Assessment of Key Features and Major Ploys of Ideology

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Samevatting

Sedert die Verligting van die Agtiende eeu is daar 'n neiging om die term ideologie op arbitrêre en kontroversiële wyse in uiteenlopende (positiewe, sowel as negatiewe) konnotasies aan te wend. Om hierdie rede bestaan daar veel onsekerheid aangaande die ware aard en reikwydte daarvan. Veral die verruiming van die begrip ideologie, waardeur ook 'n positiewe betekenis daaraan toegeken is, sou uiteindelik die oorspronklik negatiewe sin daarvan ernstig ondermyn. Dit blyk dat ideologie – streng gesproke – slegs in 'n negatiewe konnotasie gebruik behoort te word. Ten einde die fundamenteel negatiewe aard van ideologie, asook die skadelike invloed daarvan in die lewe van sowel persone as gemeenskappe te belig, word die opvattings aangaande ideologie van drie eietydse deskundiges, naamlik Boudon, Salamun en Thompson aan die orde gestel.

1. Motivation

Exponents of the philosophy of the *nomic idea* have always acknowledged, as well as attempted to account for, the state of affairs that a variety of extra-rational forces and motives control every form of human thought and conduct, including even our most austere scientific enterprises [[Recognition of the influence of extra-rational forces on human thoughts and behaviour is certainly not limited to the above-mentioned stance in philosophy and theory of science. In this regard, the reader is referred to the *oeuvres* of – *inter alia* – T.S. Kuhn, P. Feyerabend, E. Bloch, M.Polanyi, C. Castoriades.]]. This treatise endeavours to follow in this tradition. We will take up the ideas of some eminent scholars in the field of the *theory of ideology*, and expound – in a very modest and tentative way – the nature and design of ideology itself, and review critically the major ploys used by ideologues in their effort to change

ideas into *effective forces* that – in Weber's words – eventually become so powerful that they determine practical conduct and even hold persons to it (1970: 90,97).

The importance of this investigation is highlighted when we consider that weak, reprehensible, even overtly false theories frequently become highly popular, extensive and authoritative; that people over and over again adhere tenaciously to ideas and doctrines that are patently untrue and illusory; that, without fail, they become dupes and supporters of dubious political policies; that they often experience little or no moral indignation in the face of gross injustice perpetrated against dominated and oppressed groups; and that they time and again deliberately misinterpret conspicuous states of affairs just to suit their own hidden agendas.

We trust that this essay will stimulate *critical thinking*, and – particularly – *self-criticism* in the case of all who take an interest in these matters. Indeed, by cultivating critical self-reflection and critical control, we may well become aware of, and grow sensitive to what has been appropriately called "our own habitual misunderstanding of and our own complicity in the structures of domination that warp relations in our society" (Visagie & Strauss, 1993:1).

2. Preparatory remarks

During the *Enlightenment* of the eighteenth century the French scholar and intellectual, Destutt de Tracy, coined and first availed him of the term "ideology" (Elseviers, 1968; cf. also Klaus & Buhr, 1975; Thompson, 1992: 28). Since then it has been and still is a highly controversial concept that is used in disparate (*positive, neutral* and *negative*) connotations, either to *represent* certain situations and their conditions, or to *evaluate* them critically, thereby creating much confusion regarding its basic nature and significance (cf. Salamun, 1992:3-10,40-41; Thompson, 1992:5; 28-73; Grieder, 1992:17,21; Boudon, 1989:23,17ff; Leatt, Kneifel & Nürnberger, 1989:284; Ashley, 1989:2-3; Larrain, 1979:17-34; Mannheim, 1972:49; Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546; Blankertz, 1976:301,303; Rauch & Anzinger, 1973:170-173). Also in South Africa the concept "ideology" has always been highly contentious and the centre of much controversy: "For many the word evokes the devils of communism, Marxism and socialism. For others, ideology is a form of false consciousness embodied in capitalism, Afrikaner nationalism and racialism" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:273).

Deliberations regarding the nature of ideology will – therefore – pertain primarily to the following:

* Does the term *ideology* have a negative, critical meaning only, or can it also be understood positively as   a neutral (non-committed) *view of the world*?

* Should *ideology* be used exclusively to designate political arrangements (structures) and class relations, or does it have an ampler, more wide-ranging compass?

* Does *ideology* effectively incorporate the whole range of human assumptions, or is a more detailed classification possible, in other words, are there not deeper, more profound regulating forces that impel even ideologies?

* To what extent do issues regarding ideologies and the forces that steer them relate to the question of truth/falsehood?

3. Concepts of ideology

[[In view of the limited scope of this investigation, no detailed historical overview regarding the development of *theories on the subject of ideology* is envisaged. Consequently, the viewpoints of only a select group of experts in the field are introduced.]]

The term, *ideology*, has four (divergent) modes of application. It is used –

* in a *Marxist* context, where *ideology* has a distinctly negative meaning, in the sense of *illusion* and *false consciousness*;

* in a *critico-positivist* context, where *ideology* also has a negative meaning, but then in the sense of impeding *religious presuppositions* and *beliefs, non-scientific assumptions, metaphysical speculation* and the like that detrimentally affect scientific interpretations of reality and should be eliminated at all costs from any scientific discussion*;*

* in a *sociological* context, where it is regarded as a normal and neutral phenomenon, characteristic of all communities, in terms of which it is endeavoured to outline the relationship between social position and individual and group-perceptions;

* in a *language-analytical* context, where it is regarded as a conceptual condition that is expressed (prescriptively) in language.

3.1 Classical Marxism: Ideology as "false consciousness"

Neither Marx nor Engels ever used the term "ideology" to characterize their own theories, presumably because they never conceived of the latter as forms of "false consciousness" (Plamenatz, 1979:26-27; Mannheim, 1972:66 note). In terms of classical Marxism, beliefs of the masses

(*proletariat*), i.e. beliefs regarding "society and the course of social change that favour their interests" are considered as true *per definition*, and never "ideological" in nature: "It is a condition of proletarians recognizing the real interests of their class that they should hold these beliefs. It is their destiny to be the only class that understands the course of social change and rises above false consciousness" (Plamenatz, 1979:27,124; cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:548).

In accordance with the orthodox Marxist stance, ideology is conceived in eminently negative terms (Larrain, 1979:13; cf. Thompson, 1992:34ff). It is understood to constitute a delusive and erroneous perception of human circumstances that underlies a warped and mystifying interpretation of socio-economic relations, the laws for social development, and the attending influence of class interests and class conflicts (Klaus & Buhr, 1975: 546; Salamun, 1992:7; Grieder, 1992:17). As such it is perceived to relate directly to the criterion of *true* and *false* (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547; Boudon, 1989:23). Ideology is considered the outcome of a conscious process, but with a proviso: this consciousness is in the grip of illusory preconceptions (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547; Larrain, 1979:45-49; Almeida, 1980:9ff). For Marx, who correctly assessed the powerful influence of *ideology* on the structuring of human societies, the term referred to the conditioning of human ideas (in economics, jurisprudence, education, morality, politics, religion, philosophy, art, literature) (Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546; Salamun, 1992:7) by the "material base" (economic substructure) alone, that is manipulated and misapplied by dominating classes (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546; Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274; Salamun, 1992:7; Grieder, 1992:17).

All the bourgeois ruling classes employ *ideology* to justify their "privileges, political power, social prestige and financial benefits", thereby creating an illusion of legitimacy and credibility (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:283; Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547; Salamun, 1992:7). As such it becomes an instrument of domination, "consciously administered in order to sanctify unholy things" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:276; cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546). Small wonder that the "ideas" (thoughts) of ruling classes become the "ruling ideas" of every era in history (Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546).

As *ideology*, then, represents the "ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274; cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546) that exist in communities, it has extensive and grave social consequences because it invariably leads to warped interpretations of social and economic realities. It effectively obscures the true relations and differences between classes, i.e., relations of domination and subordination. Thus people fabricate "in consciousness" an illusory world

in which all are *free* and *equal*, despite the fact that "hierarchical conceptions of the world" underlie all attempts at legitimising class differences (Larrain, 1979:48). Perceived through the "lenses" of ideology, social relations appear harmonious, and individual members of communities are believed to be performing their various "reproductive practices" without disruption. *Ideology* is, therefore, nothing but "a solution in the mind" to discrepancies that cannot be solved in practice (Larrain, 1979:46). Accordingly, any *middle-class*, *money-oriented* experience of the real world is distorted and biased. As this *bourgeois* consciousness is mainly foreign to reality itself, the result is "*false consciousness*" (Marx-Engels, 1969, *Werke,* Vol. 39:97, Berlin: Dietz; cited by Larrain, 1979:48). It is *false* because it is oblivious to the fact that it is being misappropriated to legitimise and sanction the particular economic arrangement from which a ruling class derives its privileges. Without fail, this fabrication results in a *camera obscura* (back-to-front) representation of how squalid and corrupt things really are (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:209,275; cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:546,547).

Because ruling classes without fail accept ideological deceptions uncritically as the truth, the resulting social order is mistakenly regarded as *right* and *just* too. So *ideology* becomes the instrument of a ruling class for sanctioning, legitimizing and perpetuating its domination of the poor. In addition, this fundamental untruth is passed on to all levels of the community, for – ironically enough – even the dominated classes, themselves, succumb to this collective illusion of the ruling class that the *status quo* is the only reality that can be. The existing social order with its structures of domination and relations of subordination is thus mistakenly accepted by all as "benefiting the whole community (whereas they benefit only a few); as being just and claiming that a proportionate share is attributed to everybody according to his status in society or level of education (whereas status and access to different levels of education are unjustly structured); or as willed by God" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:275). In this way *ideology* actually produces the "cohesive driving force that binds together the different … levels of society into a unified system" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:275).

And, as mere criticism, based on theoretical deductions in regard to a particular socio-economic order cannot solve the problem of ideology, the only option left is radical intervention to alter circumstances, i.e., the "practical overthrow of the actual social relations that gave rise to this idealistic humbug ..." (Marx-Engels, *The German Ideology*: 58-59, cited by Larrain, 1979:47).

3.2 Marxism-Leninism: Ideology as weapon in the class struggle

3.2.1 Preparatory remarks

In recent times, however, Marxist-Leninists have also been known to use the term *ideology* in a positive sense as well, e.g., when they speak of a communist, proletarian or Marxist ideology (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547). For, it is argued, if ideology is such a powerful tool that it can be misapplied as effective mechanism of domination by the bourgeoisie, there is no reason why it cannot also develop into a mighty and potent instrument of liberation in the hands of the proletariat (cf. Blankertz, 1976:303; Mannheim, 1972:66). Socialistic ideology (i.e. Marxism-Leninism, cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547) is, therefore, held to be *essentially true*, although it is occasionally misappropriated by those who support and sanction it: The ideology is basically sound; its agents (representatives) are now and then corrupt (cf. Salamun, 1992:36; also Plamenatz, 1979:80).

3.2.2 Lenin

Whereas Marx was a revolutionary *theorist*, Lenin was a revolutionary who viewed Marxism as essentially a philosophy of *practice* (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:225). Therefore, a completely new and modified interpretation of the nature and role of ideology emerged when Lenin introduced into Marxist theory, apart from the classical (negative) Marxist, a positive perception of ideology (cf. Salamun, 1992:8; Larrain, 1991:63-69). As a result, it gradually attained a far wider, more inclusive compass than it had initially. As *ideology of the proletariat* (Salamun, 1992:8), it would henceforth, in addition, communicate the standard Marxist-Leninist "world-view". This "twofold" concept of the task of ideology caused Marxist-Leninist critique of ideology to expand in two directions, viz. (1) ongoing perfection and justification (legitimizing) of the foundations of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and (2) persisting and persevering exposure of the bourgeois ideology as illusory and mendacious (Salamun, 1992:8). Along these lines Marxist theory was effectively adapted to the "practical political requirements of the socialist revolution in Russia" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:223,277; cf. Salamun, 1992:31).

Lenin maintained that every class has its own and characteristic (particular) political and economic ideology. Thus, for the first time, Marxist-Leninists recognized a legitimate and unerring *proletarian ideology* that was radically distinct from its false and distorting bourgeois counterpart (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547; Larrain, 1979:76; 1991:65).

To Lenin, all ideologies, irrespective of whether they belong to

dominating or dominated classes, represent characteristic analyses of the existing social order. They also relate to a future ideal model and outline strategies to achieve the desired state in one of three ways, either by entrenching the *status quo*, or by reforming it, or by replacing it with an entirely new order (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:282). In the case of proletarian ideologies, protagonists in the class struggle can use successfully theories or idea systems that relate to consciousness as conveyed (carried) and transmitted by the party (cf. Larrain, 1979:75; cf. Salamun, 1992:32). Proletarian ideology is, therefore, a positive influence in the sense of a doctrine of salvation related exclusively to everyday reality (Salamun, 1992:32). It is an all-encompassing world-view whose validity tends to vary "according to the imputation of a class background" (Larrain, 1979:77). Although their truth or falsehood may vary, these idea systems are all useful. Their usefulness, however, has nothing in common with their truth (Boudon, 1989:19).

However, like certain other "dogmatic forms of Marxism-Leninism", Lenin's thoughts are to be categorized as full-blown ideology: "Whereas the Marxism of Marx constitutes above all an analysis of capitalism and a strategy to overcome it, Soviet ideology has made of it a total ideology. It has become another religion, the total answer to man's deepest questions" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:283-284).

3.2.3 Althusser

Much in the same vein is Althusser's more modern interpretation of ideology. He contends that ideology is characteristic of every society, and ascribes an all-inclusive (even to the point of being vague) reach to it. To him it amounts to the "totality of ideas, concepts, and representations that do not come under the heading of science" (Boudon, 1989:18). These ideologies (neither true nor false), therefore, correspond primarily to a need for knowledge. They are, however, indispensable for social life in the sense that social actors employ them to alter or justify an existing socio-economic order (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:282). Against this background, Althusser sees ideology as "an organic part" of all societies: "It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies without ideology and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not just one of its historical forms) would disappear without trace, to be replaced by science" (Althusser, 1969:232).

The myths prevalent among dominating and exploiting classes have many functions. However, the prime objective of these false beliefs is to legitimise existing class and social structures of domination (cf. Althusser, 1979:158). Thus, the interests of a ruling establishment are promoted to the detriment of all others. For, without doubt, class interests are fostered by the ideological justification of the very condition of their predominance and exploitation, viz. the established order (cf. Althusser, 1971:152, 137, 140-141, 142-143; Plamenatz, 1979:24). It is this established order that is challenged by oppressed and exploited classes (Althusser, 1971:152; Plamenatz, 1979:26).

A prominent feature of Althusser's critique of ideology is the strong emphasis he places on the indissoluble relation between the state and political power. The significant role of ideological and repressive state apparatuses in entrenching state hegemony is highlighted throughout (1971:142-143, 152; cf., however, Thompson, 1992:86-97). Yet, despite this stance, he rejects a "mechanistic determination" of the superstructure ("political, legal and ideological levels") by the economic base alone, as was the case with Marx and Lenin, thereby ascribing a measure of autonomy to it (cf. Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:277). He also maintains that the "economic base" of human societies is reproduced on both the political and the ideological levels by material forces (state) and moral power (ideology). In terms of this perception, he distinguishes between (1) the repressive state apparatuses that work primarily by force and secondarily by ideology (police, army, courts, prisons etc.), and (2) the ideological state apparatuses that work primarily by persuasion (ideology) and secondarily by force and repression (public and private schools, churches, family, legal institutions, political parties, trade unions, public media like press, radio, television, and finally cultural institutions in the fields of literature, the arts, sports and the like) (1971:142-145; cf. Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:277; also Thompson, 1992:61-67). So ideology is perceived as directly linked to the problem of state power and class domination. Indeed, "no class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exerting its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses" (Althusser, 1971:146, cf. Thompson, 1992:86-97).

3.3 Ideology as "neutral" view of the world

3.3.1 Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci, on his part, uses a rather wide range of expressions as equivalent terms for ideology, viz. "philosophies", "conceptions of the world", "systems of thought", "forms of consciousness", and even "common sense" (cf. Hall, *et al.*, 1978:46). These terms appear to have "distinct applications and frames of reference" (Hall, *et al.*, 1978:46).

They range from the all-encompassing world-view (outlook/viewpoint) with a specific political and economic emphasis (cf. Boudon, 1989:20; Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:282), to very particular "forms of consciousness" (cf. Hall, *et al.*, 1978:46).

3.3.2 Critical positivism

Critical positivism postulates a value-free science. In terms of this stance, a supposedly "neutral" concept of ideology emerges (cf. Thompson, 1992:5). To exponents of critical positivism, ideology embraces *assumptions*, *value-systems*, *patterns of thought* and *norms* that persons, groups or sections of society share (Klaus & Buhr, 1975:547,548; Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:273; Salamun, 1992:9-11; 1984:249-260). Critical rationalists like Popper actually perceive ideology as essentially opposed to science (cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:548): Science, which emanates from humankind's trust in Reason, concerns empirically verifiable facts that a person can report (state) objectively, without being influenced by subjective (usually political) interests (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274; cf. Klaus & Buhr, 1975:548). Ideology, on the other hand, originates from "faith in the meaning of history apart from the decisions of human beings (which alone can confer meaning on facts)" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:174). To the critical positivist, ideology therefore epitomises everything that is irrational, subjective and non-scientific (cf. Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274).

However, to the Marxist, positivism itself is but the consequence of the illusions that enshroud and beguile all bourgeois reflection on reality (Klaus & Buhr, 1975: 954ff). Analysts of critical positivism, like Habermas, have indicated beyond dispute that, "in its reverence of facts", it is an ideology "that generally plays into the hands of those in power" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274).

That the ostensibly neutral stance that is professed by critical positivism is "profoundly ideological" (cf. Harris, 1972:3) is clear from the outset. For undoubtedly, the positivist's trust in "Reason" is patently not a rational matter. It is a matter of faith, deeply irrational and totally committed in all its endeavours to entrench and sustain the existing order. By affecting impartiality, positivism sanctions and supports the political and social *status quo*. In its attempt to remain "uncommitted" and "neutral", it accepts this broken and imperfect reality as the norm, i.e., as "natural" and "valid"; as things "ought to be". It thereby not only neglects a thorough critical interrogation of its foundations in terms of "more basic human values" (Leatt, *et al.*, 1989:274), but also serious attempts at redressing existing social injustices and abuses.

From the preceding paragraphs it becomes clear that there is a tendency to use the term *ideology* in an unqualified manner, as equivalent for disparate concepts, as well as to signify divergent attitudes and states of mind (cf. also Hall, *et al.*, 1978:46). This is a problematic matter, because some of these terms may well refer to its substratum; others to its superstructure. It would, therefore, be preferable to maintain that *ideology* is part of a complex realm of presuppositions (not necessarily prejudices) that underscores our thoughts and actions under all circumstances and at all levels of our existence.

4. Key features of ideology

The shift in meaning assigned to the term "ideology", i.e., from a fundamentally negative concept as in Marx to an intrinsically positive view from Lenin onwards, eventually resulted in the relinquishment of its original "spirit". Stripped of its essentially critical connotation and function, it degenerated into a receptacle for all forms of social and political thought, despite their origin, depth, function or validity. In this way, the value of ideology as a "tool of analysis and critique" (Larrain, 1979:77) was largely forfeited: "The reference to social contradictions in society is lost and ideology is confused with all sorts of errors or simply with pre-scientific consciousness. Thus, even maintaining some negative and critical connotation, ideology lost its specificity" (Larrain, 1979:77). And those who still claim to preserve the original critical meaning of the term, are confronted by a serious problem: As some ideologies are equated with science, while others are taken as belonging to the realm of speculation (pre-scientific or non-scientific knowledge), the eventual proof of what is ideological and what is not, becomes a matter of *truth* and *falsehood,* a highly committed and "un-neutral" (pre-scientific) issue.

All ideologies relate to cherished and legitimate ideals and goals of groups of peoples, especially of those who suffer from the structures of domination imposed on them by oppressors, despots, dictators, tyrants, and the like. Therefore, in the initial stages of their development, ideologies are pursued in good faith as honourable ends and objectives. For who will be reluctant to resist the elimination of oppression, exploitation and alienation? Who will be unwilling to hasten the liberation of the oppressed, or struggle for the rights of those who have none? Who will not fight to recover their lost freedom, or struggle for the retention and

preservation of their cultural heritage? Who will willingly undermine the very survival of their people (cf. Goudzwaard, 1981:21)?

However, the significant question is the following: When does the pursuit of honourable, praiseworthy and legitimate social objectives become objectionable and offensive? When do the sublime and noble designs of a people degenerate to the level of a collective psychosis, causing otherwise rational men and women to become possessed by an irrational, even insane lust for *absolute* (political) *power*? In other words, when are *ideas* and *ideals* transformed (distorted) into *ideologies* (cf. Van der Walt, 1976:398,401-406)?

The answer is clear: The pursuit of legitimate objectives become ideological the moment when the chosen end relates to only one, *idolized* (absolutized, deified) *aspect* (e.g. cultural, social, economical), *relationship* (e.g. race, nation, state, church) or *activity* (e.g. science, technology, worship) of our many-sided social world. In this way, the full meaning of our life world is illegitimately reduced and impoverished, as the remaining aspects, relationships and activities are engulfed by, and subordinated to this all-encompassing greatness that towers above all the rest, while – at the same time – justifying the *means* employed to impose this anomalous restriction on the remainder. These means, idolized for their indispensability for the survival of the ideology, eventually become *ends in themselves*, new idols that tolerate neither opposition nor resistance. For ideological justification of an objective ignores all other valid claims and interests and seizes total, albeit illegitimate, power and elevates this power into a malignant monstrosity that cannot be contained until it is destroyed in its turn.

Consequently, it is argued that – in essence – ideology can be understood in a negative sense only. It should be used exclusively to denote "*false consciousness*". Ideology is never a "neutral", non-committed view of the world ("world-view"). It does not merely embrace the values of a distinct social class. In other words, ideology is never but a harmless tool that can be applied/misapplied at will for either good or evil purposes by those intent on either the transformation or entrenchment of the *status quo* (cf. Strauss & Visagie, 1993:3). Ideology always represents a reductionist and warped (slanted) perspective of reality and is coercive without exception.

Secondly, ideology should not be used to designate political arrangements (structures) and class relations alone. If ideology is understood in this way, a much too limited reach is straightaway awarded to it. This is evident from Marx's economic reductionism in terms of which class relations are taken to be the sole source of ideological domination in human society. The merit of his perspective is that it correctly assumes that *aesthetics*,

justice, *morality* and *faith* (i.e. the *post-economic* realms of human life) are all founded upon an *historical-economic* sub-structure. However, it becomes reductionist (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1955:293) when it erroneously postulates that it can explain all *aesthetic*, *juridical*, *moral* and *faith* impressions and conceptions in terms of "laws" (norms) that pertain exclusively to the *economic* sphere of human endeavour.

The detrimental effect of ideology is of a comprehensive nature: It adversely affects every mode of human existence, every aspect of human culture, and every structure in society. As part of the motivational impetus of ruling classes, ideology distorts collective thinking to become so "intensively interest-bound" to certain *situations* that such groups "are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination" (Mannheim, 1972:36). On the other hand, it equally misleads oppressed groups that are focused on the destruction and transformation of a ruling and suppressing elite to the extent "that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it" (Mannheim, 1972:36). In this way ideology establishes and perpetuates relations of domination among variant and opposing interest groups in the political struggle for supremacy, as well as in literally all "extra-political" sectors of human life (Strauss & Visagie, 1993:3). This position opens up the possibility of alternative forms of critique, e.g. the (feminist) critique of patriarchy, and critiques of *technicism*, racism and the like. Only along these lines can relations of domination be traced meaningfully beyond the political scene, thereby exposing their workings in, e.g., the media, as well as in everyday contexts like family, work-place, classroom and the like (cf. Strauss & Visagie, 1993:3).

Furthermore, only if ideology is regarded as a form of false consciousness, i.e., when the criterion of *truth/ falsehood* is applied, will it be possible to distinguish meaningfully between ideology as a tool consciously administered in the struggle for social supremacy on the one hand, and a more "hegemony-focused" interpretation of it on the other (cf. Strauss & Visagie, 1993:4). Such a "disunion" will enable the critical student of ideology to distinguish effectively the more obvious, "asymmetrical power-relations" in society from the more subtle, "hegemony-focused" ones (Strauss & Visagie, 1993:4). In the first instance, what Strauss and Visagie call "relatively unobscured power-structures in society" (e.g., those of class, gender, or race) are focused on. In the second, the subtle and undermining role of ideology – as it affects the ways in which people experience reality and the ways in which initially legitimate ideals, values, beliefs and the like eventually dominate discourses about society in

general and how these discourses underpin and mould societal structures – is brought to light (1993:4).

Evidence of what Visagie & Pretorius (1993:54) aptly describe as a "hypernorm", is revealed when some or other practice, a value, concept or institution is illegitimately elevated to a position of hegemony. When such an illegitimate shift in significance takes place, other practices, values, concepts, institutions and the like that all have legitimate claims to diverse and unique spheres of competence and existence are subordinated to this hypernorm. This ideological process occurs in a "range of societal and cultural contexts where its influence brings about the domination of some people by others" (Strauss & Visagie, 1993:4). Therefore, once a hypernorm (or configuration of hypernorms) secures a position of socio-cultural eminence, a significant number of people are directly placed under its domination. Strauss & Visagie perceive a "necessary and mutually supportive relationship" between hypernormative hegemony, the power it holds, and the domination of sectors of a population over other members of the same community (1993:6).

To illustrate the compass and bizarre nature of devices used by ideologues in their on-going efforts to establish and secure power, not only by applying *physical force*, but – in our times – especially by means of words and symbols that constitute so-called *grand narratives* that have direct bearing on the continuation and safeguarding of existing *relations of domination* in society, the views of three prominent contemporary scientists on this matter, namely K. Salamun, R. Boudon and J. Thompson will be considered briefly:

5. Characteristics and stratagems of ideology

5.1 K. Salamun

In the tradition of Max Weber, Salamun perceives *ideology* as a system of "idea-icons" that serves as "parameters of interpretation" for the assessment of social realities (1992:45,47). Apart from entirely legitimate elements, these "parameters of interpretation" unfortunately also incorporate what he depicts as "crypto-normative", mendacious and misleading representations that are related to their unjustified claims concerning truth-falsehood. Against this background, he offers a convenient scheme by which the ambit of illusory (ideological) political ambitions can be surveyed and appraised (1992:45-49):

* Ideology can be suspected where absolutist claims regarding the unassailable nature of certain ideas, judgements, perceptions and

principles are evident. The exclusivism of such suppositions is conspicuously illusory in nature and prepares the way for the emergence of fanaticism, intolerance and the unconditional rejection of opposing viewpoints.

* A second feature of ideology is the aura of exclusiveness that surrounds the explication and interpretation ("exegesis") of aspects of a certain ideology by either an elite group, or a charismatic leader. Thus an uncritical attitude is cultivated, as supporters of the ideology are expected never to query, but rather to obey these dictates in docility, faith and trust.

* A third consideration relates to the manner in which the self-appointed "explicators" of the ramifications of an ideology shield from criticism their privilege to interpret. In the case of ideology, this usually takes the shape of violence, censorship and other coercive methods.

* Fourthly, ideology is evident where dogmatic and over-simplified, dichotomistic parameters for the interpretation of reality (especially political reality) are furnished. These parameters invariably embrace irrational categories of polarization and simplistic "either-or" schemes like "we – they", "black – white", "good – bad", "rich – poor", "demo-cratic – socialist", "liberalist – socialist", "communist – capitalist", "socialist – bourgeois", "First world – Third world", "apart-heid – democracy", "natural – technical", and the like.

* The phenomenon of "scapegoatism", i.e., the fabrication of demonised enemy-images and accompanying theories regarding conspiracies, is another indication of the imminence of ideology. This attitude effectively eliminates and invalidates the perspective that many social abuses and tribulations are of necessity the consequence of well-designed subversive actions of antagonists.

* The existence of utopian-messianic doctrines of salvation in and for temporal reality, is also an unerring confirmation of the presence of ideology. In terms of this delusion, false "icons" of "chosen peoples" (parties, groups, classes) selected by fate, history, God or some other metaphysical institution, make their appearance. These "chosen few" have the obligation to instate the utopia and accomplish the salvation of the masses.

* More often than not, ideologies are permeated by pseudo-scientific hypotheses and "facts", thereby bestowing on them an aura of scientific merit and decorum. The transmission of ideology under the semblance of science, indubitably facilitates the proliferation of peremptory normative perceptions by so-called "experts".

5.2 R. Boudon

In much the same vein, Boudon (1989:20) contends that ideologies can be distinguished from other "belief systems" because of the following typical features common to all ideologies:

- ◆ "the explicit nature of their formulation,
- ◆ their wish to rally people to a particular positive or normative belief,
- ◆ their desire to be distinct from other belief systems past or present,
- ◆ their rejection of innovation,
- ◆ the intolerant nature of their precepts,
- ◆ the affective way they are promulgated,
- ◆ the adherence they demand, and
- ◆ ... their association with institutions responsible for reinforcing and putting into effect the belief system in question."

5.3 J. Thompson

Thompson does not understand ideology primarily in terms of truth and falsification, but rather in a *socio-historical context*. He sees it mainly as the devious ways in which *symbolic forms* (meanings, utterances, actions, images, texts and the like) are used in the quest to secure power and establish and sustain relations of systematic domination (between races, classes, sexes, nation-states, etc.) in society (1992:6-7). His method of hermeneutic clarification provides a conclusive illustration that political struggles do not take place through the use of physical force alone. In a very insidious way, ideology also incorporates the subtle and cunning manipulation of words and symbols. Thompson emphasizes the interrelations of meaning (via symbolic forms) and power (1992:6), i.e., the ways in which meaning serves, in particular circumstances, to establish and sustain relations of domination (1992:7). He identifies five operational "devices" or "mechanisms" through which ideology can operate to establish and sustain its "relations of domination", viz. "legitimation", "dissimulation", "unification", "fragmentation" and "reification" (1992:60-67).

5.3.1 Legitimation:

Relations of domination can be established and sustained if they are represented as legitimate, as "just and worthy of support" (Thompson, 1992:61). This claim to legitimacy may be based on (1) rational grounds ("appealing to the legality of enacted rules"); (2) traditional grounds

("appealing to the sanctity of immemorial traditions"), and (3) charismatic grounds ("appealing to the exceptional character of an individual person who claims authority") (Thompson, 1992:61).

Typical strategies that are used in legitimizing structures of domination are *rationalization, universalization* and *narrativization:*

Rationalization: Relations of domination can be rationalized by producing a "chain of reasoning" by which a set of social relations or institutions of domination is defended or justified, thereby convincing people that it is worthy of support (Thompson, 1992:61).

Universalization: Institutional arrangements that best serve the interests of dominating groups are legitimised by representing them as "serving the interests of all", and as "open in principle" to everyone who has both the ability and inclination to succeed within them (Thompson, 1992:61).

Narrativization: Relations of domination are also legitimized by narrativization, where certain claims to domination are embedded in stories that "recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition" (Thompson, 1992:61). Traditions may even be "invented", as it were, thereby creating a sense of belonging to a community and to a history "that transcends the experience of conflict, difference and division" (Thompson, 1992:61-62). These "stories" serve to (1) justify the exercise of power by those who possess it, and (2) to reconcile others to the state of affairs that they do not have any. In this regard, "speeches and documentaries, histories, novels and films are constructed as narratives which portray social relations and unfold the consequences of actions, in ways that may establish and sustain relations of power" (Thompson, 1992:62). Even anecdotes and jokes, and "laughter which profits at another's expense", reinforce existing relations and structures of domination, i.e., the prevailing "order of things" (Thompson, 1992:62).

5.3.2 Dissimulation (hypocrisy, deception, pretence):

Relations and structures of domination are established and maintained by simply ignoring, concealing, denying or obscuring them, or by depicting them in a way that diverts attention from or disguises them (cf. Thompson, 1992:62-63). Strategies employed in this regard are the following:

Displacement: Terms, customarily used to refer to certain objects or individuals, are used to refer to others, thereby transferring positive or negative connotations to other objects or individuals.

Euphemization: Actions, institutions and social relations are depicted or re-described in congenial terms, or via slight and often hardly perceptible

altering of meaning, that eventually assure positive assessments. Classical examples are the following:

◆ violent suppression of protest = restoration of order;
◆ prison/concentration camp = rehabilitation centre;
◆ institutionalized inequalities based on ethnic divisions = separate development;
◆ foreign labourers deprived of civil rights = guest workers (Thompson, 1992:62).

Metaphorical use of language/ symbolic forms: Thompson (1992:63) distinguishes three forms of figurative use of language/symbolic forms, viz.

◆ using terms that refer to parts of something to refer to the whole, or vice versa, i.e., using terms standing for a whole to refer to part of the whole, in the way generic terms ("the British", "the Germans", "the Russians", "the regime", Blacks, Whites etc.) are used to refer to particular governments or groups within a nation-state;
◆ using terms that signify attributes of something in order to refer to the thing itself, as in the advertising business where meaning is often used subtly without explaining the connection between the object referred to and the advertisement itself;
◆ the illegitimate application of (metaphorical) expressions to things (actions, objects) to which they cannot be applied in a literal sense ("the Lion of the North", "the Iron Lady").

5.3.3 Unification:

A third method by which relations and structures of domination are established and sustained, is by constructing an artificial unity that embraces individual persons in a "collective identity", irrespective of differences and divisions that may separate them (Thompson, 1992:64). Typical strategies are those of "standardization" and "symbolization of unity". An example of standardization is the establishment of a national language in the context of diverse and linguistically differentiated groups, thereby creating a "legitimate hierarchy among languages and dialects within the boundaries of a national state" (Thompson, 1992:64). "Symbolization of unity" involves the construction of symbols of unity, collective identity, identification and the like, that are "diffused throughout a group or plurality of groups" (such as flags, national anthems, emblems, inscriptions and the like) (Thompson, 1992:64).

5.3.4 Fragmentation:

Relations and structures of domination are also established and maintained by fragmenting groups that may pose a threat or effective challenge to dominant sections of the population, or by orientating "forces of potential opposition" towards a target that is projected as "evil, harmful or threatening" (Thompson, 1992:65). Fragmentation is effected via either *differentiation*: i.e., emphasizing distinctions, differences and divisions that exist between individual persons and groups, thereby dis-uniting them and preventing any effective challenge to existing relations of domination, or

expurgation of the other: i.e., construction of imaginary enemies, within or without a country, that are portrayed as "evil, harmful or threatening and which individual persons are called upon collectively to resist or expurgate" (Thompson, 1992:65).

5.3.5 Reification (converting a person or abstract concept into a thing):

Relations and structures of domination are established and sustained by "eternalization", i.e., portraying transitory, historical states of affairs as if they were natural, permanent, untouched by time (Thompson, 1992:65). It involves what Thompson depicts as the "elimination or obfuscation of the social or historical character of social-historical phenomena" (1992:65). Thus circumstantial events and incidents are misinterpreted as having a "permanent, unchanging and ever-recurring" character. In this way "customs, traditions and institutions which seem to stretch indefinitely into the past, so that any trace of their origin is lost and any question of their end is unimaginable, acquire a rigidity which cannot be easily disrupted. They become embedded in social life and their apparently a-historical character is re-affirmed by symbolic forms which, in their construction as well as their sheer repetition, eternalize the contingent" (Thompson, 1992:66).

Other devices in this regard are –
nominalization: when parts of sentences, descriptions of actions and participants involved in them are turned into nouns: e.g., "the banning of imports", instead of "the Prime Minister has decided to ban imports", and *passivization*: that occurs when verbs are presented in the passive form, thus focusing the attention on certain themes at the expense of others, e.g., "'the suspect is being investigated'" instead of "'police officers are investigating the suspect'" (Thompson, 1992:66).

Stratagems like nominalization and passivization "delete actors and agency" and tend to render actions and performances as things or events that take place "in the absence of a subject who produces them" (Thompson, 1992:66).

6. In sum

There is little doubt that adequate insight into the true nature, strategies and workings of ideology is a requisite should one wish to –

◆ cultivate a critical awareness of the ever-present danger of ideological contamination of our experience and interpretation of the world we live in;

◆ develop effective mechanisms to safeguard our own fundamental preconceptions and points of departure from the pernicious influence of ideological distortions and prejudice and their hidden ramifications;

◆ encourage a critical sensitivity for the problem of ideological distortion in all departments of life, but especially in culture, society, and education;

◆ deconstruct critically and fundamentally all relations of domination that are the outcomes of centuries of ideological and cultural imperialism, and open up new perspectives and offer alternative possibilities;

◆ deconstruct critically some of the "grand narratives" or "master-symbols" (popular myths, metaphors and codes) that are currently in vogue in the country;

◆ stimulate critical thought and judgment;

◆ counteract the misappropriation of "the truth" for partisan purposes, thereby elevating such (distorted) "truths" above penetrating inquiry, critical analysis and open debate;

◆ view critically the heterogeneity and profound conflict of interests and purposes of the different factions of post-apartheid South African society;

◆ explore the possibility of eliminating intolerance in the debate on educational matters by supporters of the different political positions;

◆ endeavour to dismiss the prevailing reluctance of political opponents to consider (even to take seriously) the theories and positions of their rivals;

◆ remove bias and distorted perceptions as regards differences in *race, culture, class, gender, faith* etc.;

◆ obtain a clear perspective on former and existing educational systems, in order to expose underlying (covert) suppositions of each that – in turn – gave/ gives rise to indoctrination, as is manifested in (propagandistic) curricula, syllabi and textbooks;

◆ by way of critical deconstruction and uncommitted appraisal, bring forward new perspectives on ideologically distorted concepts, symbols, signs, language and the like, thereby promoting under-standing and respect among different cultural groups in the country.

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