “structure” designates that “object” which guarantees the intelligibility of ideology – as Althusser quite explicitly maintains when he claims that “ideology is intelligible only through its structure” – then we must interrogate the concept itself.<sup>3</sup> We simply cannot accept that “ideology is intelligible only through its structure,” regardless of what *form* that structure may take, unless we know what must be the case in order for *any* structure to exist *at all*.<sup>4</sup> The following discussion will therefore begin with an interrogation of the concept “structure.” While doing so I will not be concerned with

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<sup>3</sup> Althusser introduces this claim in “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” when outlining several of the “essential characteristics” of ideology (Althusser 1990, 26). In the context of that discussion Althusser is specifically concerned with ideological formations, understood there as structured systems of ideological representations. The term “structure” is used to characterize the “mode of arrangement and combination” of ideological representations. I do not believe that when invoking the claim mentioned above, while referring to the mirror-structure of ideology “in general,” I am fundamentally misrepresenting Althusser’s position. Indeed, on pages 180-182 of the ISA essay Althusser clearly identifies the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” as that which maintains the ideological illusion, and consequently as that which must be known if the illusion itself (ideology) is to be understood.

<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding any further I would like to raise three points. First, although it would certainly be an interesting endeavor unfortunately I will not, here, be able to develop an exhaustive list of all of the conditions that must hold true if some (x) is to be deemed a structure. Second, the reason why it is important to determine what must be the case in order for *any* structure to exist is simply because doing so will enable us to effectively ground our analysis of the formal structure of political ideology and the mirror-structure of ideology in general.” Our interrogation of the concept “structure” will not be primarily concerned with examining a specific structure – whether this be Adams’ formal structure, Althusser’s mirror-structure, or the Empire State Building – in order to determine whether or not each of these *instantiations* of “structure” provides us with an indication as to what must hold true of every structure. Rather, what is fundamentally at stake here is whether or not the *concept* “structure” – as it is to be understood *after* we have identified the conditions which must hold true of *any* (x) if it is indeed a structure – is consistent with that which, in the context of Adams’ and Althusser’s respective theories, is designated by the *term* “structure.” Third, I do realize that my attempt to determine what must be the case in order for any structure to exist presupposes that all structures – regardless of whether or not one may have in mind an ideal structure or a material structure (such as a building) – are intelligible *as such* only if they exhibit or express the general principles and conditions entailed by the concept “structure.” I have no problem with this, but the reader will no doubt feel compelled to challenge this assumption, particularly when he or she comes across those parts of the following discussion wherein I intentionally use language which suggests that some kind of subject is involved during the construction of a structure. Although the following claim is of crucial importance, and although I will forego an explanation of it (as it will hopefully be justified by virtue of the fact that it is a necessary and logical consequence that directly follows from all of the conditions which will be elucidated during our interrogation of the concept “structure”), I maintain, albeit tentatively, that *every* structure has been constructed, in some way, by at least one subject.

examining a particular instantiation of a “structure” within the framework of a general explication of the concept of “structure,” nor will I be concerned with clarifying the precise relationship between the concept and whatever object may be designated by the term “structure.” Rather, I hope that on the basis of the conclusions arrived at while thinking through the concept “structure” we will have acquired a set of criteria – criteria that will hold true of any object which can properly be called a structure – according to which we may then examine the formal structure of political ideology and the mirror-structure of ideology “in general.” This will enable us to determine whether or not “ideology (*really is*) intelligible only through its structure.”

### 3.2 – Interrogating the Concept of “Structure”

In order to ensure that our analysis of the concept “structure” does not, from the very beginning, start off in such a way that it continues in a manner which is hopelessly misguided, it may be best to consider the following rather simple and perhaps obvious proposition: if any structure exists, it must exist as that which has *either* been constructed and has therefore come to exist as the result of a process, or, alternatively, it need not necessarily be constructed in order for it to exist as such.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the first possibility points towards the historicity of *both* the process and the structure which results from it, the latter certainly does not. If a structure need not be constructed in order for it to exist, then it would appear as though the only way to account for the fact that it does exist is to think of it as existing eternally: as a phenomenon that has always existed and will never

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<sup>5</sup> For now it will suffice to say that every use of the term “process” in this discussion is to be understood as referring to the process of constructing a structure. Though I will not, here, provide a complete account of what this process must involve, during the course of the following discussion I will attempt to identify several important considerations concerning the process in question.

cease to exist.<sup>6</sup> However, in order to lend even a semblance of plausibility to this position one would need to provide at least one example of a structure whose existence is eternal. I simply cannot fathom how or where one could locate such an example, nor do I believe it is even possible for one to think of a structure that has always existed and will never cease to exist. And second, even if one could find such an example does this not demonstrate that one already knows what a structure is; for one must already know what a structure is if one is to correctly identify any (x) as a structure? But this is precisely what is at issue in the present discussion and exemplifies the concern that has been raised with regard to the utilization of the term “structure” in the texts of Adams and Althusser.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, though it might seem somewhat trivial to maintain that “a structure must be that which has been constructed and has therefore come to exist as the result of a process,” from this proposition one can derive several others, the elucidation of which is

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<sup>6</sup> The reader could, arguably, suggest that the dichotomy presented above is false or somewhat misleading insofar as it does not take into account the notion of an emergent structure as a reasonable third alternative. If it is true that every structure exists as the result of a process, then there is clearly a sense in which every structure is, to some extent, an emergent structure. But this is not necessarily what is at issue here. Much of the work that has been done on emergent *systems* postulates that it is possible for a system to emerge as the result of spontaneous, random, or accidental occurrences. In contrast, my use of the term “constructed” has connotations which suggest that the process in question is intentional, directed, or in some sense “governed.” The difference between the two ways to view the process which results in the “emergence” of a structure poses a serious problem, as one can draw a number of divergent conclusions from each of these two possibilities. I am unaware of any work which has been done on the notion of an emergent structure, and so to my mind, in order to resolve this problem – which is the only way to determine whether or not the notion of an emergent structure is a valid alternative – one would need to first establish the precise difference(s) between the notion of “system” and that of “structure.” This is something I cannot do here, and so I will continue this discussion by supposing that only systems may be “emergent” in the sense of a random, spontaneous, or accidental process.

<sup>7</sup> The point is that without an adequate understanding of the ontological meaning of “structure” it is possible that one may *incorrectly* identify some (x) as a structure, when in fact the (x) in question is not a structure. Indeed, saying that some (x) is a structure does not make it so. I hope to demonstrate that this is precisely the problem with regard to Adams’ and Althusser’s use of the concept “structure.” In effect, they have utilized the concept without first providing the reader with any indication as to what they mean by “structure.” Because neither thinker has a precise understanding of the meaning of “structure” – according to which the conditions of possibility which hold true of every structure may be sufficiently grasped with a view to fully comprehending the (x) which is designated by the term “structure” – both thinkers have mistakenly concluded that “ideology is intelligible only through its structure” when in fact there is no reason to accept that either the “formal” structure of political ideology nor the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” are actually structures.

advantageous for an analysis of the concept “structure.”<sup>8</sup>

The first of these is: if a structure exists as the result of a process, then in principle it must be possible to identify a point in time when the structure came to exist as such; a singular *event* which simultaneously signals *both* the end of the process as well as the “emergence” of the structure. But what does this suggest? In effect, the event conjoins the two and can only occur if the following holds true: there is no structure without the process, *and vice versa*. That is to say, the event in question can only occur insofar as the structure itself functions as a condition which facilitates the initiation of the process. This can be made explicit if we recognize that since the process ends only with the emergence of the structure, the emergence of the structure shows itself to be that which the process is directed towards. The directedness of the process may be appropriately grasped if the event is understood as that which is *anticipated*. As the anticipated result of the process, the event is that *towards which* the process is oriented, and may be understood as its “objective.” The process, then, is oriented from the very beginning by its own finalization, which is nothing other than the anticipated result, i.e. the structure itself. Therefore, the event *qua* anticipated result is the culmination of the very same process which the anticipation of the event initiates.

Second: if the process is oriented from the very beginning by its own finalization, which is nothing other than the anticipated result, i.e. the structure itself, then prior to the occurrence of this event there could not have been a structure, only the continuation of the process by virtue of which a structure will eventually come to exist. For this reason

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<sup>8</sup> What is at stake here is explicating a number of conditions which are, in some sense, already “known,” though often these conditions are known only pre-reflectively. For example, when one looks at a building of any kind one is already aware of the fact that it has been constructed. This is neither learnt nor does one need to reflect on it in order for the existence of the building to be intelligible for the one who encounters it.

we are entirely justified in stating that an incomplete structure is not a structure at all but is, rather, a *project* which is *meant* to be completed and remains *yet* to be completed. Moreover, if a completed project is a structure, then any structure is, necessarily, complete. In order to provide what at this point could only be a tentative clarification of the difference between “process” and “project,” let us recall that the event is that “towards which” the process is oriented. As something which is directed towards something, the process is to be understood as an occurrence which takes place “through” or “in” time. In this case, that which is occurring is a “structuring.” Provisionally, we will say that that which is being structured are “elements.” A project, then, is the tangible manifestation of this structuring. As a manifestation of the process, the project also occurs concurrently with the process, though only as a result of it. But if the “project” is that which is meant to be completed and remains yet to be completed, can we say the same of the process? Quite simply, we cannot. This is because the process will only be *finalized* with the “emergence” of the structure, but even when finalized the process will not *be* the structure. Only the completed project will be the structure. While the project may be that which is meant to be completed and remains yet to be completed – which is due to the fact that when completed the project will be a structure – the process will not become anything since the process is only that which determines how the structure is to be constructed. Therefore, the process cannot be that which is meant to be completed and remains yet to be completed.

Third: if the anticipated result is that towards which the process is oriented, it must also be that *by which* the process is oriented. In what sense, though, is the anticipated result to be understood as that “by which” the process is oriented? And if

there is a difference between the “towards which” that we have already considered, and the “by which” that is now in question, what is it? Perhaps we may render the third proposition explicit by taking as our clue the directedness of the process. In order to account for the fact that the process is finalized with the completion of the project it was necessary to think of the process as being directed towards the anticipated result. It is in this sense that the process is oriented by it. However, in this case the directedness of the process, which is established on the basis of the function of the anticipated result in its capacity as origin and end of the process, is characteristically one whereby the process is “given a sense of direction.” That is to say, the anticipated result is a recognizable “destination,” an “objective,” towards which the process is directed. But the process is directed by the anticipated result in another sense, which must nevertheless be thought of in conjunction with the original sense. In addition to providing the process with an orientation towards which it is directed, the anticipated result also “guides” it in the sense that it “provides directions.” The anticipated result is that *by which* the process is directed insofar as the anticipated result determines *how* the process is to enable the structuring of the elements which, together, will comprise the structure.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it is only because there is some indication as to how the process will structure elements that the process can “realize” its objective. But how does the anticipated result dictate in what way the process will structure the elements that will comprise the structure?

Fourth: if, in its capacity as end, the anticipated result orients the process towards

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<sup>9</sup> While the anticipated result establishes how the project is to be completed, that is to say, how elements are to be structured, it is not thereby the “by which” that orients the *project*. This is because the project is not *in any way* oriented by the anticipated result. Its occurrence is, in a sense, “blind”: any “vision” of the anticipated result is obtained from the process, which remains “(trans)fixed” to the anticipated result due to the fact that the process only *is* as an attempt to realize the anticipated result. As was already mentioned, the project is a tangible manifestation of a certain structuring (the process), which is the only “occurrence” that is oriented by the anticipated result.

itself, it does so, in its capacity as origin, by imparting a certain “logic” according to which the end *can* be realized. This “logic” consists of principles which are established on the basis of certain requirements necessitated by the anticipated result. That is to say, the anticipated result is that “from which” the principles that govern the process are derived. Together, these principles provide a general schematic for the organization, arrangement, and regulation of structural elements; contributes to the formation of certain parameters within which and by virtue of which the project can be completed; and renders any element that may be required, at a specific point during the development of the project, capable of being effectively utilized. Insofar as a certain logic governs the process, and is established in accordance with the requirements necessitated by the anticipated result, we may conclude that if the process is to be finalized it must not deviate from this logic. Therefore, the process in question is best characterized as a structuring that occurs according to a certain logic which is operative from the very beginning because it is established on the basis of the requirements necessitated by the anticipated result.<sup>10</sup>

This *precludes* the possibility of such a process being spontaneous, random, or arbitrary, which in turn precludes the possibility that the *structure* came to exist in a manner that was spontaneous, random, or arbitrary. Now, if what we have so far been able to determine suggests that there is nothing arbitrary about the process, this is because there is nothing arbitrary about the existence of a structure. Indeed, even if there were only one (x) that could be correctly identified as a structure it is important to note that a

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<sup>10</sup> Although I cannot do so here, it would be interesting to determine whether or not one can *predict* what kind of structure will come to exist by deducing, through an examination of the *project*, the logic of the process. There is a sense in which, as a manifestation of the process, the project must “incarnate” the logic of the process. This suggests that it is not necessarily the case that certain principles simply govern the process. Rather, they are operative “during” the process because the process *just is* the principles “set to work” as a structuring.

*specific* structure has come to exist rather than any other. We must therefore make a qualification to an earlier claim and state that the completion of a *specific* project orients the development of a *specific* process. But it is also important to note that if a specific structure came to exist in a manner that had nothing spontaneous, random, or arbitrary about it, then there must be a *reason why that* structure came to exist rather than any other. This is a significant point which needs to be further explored.

In an essay entitled “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Jacques Derrida points to the occurrence of what he believes is a notable event which has transpired in the thinking of what he refers to as the “structurality of structure.”<sup>11</sup> While doing so Derrida suggests that the structural center “closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements...is forbidden” (Derrida 1978, 279). These are so many ways of characterizing the *function* of the structural center, and this holds true of every structural center regardless of how it is determined, that is to say, regardless of what sign

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<sup>11</sup> The event Derrida is attempting to elucidate in this text involves a shift in thinking regarding the “structurality of structure,” and, in particular, the introduction of an alternative conception of the *status* of the structural center. Derrida suggests that this event marks a transition from the long-held traditional conception of the center as that which “constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*” (Derrida 1978, 279). The “classical” approach to the thinking of structure was compromised when “it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play” (Derrida 1978, 280). Although the center must remain, as “even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself,” it can no longer be thought of in terms of a “present-being” or “fixed origin” which persists as a “full presence” precisely because of the fact that it is a *function* which obeys the linguistic law of metaphoric substitution. Paradoxically, the center can only carry out this function if it is present *as an absence*, as a present absence, or a sort of “void” that is every now and then “filled in.” Interestingly enough, Derrida links the thinking of the center in terms of a “present-being” to the desire to master a certain anxiety, which is lived because “anxiety is invariably the result of a certain mode of being implicated in the game, of being caught by the game, of being as it were at stake in the game from the outset” (Derrida 1978, 279). We could take this a step further and say that it is not only the structural center which holds out the promise of mastering a certain anxiety, and in so doing temporarily satisfies the desire in question: by extension *it is also the structure itself*.

has come to occupy the position of structural center. According to Derrida, “the concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play” (Derrida 1978, 279). The structural center is this “fundamental immobility” which provides a “reassuring certitude” insofar as through its function it regulates the additional structural elements organized around it, thereby allowing them to “play,” i.e. to relate to one another in an agreeable and congenial manner, and to remain undisrupted in this state.

Derrida’s discussion of the *function* of the structural center is interesting in its own right, but for our purposes it is especially noteworthy for another reason. In particular, the connection that Derrida draws between the way in which the structural center had been traditionally determined, namely, as a “full presence,” and its *purpose*. Derrida’s analysis of the historical development of the thinking of structure suggests that through its function the structural center has always *served a purpose*. Although the function of the structural center is to facilitate the “play” of the totality of elements which together comprise the structure, this is *not* its purpose. When it was posited as a “full presence” the purpose of the structural center was to satisfy the desire to master a certain anxiety. Thus, in order to establish the reason why a structural center is determined *in its specificity* (that is, as a “full presence” or “present being”) one must consider not its function but its purpose. Furthermore, if we may say that, by extension, the structure itself also serves a purpose, it then follows that the reason why the *structure exists in its specificity* can be grasped through a consideration of its purpose.<sup>12</sup> But clearly this would

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<sup>12</sup> The “specificity” of a structure is determined on the basis of, for example, the distinctive character of its form, its function, its purpose, its operation or its elements. Not all structures have in

only allow one to approach, albeit with greater focus, the problem of accounting for the reason why the structure is *as it is* in its specificity. If there is a difference between how one may determine the reason why the structural center is determined in its specificity, and on the other hand the reason why a structure exists in its specificity, it is because any structure is constructed according to a process which is in every case unique.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in order to account for the reason why the structure is as it is in its specificity, one must explain the nature of the relation between its purpose and its constitution.

Fifth: prior to the initiation of the process by virtue of which a structure will be constructed there must exist a field of elements out of which the structure can be constructed.<sup>14</sup> If the principles which govern the process are to enable, at least in part, the proper organization, arrangement, and positioning of the elements within the structure, this suggests that specific elements *will be* organized into a coherent whole according to certain principles. The fact that some elements will be organized indicates that all such elements *become* organized through their subjection to the principles which are

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common the same form, serve the same function, were constructed for the same purpose, or are comprised of the same elements. Each structure exists as it is in its specificity insofar as each structure is distinct or unique in terms of the aforementioned characteristics and features. Something similar could be said of any given structural center. For any structure that may, within reason, be deemed unique – that is, singular and not identical with any others – it will have a structural center which is as it is in its specificity, i.e. a structural center which has been determined in a way that no other structural center has been. Depending on the case, this structural center could be construed in terms of a “full presence,” as Derrida had pointed out when considering the traditional conceptions of structure. And, what is more, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there may be many manifestations or instantiations of the structural center qua “full presence,” that is to say, many manifestations of how the structural center has been determined, each of which are specific or unique.

<sup>13</sup> Here “unique” simply means that any given process is always unique to the structure which is being constructed. And this because any given structure, in its capacity as origin and end of the process, requires that a specific process structures (organizes and arranges) specific elements in such a way that the structure *can* come to exist.

<sup>14</sup> Depending on what specific structure one is considering, the “elements” which are to comprise it could, of course, be radically different. For instance, if one were to consider a house, it is clear that the elements in question may be a certain type of brick (that is to say, bricks of a certain color or shape), wood (of various types and cut to certain lengths), steel, glass, etc. On the other hand, if we were to consider the symbolic structure of kinship relations, introduced by Claude Levi-Strauss in *The Elementary Structure of Kinship Relations*, we see that the elements which comprise the structure are signifiers of various types.

established on the basis of the anticipated result. And the fact that elements become organized suggests some kind of a *transition* with regard to what we will provisionally call the “status” of elements.

If I am to introduce the following distinction, it is to be understood as a distinction which aims at differentiating between elements solely on the basis of whether or not a particular element can, relative to the point at which the development of the process has reached, be incorporated by the process into the project. Homogenous elements are those which have been incorporated into the project by the process, and heterogeneous elements are those which, for whatever reason, cannot be so incorporated at a specific point in time relative to the point at which the development of the process has reached. What follows is that any given homogenous element has *become* something other than what it was, and that any heterogeneous element may, *in principle*, become a homogenous element. Since any heterogeneous element can, in principle, become a homogenous element, not only does its “status” as an element change (a homogenous element was a heterogeneous element though it no longer can be considered as such), but the element itself undergoes a similar transformation, if only because it is being utilized for a purpose whereas previously it was not or could not be. For this reason, the principle difference between the two kinds of elements is not dependent upon anything that has to do with the element “in itself,” nothing at all pertaining to its “essential” or “inherent” nature. Rather, the principle difference depends almost entirely on whether or not a particular element can, at a specific point in time relative to the point at which the development of the process has reached, be utilized by the process such that it can be situated in relation to the other elements which have already been incorporated.

The sixth and last proposition is the following: both the process and the structure *qua* anticipated result are intelligible only if we consider them within a motivational framework. On the one hand, in addition to being directed (in the two senses that we have discussed) the process is motivated by the realization of the anticipated result. This is the only way that the project is intelligible as that which is meant to be completed and remains yet to be completed. But on the other hand, the “positing” of the anticipated result is also motivated, though of course by something else. When considering Derrida’s analysis of the “structurality of structure” it was clear that Derrida links the positing of a structural center which is thought of in terms of a “full presence” to the desire to master a certain anxiety. Which in turn suggests that the reason why this specific structural center exists, rather than any other, may be grasped if we think of it as a response to the desire in question. This is because the structural center as it is determined in its specificity is intelligible, at least in part, on the basis of the purpose that it serves. And in the context of Derrida’s discussion, this purpose is shown to be the effective response to the desire to master a certain anxiety. The determination of the structural center in its specificity is thus motivated. Furthermore, I had suggested that if it is reasonable to conclude that, by extension, the structure itself also serves a purpose, this would help us to understand why a specific structure came to exist rather than any other. But it also means that the determination of a specific structure *qua* anticipated result, which, since it functions as origin of the process, will only exist as a structure with the finalization of the process, is also motivated. That the process and the structure *qua* anticipated result are both intelligible only within a motivational framework suggests that we are required to acknowledge that some kind of subject is actively involved in the structuring of elements

according to the principles that are established on the basis of the requirements necessitated by the anticipated result.<sup>15</sup>

Now that we have established some, though certainly not all of the conditions which must hold true of any structure insofar as it is indeed a structure, we are now in a better position to determine whether or not the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” and the formal structure of political ideology satisfy these conditions. Let us begin with a consideration of Althusser’s mirror-structure.

### 3.3 – Analysis of the Mirror-Structure of Ideology “In General”

We may recall that “interpellation” is the term Althusser utilizes in order to designate the function of ideology “in general.” Interpellation involves a “hailing” or “calling,” both of which are modes of addressing oneself towards another. When the non-subject is successfully interpellated, it becomes a subject. But interpellation can only be successful on condition that three “moments” occur: the non-subject must be hailed, the non-subject must recognize that it has been hailed, and the non-subject must respond *as a subject* upon being hailed. Although interpellation always involves a “hailing” which is issued by a subject to a non-subject, *it is not the subject which interpellates the non-subject*. Althusser never claims that “subjects hail or interpellate concrete individuals as concrete subjects.” Rather, it is always *ideology* which “interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects.” Those subjects which hail the non-subject do so in the “Name” of a “Unique and central Other Subject,” i.e. the Absolute Subject of a given ideological formation. Subjects act “on behalf” of an Absolute Subject which they have already been interpellated by, and in relation to which they can recognize both themselves and others

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<sup>15</sup> In the concluding section of this thesis I will suggest that there are several reasons as to why we should think of this subject in connection with the theory of the subject which was introduced by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

as subjects. In a sense, subjects are “agents” of the Absolute Subject. The Absolute Subject is an image of the non-subject which is created for the non-subject by other subjects who already exist in a mirror-relation with the Absolute Subject of the same ideological formation. Furthermore, although it is not unreasonable to suppose that the non-subject’s hailing by other subjects (which is not the same as the non-subject’s interpellation) is a kind of process, Althusser does not maintain that interpellation is a process: the three “moments” comprising a successful interpellation are not successive, but occur *at the same time*. The successful interpellation of a non-subject occurs at the moment when the subject responds as such to the hail, and the non-subject responds as a subject to the hail only when the non-subject recognizes that it has been hailed.

As an image which is created for the non-subject by other subjects, the Absolute Subject is a construct that is created out of the various ideological representations which are particular to a given ideological formation. Insofar as these other subjects already exist in a mirror-relation with the same Absolute Subject, in whose Name the non-subject is interpellated, the Absolute Subject is a *collective* Subject. For this reason, the “mirror-structure” of ideology refers to both the relationship between a specific subject and the Absolute Subject of a given ideological formation, as well as to the relationship between the multitude of subjects and the collective Subject. Furthermore, there is in principle a point in time when the mirror-structure comes to exist *for the non-subject*, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the non-subject becomes situated in a mirror-relation with the Absolute Subject at the moment when the non-subject is successfully interpellated, that is, when the non-subject recognizes itself as a subject and responds as such to the hail. It is only on condition that every subject exists in relation to the collective Subject

that the subjects will recognize each other as subjects. In addition, it is important to note that when Althusser says that the mirror-structure of ideology is eternal, i.e. “the structure and functioning [of ideology] are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history” (Althusser 1971, 161), he has in mind only the *form* of the structure, not a particular instantiation of it.<sup>16</sup>

If the successful interpellation of the non-subject is an event, in the sense that it occurs at some point in time, and the “emergence” of the mirror-structure for the non-subject occurs *at the same time* as the non-subject is successfully interpellated, it then follows that the emergence of the mirror-structure is also an event. Indeed, the non-subject’s recognition of itself as a subject and the emergence of the mirror-structure have to occur at the same time, for there is no way to separate them either logically or chronologically. But the “emergence” of the mirror-structure is fundamentally different from the event *qua* anticipated result that we had considered during our interrogation of the concept “structure.” Although there is a sense in which the mirror-structure “emerges” for the non-subject, Althusser gives us no reason to conclude that the mirror-structure is the result of a *process*. Rather, it appears as though the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” just “appears” at some point in time. This is a structure without a process, and for this reason it is not the event *qua* anticipated result that we had identified during our interrogation of the concept “structure.”

However, since ideology is a collective phenomenon, and the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” pertains as much to the relation between the multitude of subjects

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<sup>16</sup> Importantly, if it is determined that a particular instantiation of the mirror-structure does not accord with the conditions we have established, this will have implications for the very possibility of the *form* of the mirror-structure of ideology “in general.” If we cannot accept that there are manifestations of the form of the mirror-structure, then by extension we cannot accept even the form itself.

and the collective Subject as it does to the relationship between a specific subject and the same Subject, perhaps we should attempt to determine where the mirror-structure *for the collective* came from. This is important not only because any analysis of ideology must accept that it is essentially a collective phenomenon, but also because the interpellation of the non-subject presupposes that a multitude of subjects already exist in a mirror-relation with the same collective Subject. Indeed, this is what ensures that the non-subject is addressed (hailed) *in the right way*, and consequently that the *right* image is created for it. Therefore, if it can be determined that Althusser cannot account for how a multitude of subjects already exist in a mirror-relation with the (collective) Absolute Subject prior to the interpellation of any given non-subject, it is difficult to understand *how* the non-subject could be interpellated in the Name of this collective Subject. Which in turn suggests that Althusser's explanation of the mirror-structure as it exists *for the subject* is faced with additional problems, since the existence of a number of subjects who exist in a mirror-relation with the collective subject of an ideological formation is a *precondition* for the successful interpellation of any given non-subject.

For one who is interested in explaining the "origin" of the mirror-structure *for the collective*, there is reason to suppose that the best place to start is by accounting for the origin of the collective Subject itself. This is simply because, as Althusser points out during his discussion of the Christian religious ideology, "there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, i.e. God [author's italics]" (Althusser 1971, 178). As that which is the "absolute condition," the Absolute Subject is the absolute *precondition* for the possibility of other subjects. Therefore, if Althusser cannot account for the "existence" of

the collective Subject (the precondition for the possibility of other subjects), it is very difficult to accept the idea that non-subjects will come to exist in a mirror-relation with the Subject.

We have already seen that the Absolute Subject is an image which is created for the non-subject by other subjects who already exist in a mirror-relation with the collective Subject. In addition, the subjects create this image for the non-subject through their discourse and their actions. That is to say, they “hail” or address the non-subject as a subject while acting towards the non-subject as a subject. Let us focus our attention on the former, i.e. the hail as a form of address. Insofar as the Absolute Subject of an ideological formation is created for the non-subject by subjects who address themselves towards it, it is created out of the ideological representations peculiar to the ideological formation. As a discursive activity, the hailing involves spoken utterances, and therefore must consist of those ideological representations which are fundamentally discursive in nature. In “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” Althusser identifies one ideological representation which most assuredly fits this profile: the sign. But he also includes within the set of ideological representations “concepts.” Surely concepts are also discursive in nature? Why, then, should we focus on the sign?

I suggest that we think of Althusser’s reference to “signs” in connection with the theory of the sign developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>17</sup> If we do so,

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<sup>17</sup> In his *Course on General Linguistics* Saussure introduced a comprehensive theory of the sign. According to Saussure the sign is a “linguistic unit” which consists of two inter-dependent components: the signifier and the signified. Without going into too much detail, the signifier is a “sound pattern” which we may understand in terms of a spoken word as it is apprehended by the one who hears it. The signified is the concept which is expressed or conveyed by this sound pattern (de Saussure 1989, 66). Arguably, in addition to being a sound pattern the signifier may also be thought of as a written inscription which also expresses a signified (a concept). Although I have no hard evidence which could conclusively prove that Althusser does indeed have in mind Saussure’s theory of the sign, or perhaps a variation of this theory, the following are several merely tentative considerations that could support my claim. First, Saussure was one of several

Althusser's reference to concepts becomes somewhat superfluous. That is to say, the concept qua ideological representation is already one of the structural components (the signified) of the Saussurean sign. Furthermore, considering Althusser reference to signs in connection with the Saussurean sign has an added benefit in that we may then think of Saussure's signifiers as ideological representations, which it seems Althusser would have to accept. And this for two reasons: first, the signified (the concept) is inseparable from the signifier (the spoken word). And second, hailing is a discursive activity involving spoken utterances.

Supposing, then, that the collective Subject is that which guarantees the coherency and consistency of the spoken utterances operative during the hailing of the non-subject – and this because those subjects who are addressing the non-subject are doing so in the Name of the collective Subject – which is crucial if the image that is being created is a coherent and consistent one (as it must be if the non-subject is to recognize itself in the image created for it), what sustains the coherency and consistency of the collective Subject in whose Name the non-subject is being hailed? If the Absolute Subject is the Subject of a particular ideological formation, and the Absolute Subject is created, at least in part, out of the discursive ideological representations (signifiers and

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renowned linguists who advocated a structuralist approach to the study of language. This particular approach was influential throughout the 1950's, 60's and 70's, and had informed the work of many prominent French thinkers. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Althusser was, at the very least, aware of the ideas that Saussure had introduced and had recognized that these ideas were taken seriously by thinkers working in fields such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and literary criticism. Second, Althusser was clearly interested in the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose theory of the "mirror-stage" had directly influenced Althusser's theory of the mirror-structure of ideology "in general." No one disputes this, and Althusser himself acknowledges his indebtedness to Lacan in "Freud and Lacan," which was included in the collection of essays entitled *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. If Althusser understood Lacan's thought (and there is debate about whether or not he did) he could only have understood it on condition that he knew just the very basics of Saussure's theory of the sign. This is simply because Lacan's transformation of Saussure's theory occupies a fundamental place in Lacan's work, and the implications of this permeate almost every aspect of Lacan's thought. And third, it is difficult to see what else Althusser could mean by "sign."

signifieds) peculiar to a given ideological formation, then the collective Subject cannot be that which guarantees the consistency of the meaning of those representations: for the collective Subject is itself constructed out of them.

In “Theoretical Practice and Theoretical Formation” Althusser had said that ideological representations acquire their meaning by virtue of their “mode of arrangement and combination, i.e. their systematicity.” Is this a sufficient solution to the problem at hand? Not at all. If Althusser wants to maintain that “ideology interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects,” he must then explain how the ideological formation qua system of ideological representations generates the Absolute Subject. Because the Absolute Subject of a given ideological formation is the precondition for the interpellation of other subjects, this means that it must somehow exist *prior* to the non-subject’s interpellation. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how Althusser could explain this without first identifying something peculiar to the system of representations which is responsible for guaranteeing the existence of the collective Subject. From where else could this “guarantor” originate?

In conclusion, as it stands we cannot accept that ideology “is intelligible only through its structure.” In addition, since Althusser claims that the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” is that which sustains ideological interpellation, and thereby guarantees that subjects will continue to be constituted in the image of a “Unique and central Other Subject,” these propositions are also, by implication, rendered untenable. There are two reasons why Althusser’s theory of the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” is unsatisfactory. First, if Althusser cannot explain how a particular instantiation of the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” comes to exist – because doing so would

require him to identify the process by virtue of which the structure was constructed – then there is no reason to think that considering the *form* of the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” provides a satisfactory approach to the study of ideology. Second, and more importantly, if Althusser cannot account for that which guarantees the “existence” of the collective Subject, we cannot even accept that non-subjects are interpellated in the Name of this Subject.

#### 3.4 – Analysis of the Formal Structure of Political Ideology

Now we will attempt to determine whether or not Adams’ theory of the formal structure of political ideology accords with the conditions that we had outlined during our interrogation of the concept “structure.” We may recall that, according to Adams, “it makes more sense to think of [political] ideologies in terms of traditions of [political] thought...rather than a fixed core of essential doctrine” (Adams 1989, 123). Several examples of such traditions are Liberalism, Communism, Fascism, and Anarchism. These traditions are comprised of a number of individual positions, each of which “may be linked to others in the tradition by a variety of connections in a highly complex pattern” (Adams 1989, 123). In effect, “the position will have a variety of loose, though important, connections with other positions within the tradition of thought” (Adams 1989, 124). Since Adams is attempting to elucidate the formal structure of political ideology, and a political ideology may be thought of in terms of a tradition of political thought, it then follows that the formal structure Adams is referring to concerns the structure of the tradition itself, that is to say, the structure of a tradition which, as a tradition of *thought*, must consist of various principles, concepts, ideas, beliefs, precepts, theories, etc. which are structured in a manner that is consistent with the form of the

formal structure.

The formal structure that Adams outlines consists of several components, all of which are situated in a direct and necessary relation with the structural center. These are the evaluative component, the prescriptive component, the descriptive component, the explanatory component, and a component which we will refer to as the “ideal society.” That which occupies the privileged position of structural center is an archetypal conception of human nature which acquires its unique character due to the fact that it is formulated with pseudo-descriptive rather than purely descriptive terms.

Adams points out that because ideological traditions are “vague and elusive entities, whose exact content and boundaries are uncertain and controversial,” all of those theorists who have taken “the tradition, or some conception of the essence of the tradition, as the appropriate unit of analysis” have encountered serious difficulties. In order to avoid these difficulties, Adams concludes that “it is only in analyzing the individual position that the structure and logic of ideology will be clearly revealed” (Adams 1989, 124). Thus, Adams takes as his unit of analysis the individual position, and attempts to show how the positions introduced by a number of the “core” thinkers who “belong” to a specific tradition of political thought have developed their theories on the basis of either an explicitly formulated or an implicit and presupposed conception of human nature.

When outlining Adams’ theory of the formal structure of political ideology I had raised a concern which pertains directly to a certain inconsistency in Adams’ argument. This revolves around Adams’ outright objection of the possibility that a specific ideological tradition has a single recognizable conception of human nature. Adams’

dismissal of this possibility is clearly evident in the following quotation: “There may be something to be said for linking these thinkers [J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, L.T. Hobhouse, John Dewey, Bernard Bosanquet and John Rawls, all of which are generally thought of as Liberal thinkers] in terms of certain shared features of their thought, but to insist that they all share the same conception of man is to overstate the case greatly” (Adams 1989, 123). However, it is difficult to see how a political ideology can have the formal structure that Adams identifies if the formal structure of ideology *is* the formal structure of an ideological tradition: for the formal structure can only have a *single* conception of human nature as its structural center, and therefore also a single evaluative, prescriptive, explanatory, descriptive and “ideal society” component. And this is precisely what Adams is rejecting. Furthermore, this problem is amplified by the peculiar way in which Adams refers to a conception of human nature *qua* structural centre. There are several instances where Adams refers to both “ideology” and “conception of human nature” concurrently in the *singular*, as when he says: “ideological man is the lynchpin of the ideological structure” (Adams 1989, 103), “the ideology’s conception of man” (Adams 1989, 98), and “the ideology’s conception of human nature” (Adams 1989, 99). Although Adams does not acknowledge as much, in these instances it appears as though he is referring to an ideology’s “conception of man” or “account of human nature” in the singular because *he has to* if he is to maintain that an ideology (a tradition of political thought) does indeed have the formal structure that he believes it does.

In section one of this thesis I proposed what could only be a tentative solution to the problem. In effect, this solution attempts to resolve the problem by fleshing out some of the implications which follow from Adams’ claim that all of the positions within a

given tradition are related by a variety of “loose though important connections.” I suggested that if a specific position “belongs” within a tradition, this must be, at least in part, due to the fact that it shares (with other positions in the tradition) a similar, *though not identical*, conception of human nature. By identifying all of the important connections between the various positions within a tradition, one may then identify the very basics of a conception of human nature which is particular to the *tradition*, though not necessarily each position. And this, I suggested, may provide Adams with a way out of the problem I had raised. However, it is not clear that this merely tentative solution will suffice. This is simply because it is difficult to see why those connections which may potentially exist should be privileged over and above the significance of any “tensions” between and amongst the various conceptions of human nature which are either explicitly advocated or are presupposed by all, or at least many, of the thinkers within a given tradition. In some cases such tensions result from the fact that various aspects of a conception of human nature which is proposed by a particular thinker acquire a greater significance in their body of thought than certain other shared aspects of a conception of human nature which is proposed by another thinker who nevertheless “belongs” to the same tradition. To my mind it is precisely these tensions which are reflective of divergent beliefs, amongst the various thinkers within a tradition, as to what is required of any *correct* account of human nature.

The persistence of this worry is important. If we consider it in relation to several of the conditions that had been established during our interrogation of the concept “structure” not only is Adams’ theory faced with additional problems, but the implications of these problems point towards further considerations that will be addressed

in the concluding section of this thesis. To begin with, Adams has presented what he believes is the formal structure of political ideology. However, as we have seen, any structure must exist as the result of a process. Adams provides us with no indication as to what this process may be. Moreover, I had suggested that Adams has simply inferred, on the basis of the conclusions he has arrived at after analyzing the individual position, that a tradition of political thought must also have a formal structure. In effect, Adams has presupposed that the formal structure of the tradition *mirrors* the formal structure of each position. But even if the individual position has this structure, the burden of proof simply shifts: Adams now has to explain how the formal structure of the *individual position* is the result of a process. Arguably the formal structure of the individual position could be the result of the work of the individual thinker; the work, in this case, being the process. However, it is not clear that Adams would have accepted this possibility. Which, in conjunction with the fact that Adams cannot adequately resolve the problem I have raised, are good reasons as to why we cannot accept that the formal structure Adams has outlined actually “exists.”

But what would happen if we consider the formal structure as the anticipated result of a process *that has not yet come to completion*? First of all, we need not maintain that the formal structure of political ideology actually “exists” in the sense that a tradition of political thought possesses this structure. Second, rather than attempt to reconcile Adams’ claims pertaining to the absence of any single conception of human nature which is shared by all of the thinkers within a given tradition of political thought, and on the other hand the fact that Adams’ theory seems to require just such a conception of human nature, we could think of this as a problem which indicates that the process whereby a

structure will eventually come to exist has not yet been finalized. It could be that Adams was simply a little too hasty when claiming that there is a formal structure of political ideology. Third, insofar as the conditions which we had established during our interrogation of the concept “structure” hold true, it would not be difficult for Adams to maintain that political ideologies are so many manifestations of a *process* which, if it ever comes to completion, will *eventually* result with the “emergence” of the formal structure *qua anticipated result*.

If it is possible that the process which could result in the “emergence” of the formal structure of political ideology has not yet come to completion, and this process is to be understood in terms of a structuring of elements which is guided by the anticipated result, what are the elements that the process is structuring? And how do we understand the manner in which the anticipated result guides this process? Let us begin with the second question. Since Adams maintains that political ideologies are traditions of political thought, it would have to be the traditions of political thought themselves which are being structured according to the requirements necessitated by the anticipated result. This process, which of course occurs during the evolution of a tradition (or just is the evolution of a tradition), would have to involve the harmonization of all of the positions within that tradition, as this is the only way that there could be a single formal structure *qua anticipated result*. Any differences between the various positions, and in particular, the differences between the components of each position (the conception of human nature, as well as the prescriptive, evaluative, explanatory, descriptive, and “ideal society” components), would have to be reconciled. Arguably this could involve the elimination of contradictions, the introduction of qualifications to existing principles, the

refinement of existing theories and the development of alternative theories.<sup>18</sup> What makes this possible is precisely the persistence of “loose, though important, connections” between the various positions within a given tradition of political thought.

A response to the first question follows directly from our response to the second question. If a conception of human nature is the most crucial structural component, and is itself a construct (in the sense that it is formed out of concepts and pseudo-descriptive terms), then it is not unreasonable to suggest that the elements which would have to be structured by the process are the concepts and pseudo-descriptive terms that are utilized by various thinkers.<sup>19</sup> These elements must be structured precisely if a single conception of human nature is to be developed. Thinkers use concepts in order to formulate alternative theories, refine existing theories, or reconcile the theories of two seemingly incompatible positions, and the concepts that they use are further refined, developed, or problematized by, at least in part, the various ways in which positions within a tradition are becoming structured.

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<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately I cannot, here, provide any concrete examples which demonstrate either that this has happened or that it is happening, as doing so would require a sustained analysis of the development of a certain tradition of political thought. However, this could certainly be the basis of a future project. And although I cannot substantiate these claims with evidence gathered from an analysis of the historical development of a tradition of political thought, I do believe that they follow from our treatment of the formal structure of ideology in relation to the conditions which were established during our analysis of the concept “structure.” Lastly, though there is a sense in which the claims that I have made are tentative, they are not, for that reason, mere speculation.

<sup>19</sup> That “ideological” conceptions of human nature are constructs is acknowledged by Adams himself. On page 103 of *The Logic of Political Belief* Adams states: “Ideological man is a theoretical construct.”

## Chapter 4

### 4.1 – Introduction

In the last section I had attempted to demonstrate that neither the formal structure of political ideology nor the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” accord with the conditions that were established during our analysis of the concept “structure.” When examining the concept “structure” I had claimed that accounting for the “emergence,” origin or genesis of a structure is of crucial importance. A number of the problems which had been raised in connection with the theories of ideology introduced by Adams and Althusser revolve around the fact that in both cases the authors do not provide us with any indication as to where the structure of ideology came from. And this, I contend, must involve an explanation of whatever processes occurred such that each of the structures Adams and Althusser proposed *could* come to exist; if only because there is no meaningful way to think of *any* structure that may exist otherwise. Provided that the aforementioned conditions are correct, it then follows that each “version” of the structure of ideology cannot be sufficiently accounted for. Consequently, there is no reason to suppose that the theories developed by Adams and Althusser can adequately explain ideology through an analysis of its structure, as it is not clear that either “structure” could actually exist.

In this section (the last in this thesis) I will present the very basics of an alternative theory of political ideology. More precisely, I intend to demonstrate that political ideologies may be understood as so many manifestations of a collective attempt to structure our social world. To do so I will draw on the work of thinkers such as Slavoj

Zizek, Lorenzo Chiesa, and Yannis Stavrakakis. Anyone who may be familiar with the work of these thinkers will not be surprised that the theory I am proposing is informed by a number of notions and concepts which were formulated by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Understandably, the reader may be inclined to wonder why I had even bothered with an analysis of the theories developed by Adams and Althusser. Why not just introduce, explain, and attempt to justify an alternative theory of political ideology right from the outset? Quite simply, it is difficult to justify an alternative theory without indicating what it is an alternative to, and without demonstrating why these other theories are inadequate. This is clear enough. But there are at least two additional reasons as to why the following discussion will benefit from our previous analyses. First, as an *attempt* to structure our social world, political ideology cannot be “intelligible only through its structure.” For this reason, the theory I intend to introduce is not faced with a number of the problems that had been raised in connection with the formal structure of political ideology and the mirror-structure of ideology “in general.” And second, although the alternative theory is not premised on the idea that “ideology is intelligible only through its structure,” it is nevertheless *consistent* with a number of the propositions which had been derived from our analysis of the concept “structure.”

Before proceeding any further let us briefly consider the following: if ideology is anything it is a collective social phenomenon, and for this reason it obviously involves a multitude of subjects living together within a given social order. This is a rather basic claim, but what we have here are the two most fundamental preconditions for the very possibility of *any* ideology: a multitude of subjects and the social order in which they live. Furthermore, if ideology is a collective social phenomenon, then ideology must

somehow be “lived,” to varying degrees and in various ways, by the subjects who comprise this multitude. Arguably, the way in which a multitude of subjects may live political ideology reveals a great deal about what political ideology is. However, determining how the subject may “live” ideology depends on how the subject is ontologically theorized. Therefore, without an ontological knowledge of what kind of subject is participating in a given political ideology, and without a theory of the social order within which the subject dwells and political ideology persists as a social phenomenon, it is difficult to see how one could say anything meaningful about what political ideology is.<sup>1</sup>

Provided it is true that a theory of political ideology must include some ontological conception of the subject, the remainder of this discussion will proceed in the following way. I will begin by explicating just two concepts pertaining to Lacan’s theory of subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> As we will see, in terms of its being the (Lacanian) subject is *necessarily* both a lacking subject, and a desiring subject. Despite appearances, the choice to include

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<sup>1</sup> To my mind, that one may be required to take into consideration the two preconditions mentioned above raises what could be a rather difficult problem which, unfortunately, cannot be sufficiently explored here. That being said, I will attempt to outline the problem as I see it. Depending on how one theorizes ontologically the subjects who comprise a multitude, and, on the other hand, depending on how one understands the social order within which each subject – as it is theorized ontologically – participates, the result will inevitably be a theory of ideology which is informed by (because formulated partly on the basis of) a specific ontological account of the subject and a specific theory of the social order. Consequently, it would appear as though any theory of political ideology which does not have a *correct* ontological understanding of the subject and an accurate theory of the social order is bound to be inaccurate, incomplete, or partial. I will leave this problem open, and will continue with the present discussion by proposing a conception of the subject and a theory of the social order according to which we may develop what is simply an alternative theory of political ideology.

<sup>2</sup> Arguably *everything* that Lacan has written either directly or indirectly contributes to an extensive reconceptualization of what it means to be a subject. Thinkers such as Lorenzo Chiesa and Bruce Fink have each devoted an entire book to outlining, explicating and in some instances problematizing Lacan’s theory of the subject. Perhaps one reason why they feel it necessary to author book length texts focused specifically on a Lacanian theory of the subject is because they realize that Lacan’s thought revolves around a central concern. This is what Lacan says in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*: “Psycho-analysis is neither a *Weltanschauung*, nor a philosophy that claims to provide the key to the universe. It is governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject” (Lacan 1978, 77).

a Lacanian conception of subjectivity is not an entirely arbitrary one. The reader may recall that the sixth and last proposition concerning the “structurality of structure” stated that every other proposition was intelligible only if we think of them within a motivational framework. This requires us to acknowledge that some kind of subject is, in some way, actively participating in the construction of any given structure. After looking at how the being of the subject may be understood in terms of lack and desire, I will then briefly consider several additional Lacanian terms, namely, the “master-signifier,” the “*point de capiton*,” and the “symbolic field.” This will provide a helpful introduction to the problem of political ideology. And finally, since I will endeavor to show that political ideologies may be understood as so many manifestations of a collective attempt to structure our social world, I will then consider several of the propositions concerning the “structurality of structure” *in conjunction with* our main theme (political ideology). This last part will be premised on the idea that the subject as it is formulated by Lacan, and as it is presented here, is not only the subject who “lives” a particular political ideology, but is also the subject who participates in the construction of any given structure.

#### 4.2 – The Being of the Subject: Lack and Desire

In *Seminar II* Lacan provides a rather elliptical formulation which expresses a fundamental relation of being to lack. “This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists” (Lacan 1988, 223). Let us note that, on the one hand, Lacan is clearly maintaining that some kind of being exists.<sup>3</sup> He is not in any way suggesting that something which *is* lacks being – in

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<sup>3</sup> The general context in which Lacan is discussing “being” involves a consideration of both the being of the subject as well as the being of the “objects” or “things” which it encounters. In particular, Lacan is attempting to weigh the significance of the Freudian discovery (the magnitude of which he equates with the Copernican revolution) by explaining how Freudian thought introduces a rupture in the classical

the sense that it does not have any being whatsoever – as this would, arguably, imply that it *is not*. On the other hand, Lacan is certainly rejecting any notion of being whereby being is conceived of in terms of a “full presence,” “complete being,” or “wholeness.” And, as we will see, for Lacan “being” is not to be equated with the “lack” in question, that is to say: the subject is not, in terms of its being, this lack. Generally speaking, when Lacan refers to a “lack of being” he has in mind something less than an (ultimately impossible) complete or full being. But if we continue to think of complete-being as a hypothetical (though still impossible) alternative modality of being, we may say that being just is “complete-being” lacking that which is required in order for it to be complete. Being qua lacking-being *is* only insofar as complete-being is lacking in being. This Lacanian conception of being, according to which being is thought of in terms of a lack of being, does not in any way entail a kind of teleology such that the subject is engaged in a process whereby it will eventually become complete-being. Since the subject can “be” only on condition that it is lacking, the subject will always be “incomplete” in terms of its being.<sup>4</sup> The question as to whether or not the subject nevertheless “tolerates” its being is an interesting one, and I will consider it shortly.

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approach to the study of the objects of human experience (see pages 222-226 of *Seminar II*). Although this discussion is interesting in its own right, I draw attention to the precise context in order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the proper referent of “being” in the text that I have cited. The claim cited above reveals Lacan’s position on the being of the subject. I am not, here, interested in considering Lacan’s discussion of “coaptation” as it is found “within the classical, theoretical perspective, between the subject and the object”; the subject placing “himself in adequation with the thing, in a relation of being to being - the relation of a subjective being, but one that is truly real, of a being aware of being, to a being one knows to be” (Lacan 1988, 223).

<sup>4</sup> Here I would like to point out that Lacan always and consistently (though often times implicitly) preserves a distinction between the infant, which he refers to as a “non-subject” (“*assujet*”), and the subject. This is why any discussion of “being” as it concerns the subject must be able to account for its fundamentally *emergent* character. The being of the subject *becomes* what it is. That being said, even though being is “emergent” in the sense that the subject comes-to-be, it would be a mistake to conclude that the *infant* is at any time “complete” or “whole” in terms of its being. Hence, we cannot maintain that there was ever a point at which a “complete” being “lost” a “piece” of its being, which is now somehow “missing.” Nor should the hypothetical “mother-child unity” that one finds in Lacan’s texts, as well as in a number of commentaries on Lacanian thought, be taken as evidence that the infant ever existed as some kind of “one” or “whole” in terms of its being.

However, before doing so perhaps it would be best to further explore Lacan's reflections on the being of the subject by thinking of it in connection with his notion of desire. And let us take as our clue a point raised by Bruce Fink: "Lack and desire are coextensive for Lacan" (Fink 1995, 54).

The Lacanian notion of desire is drawn from Alexandre Kojève's reflections on Hegel's "master-slave dialectic."<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the most crucial point one must bear in mind if one hopes to understand anything about Lacan's conception of desire – and the following is also maintained by Kojève as well – is that "in its essence, desire is a constant search for something else, and there is no specifiable object that is capable of satisfying it, in other words, extinguishing it" (Fink 1995, 90). But why is desire a "constant search for something else"? To begin with, it is important to note that the very notion of desire always presupposes a certain lack: one only desires what one does not have, namely, what one lacks. If there is no specifiable  $x$  which is capable of satisfying desire, then it cannot be some specifiable object which "causes" desire. Nor is it some specifiable object which sustains desire. For this reason the desiring subject does not, and, more importantly, *cannot* know what exactly it is lacking. In this sense, desire is a constant *searching* for something which is, ultimately, impossible. There just simply is nothing which, if it were eventually found, would put an end to this searching. So how

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<sup>5</sup> Before proceeding any further it is important to note that Lacan's conception of desire, and everything he says about it, has led some commentators to suggest that "desire" is best understood if it is considered from a number of different viewpoints and in relation to a number of different phenomena, i.e. imaginary, symbolic, or real "objects," other subjects, being, etc. For example, Evans interprets Lacan's formulation of desire: "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (which is found in *Seminar XI* and is clearly informed by Kojève's work), in the following ways. (1) "Desire is essentially 'desire of the other's desire', which means both desire to be the object of another's desire, and desire for recognition by another." (2) "It is *qua* Other that the subject desires (E, 312): that is, the subject desires from the point of view of another." (3) "Desire is desire *for* the Other... The fundamental desire is the incestuous desire for the mother, the primordial Other (S7, 67)." (4) "Desire is always 'the desire for something else' (E, 167), since it is impossible to desire what one already has." (5) "Desire emerges originally in the field of the Other; i.e. in the unconscious" (Evans 2005, 37-38).

are we to construe the lack which is coextensive with desire?

The subject comes-to-be as a desiring being. This is another crucial point regarding Lacan's conception of desire. "What arouses desire in a child is the Other's desire, not the Other's demand, nor even the Other's desire for this or that particular thing or person" (Fink 1995, 91). In this passage Fink is attempting to point out that an encounter with the desiring Other is one condition for the eventual emergence of a subject which will come-to-be a desiring being. According to Lacan, "the desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and the child's *whys* reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a *Why are you telling me this?* ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire" (Lacan 1978, 214). Lacan identifies the m(O)ther as the subject who initially and most effectively incarnates the desiring Other for the infant, and contends that every subject (or, better, every infant) first encounters the Other's desire during the Oedipus complex (Lacan 2006, 696-699). This is clearly repeated by Chiesa when he writes: "During the Oedipus complex, the child's relation to his mother is marked by a basic question: 'What does her desire want (so that I can be it)?'; the signified of the mother's desire – which is the signified of what the child desires, since he desires what she desires – is an enigmatic *x*, an unknown signification" (Chiesa 2007, 90). Here we have an indication as to how we are to construe the relation of desire to lack: the fact that desire cannot, by definition, be extinguished through the acquisition of some specifiable *x* means that there is nothing which can "fill in" the lack sustaining the subject's desire.

Desire is sustained as such because the subject is fundamentally lacking in terms

of its *being*. Fink notes that “Desire is the result of a fundamental want-to-be or lack of (or in) being, a wanting or lacking that is represented and relayed in each new desire that inhabits us” (Fink 2004, 22). According to Lacan, “desire, a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable. And at the same time this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation. If being were only what it is, there wouldn’t even be room to talk about it. Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the experience of desire” (Lacan 1988, 223-224). When “being attains a sense of self” it is because “the child manages to “positivize” the lack that surfaced with the unconditionality of the demand for love [by signifying the lack in question], and in so doing he subjectivizes himself and emerges as a desiring lack-of-being (*manque-à-être*)” (Chiesa 2007, 153-54). Lacan’s term “*manque-à-être*” already expresses the relation of desire to lack, and it does so in such a way that both concepts are inextricably bound up with “being.” Chiesa effectively highlights this triadic relationship when he writes: “the satisfaction of desire essentially consists of the preservation of its own unsatisfaction, since a subject remains a subject only insofar as – to use the full meaning of the denomination *manque-à-être* – his is a desiring *lack-of-being* that *wants-to-be* [author’s italics]” (Chiesa 2007, 155).

Chiesa is not alone in translating *manque-à-être* as “want-to-be.”<sup>6</sup> The term “want-to-be” is generally utilized by Lacan during a discussion of the relation between

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the entry on “being” in Dylan Evans’ *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pages 16-17. Also, Alan Sheridan, in his translation of Lacan’s *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan 1978, 29), and Bruce Fink, in his book *Lacan to the Letter* (Fink 2004, 37), both translate “*manque-à-être*” as “want-to-be,” or, in some cases, as “lack-of-being.” The fact that “*manque-à-être*” may be translated as both “want-to-be” and “lack-of-being” opens up two complementary perspectives which overlap precisely at that point where it is realized that the “being” of “lack-of-being,” and the “be” of “want-to-be,” are both intelligible as “complete-being.” This provides us with an opportunity for further exploring the relationship between lack, being, and desire. I will return to this shortly.

being, *qua* lacking-being, and desire.<sup>7</sup> If the subject is (to use Chiesa's expression) "a desiring lack-of-being that wants-to-be," and "desire is thus essentially a desire for being," the expression "want-to-be" would altogether lose its meaning and would thereby be rendered unintelligible if "be" is understood as anything but a hypothetical and impossible "complete-being." The subject *qua* lacking-being does not desire to be what it already is, namely, lacking-being. For this reason, "want-to-be" cannot be thought of in terms of a "want-to-be-lacking-being." The subject wants-to-be "complete-being" precisely because it is lacking-being, which appears to be why Evans relates this to desire when he renders desire almost identical with want-to-be. "This relation [the subject's relation to the Other], like the Other itself, is marked by a lack (*manque*), and the subject is constituted by this lack of being (*manque-à-être*), which gives rise to desire, a want-to-be (*manque-à-être*); desire is thus essentially a desire for being [author's italics]" (Evans 2005, 16).

I suggest that the two alternative translations of "*manque-à-être*" – "want-to-be" and "lack-of-being" – open up two complementary perspectives according to which we may further explore not only the relationship between lack, desire and being, but also acquire a better grasp of each of the terms implicated therein. We might say that the subject's being is fundamentally a want-to-be-complete. That is to say, being as a want-to-be-complete-being *is* insofar as it is constituted as such on the basis of the *impossibility* of complete-being. The subject is sustained as a lacking-being which wants-to-be-(complete-being) not just because the subject cannot be complete-being, but also

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<sup>7</sup> For example, in *Seminar XI* Lacan praises one of his students, Jacques-Alain Miller, for giving "an excellent outline of what he recognized, in my previous writings, as the structuring function of lack, and by an audacious arch he linked this up with what, speaking of the function of desire, I have designated as *manque-à-être*, a 'want-to-be'" (Lacan 1978, 29).

because it *wants-to-be*. The subject can only want (desire) if it is lacking, which is why the subject will always “want” (desire) “to be” (complete-being). One may understand this in the following way: only a lacking-being may want-to-be for the sole reason that insofar as we construe being, here, as complete-being, a complete-being is already complete and therefore could not desire to be what it already is. In fact, a complete-being could not desire at all, since, in terms of its being, it is not lacking anything.

Here we have a response to a question which was raised earlier regarding whether or not the subject “tolerates” its being. The answer is, of course, that it does not. The subject wants (desires) to be complete-being. This is why Stavrakakis maintains that “Desire...is animated by the quest for a lacking/impossible fullness, around the promise of encountering *jouissance* – and *jouissance* always has ‘the connotation of fullness’” (Stavrakakis 1999, 45). Though I will not, here, elaborate on the Lacanian notion of “*jouissance*,” during our previous discussion of both desire and lack it became clear as to why and how “desire is animated by the quest for a lacking/impossible fullness.” The crucial point is that if desire is indeed animated in such a way, the fullness in question undoubtedly pertains to the subject’s *being*. But how does the subject pursue this quest for a “lacking/impossible fullness” of being?

Stavrakakis explores a similar problem. In *Lacan and the Political* Stavrakakis argues that the particular ontological-psychical constitution of the Lacanian subject, and the way in which such a subject lives its relation with the socio-political order, compels the subject to partake in an impossible quest to establish a complete or full *identity*. Stavrakakis focuses on the Lacanian thesis that every act of identification, whether this be imaginary or symbolic identification, is an *alienating* act. By this Lacan means that every

act of identification creates a sort of tension which is experienced by the subject precisely because the subject is always *other* than the image it identifies with. Even if the subject identifies with an image which appears to hold out the promise of overcoming or alleviating this tension – an image which seems to have a greater resemblance to the subject than did prior images – the subject ultimately ends up sustaining its alienation. Consequently, every act of identification inevitably *fails* insofar as the subject can never absolutely be that which it identifies with. This is why, following Lacan, Stavrakakis maintains that a complete identity is impossible. And yet, when Stavrakakis focuses on the logic and impossibility of identification he is trying to reinforce one of his most significant claims: “what we have then, if we want to be precise and accurate, is not identities but identifications, a series of failed identifications or rather a play between identification and its failure, a deeply political play” (Stavrakakis 1999, 29). In effect, the *impossibility* of a politics of identity is by no means inconsistent with a politics of identification.

Stavrakakis’ argument regarding the impossibility of a complete, full, or whole identity presupposes and entails the impossibility of fullness or completion with respect to the subject’s *being*. My primary concern, though, is not necessarily to critique Stavrakakis so much as to build on what he and others have already done. In particular, I hope to draw a connection between the ontological constitution of the subject and the *function* of political ideology in order to show that political ideology is one manifestation of how a multitude of subjects attempt to attain a “lacking/impossible fullness” of being.

#### 4.3 – Political Ideology and the Symbolic Field

Both Stavrakakis and Žižek draw on Lacanian thought in order to show that every

political ideology, such as Liberalism, Communism or Fascism, is “represented,” in a way, by a signifier. “In the last resort,” writes Žižek, “the only way to define ‘democracy’ is to say that it contains all political movements and organizations which legitimize, designate themselves as ‘democratic’; the only way to define ‘Marxism’ is to say that this term designates all movements and theories which legitimize themselves through reference to Marx, and so on” (Žižek 1989, 98). On this basis we can make a rather modest claim and say that each political ideology is designated by a signifier which is its name. But what is especially interesting is that there is no determinate or specifiable *x* corresponding to that which is signified by “Liberalism,” “Communism” or “Fascism.” In fact, neither “Liberalism,” nor “Communism,” nor “Fascism” actually signify anything in particular. Žižek contends that in each case what we have is a “signifier without a signified,” and he then links this with the Lacanian notion of the “master-signifier” and the “*point de capiton*,” or “button tie.”<sup>8</sup> In this case, the master-signifier functions *as a point de capiton* which establishes the meaning of all other signifiers within a given field.<sup>9</sup> Each of these *ideological* master-signifiers are without a signified, and yet they can

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<sup>8</sup> Commentators and translators of Lacan’s work have either kept this term in the original French, or have used the English “button tie” or “quilting point.” When it is graphically represented, the *point de capiton* looks just like what a quilter’s “button tie” would look like. The fundamental idea behind Lacan’s use of the term is that signification always occurs retroactively and by virtue of a mechanism which temporarily anchors or binds a signifier to a signified. This mechanism is the *point de capiton*, which, due to the simultaneous play of anticipation along the signifying chain, and the “scansion” introduced by any mark of punctuation, “stops the otherwise indefinite sliding of the signifier” (Lacan 2006, 681). “The diachronic function of this button tie can be found in a sentence, insofar as a sentence closes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction constituted by the other terms and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect” (Lacan 2006, 682). In addition to the diachronic/metonymic aspect of the *point de capiton*, there is also a synchronic/metaphoric aspect. “But the synchronic structure is more hidden, and it is this structure that brings us to the beginning. It is metaphor insofar as the first attribution is constituted in it,” which is to say that the synchronic operation of the *point de capiton* contributes to the determination of meaning by establishing a relation between a specific signifier and a signified rather than by *deferring* meaning from signifier to signifier (Lacan 2006, 682).

<sup>9</sup> This “field” is not a strictly discursive or linguistic field, but is best understood in terms of the Lacanian notion of the symbolic order. The symbolic order is one of Lacan’s three orders, or registers, the other two being the “real” and the “imaginary.” The two distinctive features of the symbolic order are language and Law. Let us put aside a consideration of the symbolic function of the Law in order to focus

serve as a reference point by which other “political” or “ideological” terms (such as “democracy,” “freedom,” “equality,” “justice,” “autonomy,” etc.) acquire a certain meaning *precisely because* the master-signifiers are without a determinate signified.

According to Žižek: “If we maintain that the *point de capiton* is a ‘nodal point’, a kind of knot of meanings, this does not imply that it is simply the ‘richest’ word, the word in which is condensed all the richness of meaning of the field it ‘quilts’: the *point de capiton* is rather the word which, *as a word*, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which ‘things’ themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity [author’s italics]” (Žižek 1989, 96). Although “equality” and “freedom” are signifiers which are found within “Liberal,” “Marxist” or “Fascist” discourse, the important point is that these terms will come to signify completely different things depending on how they are situated within a field of signifiers.

As master-signifiers, “Liberalism,” “Communism” and “Fascism” each function

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on why and how Lacan thinks of language as a distinctive feature of the symbolic order. To begin with, although it is not exactly incorrect to think of language as one of the distinctive features of the symbolic order, this is not entirely correct either. When Lacan maintains that the symbolic order is the order of language and Law he expects his readers to recognize that the only strictly symbolic aspect of language is the *signifier*. Evans is well aware of this: “Lacan does not simply equate the symbolic order with language. On the contrary, language involves imaginary and real dimensions in addition to its symbolic dimension. The symbolic dimension of language is that of the signifier; a dimension in which elements have no positive existence but which are constituted purely by virtue of their mutual differences” (Evans 2005, 202). Despite the fact that the signified is indeed an element of language – insofar as it is one of the two components which make up the sign – the signified partakes of the imaginary and so is not, *strictly speaking*, symbolic. Furthermore, when Lacan begins to reconceptualize the Saussurean theory of the sign he quickly develops a radical theory of the *signifier*. At this point the signifier comes to be thought of not just as a component of the linguistic sign: objects, images, gestures, relations, non-linguistic sounds, and psycho-somatic symptoms can also function symbolically as signifiers which express or convey a signified. All of these non-linguistic signifiers can be engaged with in the same way that one would engage with linguistic signifiers: one interprets them. “The single condition which characterizes something as a signifier, for Lacan, is that it is inscribed in a system in which it takes on a value purely by virtue of its difference from other elements in the system” (Evans 2005, 187). Non-linguistic signifiers, *as signifiers*, are just as much a part of the symbolic order as are linguistic signifiers. For this reason, both linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers *together* constitute a network, a symbolic field, wherein all signifiers are situated in a differential relation with one another.

in such a way that they temporarily veil or cover, *but do not fill*, the lack in the symbolic field of the big Other.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Lacan repeatedly claims that it is *impossible* to fill the lack in the symbolic field of the big Other. Chiesa puts this most succinctly when he states: “a whole Symbolic would in fact correspond to a *real-ized* Symbolic, a mythical

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<sup>10</sup> Here it is important to provide a brief explanation of Lacan’s notion of the “big Other.” Lacan, and many of those who work on or with Lacanian thought, often use the big Other as though it is synonymous with the symbolic order. To some extent it is, but one must be careful about how this is to be understood. The big Other cannot be equated with the symbolic order in a strict sense, as all three orders together constitute the big Other. When Lacan appears to be using the big Other and the symbolic order interchangeably, he is intentionally evoking and playing on the connotations of the term “Other.” In Lacan’s algorithms the big Other is symbolized by the “A” of the French “Autre.” This allows him to “subjectivize” the symbolic order so as to highlight certain aspects of it which may otherwise go unnoticed. There are at least two ways we can understand this gesture. First, Lacan is attempting to emphasize the radical *otherness* of the symbolic order. According to Lacan, the otherness of language and the Law is most apparent for the infant, though both will continue to remain somewhat “other” or “foreign” for all subjects. Lacan contends that there is a certain sense in which the acceptance of the Law and the adoption of language by the infant is “forced” since they are imposed “from without.” “Long before a child is born, a place is prepared for it in its parents’ linguistic universe... The words they use to talk about the child have often been in use for decades, if not centuries, and the parents have generally neither defined nor redefined them despite many years of use. Those words are handed down to them by centuries of tradition: they constitute the Other as language, as Lacan can call it in French (*l’Autre du langage*), but which we may try to render as the linguistic Other, or the Other *as* language” (Fink 1995, 5). The crucial point is simply that our experience provides proof that language (in particular) is never entirely one’s own, as it exists prior to one’s birth and independently of one’s existence. Indeed, when reflecting on the “otherness” of the symbolic order, and especially the infant’s initial experience of it as radically other, it often appears as though Lacan has in mind a rather Heideggerian operation whereby the infant is “thrown” into, absorbed by, and forced to come to terms with its experience of a world which is already permeated by an elusive and at times unsettling Other. Perhaps this is one way to understand what Lacan is getting at in a rather eloquent passage from “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” Lacan writes: “Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total that they join together those who are going to engender him ‘by bone and flesh’ before he comes into the world; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgment, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it – unless he reaches the subjective realization of being-towards-death” (Lacan 2006 231). This brings us to a consideration of the second way in which we can understand Lacan’s use of the term “big Other” when referring to the symbolic order: Lacan is inviting us to think of the symbolic order *as an Other*. In particular, as a fundamentally and necessarily *lacking* Other. As we have seen, Lacan’s conception of subjectivity is such that the subject is lacking in terms of its being. So in what sense, then, is the big Other, the symbolic order, lacking? When the big Other is thought of as designating the “set” or “battery” of all signifiers which make up a particular natural language, and is later crossed out or barred (“A” with a line through it), Lacan is indicating that the set in question is always lacking at least one signifier, and is therefore an incomplete set. Consequently, we can posit a kind of “hole” which is constantly present *as the absence* of that final signifier. For Lacan, the constant introduction of new signifiers peculiar to a given natural language, throughout the history of that language, attests to the fact that this is encouraged by the persistence of a lack in the set. The master-signifier is a signifier which is used to signify the lack in question. As a signifier, it is included within the set of all signifiers, but because it does not nor cannot have a positively determined signified, it is also fundamentally different from all other signifiers within the set. In this sense, the master-signifier enjoys a privileged status.

return to the primordial Real (as 0) by means of a ‘saturation’ of the Symbolic” (Chiesa 2007, 122). To symbolize the real-of-the-symbolic, to fill the lack in the symbolic field, would altogether destroy the symbolic, as it would no longer be possible for a signifier, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, to be symbolic of anything. Arguably, however, this does not necessarily mean that words and concepts would disappear. Because the lack in the symbolic field is a consequence of the fact that a signifier is missing from the totality of all possible signifiers within the field, a saturation of this lack means that there would then be a word for everything. Therefore, everything could be signified without remainder, that is to say, without any question as to what a given signifier is signifying. This, in turn, suggests that with a “saturation” of the symbolic field concurrent with the symbolization of the real-of-the-symbolic, signifiers would acquire a fixed meaning, which itself is only possible if each signifier is definitively bound to a given signified. There is one important consequence that can be drawn from this.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that with a saturation of the symbolic field there simply could not be a master-signifier which signifies lack (as there would no longer be any lack). However, if there could no longer be a “quilting” of the symbolic field (since the “quilting” of the symbolic field through the operation of the master-signifier can only occur on the basis of a lack in the symbolic field), then the prospect of alternative constellations or configurations of signifiers henceforth becomes impossible. The significance of this is profound, as “every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way” (Žižek 1989, 56). In effect, we would no longer have a systematized *network* of signifiers – which, as a network, is

susceptible to change and transformation – but a *structure*. That is to say, one consequence of the symbolization of the real-of-the-symbolic is the complete *structuration* of the symbolic field itself.

#### 4.4 – Political Ideology as a Structuring

The question now is: on the basis of what has been said so far, can we conclude that political ideologies may be understood as so many manifestations of an attempt to structure the social world? In order to determine whether or not this is plausible, let us consider several of the propositions which had been derived from our analysis of the concept “structure” in relation to the Lacanian notion of the symbolic order and the subject. And let us begin with a consideration of the first proposition. If we are to think of political ideology in connection with the first proposition – so as to determine whether or not political ideologies may be understood as an attempt to structure the social world – we can only do so if it is possible to establish a connection between, on the one hand, political ideology, and on the other hand, the two related notions of “process” and “anticipated result.”

Because the ideological master-signifier is a signifier without a signified, there will never be a point at which the signified of “Liberalism,” for instance, will be conclusively or definitively established. That is to say, the social order will never correspond to anything which could be signified by the ideological master-signifier. For this reason, there will never be a social order which epitomizes or represents a genuinely “Liberal,” “Communist” or “Fascist” society. But this does not mean, however, that all attempts to construct such societies will cease. In fact, it is precisely why they will continue. Historically speaking, every attempt to build or construct a society which

identified itself as “Liberal,” “Communist” or “Fascist” always encountered and sought to overcome obstacles which were interpreted as inconsistent with the end towards which society saw itself headed.<sup>11</sup> Here we have a preliminary indication that the collective attempt to render the social order compatible with that which is to be signified by a given ideological master-signifier may be thought of in terms of a process. The process in question is clearly one which occurs through or in time, i.e. it is a thoroughly historical process. And in this case, the anticipated result of such a process is the eventual realization of a social order which can directly correspond to the signified of the ideological master-signifier. The anticipated result is not the ideological master-signifier, but is an *impossibility* towards-which the process is oriented. Interestingly enough, it is precisely this impossibility which ensures that the master-signifier is capable of continuing to quilt the symbolic field of a given social order.

But how does the anticipated result facilitate the construction of a future social order by ensuring that the ideological master-signifier is capable of continuing to quilt the symbolic field? While discussing the first proposition derived from our analysis of the concept structure I had suggested that the anticipated result functioned as both origin and end of the process. In this case, the anticipated is the finalization of a historical process which culminates with the realization of a social order that corresponds to the signified of

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<sup>11</sup> There are many examples one could provide in support of this claim. The most obvious are, of course, also the most violent and destructive. Stalin’s purges, the Nazi slaughter of Jews, Gypsies, Slavs, homosexuals, and other “undesirables,” and the actions of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, were all – and in every case this is explicitly avowed by the leaders of those societies – undertaken in order to rid the present social order of elements which, it was thought, would prevent that society from realizing a more desirable social order in the future. Žižek looks at how the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew is a fantasmatic construct which, within anti-Semitic discourse, operates according to the same logic as the Lacanian notion of the symptom. The basic point is that the figure of the Jew was socially constructed (in Nazi Germany, for instance) in order for people to *tolerate and escape* from the undesirable conditions of their “real” social existence. Despite being a fantasmatic construct, however, the anti-Semitic *figure* of the Jew is not without consequence for those who subscribe to its truth; that is to say, it has an effect insofar as those who believe it *act as if* the Jew “really is” as they say (Žižek 1989, 47-50).

the ideological master-signifier. How, then, are we to think of the anticipated result as *origin* of the historical process in question? The development of alternative economic, political and legal organizations, institutions, charters and foundational documents of all kinds presupposes, first, the adoption of certain ideas and concepts; second, the formation of a set of beliefs consistent with those ideas and concepts; and third, the implementation of principles inspired by those ideas, created with those concepts, and consistent with those beliefs. In most cases the ideas, concepts, beliefs and principles have already been articulated in theoretical doctrines or treatises by thinkers who have sought to provide an alternative framework for the organization of society. It is as a theoretical framework, as a possible model of a future society which spells out how to construct an alternative social order, that the anticipated result functions in its capacity as origin of the historical process by which the alternative mode of social organization is to be realized through the implementation of the theoretical framework.

In what sense, though, can we identify anything like a project? The construction of an alternative social order *is* a project. This project is only finalized with the saturation of the symbolic field of the big Other, i.e. the symbolization of the real-of-the-symbolic, which, as we have seen, would give rise to a wholly structured symbolic field. Structuring the symbolic field of the big Other would then give rise to a structured social order. Of the three orders, it is the symbolic order that most closely corresponds to anything that could be called “social.” Lacan often refers to the symbolic order as the “realm of culture,” i.e., the most uniquely “human” of the three orders.<sup>12</sup> When Lacan

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<sup>12</sup> That being said, it would be a mistake to equate the symbolic order with the *social order*, as both the imaginary and the real contribute to the subject’s experience of social reality. Without going into too much detail, we may think of the real as that which absolutely resists symbolization. As we have seen, the symbolic field of the big Other is lacking, and it is this lack which is present within the network of

maintains that human society and culture is founded on the function and operation of the primordial Law, it is clear enough why the symbolic order is referred to as the “realm of culture.” But in Lacan’s work the signifier is granted an equally profound and especially unique role insofar as it is the signifier which facilitates the construction of social reality. This is part of the reason why Žižek often refers to the big Other as the “socio-symbolic Other.” In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” Lacan makes a claim which he does not, at least as far as I can tell, ever diverge from.

According to Lacan: “It is the world of words that creates the world of things...” (Lacan 2006, 229). This is, without a doubt, a strong claim, and so it is important for me to explain what I think Lacan means by it.

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signifiers as a “hole.” The real is “in” the symbolic as a “hole” which is present due to the lack of a final signifier that could complete the set of all signifiers. Chiesa refers to this conception of the real as the “real-of-the-symbolic.” This is where we start to see the intertwining of the two orders: the real-of-the-symbolic is “in” the symbolic itself, though it is still “other-than” the symbolic. “Wirklichkeit is the Real-of-the-symbolic which, despite being ‘at the limits of experience,’ is nevertheless absolutely necessary for the functioning of the symbolic as such” (Chiesa 2007, 127). Because the real-of-the-symbolic is “in” the symbolic field of the big Other, it is also present as an absence within the social order as well. Therefore, just as the symbolic order is a constituent factor in the experience of social reality, so too is the real-of-the-symbolic. Žižek maintains that the real-of-the-symbolic may be encountered as an unintelligible (because not signified) irruption which occurs when that which had previously “veiled” this lack is no longer capable of doing so. The example Žižek employs is a scene from the Romanian Revolution: “the rebels waving the national flag with the red star, the Communist symbol, cut out, so that instead of the symbol standing for the organizing principle of social life, there was nothing but a hole in its center” (Žižek 1993, 1). Thus, it is during the transition from one formerly hegemonic signifier (the master-signifier) to another, which is inevitably coincident with a socio-political crisis, that the absence of a master-signifier and the hole which it had veiled is most immediately felt. On the other hand, the imaginary order is similarly implicated within our experience of social reality. As Evans points out, “it is important to note, however, that while the imaginary always retains connotations of illusion and lure, it is not simply synonymous with ‘the illusory’ insofar as the latter term implies something unnecessary and inconsequential” (Evans 2005, 82). Lacan develops his notion of the imaginary order while attempting to make sense of such phenomena as narcissism, aggression, object-relations, imaginary identification, ideal-ego, libido, transference, projection, etc. The origin of most of these phenomena can be traced back to a crucial formative experience for the infant, namely, its perception of its (specular) Gestalt image in a mirror. The infant’s identification with its specular image facilitates the infant’s/subject’s (mis)recognition of form, fixity, similarity, completion, wholeness, and perfection, all of which are characteristic of the imaginary order. In his book *Lacan* Malcolm Bowie elaborates on this point: “The Imaginary is the order of mirror-images, identifications and reciprocities. It is the dimension of human experience in which the individual seeks not simply to placate the Other but to dissolve his otherness by becoming his counterpart.” “Lacan’s ‘Imaginary’ thus creates a bridge between inner-directed and outer-directed mental acts, and belongs as much to the objects of perception as to those internal objects for which the word is usually reserved in ordinary speech” (Bowie 1991, 92).

To begin with, the “world of words” is best understood in terms of the symbolic “field” or “network” of linguistic signifiers. Because every signifier is situated within a network, when a signifier comes to signify something, when it is “bound” or “coupled” with a signified, the signified becomes “caught” in the symbolic network of the signifier. Since every signifier signifies something, then that which is signified by the other signifiers within the network is also caught in the symbolic network of the signifier. These other signifieds, then, are similarly organized, systematized, arranged and situated within a differential relation to other signifieds.<sup>13</sup> Even though Lacan does not believe that there is some kind of one-to-one correspondence between the linguistic sign (which just is the signifier/signified couple) and the world of experience, he does maintain that our experience of the world (for instance, our experience of “things,” objects, or other subjects) is mediated by language. The world of experience is rendered intelligible by language, that is to say, the world is organized, arranged and systematized in accordance with a particular network of signifiers. But the world is organized, arranged and systematized only if it is “cut-up,” “dissected,” fragmented and separated into discrete units and pieces, into “things” and “objects” which may then be referred to, named and designated by the signifier. In *Seminar III: The Psychoses*, Lacan expresses this in the following way: “Day and night, man and woman, peace and war - I could enumerate more oppositions that don’t emerge out of the real world but give it its framework, its axes, its structure, that organize it, that bring it about that there is in effect a reality for man, and that he can find his bearings therein. The notion of reality that we bring to bear

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<sup>13</sup> This is what Chiesa reminds his readers of when, quoting Lemaire’s work on Saussure, Chiesa writes: “the sign cannot be isolated from the system of which it is part – that is, as Lemaire notes, ‘only the entire system of language gives the sign its specificity [its linguistic value] as opposed to the other signs.’ (*The same applies to the signified and the signifier considered independently of one another.*) In other words, language is a *differential* system in which the signification inherent to one sign emerges exclusively through the *opposition* that exists between all signs [my italics]” (Chiesa 2007, 47).

in analysis presupposes this web, this mesh of signifiers” (Lacan 1993, 199).

Stavrakakis provides an example of how the introduction or emergence of new signifiers in the symbolic field actually gives rise to a change in the way that a subject, or indeed a multitude of subjects, experiences the world. This example effectively demonstrates what I had just said about how the symbolic field provides a framework within which, and according to which, we experience the world. And it also reveals how the “world of words creates the world of things.” Stavrakakis looks at the solution to the longitude problem, a problem which “was related to the lack of a first reference point (the zero degree longitude) from which it was possible to calculate any other longitude.” The lack of this reference point made it “impossible for seamen to calculate their exact longitude,” which in turn created “so many obstacles for long-distance travel that, for more than two centuries, the quest for a ‘scientific’ solution to this problem assumed legendary proportions” (Stavrakakis 1999, 61). Stavrakakis then goes on to show that the required reference point of zero degree longitude did not, prior to its institution, actually have a fixed place. As *signifier*, zero degree longitude did not have a signified. “There was no such signified: there was no natural anchor in the real. There was no geographical location embodying by nature the zero degree longitude. This anchor had to be constructed, and, in fact, it could be constructed in a plurality of ways: the zero-longitude, the prime meridian, had been identified with the Azores, Cape Verde, Rome, Copenhagen, Jerusalem, Pisa, Paris and other places. It could be put wherever one liked” (Stavrakakis 1999, 61). When, after an essentially political contest, the Greenwich Meridian was accepted as the point of zero degree longitude, the introduction of this signifier made it possible to standardize time; became the center for international time

zones; became a reference point for “universal time”; and made long distance travel and communications increasingly efficient. This “reveals that what was necessary for the stability and practical usefulness of a certain signification (the calculation of longitude) was the structural ordering introduced by a certain point of reference; this point of reference was a signifier whose signified could be produced in a variety of ways, all of them having comparable implications in terms of symbolizing the real” (Stavrakakis 1999, 61).

Returning to the question of whether or not it is possible to link the notion of project (as it was discussed during our elucidation of the second proposition which had been derived from our analysis of the concept “structure” in section three) with political ideology, I suggest that there is good reason to think of the construction of a “Liberal,” “Communist” or “Fascist” society as a project which is oriented from the very beginning by the anticipated result, i.e. the realization of a social order which corresponds to that which could be signified by the master-signifier. As we have seen, the notion of project presupposes that it is something which is meant to be completed and remains yet-to-be-completed. However, the project in question is a peculiar one insofar as there will *always* be something which remains “outstanding” or yet-to-be-done: the lack within the symbolic field of the social order necessitates additional symbolizations due to its very presence as that which has not been signified. The lack in the symbolic field, then, is correlative with the need to undertake or accomplish that which is yet-to-be-done. Consequently, in this case, since there is always something which is yet-to-be-done, those who are involved in the project cannot ever complete it; it will always be something which is meant-to-be-completed and remains yet-to-be-completed. That is to say, it will

always be a project.

Who, then, has engaged in this project? And why have they done so? The reader may notice that these two questions indirectly express the need to take into account what was explicitly addressed during our consideration of the sixth proposition. The sixth proposition maintains that the process, the project, and the anticipated result are intelligible only if we consider them within a motivational framework. On the one hand, in addition to being directed (in the two senses that we have discussed) the process is motivated by the realization of the anticipated result. This is the only way that the project is intelligible as that which is meant to be completed and remains yet to be completed. Furthermore, I had also suggested that the reason why a specific structure is as it is in its specificity can be determined on the basis of the purpose that it serves. In this case, saturating the symbolic field of the big Other by symbolizing the real-of-the-symbolic would entail the finalization of a process culminating with the emergence of a completely structured social order. Although it is impossible to structure the symbolic field of the big Other (because it is impossible to saturate the real-of-the-symbolic), it is precisely this impossibility which drives or compels all attempts to do so.

The reason *why* this specific project has been pursued reveals a great deal about *who*, ontologically speaking, is involved. At the beginning of this section I outlined the two related notions of lack and desire as they pertain to the subject's being. Within a Lacanian theoretical framework, the subject is lacking in being insofar as it is not nor cannot be complete in terms of its being. Nevertheless, the subject still wants-to-be (*manque-à-être*); the subject still desires to be complete-being. By structuring the symbolic field of the big Other the conditions which maintain the subject qua desiring

lack-of-being would no longer persist. With a symbolized real-of-the-symbolic, there is nothing left to signify. All signifieds may be expressed or articulated without any question as to the meaning of the utterance. If there was a point at which meaning, whether linguistic or otherwise, is incapable of being ambiguous, then there would no longer be any question as to what the Other wants (so that the subject can be it): the question itself could not even be posed. That which the subject desires could be signified, which basically means that desire is not the desire for some unnameable x. Paradoxically, this also means that there would no longer be a desiring subject, and consequently no lacking subject as well. In fact, a fully structured social order would signal the disappearance of the subject altogether. And yet this is precisely what the process is oriented towards! And for precisely this reason! What we have here is clearly a rather perverse paradox, which, to my mind at least, cannot be resolved.

#### 4.5 – Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to determine what exactly political ideology is. In the first two sections I considered the work of two thinkers – Ian Adams and Louis Althusser – who have introduced strikingly similar though certainly unique theories. Each theory is premised on the idea that we can objectively know what political ideology is if we pay close attention to its structure, as its structure is what differentiates it from other “objects” of knowledge. Because, in the work of both Adams and Althusser, the concept “structure” functions as a ground on which the intelligibility of ideology depends (and therefore also the very possibility of an “objective,” that is, “non-ideological” knowledge of ideology), its meaning cannot be taken lightly. With this in mind, in section three I endeavoured to show that any use of the term structure presupposes a number of

conditions, which I then tried to render explicit in the form of propositions which must, necessarily, pertain to anything which could be identified as a structure. Following from this, I suggested that neither Adams nor Althusser could account for where the formal structure of political ideology and the mirror-structure of ideology “in general” came from. In the last section I have tried to outline only the very basics of what an alternative theory of political ideology could look like. Consequently, there certainly remains a great deal of work which needs to be done in order to strengthen many of the claims presented in this thesis. In particular, a thorough, sustained, and extensive historical analysis would provide a tangible, substantial basis for a theory which, though it aims at explaining what political ideology is, must do so by taking into account the particular manner in which it has been and continues to be lived. This could provide us with a better indication as to how the particular manner in which ideology is lived may actually be reflected in the social world. Which in turn points towards a theory of how a political ideology “presents itself” as “obvious” to those who live it, and especially to those who will come to live it.

A second possibility which remains open for further investigation is the following. As a structuring of the symbolic field of the big Other, which occurs correlatively with a structuring of the social order, political ideology must necessarily encompass the entirety of the symbolic field. In this sense, political ideology is a totalizing phenomenon. If this is so, the question as to how certain events which occur during the structuring of the symbolic field are apprehended from within an ideological framework becomes an especially interesting one. Of particular interest is the way in which a particular social order may attempt to engage with some  $x$  which is, perhaps only initially, incompatible with it. If, when engaging with the  $x$  in question, it has been

explained, vilified, rejected, or condemned from the standpoint of an ideological framework, has it not also, in a sense, been rendered *consistent* with that framework? Has it been incorporated or appropriated by the process, becoming subjected within it insofar as it is subjected by it – that is to say, insofar as it thereafter becomes an element of the anticipated structure? In what way could any  $x$  remain *absolutely* incompatible?

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