

Foucault and Rorty on Truth and Ideology: A Pragmatist View from the Left

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An anti-representationalist view of language and a deflationary view of truth, key themes in contemporary pragmatism and especially Richard Rorty, do not undermine the notion, in critical theory, of ideology as ‘false consciousness’. Both Foucault and Marx were opposed to what Marxists call historical idealism and so they should be seen as objecting to forms of ideology-critique that do not sufficiently avoid such an ‘Hegelian’ perspective. Foucault’s general views on the relations between truth and power can plausibly be construed in a way that makes them compatible with a Marxian critical theory.

1. Introduction

Critical theory since Marx has emphasised the role of illusion in the perpetuation of oppression. Oppression-sustaining illusions are the trademark of the ideological. In the critical theorist’s sense of ‘ideology’, ideology distorts and does so in ways that are functional for a social order that is marked by systematic oppression and exploitation. Critical theorists, like proponents of any theory in any domain, believe they can offer a less distorted perspective on certain matters; they claim to have a less falsifying account of the world — specifically, the social and political world — than what is given in the more dominant or ‘hegemonic’ ideologies. They view the critique of ideology as being instrumental to enlightenment, a secular kind of enlightenment, and to the liberation of human beings from modern structures of power and illegitimate authority. For a sample of work on critical theory see Guess (1985), Roderick (1986), McCarthy (1978), Benhabib (1986), and Held (1980).

More or less reflectively, many people today maintain a sceptical attitude towards this tradition. Critical theory has itself been subject to criticism, scorn, and ridicule. Michel Foucault was no exception to this sceptical ‘postmodern’ mood (as it is sometimes called) even though Foucault arguably

neither was nor viewed himself as being a postmodernist.¹ Foucault was sceptical of Enlightenment conceptions of a *general* emancipation. His interest in the relations between knowledge and power did not translate into speculations about an ideal society: a society in which the reign of mystifying ideologies will be overcome. His work as a critical intellectual was distant from such utopian endeavours, in this respect very different from that of Jürgen Habermas, the most widely read and discussed contemporary critical theorist.²

In his ‘Two Lectures’ Foucault expressed scepticism about the critique of ideology partly on the grounds that power in modern society has much less to do with ideology than critical theorists assume. Instead of focusing on the role of ideological belief-systems in the manner of critical theorists, Foucault wanted to examine the (more or less) coercive *practices* and subtle *techniques* by which people are subjected and subject themselves to discipline; practices and techniques that, in Foucault’s view, have been closely linked to the development of the human and social sciences. The way that modern relations of power and authority have developed and been sustained, Foucault believed, is not primarily through the inculcation of ideological distortions or ‘false consciousness’ but, more decisively, through “the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge — methods of observation, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control” (Foucault 1980, 102). Foucault stressed these developments and the fact that ‘apparatuses of control’ and surveillance and the social practices and disciplines linked with them have commonly been overlooked, even by Marxist and other critical theorists who explain the reproduction of oppression in terms of mass ‘ideological mystification’ or ‘false consciousness’.

This Foucauldian objection to ideology-critique is the topic of section two. There I argue that Foucault’s position, though different from Marx’s in subtle ways, is actually consonant with Marx’s (and Engels’) core criticism, in *The German Ideology*, of what has come to be known as historical idealism. Like Marx, Foucault resisted the tendency to discuss prevailing ideas and ways of thinking as if these had magically sprung from some ahistorical heaven; and like Marx, he eschewed the sort of narrative in which ideologies play a dominant or starring role in the historical process. Yet these warnings about *certain forms* of critique should not be seen as vitiating the idea of critical theory in general or the critique of ideology in particular. This, at any rate, is something I try to make clear and persuasive in what follows.

But that is not all Foucault said about ideology. In one of his well-known interviews (‘Truth and Power’) Foucault maintained that “the notion of ideology” as it has been used by Marxists and others on the Left, is problematic because ideology

always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth. Now I believe that the problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in a discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false. (Foucault 2000, 119)

Here Foucault was voicing opposition to a particular tradition of ideology-critique. For purposes of this discussion, I will call Foucault's objection his 'truth objection to ideology-critique'.

Before elaborating on this, it is worth noting that Foucault had other, related objections to ideology-critique. He also objected on the grounds that "the concept of ideology refers, I think necessarily, to something of the order of a subject" and that, in the case of Marxism, "ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material/economic determinant, etc." (Foucault 2000, 119). I have elsewhere argued (Kumar 2003) against the first type of objection: against the view that critical theory necessarily presupposes a problematic philosophical theory of the self or human nature or 'subject' — such as Kantian conceptions of a transcendental subject or Rousseauian conceptions of human nature. The second objection is less elaborated in Foucault's work than the first. Foucault was opposed to economic determinism in Marxian theory. For the most part I avoid this issue here. While I try to show that Foucault can be interpreted as being opposed to the same sort of thing, historical idealism, that Marx and Engels objected to in *The German Ideology*, I do not deny that one can consistently reject both historical idealism *and* the Marxian idea that the economic system is, causally speaking, the most important factor in our explanations of ideology and other social phenomena. I think this is exactly what Foucault did. For him there were important social phenomena including "psychiatric internment, the mental normalisation of individuals, and penal institutions" that "have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for their economic significance" but are "undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power" (Foucault 2000, 117). This suggests that power, for Foucault, was a more important category than the economic. There are issues that need careful consideration in this context, for example, the question whether Marxian theory, charitably understood, is actually rival or complementary to Foucault's genealogical analyses. These issues deserve separate treatment; here I simply wish to stress that Foucault's aversion to a Marxian historical materialist perspective does not make Foucault an historical idealist.

My focus will be more on Foucault's 'truth objection' than on his objections to Marx's so-called economic determinism. Foucault's truth-objection was linked to his understanding of modern 'disciplinary power' and 'normalisation' and the connections these have to the production of knowledge. In one of his provocative claims regarding truth and power, Foucault asserted that "[t]he problem is not changing people's consciousness — or what's in their heads — but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth" (2000, 133). Foucault's central argument here, it would seem, is that even truth, or what is taken as truth, as produced in various disciplines deemed scientific, often works in the service of power. I do not think this insight provides a telling objection to all critical conceptions of ideology but only to those that draw a hard and fast line between science and truth on one side and ideology on the other. Critical theory, Marxian or otherwise, need not do so; or so I will argue. But Foucault's truth objection may be viewed, not only as a critique of such *scientific* conceptions of ideology but also of certain problematic conceptions of and stances toward truth. What is less clear is whether those conceptions, problematic as they seem to be, are inseparably entangled with the 'notion of ideology' as deployed by critical theory.

Related to much talk of truth and its assumed liberating potential is a kind of picture of the relation between humans and the rest of the world: a *representationalist* picture, according to which truth is what emerges or becomes present when our beliefs, our minds, our sentences and our language-games, theories or world-views, accurately represent what the world is 'really' like apart from all of our discursive practices, our values, needs and interests, our conceptual and theoretical assumptions and beliefs. The assumption is that there is an intrinsic nature of reality, that 'in the final analysis' the trail of the human is not over all, that truth is what we get when we are properly disposed towards or properly represent this nonhuman, nonlinguistic reality. (Note that this picture becomes less plausible if we are thinking of social realities, for there the observer is more obviously also a participant-observer.) The critique of this representationalist image, especially as it has been articulated by contemporary pragmatists, seems to create problems for those who wish to contrast 'the way things are in themselves' with 'the way things are ideologically represented by (or to) us'.

Moreover, certain developments in philosophical thinking about truth *seem* to have made it more difficult for social critics to refer to their opponents' views as ideological while viewing their own as non-ideological or at least less ideological. One of these developments is the rise of postmodernism in our intellectual life over the past thirty years. 'Postmodernism' is not a term I will try to define. But in its apparent opposition to all forms of rationalism, particularly those most clearly stemming from the Enlightenment, postmodern

thought is sceptical of ‘truth-talk’ (a phrase from the pragmatist philosopher, Robert Brandom) or at least certain kinds of truth-talk. Postmodernism may now be on the decline but whether or not this is so, perhaps scepticism is in order, at least towards *certain conceptions* of truth. Perhaps some truth-talk, in particular the sort of truth-talk that has prevailed in philosophical and theological discourse through the ages, *should* be dropped. Interestingly the movement against *such* truth-talk is alive and well in analytical philosophy as well. The idea of truth has steadily been ‘deflated’ and the movement towards a deflationary view of truth can be seen in the context of a broader dissatisfaction with representationalism.³

Representationalism, though not invented by Descartes, is a central doctrine of Cartesian thought. Descartes split the world into two substances (Mind and Matter) and a broad swathe of post-Cartesian English philosophy revolves around the issue of the relations between them; specifically, the questions whether and how the mind (or language) can be seen to accurately represent what is really ‘out there’ beyond the mind (beyond language). The foil for such endeavours is usually the epistemological sceptic, the one who denies that we can ever possess genuine knowledge of the world ‘as it really is’ apart from how we humans think about it. This sort of modern sceptic makes the most of the metaphysical divide assumed by representationalism, denying that we can know that we have successfully, representationally, forged a bond between the human and nonhuman worlds.⁴ Representationalism is the general framework within which both sceptical and non-sceptical ‘realist’ and ‘anti-realist’ philosophers have their disputes. The framework is nicely depicted by Bjørn Ramberg in a discussion of two prominent anti-representationalists, Richard Rorty and Donald Davidson. Ramberg characterises representationalism as a view of the world, implicit in much analytical philosophy (but not only analytical philosophy) that rests on “two problem-defining assumptions”:

The first is the Kantian idea that knowledge, or thinking generally, must be understood in terms of some relation between what the world offers up to the thinker, on one side, and on the other the active subjective capacities by which the thinker structures for cognitive use what the world thus provides. [Note that Kant’s idea is a variation on a Cartesian theme.] The second is the Platonic conviction that there must be some particular form of description of things, which, by virtue of its ability to accurately map, reflect, or otherwise latch on to just those kinds through which the world presents itself to would-be knowers, is the form in which any literally true — or cognitively significant, or ontologically ingenuous — statement must be couched. Together, these comprise what Rorty calls representationalism. (Ramberg 2001, 351)

I will argue that even with a deflationary view of truth (which will be elaborated in section four) and even with an acceptance of anti-representationalism — the denial or the putting aside of the two ‘problem-defining assumptions’ mentioned by Ramberg — there remains a non-misleading way to think of the contrast, in critical theory, between truth and ideology, or better, between ideological and non-ideological consciousness. To put it another way: One can be as thoroughly anti-representationalist as a Richard Rorty or a Michel Foucault and yet, contrary to both, still reasonably cling to a critical sense of ‘ideology’, a sense in which to be under the sway of ideology is, in part, to be under the spell of a specific kind of delusion or illusion.⁵ Anti-representationalism and the deflation of ‘truth’ do not undermine the critique of distorting or mystifying ideologies. If representationalism is as incoherent or problematic as contemporary pragmatists such as Rorty, Ramberg, Kai Nielsen, Michael Williams, and Hilary Putnam (who calls it metaphysical realism rather than ‘representationalism’) believe, this would not establish that the ‘notion of ideology’ in critical theory is also so deeply problematic. (I will go along with Nielsen, Ramberg, and Putnam; unlike Rorty, they do not think we would do better to forget ideology once we accept pragmatism into our hearts. For a sample of anti-representationalist writings, see Rorty (1983), Ramberg (1993), Putnam (2001), Nielsen (1991), and Williams (1995). Again, note that Putnam does not disavow all notions of representing but he is, in effect, anti-representationalist in the same sense as the others.)

So I claim it is important to stick with a notion of ideology as ‘false consciousness’, suitably demystified of both representationalist and rationalist assumptions. Foucault’s truth objection, construed as a kind of historicised anti-representationalist critique, works against a *certain* notion of ideology, a scientific one, but not against all critical notions. In making this case, I also contend that Foucault’s general ideas on the connections between truth and power are not only compatible with a form of Marxian critical theory, they actually make more sense than they otherwise would when placed within (or at least alongside) the latter.

2. Foucault and Marx against historical idealism

In an interesting discussion of Foucault’s views on power and politics, Nancy Fraser made the following comment which is, I think, illuminating in a way that she did not intend: “Foucault’s genealogy of modern power establishes that power touches people’s lives more fundamentally through their social practices than through their beliefs” and this “suffices to rule out political orientations aimed primarily at the demystification of ideologically distorted belief systems” (Fraser 1989, 18). Fraser’s implied contrast between practices and beliefs is

odd; for what practice is not belief-laden, what social practice can be understood without understanding something of the beliefs, assumptions and attitudes of the participants in the practice? Nevertheless, there is a more charitable way of understanding Fraser (and Foucault) in this context; but this interpretation would situate Foucault more in the tradition of Marxian thought than Foucault sometimes seemed willing to countenance.

Let me explain. Fraser's suggestive comment is similar to Marx's and Engels' criticisms, in *The German Ideology*, of what is sometimes called 'historical idealism'. They accused the "German ideologists," most of them followers of Hegel or strongly influenced by his philosophy of history, of interpreting and explaining social and historical change in terms of an autonomous world of ideas, theories, or world-views, rather than placing the latter in the context of more 'material' developments in social and economic institutions and practices. One of the problems with the German ideology, Marx and Engels argued, was the tendency to discuss historical change as if it had "taken place in the realm of pure thought" (Marx and Engels 1985, 39). The Young Hegelians, they wrote, "consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as the Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society)." The Young Hegelians thought we could look to the 'products of consciousness' to discover both the fundamental causes of and constraints on the forms of human relations and human activity that prevail in different historical periods. They implied that the critique of this free-floating consciousness was the most crucial factor in bringing about substantial improvements in social and cultural life.

Marx and Engels believed that the Young Hegelians were, in effect, practicing a conservative or at least very limited form of critique. These critics were only fighting against certain interpretations or phrases and forgetting "that to these phrases they themselves are only opposing other phrases, and that they are in no way combating the real existing world when they are merely combating the phrases of this world." The suggestion is not that 'phrases' and 'interpretations' are not part of the 'real existing world'. In context, 'real existing world' means something like 'the historical world of socio-economic institutions and practices within which theories, language and thought are embedded and from which ideologies emerge'. This interpretation squares with their scathing remark that "[i]t has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings" (Marx and Engels 1985, 41).⁶ 'Reality' qualified by 'German' suggests a social, political, economic reality, not Reality *simpliciter*; and as Nielsen, Michael Williams, and Rorty suggest, it is less than clear that we even know what we are

talking about when we refer to ‘reality-in-general’ or reality ‘as-it- is-in-itself’. (See section four for further discussion of this.)

Similarly, Foucault believed that ideas, theories, world-views, moral codes and ways of thinking and ‘problematizing’ generally, are historically conditioned by, and have no meaning apart from, an historical background of social practices, traditions, customs, institutions, all pervaded by relations of control, domination, power and resistance — a background of ‘material practices’, so to speak. Like Marx and Engels, he believed that an effective form of critique would not simply criticise the ‘products of consciousness’ but would also view ‘consciousness’ as a product. (This is a key feature of genealogy in Foucault’s work.) Foucault wished to historicise these ‘products of consciousness’ in a particular way, to view them against a background of social power, to examine how they emerged from coercive social practices or how they have functioned to preserve or to challenge social and political hierarchies and other relations of power.

It is noteworthy that in criticising forms of historical idealism, Marx and Engels were not suggesting that there *were* no dominant ideologies, world-views or theories, nor were they suggesting that it was futile or pointless to expose them to rational criticism. It is reasonable to suppose that, on the contrary, they regarded the idealism of the ‘German ideology’ as playing a role in a culturally dominant ideology and that they were exposing it to rational criticism. In claiming that social change (or the lack of social change) is not traceable to a “realm of pure thought,” they were not suggesting that modern life was devoid of “ideologically distorted belief-systems” if this means “belief-systems which, partly through distortion and falsehood, *contribute* to or *reinforce* existing or developing structures of power and authority.” They devoted much of their lives to exposing and criticising what they regarded as pro-capitalist ideologies that in important ways distort our understandings of social and political life. They would not have denied that capitalism is sustained as a social form with the help of a dominant ideology or ideologies (in the sense specified).⁷ Their point was that the critique of such belief-systems probably would be feckless and have conservative effects so long as these critiques remained safely in the “realm of pure thought”; remained, that is, trapped in a discourse or vocabulary that treats history as if it were primarily the manifestation of a more basic intellectual process (a world of ideas); and so long as intellectuals refused to inquire into the connections which their ideas, principles and theories have to social and economic realities. If my reading of Fraser’s reading (quoted above) of Foucault is accepted, then it makes sense to think that Foucault and Marx did not differ *in this respect*; that is, both repudiated what Marxists call historical idealism. Many historians and social scientists, even if they are not Marxian, are now suspicious of historical idealism, though

they tend not to acknowledge the Marxian pedigree of their suspicions and tend to be suspicious of Marx's historical materialism as well, in effect saying "a plague on both your houses." (For clear, though sometimes conflicting versions of historical materialism coming from the 'school' of Marxism known as 'Analytical Marxism', see Cohen (1978, 1988); Miller (1984); Nielsen (1989); and Levine, Sober, and Wright (1995).)

The differences between Marx and Foucault have more to do with what replaces historical idealism. While Marxists have emphasised the development of modes of production (the forces and relations of production) as the crucial determinants of ideology and of social and historical change, Foucault emphasised strategies and techniques of social control and, to a lesser extent, strategies and techniques of resistance. Nevertheless, neither Marx's base/superstructure model of society nor Foucault's power model establish that the critique of ideology is an incoherent or unworthy practice.⁸ Even if prevailing ideologies are rooted in economic relations of production and the conflicts arising from these, as Marxians say, this does not imply that it is pointless or futile to criticise those ideologies; at most, it implies that such critiques would be even more cogent when ideology is understood and depicted in a broader 'material' context, that is, when it is adequately historicised and linked to prevailing socio-economic structures — when Feuerbach is supplemented by Marx. (Note that this has nothing to do with a view to which some Marxists such as Engels have been prone, namely *metaphysical* materialism, the view that all reality is ultimately only matter. On decoupling Marxian theory from materialist metaphysics, see Norman (1989, 59–80)). Similar things can be said of Foucault's quasi-materialist objection to ideology-critique. Perhaps the critical intellectuals *should* put greater emphasis on material practices and techniques of control other than the ideological or 'purely' ideological — 'panoptical' techniques for monitoring employees and isolating them from each other, for example. Moreover, one should not simply assume without argument that masses of people are ideologically deluded to act in ways supportive of their own oppression. These points should be acknowledged but taken as friendly advice rather than as undermining ideology-critique. They do not establish the futility or pointlessness of the latter; they imply only that such critiques should be more consciously integrated with analyses of material practices and techniques of social and political control and resistance and that one should try to provide good reasons, preferably embedded in plausible historical narratives, for the claim that ideology (as a form of 'false consciousness') does significantly contribute to maintaining oppression.

Foucault's more influential scepticism towards critical theory with ideology-critique at its core, has more to do with what I have called the 'truth-objection'. It is here that Foucault seems to join forces with Rorty in order to

move social criticism away from the tradition of grand critical theory; but in particular, away from the idea of exposing the irrationalities and distortions of dominant ideologies (or ‘false consciousness’).

3. ‘Truth’, ‘freedom’ and ‘power’ as interlocked notions: Taylor on Foucault

In thinking about the truth/ideology contrast that seems to underpin the idea of ideology as false consciousness, it may be useful first to address a common sort of criticism of Foucault that was raised in the 1980s. Philosophers such as Charles Taylor and a number of others commented on Foucault’s apparent self-contradictions and ‘normative confusions’ (Taylor 1986, 69–102; see, as well, Fraser, who wrote of Foucault’s ‘empirical insights and normative confusions’ (1989, 17–68), Habermas (1987, 238–93; 1986, 103–8) and Walzer (1988, 191–209).) Some of Foucault’s statements provoked worries about his apparent moral and cultural relativism, his fatalism or even nihilism. The following passage, for example, worried Taylor (and others as well):

The important thing here ... is that truth isn’t outside power or lacking in power; contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 2000, 131)

Taylor was troubled by these and similar general remarks in Foucault’s writings and interviews about the links between truth and power. He was also troubled by the *apparent* fact that Foucault’s “analyses seem to bring *evils* to light; and yet he wants to distance himself from the suggestion which would seem inescapably to follow, that the negation or overcoming of these evils promotes a good” (Taylor 1986, 69). Taylor characterised Foucault’s position as follows:

There is no truth which can be espoused, defended, rescued against systems of power. On the contrary, each such system defines its own variant of truth. And there is no escape from power into freedom, for such systems of power are co-extensive with human society. We can only step from one to another. (Taylor 1986, 70)⁹

According to Taylor, Foucault was mistaken about the interrelations between truth, power and freedom, indeed about the concepts of 'truth', 'power' (or 'domination') and 'freedom'.

Taylor maintained that Foucault was caught in a self-defeating relativism, using these concepts in ways that amount to abusing them. How, Taylor wondered, could Foucault have made such claims about the inseparability of truth and power while, without contradiction, believing his genealogies were in any meaningful sense *critical* of 'truth regimes'? Foucault did not think that his historical analyses of modern power were morally or politically neutral. They were, at least, meant to make us think twice about some of our norms and practices, to show that what looks like progress and freedom was, or is, at least in some significant respects neither progress nor freedom. But given (what Taylor regards as) Foucault's relativist ways of speaking about truth, freedom and power, what good reasons could he have had for making these claims? On what non-arbitrary basis could one take the side of 'subjugated knowledges' in opposition to dominant paradigms of knowledge? On what non-mythical, non-question-begging, non-arbitrary basis could Foucault have criticised the 'disciplinary society' or the 'society of normalisation'? If there is no escape from power into freedom, no truth outside power (if 'truth is already power'), what rational moral justification is there or could there be for resisting and trying to change or to overthrow an existing system of power? (But then couldn't we also ask: What justification is there or could there be for *not* resisting, for acquiescing in the *status quo*?) Taylor suggested that Foucault was confused on these matters and he tried to give a diagnosis of this confusion in the context of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality. Volume One*.

Taylor and several other commentators have insinuated that in *Discipline and Punish* the emergence and development of modern 'humanitarian' forms of punishment is depicted as if these were, at best, morally on a par with prior forms of punishment in which torture and public executions were regular, ritualised practices. More generally, some of Foucault's interpreters and critics have remarked on his apparent unwillingness sufficiently to acknowledge moral progress in the emergence and development of modern institutions, practices and norms. Clifford Geertz made the strong claim that Foucault gave us "a kind of Whig history in reverse — a history, in spite of itself, of the Rise of Unfreedom" (Geertz 1978, 6; cited by Hoy 1986, 11). That seems to imply that

in Foucault's genealogies modern societies are depicted as actually regressing, in terms of freedom, from pre-modern societies. Whatever the most plausible interpretation of Foucault may be,¹⁰ readers of Foucault can accept Taylor's suggestion that Foucault's impatience with modernist claims about progress was, for the most part, rooted in his "concrete reading of this 'humanitarianism', which [he saw] as a growing system of control" (Taylor 1986, 80).

Again, Foucault's accounts of modern techniques of control and discipline were not value-free or politically neutral. He would have been the first to acknowledge this: he made no pretensions to being neutral in the sense of not taking sides in social and political conflicts; he evinced no longing for transcendence, that is for 'rising above' any historically specific social and political concerns in his work. In fact he was suspicious of the assumption that this could be done in the social and human sciences. And in Foucault's 1971 Dutch television discussion with Noam Chomsky (it wasn't much of a debate) he said, in no uncertain terms, that

one of the tasks that seems immediate and urgent to me, over and above anything else, is this: that we [in our intellectual work] should indicate and show up, even where they are hidden, all the relationships of political power which actually control the social body and oppress or repress it. (Foucault 1974, 171)

Foucault was active in political struggles; the struggles of prisoners, for example. Evidently he did not suspend his moral convictions and his concern for certain marginalised groups (but not only for them) when he wrote about the development of modern conceptions and techniques of punishment, norms of sexual health or sanity, and modern forms of 'governmentality' generally. He knew that these values and concerns led him to ask certain questions, pose certain problems, pursue certain lines of inquiry and to be more interested in or sympathetic with certain interpretations of events rather than others (Bernstein 1992, 142–71). He may not have been an advocate of critical *theory*, including Marxian theories, or interested in doing moral *philosophy*, but he was doing work and saw himself as doing work that was informed by certain moral convictions; work that was both empirically-oriented and critical of certain tendencies (critical of certain social practices and ways of thinking) characteristic of modern (Western) societies.

Yet in Foucault's genealogies the values tend to be implicit and he typically refused, even when pressed, to defend his views by appealing to or articulating a moral or normative theory, framework or perspective; more precisely, he refused to yield to the Platonistic urge to ground values he plainly shared (such as autonomy) either in something nonhuman (God's will, laws of

nature, the intrinsic nature of reality) or in the ‘intrinsically human’ or, like Habermas, in the ‘universal presuppositions of communicative action’.¹¹ Foucault did not try to depict an ideal society, particularly when this is conceived as a society that promotes the realisation or fulfilment of a hitherto repressed human nature. (His main point of contention with Chomsky was on this very question; that is, the question whether there is any point or value in trying to give an account of a possible future, better social order in which human nature might be freely expressed or fulfilled.) All the same, Foucault was not an amoralist or politically neutral in his writing about modern power (if that is even possible); though he was no doubt elusively hard to categorise politically.

In Taylor’s judgment, the unarticulated moral perspective behind Foucault’s critical accounts of modern power (of the ‘carceral society’, the ‘disciplinary society’, the ‘society of normalisation’), a perspective that would make sense of these critical histories as coherent forms of critique, could have been “something akin to the Schillerian/Critical Theory notion that modern discipline has repressed our own natures and constituted systems of domination of man by man.” However, as noted above, this ‘Schillerian/Critical Theory’ perspective with its appeal to an ideal of liberation of human nature, was repudiated by Foucault. It was repudiated by him partly because, as Taylor put it, “the ideology of expressive liberation, particularly in connection with sexual life, is [for Foucault] itself just a strategy of power.” But if the ideology of expressive liberation is itself a strategy of power (not an unnatural reading of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Volume One*), then Foucault’s critique of this ideology then seems to imply or to presuppose “some idea of a liberation, but not via the correct or authentic expression of our natures.” Instead, it would be “a liberation from the whole ideology of such expression, and hence from the mechanisms of control which use this ideology.” Moreover, “[i]t would be a liberation which was helped by our unmasking falsehood; a liberation aided by the truth” (Taylor 1986, 80).

But Foucault refused to adopt such a stance, according to Taylor. ‘Unmasking falsehood’, ‘liberation aided by the truth’: these phrases suggest the notion that Foucault was giving us a critique of ideology. Yet Foucault seems not only not to have seen it this way but to have been ironically dismissive of the idea. Recall one aspect of the truth objection: Foucault believed that theorists who claim to be unmasking ideology tend, unhelpfully, to conceive of truth and science in opposition to false, ideological consciousness. Troubled by Foucault’s reluctance to view himself as standing up for truth against power, Taylor’s core response was to argue that Foucault’s critical accounts of systems of control, like all critical theory, presuppose the notions of truth and freedom in such a way that truth is opposed to power and ideology and some idea of

freedom is at least implicitly appealed to as a critical standard to evaluate (or even recognize) relations of power and domination. And he claimed that this is just a matter of using the relevant words in a coherent way, in a way that does not reduce to confused nonsense and that preserves the critical intent behind much of Foucault's political writing.

Taylor remarked, correctly, that any form of domination, even if it is partly self-imposed, is possible only if there is "a background of desires, interests, purposes" that people have and if "it makes a dent in these, if it frustrates them, prevents them from fulfilment, or perhaps even from formulation," diminishing freedom in these ways (Taylor 1986, 91). Foucault's genealogies can be critical only if power and domination can be counterposed to truth and freedom. This is the core of Taylor's argument:

... 'power' belongs in a semantic field from which 'truth' and 'freedom' cannot be excluded. Because it is linked with the notion of the imposition on our significant desires/purposes, it cannot be separated from the notion of some relative lifting of this restraint, from an unimpeded [or less impeded] fulfilment of these desires/purposes. But this is just what is involved in a notion of freedom ... power, in [Foucault's] sense, *does not make sense* [as a critically useful category] without at least the idea of liberation. (Taylor 1986, 91–2)

And the truth, Taylor wrote, "is on the side of the lifting of impositions, of what we have just called liberation.... To speak of power, and to want to deny a place to 'liberation' and 'truth', as well as the link between them, is to speak incoherently" (Taylor 1986, 93). This is how 'truth' fits into the picture:

'Power' in the way Foucault sees it, closely linked to 'domination', does not require a clearly demarcated perpetrator, but it requires a victim. It cannot be a 'victimless crime', so to speak. Perhaps the victims also exercise it, also victimise others. But power needs targets. Something must be being imposed on someone, if there is to be domination. *Perhaps that person is also helping to impose it on himself, but then there must be an element of fraud, illusion, false pretences involved in this. Otherwise, it is not clear that the imposition is in any sense an exercise of domination.* (Taylor 1986, 91; emphasis added)

In regard to the (relatively unimportant) question of Foucault interpretation, I am inclined to the view that Foucault cannot plausibly be construed as denying Taylor's main points and that Taylor's (rather conceptual) argument does not address Foucault's deeper critique of modern power. For example, the

fact that Foucault's critical histories of modern practices and norms seem to presuppose an idea of freedom does not establish the plausibility of the Enlightenment ideal of a *general* emancipation. The differences here between Foucault and more utopian thinkers such as Marx and Habermas are not merely conceptual (or even moral) but rooted in differing assessments of historical feasibility and of what is the most useful theoretical or interpretive framework for understanding and coping with power and oppression in the modern world.

Even so, it may be worth remembering Taylor's general point about Foucault's critical histories. There are two features of these histories that make them *critical* analyses of modern social life: (1) they unmask illusions that people have about themselves and their social practices, in part by showing that these practices are, despite appearances, feeding some system or 'network' of social coercion or control; and relatedly (2) they show, or at least suggest, how these systems of control work to frustrate or prevent the fulfilment or satisfaction of some 'significant' desires, purposes, needs or interests, not only directly or 'negatively' through repression but also (in Foucault's historical narratives) "by inducing in us a certain self-understanding, an identity" which, characteristically, locks us into power relations though not only as passive victims but often as agents and victimisers as well. What Taylor suggests is that (1) and (2) presuppose or rely upon (a) a distinction between true and false beliefs about ourselves and our social practices, as well as (b) some minimal idea of liberation, the idea that Foucault's 'power/knowledge' regimes, if they exist, make us (or many of us) less free or less autonomous than we could be in other social contexts.¹²

In effect, Taylor's response to the truth objection (to his understanding of it) is to remind us that critical language-games such as Foucault's cannot coherently disavow a concern for truth or a valuing of truth. This would be a sensible response, provided that by 'truth' one meant, simply and redundantly, 'truths as opposed to or as distinct from falsehoods', provided that truth is not held out as a goal of inquiry above and beyond the goal of justifying our beliefs as best we can in our circumstances, and provided that a concern for truth is not confused with a concern for Truth.¹³

4. Anti-representationalism and the deflation of truth

To explain and elaborate on the preceding section's conclusion, I will begin by referring to one of the classical pragmatists, John Dewey. Dewey wrote that "the profuseness of attestations to supreme devotion to truth on the part of philosophy is matter to arouse suspicion." Such attestations, he claimed, have "usually been a preliminary to the claim [that philosophy can be, or tell us about] a peculiar organ of access to highest and ultimate truth" (Dewey 1958,

410; citation from Davidson 1990, 279). Foucault was no less suspicious than Dewey of such (rather boastful) philosophical claims about or relating to truth. He certainly did not believe that there was a special realm of philosophical truth or that philosophy as a particular discipline had unique access to the nature of truth, let alone to 'highest and ultimate truth', whatever that may be. Foucault and Dewey, both anti-essentialists, did not leave much room for the idea that truth even has an essence or nature. (Of course, the classical pragmatists, including Dewey, did have theories of truth and this is a key difference between them and contemporary pragmatists such as Rorty and Nielsen; the latter reject classical pragmatist theories of truth and retain the anti-representationalism and anti-essentialism).

However, it is not clear why *such* truth-talk, *such* assumptions about truth and philosophy, are necessary or even helpful for understanding the distinction between true and false beliefs (or sentences, utterances, propositions). Much of our speech and communication, not only those instances in which ideology is being criticised, seems to rely on and take for granted this distinction. Manifestly frustrated with Foucault's provocative claims about truth and power, Michael Walzer correctly (though condescendingly) observed that Foucault, like anyone else, used declarative sentences; he made assertions of which it makes sense to say that they are or were either true or false or probably true or probably false; and he implied and assumed things that are or were either true or false or probably true or probably false (Walzer 1988). But this can be understood as just another way of saying, trivially, that Foucault was linguistically competent; the ability to wield a true/false distinction can be understood simply as being part of what makes communication possible (Ramberg 2001; Davidson 1990). We all know how to operate with the ordinary concept of truth, how to draw a true/false distinction, even if we have no idea what the supposed essence or nature of Truth may be.

Perhaps more interestingly, Foucault, unlike some of his less careful admirers, was *not* sceptical in any sort of Cartesian or relativistic way about claims to scientific knowledge: he suggested that he wanted to resist 'scientism', which he construed as "a dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge," but that he was not concerned to argue for "a sceptical or relativistic refusal of all verified truth" (1982, 212). Whatever the significant differences are between Taylor and Foucault in this context, they, like everyone else, both make use of a true/false distinction and both would in circumstances of actual inquiry prefer to believe truths rather than falsehoods in their domains of inquiry.

The trouble begins when, reflecting on what we seek when we seek truth, we interpret truth in representationalist terms; as Wittgenstein might say, when we bring in a certain, superfluous metaphysical picture.¹⁴

What anti-representationalists find most objectionable is precisely the metaphysical baggage that tends to be attached to our truth-talk: the idea that truth is a relation of representation or correspondence between mind (or language) and the world, that truth is the crucial relation or property that keeps us solidly grounded in the world, keeps us from losing touch with it or being alienated from it, and that truth is the primary goal of inquiry, a goal that surpasses the 'mere' justification of our views to other people and to ourselves. These ideas (among others), the argument goes, are excisable from our understanding of truth; the claim is that it is an illusion, or at any rate unhelpful and problematic to think that representations (in our heads or in our language in the form of statements or propositions) may somehow 'connect' us to reality. We are already in constant *causal* contact with the world beyond our bodies; there is nothing beyond this that connects us to, or that ensures our bond with, the nonhuman world. From this perspective, human interaction with the nonhuman is of a piece with the interaction of nonhuman animals with their environments; we humans just cope with our environments in different, often more complex ways involving language but like the other animals, we are fully part of the spatio-temporal universe and like them, we struggle to cope with and adapt ourselves to our environments. Sticking with this naturalistic Darwinian conception of ourselves (while resisting the temptation to depict characteristically human attributes as somehow enabling us to transcend our socio-cultural contexts, the contingency of our lot, or our finitude), Rorty and Nielsen recommend that we see our various, frequently overlapping 'vocabularies' or 'language-games' as being no more (or no less) than different ways of adapting to and coping with our environments and our lives; they should not be viewed as being, in addition, different ways of representing what reality is like apart from human needs and ways of interpreting and describing (Rorty 2000; Nielsen 1996, 2001).

Pragmatists do not deny that we can make true statements about things that exist independently of our minds. They are not like Bishop Berkeley, as they do not think that to be is to be perceived, but they reject the notion that we can match bits of our languages to bits of the non-linguistic world so that we can be sure that just those bits of language (perhaps along with a few other bits with the same meaning) accurately represent or mirror the world. Such a view of language mirroring reality seems to rest on the idea that we can transcend the vicissitudes of language in order to see, finally free from our historically specific enculturation, which beliefs or sentences or propositions correspond to what the world is really like in itself, what it would be like anyway, apart from our modes of description and categorisation. But this idea of mirroring the wordless essence of things is just what pragmatists suggest we can do well without.

Given this understanding, both Rorty and Nielsen still maintain that we can go on as usual drawing a true/false distinction (it is useful after all), trying to be truthful and honest in pursuit of our various projects, but they equally stress that we can do this without any commitment to representationalism or to any philosophical *theory* about the nature of Truth.

Two contemporary ‘truth’ deflationists, Paul Horwich and Michael Williams, argue in their different ways that philosophy should give up the search for a robust theory of Truth; they try to provide support for Rorty’s contention that “truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about”; as well as the contention that it will not help in justifying one’s beliefs to know the essence of Truth (Rorty 1982, xiii, xv).

Williams stresses the deflationary character of Alfred Tarski’s ‘disquotational’ account of the truth predicate. Tarski’s general formula is that “p is true in L [a particular ‘natural’ language] if and only if P” — “‘Snow is white’ is true (in English) if and only if snow is white,” and so on. Williams thinks that this schema captures something about the ordinary concept of truth, about the meaning of the predicate ‘is true’, even if it seems not to tell us anything new or exciting. But it gives us a way of looking at our use of the adjective ‘true’. He claims that “[p]erhaps in conjunction with some additional conventions to cover cases like ‘Everything he told you was true, where ‘true’ is used in connection with statements not directly quoted, it fixes the extension of the truth predicate for language L.” He argues that this tells us “all, or just about all, we need to know about truth”; though he adds that, in addition to using it for verbal convenience, we use the word ‘true’ as a normative compliment or to indicate agreement (Williams 1986, 223–41). English speakers also use the word ‘true’ in other ways that have been of little interest to epistemologists in the analytical tradition. For example, we might speak of a ‘true work of art’. Here ‘true’ means something like ‘genuine’, a kind of normative compliment.

Horwich in a similar vein says that when it comes to the question of the meaning of ‘truth’, “just about the only uncontroversial fact to be found in this domain” is “that the proposition that snow is white is true if and only if snow is white, the proposition that tachyons exist is true if and only if tachyons exist, and so on” (Horwich 1990, 127). Horwich generalises this ‘uncontroversial fact’ with the “equivalence schema”:

“the proposition *u* (*that p*) is true if and only if *p*”

Like Williams, Horwich argues that this minimal understanding of the concept of truth, an understanding that merely gives a formal, general schema that can be concretised with the insertion of particular assertions or propositions

in place of p , is all we need; that is, it is all we need in order to understand the predicate 'is true' (Horwich 1999a, p. 20). Horwich and Tarski provide formal accounts which, though perhaps not complete accounts of truth (though what a 'complete account' could be is not clear), are accounts of how, typically, we use the word 'true' or the predicate 'is true'. In speaking of the concern for truth, then, the only sense of 'true' that we need, according to deflationism, is the sense that is conveyed by our acceptance of typical instances of the equivalence schema — our disposition to accept non-paradoxical sentences like 'It is true that snow is white if and only if snow is white.'

Deflationism is not a form of 'reductionism' with respect to truth. Our willingness to settle for disquotationalism (i.e., the schema "'p' is true in L if and only p") plus comments on the performative use of 'true' — where it functions as a way of endorsing, commending, indicating agreement or cautioning us that even our best justified beliefs may be found not to be justified by a future community — does not commit us to viewing truth as being semantically reducible to some more basic notion of justification or anything else. Truth remains a primitive, indefinable notion. And in saying that some beliefs of ours, though justified may not after all be true, we are in fact reminding ourselves of our fallibility. This cautionary role of the concept of truth, for Rorty, is its most important function. Truth in its cautionary use helps us to preserve a sense of our fallibility because it reminds us that "[b]elief is as intrinsically disputable as it is intrinsically veridical" (Rorty 2001b, 375). The important point here is that in saying "X is perfectly justified but may not be true," we should not be taken to imply either (a) that X though justified may not after all accurately represent reality as it is in itself (as the correspondence theory would have it) or (b) that X though currently justified may not be justified at the ideal end of inquiry (as a Piercean 'epistemic' theory would have it). Recall that, on the disquotational view, 'X is true' does not say or mean 'X is assertable' or 'X is assertable by the norms of my culture' or 'X is what will be agreed to at the ideal end of inquiry'. These are not, on disquotational views, equivalent expressions. 'X is true' just says (and means) whatever X says, so that, typically, 'X is true' is rightly assertable whenever X is.

Significantly, there is no attempt on deflationary views to explain or account for the relation between our representations of the world and the world — through some causal theory of reference, for example. For the deflationist (or as Horwich would say, minimalist) but not for correspondence theorists, there is no general problem about how our beliefs 'hook up with' or 'map onto' an 'external' reality.

Though Davidson rejected deflationism and minimalism on the grounds that these views do not tell us all that we need or want to know about truth, the minimalist conception does square with Davidson's view that there is no

sense to the idea “of an uninterpreted reality, something outside all schemes and science” to which our sentences, theories or conceptual schemes correspond or fail to correspond (Davidson 1985, 198). In this context Davidson was using the word ‘uninterpreted’ in a broad sense: anything that involves language is interpreted. But though Davidson was using ‘uninterpreted’ in this broad way, it was appropriate to do so in the context of his discussion of the representationalist ‘scheme-content’ dualism. In this broad sense of ‘uninterpreted’, even planets, mountains, rivers and trees are not part of an uninterpreted reality; we use language and concepts just in identifying anything as planets, mountains, rivers and trees and in so doing we presuppose an indefinite number of things — just think of what is involved, how much we presuppose and commit ourselves to just in speaking of the planets (Putnam 1983, 1985). We could say that before the planet Pluto was discovered it *was* an uninterpreted reality, since nobody knew about it and we humans did not bring it into being by discovering it or beginning to describe it. In saying this we would be saying what the pragmatist considers truistic and trivial — as distinct from a deep metaphysical insight. The pragmatist, by rejecting the correspondence theory with its inherent representationalism, does not commit to a kind of metaphysical idealism. That Pluto exists independently of people, that it existed before it was discovered by people, that its existence is *causally* independent of human existence and human inquiry, these things no one can reasonably deny. Pluto would exist even if people did not exist. But how can we (anti-representationalists) say this? If we take seriously Davidson’s critique of the dualism of conceptual scheme and uninterpreted, undifferentiated content, how can we then say that Pluto, as a distinct entity of the sort we call a planet, existed before humans began to conceptualise it and talk about it? Wouldn’t that commit us to saying that Pluto is part of the world as it really is, as it is apart from our take on it, our ways of talking about planets?

The right anti-representationalist answer will seem question-begging to ‘realists’: namely, that according to *our* norms for describing planets we cannot rightly say that Pluto would cease to exist when humans cease to exist or that it came into being when we categorised it as the ninth furthest planet from the sun in our solar system. Our norms for planet-description include the idea that the existence of the planets is causally independent of human activities. If someone were sincerely to state that Pluto literally came into being when someone spotted it, this person would not be using the word ‘Pluto’ in the way it is normally used. (See Rorty’s argument in his ‘Response to Ramberg’, 2001b, 374.) In speaking of Pluto (normally) we are speaking the language of planet-description but this, pragmatists insist, is not Nature’s language; we are not describing things just the way the world compels us to describe them or representing a part of the world as it intrinsically, essentially is apart from our

linguistic and social practices. Anti-representationalists such as Rorty and Davidson deny that this idea of representing the way things really are can be cashed out in a non-question-begging way.

For anti-representationalists, then, what needs to be dropped from our understanding of truth is the idea that the truth of our beliefs can be analysed, explained or accounted for in terms of the relations between our beliefs (or statements, propositions, etc.) and an uninterpreted reality (in the broad sense of 'uninterpreted'). For as soon as we specify a part of the world to which our sentences or theories correspond, we defeat the purpose of talk of truth-as-correspondence. In specifying or identifying non-linguistic entities we are already presupposing a language, norms of description, explanation and so on. We are not attaining some vantage point 'beyond' language and then comparing or matching parts of that language with parts of the non-linguistic world; such 'transcendence', again, is an illusion. But the representationalist idea of truth-as-correspondence was supposed to highlight the tight connection (or 'isomorphism') between true beliefs or sentences and non-linguistic reality, between our knowledge of reality and reality itself. Rorty, sympathetic to Michael Williams's scepticism towards epistemological scepticism, puts the anti-representationalist point this way:

Williams has pointed out that epistemology, the idea of a philosophical account of something called 'human knowledge', and scepticism, the idea that human beings are incapable of knowledge, go hand-in-hand. As long as you talk about knowledge of snow, or the Trinity, or positrons, it is hard to be either an epistemologist or a sceptic, for you have to respect the norms built into discourse about these various things. Only when you start talking about Our Knowledge of Reality as such, a topic concerning which there are no norms, can you become either. 'Reality' and 'Our Knowledge of Reality' are alternative names for the normless. That is why metaphysics and epistemology go together like ham and eggs. (Rorty 2001b, 375–6)

Referring to John McDowell's attempt to rescue the idea of inquiry being somehow 'answerable to the world', Rorty makes a similar point forcefully and provocatively, relating it to the pervasive sense of alienation that he finds in philosophy from Plato to contemporary thinking about truth, reference and meaning:

We shall fear that the world is on the verge of absconding as long as we think that causal connection with the world is not a tight enough way of bonding with it.... One should just cling to the thought that what Kant

calls our ‘empirical’ self — the only one we have — is the causal product of the ‘empirical’ world, the only one there is.... [John McDowell, in his *Mind and World*, keeps alive] the pathos of possible distance from the world. He does this when he insists ... that merely causal relations with the world do not suffice. This claim keeps alive the pathetic Kantian question about the ‘transcendental status’ of the world. (Rorty 2001c, 124)

Although my aim here is not to provide decisive arguments for anti-representationalism and deflationary views of truth, I do wish to stress the distinctiveness of these views and to draw attention to some of their implications (and non-implications). So I wish to stress, with Horwich, that “[t]he deflationary attitude toward truth ... is a reaction against the natural and widespread idea that the property of truth has some sort of underlying nature and that our problem as philosophers is to say what that nature is, to analyse truth either conceptually or substantively, to specify, at least roughly, the conditions necessary and sufficient for something to be true” (Horwich 1999a, 239). Williams, likewise, stresses that the importance of the deflationary view is not that it offers new insights into the nature of truth but that “it challenges us to say why we need any theory of truth along anything like traditional lines” (1986, 223).¹⁵ Correspondence theorists point to problems with coherence theories of truth and other epistemic theories, while coherence theorists attack the idea of correspondence. One of the virtues of minimalist or deflationary views, according to Williams, is that the deflationist “is committed neither to fleshing out the idea of truth as correspondence nor to showing that truth is at bottom some kind of epistemic notion” (such as ideal rational acceptability or coherence). The deflationist “has doubts about both projects: about their feasibility and, above all, about their point” (Williams 1986, 226).

As to feasibility, the deflationist doubts that truth can be defined in terms of ideal justification or verification conditions, in terms of what it is good to believe or in terms of a relation between language (or mind) and the world that is specifiable independently of the relation between some beliefs and other beliefs. She also doubts that there is anything like a ‘property’ common to all true sentences — moral, aesthetic, mathematical, scientific, commonsensical and other types of sentences which can be true or false — other than their being amenable to being plugged into Horwich’s equivalence schema (or into Tarski’s disquotational schema).

Both Rorty and Nielsen maintain that once we abandon representationalism, we can accept that all kinds of sentences from many kinds of vocabularies (not just those of the ‘hard sciences’) can have truth-values, be true or false. Without the idea of the intrinsic nature of reality there is little sense or point in

singling out some types (say, the sentences of physics) as giving us ‘real, substantial truth’ whereas other types (say, moral judgments) are somehow second-rate truths, not really mapping onto the world as do the sentences of the physical sciences. For the deflationist, truths are truths and none of our beliefs, judgments or sentences ‘map onto the world’; inasmuch as she is an anti-representationalist she will avoid making invidious distinctions between forms of inquiry on the basis that some of these more accurately represent the intrinsic nature of reality than others. She will give up all such talk and talk instead about acquiring justified beliefs about things like snow or US foreign policy or unicorns or planets; it is all about providing more or less coherent accounts of *specific* things or domains, not of Reality or the World.

Being concerned with truth in a particular context of inquiry (say, in the context of sociological inquiry into the functioning of the modern state) should be distinguished from being concerned with Truth in philosophy. In philosophy, Truth (‘truth itself’) has been an object of reflection and inquiry; the adjective ‘true’ has been nominalised. The deflationists and anti-representationalists are reacting against what they perceive to be the ‘inflated’ conceptions of truth that have preoccupied philosophers or been implicit in their philosophising. In the history of western philosophy, they think, truth has been treated as if it were more than just a matter of verbal convenience, cautionary, a normative compliment or a way of indicating agreement (as in ‘Yes, that’s true’). Rorty repeatedly suggests that Truth in philosophy (and in the broader culture) often functions as a virtual secular substitute for God, as a quasi-divine relation between humans and an unchanging or constantly changing reality, a relation that transcends historical and cultural contexts; or again, one that facilitates our separating the wheat from the chaff in our discourse by distinguishing the genuinely truth-tracking, world-depicting vocabularies (typically, those of the ‘hard sciences’) from the less truth-tracking or purely non-cognitive vocabularies (typically, those of the ‘soft sciences’ and the humanities). Truth, in this replacement-for-God role, not only in western philosophy and culture, has been treated as an object of ultimate concern whose essence philosophers (or some other reflective, diligent inquirers) are specially trained or positioned to reveal or discover. (But even if it is not thought to be an object of ultimate concern, thinking of truth as an object or property or as having a nature is problematic. The grammatical similarity between the predicate ‘is true’ and, for example, the predicate ‘is magnetic’, may have encouraged the bad idea that we may have a useful theory of truth just as we have a useful theory of magnetism.)

What the pragmatist anti-representationalist refuses, then, is not the pursuit of justified beliefs in this or that domain of inquiry but i) a certain interpretation of what we are doing when we say we are pursuing truth and ii) the urge — the Platonistic urge — to grasp the nature of Truth itself, to provide

a general informative theory of Truth that would explain, for example, what all true sentences (sentences in mathematics, aesthetics, morality, physics, biology, history and so on) have in common that ‘makes’ them true and distinguishes them from the false ones.

I have discussed the second point in the context of anti-representationalism and the questionable ideas of the ‘intrinsic nature of reality’ or ‘how things are in themselves’. On the first point, Rorty insists that the distinction between truth and justification is not as interesting as philosophers have made it out to be. (See Rorty’s review of Habermas’s *Truth and Justification*, 2003.) As we have seen, it makes linguistic sense to say that even the most adequately justified belief may be false and so the true/false couplet is not equivalent in meaning to the justified/unjustified couplet. This counts against attempts to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for truth in terms of ideal justification and related ‘epistemic’ notions; and, as mentioned above, it points to what Rorty regards as the most useful function served by the ordinary concept of truth — it cautions us not to view ourselves as infallible, reminding us that even our best justified beliefs may turn out not to seem justified to a future community, one that is a better version of ourselves (Rorty 1998, pp. 43–63). Rorty’s point, however, is that even though truth is a primitive, indefinable notion, irreducible to justification, the only way we have of ascertaining whether an inquirer is pursuing truth is by ascertaining whether they are pursuing justification. Another way of putting this is to say that a concern for truth, in practice, is indistinguishable from a concern for justification.

What do we mean when we say that one should pursue truth or show a concern for truth in one’s inquiries? Do we mean anything coherent at all? Perhaps we do, but there may be no non-circular way to show this; there may be no getting behind our use of phrases such as ‘pursue truth’ or ‘concern for truth’ to some essential property that indicates the presence of truth. When we speak without irony of the concern for truth, it seems we run together the concepts of truth and (ideal) justification; it seems we mean ‘concern for justification’ but we call it ‘concern for truth’. On the one hand, justification and truth are not equivalent in meaning, the latter irreducible to the former in ordinary usage, particularly our cautionary use of ‘true’; on the other hand, if we do not take to heart Rorty’s point about the concern for truth being nothing more, in practice, than the concern for justification, then we run the risk of returning to representationalism with all its problems. This is the move, the positing of truth as a goal of inquiry above and beyond justification, that leads us down the garden path (Rorty 1998, 19–42).

What is involved in inquiry? First, to state the obvious, in any domain of inquiry the inquirers typically will aim to contribute to knowledge of that part of the world into which they are inquiring. They will, at least, be interested in

distinguishing justified from unjustified views in their domains of inquiry. But they will also, in showing a concern for truth, try to present their views in ways that are not significantly misleading, that take into account at least some relevant opposing views, that do not ignore relevant and available evidence, and that do not depend on an unwillingness to question their own assumptions, methods, premises, and so on (or an unwillingness to have them questioned). Perhaps most inquirers assume that the most warranted beliefs or theories in their domains of inquiry are the beliefs or theories most likely to be true (or approximately true). Then we can say, innocuously enough, that they will aim for truth; but in coming to see what this comes to, eschewing representationalist accounts of truth, we see that it means that they will use methods which they believe are best suited, in particular contexts of inquiry, to yielding rationally justified beliefs, beliefs which have the ‘force of the better argument’ (as Habermas puts it) on their side.¹⁶ There will be good reasons for adopting these beliefs, holding them true (or at least justified) though we may caution ourselves that they may not, even if justified, be true; and the gloss Rorty puts on this, again, is that they may not seem justified to a future community. In pursuing truth, then, the standards and criteria used will be those assumed most likely to yield justified beliefs in particular contexts of inquiry. We can (and do) call this sort of thing aiming for truth, but we could just as well — and more literally — call it aiming for the best justified beliefs we can attain regarding some problem/s in specific domains of inquiry.

Note that this idea of aiming for truth (that is, trying to form justified beliefs) is compatible with the idea of using torture in certain situations to find out the truth. The idea of ‘truth at all costs’ thus should raise an eyebrow. And before waxing lyrical about the intrinsic value of truth (as has often been done in the history of truth-talk) one should consider Somerset Maugham’s remark, written in the context of a discussion of philosophers’ quarrels about the meaning of ‘truth’, that “a bridge that joined two great cities would be more important than a bridge that led from one barren field to another”; some truths are more important, more worth uttering, less trivial, or misleading or counterproductive than others (Maugham 2001). This commonsensical recognition fits with the pragmatist critique of philosophical discourse about intrinsic value; if there are many situations in which it would be cruel to assert what we regard as true (such as ‘I find you ugly’) or it would be counterproductive (such as ‘You would understand my meaning if you were less selfish’), why say truth is intrinsically valuable? If there are such recurring situations in which it would not be a good thing to be truthful why not content ourselves with the idea that a concern for truth (i.e., for acquiring and putting forth justified beliefs) will in many (or most) cases be instrumentally valuable, helping us to achieve greater happiness, freedom, and democracy, for example? Isn’t that good enough?

In speaking of the concern for truth, then, we should say that such a concern, if it is anything coherent, involves trying to arrive at the most coherent and plausible justified position currently achievable and treating contrary views with reasonable open-mindedness. Is there something more metaphysical to the concern for truth? If so, that metaphysical turn is not necessary for making sense of it.

Keeping in mind Horwich and Williams and their deflationary accounts of the meaning of 'truth', the pursuit of truth can be understood as the pursuit of justification without thereby equating truth and justification. Truth remains a primitive notion, unanalysable in terms of something allegedly more basic: in terms of ideal justification, what is good to believe, what would be verified in ideal conditions, what would be consented to in ideal conditions and so on. Again, for the deflationist anti-representationalist, truth is truth and there is not much more, after all, to be said about the nature of truth.

It should be clear that a concern for truth, *so conceived*, is distinct from a concern to analyse or uncover the meaning or essence or nature of Truth. It is distinct from a concern for 'truth itself' in that sense. Truth itself is not the object of our investigations, if 'truth itself' is thought to refer to a theoretically significant property common to all true sentences or theories, a property, like magnetism, which might play a causal role so that it could even, perhaps, explain the success of our methods or theories.¹⁷

Bernard Williams, in his *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (2002), expresses discomfort with the idea that the pursuit of justified beliefs in some domain is in practice the same as the pursuit of truth in that domain; that aiming for truth is not a separate thing from aiming for justification — though, again, truth in its ordinary sense is not *semantically* reducible to justification. Williams thinks that we need to have some criteria for distinguishing the good from the bad methods of justifying beliefs, the truth-tracking methods from the distorting methods and he thinks that pragmatism falls short here. But consider Rorty's response to Williams on this point:

... the only answer the pragmatist can give [to "the question of how we tell methods of acquiring truth from other methods of producing consensus"] is that the procedures we use for justifying beliefs to one another are among the things that we try to justify to one another. We used to think that Scripture was a good way of settling astronomical questions, and pontifical pronouncements a good way of resolving moral dilemmas, but we argued ourselves out of both convictions. But suppose we now ask: were the arguments we offered for changing our approach to these matters good arguments, or were they just a form of brainwashing [or ideology]? At this point, pragmatists think, our spade is

turned. For we have, as Williams himself says ... no way to compare our representations as a whole with the way things are in themselves....

[In claiming that metaphysics and epistemology can show us which procedures are truth-acquiring and which not] Williams would seem to be claiming that these metaphysicians and epistemologists stand on neutral ground when deciding between various ways of reaching agreement. They can stand outside history, look with an impartial eye at the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, and then, by applying their own special, specifically philosophical, truth-acquiring methods, underwrite our belief that Europe's chances of acquiring truth were increased by those events. They can do all this, presumably, without falling back into what Williams scorns as 'the rationalistic theory of rationality'....

As far as I can see, Williams's [argument] stands or falls with the claim that analytic philosophers really can do the wonderful things he tells us they can — that they are ... independent experts whose endorsement of our present ways of justifying beliefs is based on a superior knowledge of what it is for various propositions to be true. Williams would have had a hard time convincing Nietzsche, Dewey or the later Wittgenstein that they had any such knowledge. (Rorty 2002)

Consider Rorty's claim that because pragmatists cannot make sense of representationalism and the correspondence theory of truth — the idea that truth is a matter of correspondence between representations and the way things are in themselves apart from any representations — they cannot say, in any non-circular way, why the arguments for, say, discarding Aristotelian physics in favour of more modern assumptions about the physical world, are justified.

Rorty is suggesting, again, that we cannot attain some vantage point outside our whole web of beliefs, attitudes and preferences and then compare this web to something called 'the way things are' or 'the intrinsic nature of reality'. Science no more than religion or poetry can do *that*. But this does not imply that we cannot have better or worse arguments for this or that opinion; Rorty surely cannot be denying or committed to denying this truism. To do so would be to move too quickly from "There is no point of view beyond language (beyond historically specific linguistic practices) from which to compare our language to non-linguistic reality" to "There is no point of view from which reasonably to criticise some of our current practices and ways of speaking."

The important Rortyan point is that 'better' and 'reasonable' should be glossed as "better or more reasonable according to the standards of this or that community — perhaps extending, in some cases, to all or most of humanity." There is, for anti-representationalists (and to use sexual metaphors) no getting

beneath, behind or on top of our talk about the world to the world-as-it-is-in-itself, there in its naked, uninterpreted reality. There are only more or less justified, more or less coherent views, theories, perspectives, and it is in these terms that we must distinguish more or less distorting, more or less ideological perspectives.

In *Philosophy and Social Hope* (2000, p. 20) Rorty concedes that we can make “local” and “contextual” distinctions between “ideological education” and “non-ideological education.” Typically he is suspicious of such talk, implying that when critical theorist’s theorise about ideology they are opposing ideology to reality-as-it-is-in-itself or to universal validity.

Foucault, like Rorty, was an anti-representationalist and, like Rorty, he raised doubts about ideology-critique insofar as its proponents, Marxian or otherwise, assumed a notion of truth as accurate representation of the intrinsic nature of things — including the intrinsic nature of ‘man’. But we have seen that the idea of pursuing truth in a particular domain of inquiry can be disentangled from representationalism if we blur the distinction between aiming for truth and aiming for ideal justification — ideal by the lights of some present community — without thereby *defining* truth in terms of justification. By focusing attention on practices of justification we can come to see that there is no need finally to appeal to a nonhuman authority (the World or How Things Are In Themselves) to ground our beliefs.

By jettisoning the image of language magically representing non-linguistic chunks of reality, we also drop the Platonistic idea of, to quote Ramberg again, “a particular form of description of things, which, by virtue of its ability to accurately map, reflect, or otherwise latch on to just those kinds through which the world presents itself to would-be knowers, is the form in which any literally true — or cognitively significant, or ontologically ingenuous — statement must be couched” (Ramberg 2001, 351). But neither move prevents us from speaking of more or less coherent or justified, more or less distorting or ideological perspectives.

That we do not have a globally encompassing super-perspective beyond all particular perspectives does not entail that we do not (or cannot) have more or less rational perspectives on our social and political lives and on how they might be made better. ‘Rationality’ and ‘reasonableness’ may not be names for a faculty or capacity that facilitates the sort of ‘transcendence’ or ‘groundedness’ that have been the promise of various strands in our metaphysical and epistemological traditions in philosophy and theology, but we may nevertheless be able to come to more or less coherent and reasonable views on things. We need simply to remain contextualist about everything, including our notions of ‘reasonableness’, ‘rationality’ and ‘ideology’.

5. Foucault's 'truth-objection' to ideology-critique

Foucault's 'truth objection' to ideology-critique, however, was not simply a philosophical questioning of assumptions about truth. Here is a further statement of that objection in another of Foucault's interviews:

Philosophers or even, more generally, intellectuals justify and mark out their identity by trying to establish an almost uncrossable line between the domain of knowledge, seen as that of truth and freedom, and the domain of the exercise of power. What struck me, in observing the human sciences, was that the development of all these branches of knowledge can in no way be dissociated from the exercise of power. Of course, you will always find psychological or sociological theories that are independent of power. But, generally speaking, the fact that societies can become the object of scientific observation, that human behaviour became, from a certain point on, a problem to be analysed and resolved, all that is bound up, I believe, with mechanisms of power — which, at a given moment, indeed, analysed that object (society, man, etc.) and presented it as a problem to be resolved. So the birth of the human sciences goes hand in hand with the installation of new mechanisms of power. (1990, 106)

In a similar spirit, Barry Allen (one of Foucault's sympathetic commentators and a fine Foucault scholar) gives this answer to Nietzsche's question 'What good is truth?':

In itself, truth is neither good nor wicked.... Considered in abstraction from *what* truth is in question, *for whom* it is passing true and to *what effect*, truth 'itself' has no more value than coins apart from their circulation. It should be no more surprising that truth can be used badly or be a source of disorder or political control than to hear the same said of money. The question 'What good is truth?' can and must therefore be divided into many smaller, local questions, and these questions touch directly upon those who (to recall [C. Wright] Mills's description) 'professionally create, destroy, elaborate ... symbols'. (1991, 439)

Allen presents these claims in the context of a discussion of Foucault's contention, against those who would contrast truth and science to ideology and power, that "[t]he political question ... is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself" (Foucault 2000, 133).

How is one to interpret Foucault (and Allen) and the idea that the political question is ‘truth itself’ rather than ‘error, illusion, alienated consciousness’? There seems to be something right in what Foucault and Allen are gesturing at, yet it is not clear why it should be viewed as a critique of ideology-critique rather than as being itself another instance of ideology-critique. We must keep in mind here that Foucault was not using the word ‘truth’ in any ordinary sense. He stipulated that in this context ‘truth’ means “not ‘the ensemble of truths to be discovered and accepted’ but, rather, ‘the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true’” (2000, 132). Foucault was well aware that in the various human and social sciences, research is pursued which does in fact produce knowledge of societies and human behaviour. Evidently there is some concern for truth (in the sense specified in section four) in these disciplines and these disciplines, undeniably, have expanded our repertoire of truths or at least justified beliefs, in various domains of inquiry. There is more knowledge now than there was before ‘society’ and ‘man’ became ‘problematised’ and made into objects of scientific theory and analysis. There has, in fact, been an explosion of knowledge in modern times and there is a constant demand for more of it — for more truth. Moreover, this has occurred under the banner of science and the human and social sciences have in fact strived, not without success, to be more or less scientific: there has been, though of course not invariably or comprehensively, a concern for empirical evidence and for formulating hypotheses which can be verified or (more or less) confirmed or disconfirmed by seeing how well they, in comparison to rival hypotheses, square with or account for the publicly available evidence — evidence which disputants can in appropriate circumstances of inquiry recognise to be evidence. There has in this way and to this extent been a concern for truth, for finding out more truths about society and human behaviour, and the discourses embodying this concern have been more or less scientific, more or less reliant on concepts and sentences with (what are widely agreed to be) empirical referents and more or less linked to (what are widely agreed to be) empirical (though theory-laden) research programs.

However, contrary to the assumptions of some Marxian and other leftist writers (though not of Marx himself) truth and science are not necessarily or inherently opposed to or independent of power.¹⁸ As Allen correctly remarks, “truth [even truth or justified belief in science] can and regularly does serve this function [i.e., supports some structure of power]” and he adds, “[o]ne might even guess that an asymmetry of power may be all the more stable without the liability of a lie” (1991, 438). But if this is the case, then the notion of ideology as ‘false consciousness’ is misleading. That notion has too often been set out in ways that suggest that there is a hard and fast line between truth and science, on

the one hand, and ideology on the other; but we know that science can also contribute to sustaining oppressive and exploitative social relations. Discourses (or, using Rorty's terminology, vocabularies) should be seen as webs of interrelated statements and judgments embedded in social practices and as being geared towards human (sometimes political) purposes; the image of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge should be taken with a grain of salt. Since purposes are not the sorts of things that are true or false (though there may be good or bad purposes) perhaps it does make sense to say that discourses as a whole are 'neither true nor false'. (But why can discourses not be regarded as more or less distorting or falsifying, more or less coherent or ideological, particularly if one of our purposes is to come to a more comprehensive reflective understanding of a particular domain of social reality — for example, US foreign policy?) At any rate, the important question is not "How does such and such a discourse falsify our understanding and, by doing so, contribute to sustaining domination or oppression?" The more pertinent question is "Whose truth, which rationality, are we implicitly supporting with our research in this or that domain of inquiry?" or "Whose interests are we serving by contributing to or working within the parameters of this rather than that research program, this rather than that paradigm of what counts as knowledge or of what counts as a problem to be solved?"

However, construed as above, Foucault's criticism only seems effective against conceptions of ideology that draw a *hard and fast* line between truth and science, on the one hand, and power and ideology on the other. But there are better conceptions of ideology than that from which critical theory can draw. There is in fact another notion of ideology implicit in leftist usage and in critical theory, one that combines what Geuss calls the 'functional' and 'epistemic' conceptions of ideology, as follows: an ideology, in a pejorative sense of 'ideology', is a web or cluster of (interrelated) beliefs and norms which tend to circulate and function in society in ways that serve *primarily* the needs and interests of some dominant social group or class; and part of what makes it possible for the ideology to so function is that it gives people a distorted understanding of their social world in certain crucial ways.¹⁹ This conception of ideology is *not* committed to denying the justifiability or truth of most or even many of the beliefs of those who are under the sway of an ideology; nor is it committed to denying many or even most of the beliefs that are part of the ideology.²⁰ However, 'ideology' in this sense does signify that there are widely shared, socially and morally significant, unjustified beliefs, beliefs that give us a distorted understanding of things.

Given this conception of ideology or false consciousness, it is possible to expand on Taylor's claim (against what he regards as Foucault's position) that a concern for truth — as distinct from a concern for Truth — will be opposed and

antagonistic to power and ideology. With these qualifications: a concern for truth will be antagonistic to power *in certain persistent social contexts, given some plausible assumptions about what people are like in those contexts and given some plausible views about social and political history*. We should not try, in Cartesian fashion, to suspend all our beliefs, including more or less theory-laden beliefs about the social world and human behaviour. How do we demonstrate the value of truth independently of all we take to be true? There is no way to do so. Instead, we are forced to argue that *some* of what we hold true is worth stressing and that so stressing it will be of value. Relating this to truth and ideology, the point to be argued is that in certain social and historical contexts and in certain domains of inquiry and reflection, a concern for truth will inherently be opposed and antagonistic to power and ideology. This is, in fact, not very different from saying that in some important social and historical contexts and in certain domains of inquiry and reflection, distorting or falsifying ideologies are likely to be prevalent, false consciousness will reign.

6. False-consciousness in history

In this section the reader is invited to assess the plausibility of some broad empirical generalisations about ideology in human societies. These general claims, if plausible, should be sufficient to defeat or at least deflate Foucault's (and Rorty's) scepticism regarding the notion of 'ideology' or 'false consciousness'. I will elaborate certain Marxian claims about ideology in class societies, particularly capitalist societies; but it is the functional/epistemic conception of ideology that is at issue, not the 'ideology as opposed to science' conception that Foucault seems to have attributed to Marxian and other critical theorists.

On the functional/epistemic conception of ideology, we are ideologically mystified to the extent that we are under the sway of misleading, distorting, or otherwise illusory beliefs and theories which tend to encourage or promote dispositions and attitudes that contribute in a systematic way to sustaining relations of unequal power in which some people dominate or oppress others. That is an elaboration of a conception of 'false consciousness' or 'ideological mystification' as these phrases have been used by Marxian (and sometimes Feminist) critical theorists — though it is not the strictly Leninist conception of ideology as a class-serving form of consciousness.²¹

For Foucault, one of the effects of the 'power/knowledge regimes', insofar as these regimes create or perpetuate forms of domination, is to undermine the freedom or autonomy of people by depoliticising them or politicising them in ways that support rather than challenge existing or developing structures of power (see Minson 1985). As Taylor pointed out, this form of 'manufacturing of consent', so to speak, relies on distortion and/or deception

(including self-deception). It relies on the widespread acceptance of some morally and politically significant beliefs that mislead, distort, and give us a false sense of what is happening around and to us; it can only be sustained if people are, to some extent, deceived about the 'grid' of power relations in which they are enmeshed, unaware or only dimly aware of the processes undermining their freedom. This insufficient awareness — insufficient from the point of view of those who value freedom — is something that Foucault's genealogies attempt to counter, making us more aware, dispelling some illusions. One such illusion is that we are acting freely so long as we are not being prevented from doing what we want to do by the state authorities; the illusion is to think that the only form of power that impinges on our freedom can be that power which emanates from the state (or a ruling class) and is exercised in a repressive, top-down manner. This is an illusion, according to Foucault, because often our very desires and aspirations are the product of subtle or not-so-subtle manipulation and other sorts of coercion in more local settings, and power is productive as well as repressive, it does not always work by 'saying no' — in Foucault's more colourful language, our self-conceptions are in many ways the products of "a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc." and a "result of the effects of power" though not only the power of the state or a dominant social class (1980, 97–8). At the same time, Foucault maintained, these 'local' exercises of power tend to have 'global' effects: they have been functional for the state's control over our lives and for the continuing stabilisation and strengthening of the evolving (capitalist) economic relations. Foucault was, in this instance, engaging in a kind of ideology-critique: he was critically exposing a pervasive bit of 'false consciousness', in a non-idiosyncratic, philosophically unencumbered sense of 'false consciousness' or 'ideological mystification' (philosophically unencumbered inasmuch as no theory of Truth is involved or presupposed²²).

Nevertheless, the point worth stressing here, regardless of questions of Foucault interpretation, is that there are true beliefs and there are false beliefs (or, if you prefer, more or less justified, more or less distorting beliefs) and that oppressive institutions and practices are sustained *at least partly* because people are badly mistaken about what they are, how they function and what negative effects they have on the possibilities for human emancipation. If, over considerable stretches of time, these culturally pervasive beliefs and the norms associated with them are not publicly scrutinised and challenged to any significant extent, this will tend to have a stabilising effect on relations of oppression and exploitation, or what comes to virtually the same thing, an anti-stabilising effect. Such stabilising beliefs are, in that way, part and parcel of the history of domination and exploitation. This history does not reflect what Habermas calls a 'democratic will-formation'. Slavery, patriarchy, class

domination, racial and ethnic domination, imperialism and many other salient features of human history, do not issue from a consensus rooted in free and open discussions in which the force of the better argument prevailed or from anything like that. Yet these forms of domination have never been sustained long without surrounding themselves with a halo of morality; although they have not been products of rational persuasion in an 'ideal speech situation', they have been rationalised as being good, just, humane, natural, proper, the expression of God's will, the best of all possible or feasible worlds, and so on. On the other hand, people have throughout history questioned and resisted these forms of domination, seeing (to some extent) their accompanying halos of morality as deceptive bits of justifying rhetoric nicely moulded to suit the needs of power.

Foucault was right to stress that in ordinary social life asymmetrical power relations are pervasive; but it is also right to say, as Marvin Harris put it, that "[t]hese inequalities are as much disguised, mystified, and lied about as old age and death" (1989, 6). Harris in his anthropological studies has made clear how many of the forms of domination and oppression mentioned in the preceding paragraph have been bolstered by myths about human beings, human societies, nature, God, the cosmos, history and countless less general false beliefs and views about specific events and actions. Even if one agrees (as Harris does) with Marx's suspicions about historical idealism and so does not treat ideas, world-views and all the 'products of consciousness' as if these were the most basic 'independent variables' in social explanation, it is not unreasonable to believe that falsifying or mythical forms of consciousness have throughout history played a significant role in persuading (or duping) people into perpetuating hierarchical social relations; relations they would be (or would have been) more likely to resist if they were not (had not been) under the sway of these myths; relations which, at the same time, many people have questioned and resisted and do question and resist, unpersuaded by the halo of system-sustaining ideology surrounding them.

Consider a non-contemporary example of ideology. In societies highly dependent upon slave production (such as Ancient Greece) slaves were conceived in the dominant culture in a way that would 'justify' or rationalise the institution of slavery.²³ Aristotle contributed to such a culture, for example, when he argued that "it is by nature that some men are slaves but others are freemen" and that therefore "it is just and to the benefit of the former to serve the latter" (1986, 553). For Aristotle, a genuine slave was not a slave by mere law or custom backed by force (though he tended to be that too) but was "by his nature not his own but belong[ed] to another." Naturally it was both for his own good and the good of "the whole" (that is, the type of social order Aristotle preferred) that he was like "a thing possessed," "an instrument which, existing

separately, can be used [by the ‘freeman’] for action” (1986, 551). And there was also little doubt in Aristotle’s mind or in the dominant culture generally, that “the male is by nature superior to the female” and that therefore it is better for “the male to rule and the female to be ruled” (1986, 551). (For a detailed account of Aristotle’s views and assumptions about women, see Susan Moller Okin, (1979).)

The point here is not to moralise about Aristotle the person or even about Ancient Greek culture but to draw attention to what were, at the time, some culturally pervasive ways of understanding the social world. Aristotle was part of a culture (a culture to which he contributed) in which social and political inequality were taken for granted as being part of the natural order of things. As Engels (with slight exaggeration) remarked:

Among the Greeks and Romans the inequalities of men were of much greater importance than their equality in any respect. It would necessarily have seemed insanity to the ancients that Greeks and barbarians, freemen and slaves, citizens and peregrines, should have a claim to equal political status. (Engels 1976, 128)²⁴

The key points are that these ancient ‘world-views’ likely (a) functioned to prop up Ancient Greek forms of class domination and patriarchy and (b) included some false beliefs and assumptions, beliefs which were crucial *at the time*, for these normative conceptions of society and social order to be persuasive enough to serve the interests they did. They included, for example, convenient beliefs about women and slaves possessing certain traits ‘by nature’ which made them suitable for occupying subordinate positions in society; beliefs which, from our twenty-first century relatively educated point of view, we tend to regard as being false. There is no escaping the taking of a position here and we can only do this by our own lights; to speak pejoratively of ancient Greek ideology is, at least implicitly, to judge that oppression-sustaining illusions played an important role in ancient Greece. Again, there is no philosophical high-road here; we need to take ‘first-order’ empirical and normative positions about actual societies and this holds as much for those who deny that ‘ideology’ is a useful notion as for those who speak of the ideological mystification of social relations.

Moving ahead to modernity, Marx compared the situation of workers in capitalist society to the situation of slaves in slave societies in terms of the potential significance of a certain “advance in awareness”:

[Labour’s] recognition of the product as its own, and the judgment that its separation from the conditions of its realisation [that is, its systematic

subordination to the demands of capital accumulation] is improper — forcibly imposed — is an enormous advance in awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he *cannot be the property of another*, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production. (1978, 254)

When enough slaves begin to view themselves more as persons and less as the property of persons, Marx seems to have been suggesting, slave-based socio-economic orders are then doomed to give way (sooner or later) to some other form of social life. And when the working classes in a capitalist world begin to view their systematic subordination to the demands of capital accumulation, their extreme lack of control over the conditions of work, the determination of their fate by a more or less fiercely competitive labour market, and the private, individual control over the fruits of their social labour, as wrong, as basically exploitative and coercive, as being contrary to their own good and, I would add, as *changeable* to something more democratic, this growing social- and self-awareness, Marx was suggesting, sounds the death-knell for the capitalist system. (This is not incompatible with the Marxian claim that such psychological shifts will only become effective levers for social transformation under certain material conditions.)

For those who wish to see democracy expanded to include some form of economic and workplace democracy, these are rather hopeful ideas — ideas that have nothing to do with the form of authoritarian rule that existed in the Soviet Union and other so-called 'Communist' countries. But Marx and many Marxists have underestimated the staying power of capitalism. In a discussion of 'what keeps capitalism going', Michael Lebowitz characterises capitalism (in a Marxian way) as follows:

Capitalism is a relationship in which the separation of working people from the means of work and the organisation of the economy by those who *own* those means of work has as its result that, in order to survive, people must engage in a transaction — they must sell their ability to work to those owners. But, the characteristic of capitalism is not *simply* that the mass of people must be wage-laborers. It is also that those who are purchasing that capacity to perform labor have one thing and only one thing that interests them [*qua* capitalist] — profits (and more profits); that is to say, the purchasers of labor-power are capitalists, and their goal is to make their capital grow. (Lebowitz 2004)

This (rather authoritarian) relation between capital and labour, combined with market exchange of the products of labour, forms the core of the type of economic system that now unequivocally predominates globally. But capitalism is a system, a way of life, that has not only developed the forces of production like no other system of production and distribution in history (as its defenders and critics alike observe), it has also developed the forces of destruction and the technologies of political and social control like no other system in history (though the Soviet Union, which was not capitalist, tried and apparently failed to keep up). At this point in history (the early twenty-first century) the leader in terms of forces of destruction and technologies of control is, of course, the US. In military and economic terms the US is indeed the most powerful, and therefore the most dangerous, empire in the history of the world. The forces of destruction and technologies of control at its disposal, apparently at the disposal of a ruling class, or a section of the ruling class, that seeks unrivalled global domination, make it so (Chossudovsky 2002; Mahajan 2002). These technologies for killing and controlling are used for many purposes. Marxists specialise in detecting how they are used to preserve or to expand capitalist class rule, both globally and domestically. No one can reasonably be confident today that broad social struggle will overcome these increasingly destructive or sophisticated methods of control and repression. The weapons of mass destruction and the immense powers of surveillance and propaganda at the behest of the wealthy and powerful today is mind-boggling and can be, frankly, depressing to contemplate.

Nevertheless, the technologies of control and destruction have been developed, it would seem, partially to counteract what Marx called 'advances in awareness' (Schweickart 2003). As societies have become more democratic — at least paying lip service to democratic ideals and ideals of freedom and equality — dominant classes and elites have struggled to keep democracy at bay, using all manner of techniques of repression, diversion, and control, not only in their own societies but, due to the expansionist nature of capitalism, in other societies as well when the populations of those societies resist the subjection of their countries to foreign economic interests. The 'advances in awareness' to which Marx referred are not small, minor advances but 'enormous' ones because they are changes in belief which have potentially significant effects on whole ways of life and they are morally progressive changes, contributing to the ability of the slaves and the workers to conceive of and act more effectively toward their own greater freedom (as well as a more general human freedom). But such changes of world-view typically come not just from the questioning of a few core general beliefs (such as the belief that some people are 'by nature' slaves) but from the critical questioning of a whole cluster of interconnected beliefs, more or less concrete (such as beliefs about

particular masters and particular slaves). 'Advances in awareness' involve the reorganisation of beliefs to some extent: discarding some beliefs and attitudes as a result of increased awareness through reflection and experience while adopting others that one previously thought false or at least did not hold true; and generally, such a moral-political reorientation would involve changes in stress so that certain beliefs once downplayed are now emphasised and vice versa, all as part of a more coherent re-ordering of the 'products of consciousness' than what had previously been attained. Whether or not such advances in awareness, such re-weaving of one's moral and political outlook, sound the death-knell of a whole mode of production, the idea that they help prepare the way for advances in freedom should hardly be surprising. It would be more surprising if they had no impact whatsoever, even if the impact in a short-term perspective is mainly to bring forth increased repression from the powers-that-be.

When Marxists criticise what they see as bourgeois or capitalist ideology, typically they criticise not only general assumptions about current social hierarchies but also particular capitalist class-serving or class-biased beliefs about particular events, actions, policies, individuals or groups. This is what the Marxian political scientist and activist Michael Parenti is doing when he depicts the political and ideological climate in the US in the 1980s and 90s:

One can see instances of false consciousness all about us. There are people with legitimate grievances as employees, taxpayers, and consumers who direct their wrath against welfare mothers but not against corporate welfarism, against the inner city poor not the outer city rich, against human services that are needed by the community rather than regressive tax systems that favor the affluent. They support defense budgets that fatten the militarists and their corporate contractors and dislike those who protest the pollution more than they dislike the polluters.

In their confusion they are ably assisted by conservative commentators and hate-talk mongers who provide ready-made explanations for their real problems, who attack victims instead of victimisers, denouncing feminists and minorities rather than sexists and racists, denouncing the poor rather than the rapacious corporate rich who create poverty. So the poor are defined as "the poverty problem." The effects of the problem are taken as the problem itself. The victims of the problem are seen as the cause, while the perpetrators are depicted as innocent or even beneficial.

Does false consciousness exist? It certainly does and in mass marketed quantities. It is the mainstay of the conservative reactionism of

the 1980s and 1990s. Without it, those at the top, who profess a devotion to our interests while serving themselves, would be in serious trouble indeed. (Parenti 1996, 213–4)

Note that this was written before the 9/11 atrocities in the US. From a socialist, liberal egalitarian or even old-fashioned conservative perspective, matters have become worse and more intense since then. While not denying Parenti's claims I would add that such distortions, if that is what they are, cannot plausibly be explained just in terms of the imposition of ideas by ruling classes and other dominant groups.

To see this, consider the hypothesis that whenever and wherever there is systemic social hierarchy and domination and there is no broad social upheaval on the horizon, it is likely that throughout the society there will be widely shared false beliefs and assumptions which are important elements of justifications for the *status quo*. This is likely, given some plausible assumptions about what people are like in such persistent social contexts. One plausible assumption is that oppressed people, especially when they are living in desperate, even hopeless conditions, gravitate towards world-views that give them some hope; this makes them more open to the influence of consoling myths, particularly religious myths. Religion, Marx claimed, is not only the "opium of the people," it is also "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world," and "the spirit of spiritless conditions" (1975, 175). Marx held that religious consciousness, though an illusory form of consciousness which usually functions to legitimise an hierarchical social order, is not simply imposed on oppressed people by the ruling classes. Rather, the oppressed themselves participate in constructing their religious world-views (including such consoling beliefs as the belief in a better afterlife) in large measure as a response to their harsh, alienating conditions of life; it gives people hope and a sense of meaning in their lives even when they have resigned themselves to an earthly life of toil, hardship and suffering. But — so as not to beg questions — whether or not one views religious forms of consciousness as being basically illusory, one can reasonably suppose that illusory beliefs and the practices associated with them have played an important role in social history. Even if one denies that religious consciousness is illusory, resting on false or incoherent views, one can hardly reasonably deny that throughout history widespread illusions have *contributed* to holding people back from acting to move their social world in a more egalitarian or at least less undemocratic direction.

Yet it is understandable that not all oppressed people want to dedicate themselves to forming justified beliefs about the social order that oppresses them. As William Shaw remarks in a discussion of Marxian views on ideology, "it is not easy to live with" the idea "that the social order is fundamentally and

arbitrarily exploitative and that one and one's family are condemned to a life of toil on behalf of a class that can claim no justification for its privileges." Shaw continues:

Few, if any, subaltern classes have found themselves able to live with an unvarnished picture of their social predicament. They have, instead, constructed interpretations of reality that make it easier to bear, and in this respect they are far from being passive victims of ideas imposed upon them by their rulers. (Shaw 1989, 440)

Yet this is not to say that the persistence of system-supporting ideologies is merely the result of psychological weakness on the part of the 'subaltern classes'. In a context in which no fundamental social change is possible (which is usually the case) the acceptance of a mystifying, ruler-supporting ideology may be in the subjects' best interests — it may even be a matter of survival. For example, in India members of impoverished castes have sometimes ardently supported the caste system with all its accompanying mythology — what we moderns would regard as mythology. But it has been in their interests to do so since "access to such menial jobs as construction worker, toddy-wine maker, coir maker, and so forth depends on caste identity validated by obedience to caste rules" and "if one fails to maintain membership in good standing one loses the opportunity to obtain work even of the most menial kind, and plunges still further into misery" (Harris 1980, 62). In general, people's belief-systems tend to adapt to what they must do to make a living and, as Shaw suggests, this may make it too burdensome and painful to have 'an unvarnished picture of their social predicament'. Truth can be intolerable.

But that can only be part of the story that accounts for the prevalence and persistence of ruler-supporting, distorting ideologies. Not all exploited and oppressed people accept the myths that justify the social order. And there is always, as Foucault stressed, resistance and recalcitrance. To understand why the views of these resisters and dissenters tend not to become culturally dominant, we must also look at the rulers and dominant elites. In this context, a relevant observation is that those who dominate and live in comfort and luxury do not, generally, want to see themselves as merely being the lucky beneficiaries of hierarchical social arrangements. It is more realistic to believe that they want to see themselves in a better light than that; they worry about their self-image. Because they typically do not wish to view themselves as exploiters, merely lucky to occupy their socially privileged positions of power and influence, they will be prone to creating self-flattering 'final vocabularies' (stories about themselves to which they cling) and to convincing themselves and others how deserving they are of all the powers and privileges which they

actually enjoy at the expense of others — and not only those others who do most of the work.²⁵ (The feudal doctrine of noble blood is an example, as is the bourgeois belief that what is good for big business is typically good for most people.) This need to see themselves as morally good, inherently noble, as benevolent, as being entitled to what they have, as beneficial to the world and so on, sometimes overwhelms their concern for truth, when the two things conflict. Also, as Shaw remarks, “rulers are like other people in generalising readily and falsely from their own situation, in having difficulty in understanding interactions from the perspective of others, and in failing to picture accurately and vividly the circumstances governing the lives of those outside their circle” (1989, 439). Typically these tendencies will lead members of dominant groups to avoid being too honest about the ‘ignoble origins’ of their position in society — origins in imperialistic plunder, for example — and even about how this position is maintained; their concern for truth is not likely to manifest itself in these areas.

However, as a corrective to the above claims about the avoidance of truth on the part of the dominant, we should also realise that not everyone among the powerful and privileged will be so evasive and they may have no qualms about maintaining their position. They will have some concern for truth in regard to how things work in the social world simply because this will be instrumental to maintaining (or expanding) their power and privilege; and they will realise or at least have some general sense that it is crucial, for the system of power and privilege to be sustained, that the exploited and oppressed do not become too critical of the social order and do not view themselves as being in a common predicament in relation to it. Wealthy and powerful people, or some of them, if they are at all clear-headed, know very well that social protest, rebellion and revolt are not good for their own interests in maintaining their wealth and power. Some will see the importance, when there are opportunities for broader segments of the population to become better informed about their political and social environments, that the great mass of people do not come to an articulate understanding of such things. It is important, to maintain any power structure and system of privilege, that certain things are not open to consistent public scrutiny: if they were, it might be too hard to maintain the system of privilege.

The above claims are, of course, controversial. But it is worth asking whether they are justifiable, whether they are warranted by the evidence of history that has been accumulated. But a Marxian cannot be satisfied with a merely psychological description of rulers and ruled, oppressors and oppressed. (For a critique of such ‘psycho-political’ approaches see Parenti 1999). In this context, what they would add is the non-psychological point that dominant social classes and elites have, *because of their economic dominance*, dispro-

portionate control over what Marx called the ‘the means of mental production’; control over means of economic production leads, directly or indirectly, to control over the means of mental production. These include “the major institutions that educate and indoctrinate young people, acquire and transfer knowledge, and articulate and mould popular opinion, as well as the physical resources those institutions utilise” (Shaw 1989, 433). Shaw presents some general hypotheses, rooted in the Marxian tradition, on how the ideas of the economically dominant class become the ruling ideas. I quote him at length:

Economic dominance often leads to control of the means of mental production simply because their ownership can be a source of profit, and the economically dominant are in a position to acquire such assets. This will not be the case in pre-capitalist societies...because of the restricted role of the market and because of their less developed means of mental production. In those societies, literacy and formal education are limited; only classes or groups with sufficient leisure are in a position to occupy themselves, actively and self-consciously, with the development, elaboration, and communication of ideas in a systematic way. Because material circumstances sharply restrict the number of knowledge workers, economic dominance thus results in a predominantly ruling-class involvement with the means of mental production...

In some modes of production, like advanced capitalism, the ruling class will have a strong economic interest in promoting (certain types of) education and research. And in all societies, ruling classes will have an interest in guaranteeing that the ideas that dominate popular consciousness are, *at a minimum*, compatible with continuation of the existing order... [emphasis added]

Neither the ruling class nor its state need actively manage the means of mental production or involve itself intimately in the world of ideas. The crucial point is only that a ruling class will not tolerate the spread of ideas that would subvert the legitimacy of its rule ... throughout history the governing classes and their institutions have employed coercion against ideas judged hostile or potentially subversive. No fancy mechanism is required to explain this fact. Perceived self-interest along with an all-too-common human dislike of, and lack of tolerance for, alien thoughts and alternative outlooks will suffice. Nor is the underlying principle mistaken: ideas can be dangerous. (1989, 434–5)

Because of effective elite or ruling class control of the major means of mental production (or what some critical theorists have called the ‘consciousness industry’) the ideas that become culturally dominant, even if they are not

conscious bits of propaganda for the existing order or for the defense of particular interests within that order, will tend to reflect the social outlook of members of the ruling class. This is just a side-effect of their direct or indirect control over the 'means of mental production'. As a result the dominant ideas, however diverse they may be, will tend to be constrained by assumptions about the naturalness or goodness of the existing order. Again, in the dominant culture the concern for truth is not likely to surface to any great extent in those areas where it might lead to a persistent questioning of those assumptions; the pursuit of justified beliefs in these areas will, in the mainstream culture, be truncated by the way the controllers of the major means of mental production consciously or unwittingly discourage such endeavours. Although it has never been the case that the subordinate classes have been entirely controlled in their thinking by the dominant classes, it has always been the case that their social outlooks have been developed from a disadvantaged position (due, in part, to their lack of effective control over the major means of mental production). This has made it harder for them to escape the distortions of dominant ideologies.

In contemporary industrial societies, particularly those which dominate on the world stage, it is especially important that capitalism itself, with its class divisions, not be critically discussed in the public sphere to any significant extent. This puts sharp constraints on critical discussion: when critical questions about specific events, policies or actions, might justifiably or reasonably lead to further critical questions about the broader system in which these events, policies or actions occur (or even about the regime responsible for them), then even the more specific, concrete discussions tend to be affected.

This is especially evident in official discourse on international politics. Consider, for example, the way the recent bombing of Yugoslavia was justified as being a 'humanitarian' intervention and the way attention was focused on how horrible the Serbian leader Milosevic had been toward the Kosovar Albanians. Attention was focused on his 'ethnic cleansing' (which increased exponentially after the bombing started, though the refugees from Kosovo were not only Albanian but included many Serbs as well as other groups in Kosovo, fleeing not only Serbian forces but also the Albanian terrorist, narco-trafficking Kosovo Liberation Army as well as NATO bombs). This was the way the bombing was justified to the vast majority of people in the United States and throughout the West. In the presentation of this event to the public, few questions were raised that might lead to a broader, critical understanding of the situation. Simple questions were avoided: questions such as 'Why is Yugoslavia getting this treatment but not Turkey or Indonesia?' If humanitarian considerations were the underlying motive of Western bombing of cities, why has there been no bombing of Ankara or Jakarta, since these regimes have done at least as much if not more harm than than the Milosevic regime?²⁶

To answer these questions, we would have to examine the nature of Western interests in former Yugoslavia, Turkey and Indonesia. What made the Milosevic regime different? Perhaps, to offer a suggestion, the Milosevic regime, however brutal, was more reluctant to put the country under the jurisdiction of Western corporate and banking interests. The regimes of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia have also been brutally repressive, but they had opened up their economies to the IMF and the World Bank to a far greater extent.²⁷ Turkey has played a significant role in suppressing democratic forces including Kurdish independence movements in the Middle East — with particular ferocity during the 1990s. Why was the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein vilified for brutal repression of Kurds while Turkey has been supported in almost every conceivable way? And if the first war against Iraq (1991) was a matter of protecting the sanctity of borders as enshrined by international law, why did the media presentations fail to recall the US invasion of Panama less than two years earlier? Did they forget? Have they, more recently, simply *forgotten* the role of the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (the latter two under the US's tutelage) in creating, training, arming and funding the terrorist group known as Al-Qaeda? These three countries are plainly just as guilty as Afghanistan for 'harbouring' terrorists. Why did the media presentations not critically question the very idea of bombing Afghanistan, particularly in light of the fact that not one of the suicide hijackers who attacked the US in 2001 was actually Afghani? Or in light of the complete illegality of the war (as with the recent bombing, invasion and occupation of Iraq)? Or in light of the fact that Afghanistan had been ravaged by years of warfare beginning in 1979, with the two superpowers (at the time) destroying much of the country? When the US and England imposed devastating sanctions on Iraq (leading to more than a million deaths, mostly of children) because of Iraq's possession of 'weapons of mass destruction', why (as Edward Herman asks) did the mainstream culture not even speak of the fact that something akin to genocide was going on (Herman 2004)? And what about Indonesia? What made General Suharto's Indonesian regime (with a horrific record of brutal massacres dating back to 1965) more worthy of Western support and aid than Nicaragua in the 1980s under the Sandinistas? Was General Suharto more democratic or peace-loving or rights-respecting than Daniel Ortega, then leader of the Sandinistas? Or was he merely friendlier to US corporate interests? The questions mount. Above all, why is it that the dominant culture never questions the right of Western powers to make these decisions about everyone else? Why should the dominance of the Western states be so accepted as if it were a law of nature? Do these states have an admirable record of peaceful international diplomacy? Do they promote freedom and democracy (or environmental safety) in the world?

These are just some examples in the sphere of international politics of reasonable questions about specific events or policies that might lead to a broader, more critical understanding of the global situation and of the way the global capitalist economy has been evolving and how it is being managed and policed. All of the facts mentioned or alluded to in the two preceding paragraphs are publicly available. Many of them are facts that have been reported in mainstream newspapers — though usually the questions are not asked in the way I have asked them. If these questions were actually pursued with even a modicum of rigour and intelligence in mainstream media and education, perhaps capitalism would not look like the benign modernising, civilising force it is made out to be in official ideology, to understate it. But this would run contrary to the interests of our rulers. Because they have disproportionate influence on cultural life, the culturally *dominant* norms of political correctness (which tend not to be recognised as such) permit discussion only within a narrow range, reflecting the outlook and interests of the powerful and privileged, just as in Aristotle's day. This narrowing of perspective and discussion (a narrowing of the field of possible statements, of the bounds of the thinkable) makes perfect sense, however, from the point of view of system stability. A population with a much broader perspective, a willingness to ask certain questions about the structure of our societies, about the dominant institutions, the dominant culture and so on, plainly would be a real threat to those who most benefit from the existing institutions. Ruling elites and ruling classes do not want to encourage *that* sort of critical questioning, *that* sort of concern for truth. In the most crucial cases, power does not want the truth to be spoken to or about it.

I submit that these claims (controversial though they may be) square with Foucault's suggestion that where there *is* plenty of institutional support for the pursuit of truth in the human or social sciences, the 'disciplines' are not 'independent of power'. They are often part of networks of social control and the knowledge that is accumulated is pursued within a framework that excludes critical questions about the functioning of the major political, economic and social institutions. The *production* of knowledge is often premised on the *suppression* of the concern for truth on key matters relevant to the promotion of human freedom. For this reason, I would suggest that Foucault's critique becomes even more cogent when it is at least combined with a more explicitly Marxian critical theory perspective.

7. Conclusion

If the broadly empirical claims in this essay (particularly those made in the section six) are for the most part plausible, there is some basis for the old

Gospel saying about the truth making us free; it has a rational kernel to it. But the important questions here are more empirical than philosophical. Even if I have not been convincing in my empirical claims, at least one can see that the question whether we should continue to speak of ideology in a pejorative sense depends very much on one's empirical (though not value-free) judgments about social history and modern society. Moreover, the idea of liberation through truth should not be seen as being some sort of conceptual (or any other kind of) necessity, but as an empirical generalisation. Coming to a more coherent or impartial understanding of the social world and of the possibilities for change, may not always be a step towards greater freedom. After all, history is not merely or even primarily an intellectual process. Nevertheless, I have tried to show, in an admittedly general way, that a concern for truth in certain areas would work against the interests of the powerful and that, potentially, it would be useful to those who are oppressed by them. Again, there is no good way of showing this without making substantive claims about society and human behaviour; and there is no interesting way of doing that without using or presupposing some theory, some conceptual framework or other. What should be asked, in this context, is whether that dependence on particular theories and substantive views has led me to falsify history or to misrepresent or ignore crucial or relevant evidence. (I did not say 'misrepresent the intrinsic nature of reality'.) Have I put forth claims about ideology, power or the concern for truth, that crucially rely on false assumptions? Are these claims themselves not true or improbable or misleading in some important way? And is there a non-Marxian theoretical (or non-theoretical) way of looking at social history and contemporary society that conflicts with a Marxian perspective and that could give us a more coherent account of ideology or an account that would show why there is no need, after all, to speak of ideology? Those are the key questions.

Commenting on Terry Eagleton's defence of a conception of ideology as false consciousness, Rorty remarks:

So when Eagleton says all women ought to become feminists because 'an unmythified understanding of their oppressed social condition would logically lead them in that direction', we anti-representationalists construe him as saying 'Those non-feminist women will get more of what we think they ought to want if they become feminists'. (1992, 41–42)

I think Rorty is only partly right about how 'we anti-representationalists' should or could construe Eagleton's claim. He is right to suggest that the phrase 'an unmythified understanding of their oppressed social condition' should not be construed as 'the one true account of social reality'. He is also right to suggest that 'non-feminist women' should not be argued into feminism by

trying to convince them that they are being untrue to their intrinsic nature as human beings or that they have failed to grasp ‘*the* correct way of seeing or understanding social reality as it is in itself, as it is apart from any discourse, interpretation or perspective’. Instead, ‘we anti-representationalists’ should openly say that we think freedom is good (while being clear about what we mean by ‘freedom’) and that there would be much more freedom for many more people in the sort of non-patriarchal world that feminists want — and, I would add, the sort of democratic world that socialists want. *If* that is what Rorty is suggesting as a corrective to (his construal of) Eagleton’s ‘realist’ account of ideology, it seems to me right, so far as it goes.

At the same time, ‘we anti-representationalists’ can also construe Eagleton’s claim as follows: we can say that it is better to have a wider range of justified beliefs about how and why women are oppressed, how and why their freedom is unnecessarily inhibited or curtailed and about how the situation might be changed, than is typically put forth or assumed in the mainstream cultures of modern societies; that there are many unjustified and/or misleading beliefs and assumptions in our culture that tend to be encouraged by the dominant, culture-producing institutions; and that feminists have, collectively, drawn our attention to some of these beliefs and assumptions and have thereby given us a less mystified, if not entirely unmystified, understanding of our lives in modern, sexist society. The gaining of a truer, less distorting perspective or, as Nielsen puts it, a “more extensively truth-bearing system of thought,” is valuable insofar as (a) we value not being deluded about the barriers to freedom and (b) we value freedom (Nielsen 1989, 112).²⁸

Since Rorty plainly shares these values and since the notion of ideology put forth here seems to be a useful way of categorising certain tendencies in social and cultural life that systematically frustrate the full flowering of human freedom, it is not clear why Rorty should dismiss that notion as he does. Anti-representationalism does not imply or entail that it makes no sense to speak of mystifying or distorting ideologies; that, at any rate, is one of the main arguments of this paper. But Rorty does not think that pragmatism or anti-representationalism *alone* are sufficient to show the uselessness or incoherence of ideology-critique. His disparagement of such conceptions of ideology has more to do with his belief that they do not give us a useful way of categorising things, based on Rorty’s own assessments of the historical evidence and of how modern capitalism works, the historical feasibility of socialism and, most conspicuously in Rorty’s writing, the political culture of the US and the role of the US in the world.²⁹ But typically Rorty focuses on the representationalism of writers such as Eagleton (or the ‘transcendentalism’ of writers such as Habermas). Again, if my claims about the social world in the preceding section are somewhat plausible, then the functional/epistemic conception of ‘ideological

mystification’ or ‘false consciousness’ as I have construed it remains a useful (and not too technical) conception for those who wish to understand the (social) world and to act more effectively to improve it. Minimally, I claim that philosophers’ and other intellectuals’ misgivings about Truth and about ‘the notion of ideology’ or ‘false consciousness’, may be relevant when it comes to criticising various forms of Enlightenment rationalism and, more broadly, Platonism in our various discursive projects, but they do not provide sufficient reason for viewing ideology-critique as being conceptually, morally or empirically inadequate, misleading or otherwise problematic in its very conception.

NOTES

1. Amy Allen (2003) presents a compelling case for not lumping Foucault in with other so-called ‘counter-Enlightenment’ or ‘postmodern’ thinkers. She argues that the Foucault/Habermas debate that raged in the recent past is better understood as a debate about two ways of practicing Enlightenment criticism than as a conflict between an Enlightenment project (Habermas) and a postmodern or counter-Enlightenment project (Foucault).

2. But see footnote 1. See also, for some of Habermas’ relevant writings, his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971); *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979); and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987).

3. For a sample of analytical writing on deflationary or minimalist conceptions of truth, see Simon Blackburn and Keith Simmons (1999), as well as Paul Horwich (1990).

4. I say ‘modern’ sceptic because Michael Williams (2001) makes a strong case for distinguishing modern from ancient scepticism.

5. See especially Raymond Geuss’s account of ideology in (1985).

6. Note that ‘material surroundings’, for Marx and Engels, includes the natural environment as well as social and economic institutions. One writer who brings out the importance of ecological constraints on human social organisation and ideology (far more thoroughly than Marx and Engels were in a position to do) is the late Marvin Harris, a quasi-Marxian anthropologist who has left a great legacy of non-pedantically-written books and articles on ‘cultural materialism’ with numerous instances of its application. See Harris (1980) for his most sustained attempt to defend his ‘materialist’ theory against various theoretical rivals in both the social sciences and ‘popular culture’. For a critical (though sympathetic) evaluation of Harris’s work see Sanderson (2002).

7. The view that there is a dominant ideology is criticised by Nicholas Abercrombie et al. (1980). But then see Terry Eagleton’s critical discussion of this book (1991, pp. 35f). For a Marxian story about how the ‘dull compulsion of the economic’, habit, and certain features of everyday life in class society, contribute to the formation of distorting ideologies, see Mills (1989, pp. 421–45), and Shaw (1989). Rosen (2000, p. 396) distinguishes the idea of a “dominant ideology” from the idea that there is a pervasive “absence of consciousness of shared interests”; he is less sceptical of the latter. But proponents of ideology-critique may rejoin that ideology is part of the

explanation for why there is a broad lack of social and class solidarity among the nonruling classes. If the hegemonic ideas were more socialist and less bourgeois than they are, for example, perhaps there would be a more widespread ‘consciousness of shared interests.’ Rosen is unhappy with what he calls ‘the theory of ideology’ on the grounds that it assumes an unjustified functional explanation of ideology. This issue of functional explanation is, I think, interesting, but to assess the claim that there is a dominant ideology or ideologies in modern society it is not necessary to settle it. What we need to do first is to look at the empirically-oriented studies that have been produced on this topic, such as Chomsky and Herman (1988), Chomsky (1989), Parenti (1992) and (1993), McChesney (2004), and many others. I think these studies thoroughly establish that there is indeed something like a dominant (class-serving) ideology that is put forth mainly (but not only) by the various mass media institutions in the wealthiest modern societies. Though the focus of these authors is on ideology in the United States, they are all quick to point out that US ideology goes wherever the US goes (more precisely, wherever US-based corporations go) and that in other capitalist countries, while the mechanisms of ideological control may be more (or less) subtle they nevertheless work in similar ways to legitimise forms of class domination. These authors focus on class domination but they do not mean to suggest (not at all) that dominant ideologies are only class ideologies — they would not deny that unjustified patriarchal and racist norms and beliefs are also part of the dominant cultures of our modern world.

8. It is true that Foucault, in the 1980s towards the end of his life, began to distance himself from the idea that all his work was about power — instead it was about the history of the modern ‘subject’. What I am referring to here is Foucault’s work in the *Discipline and Punish* period of the 1970s and including Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, Volume One*. During this period it would have made sense to speak of Foucault’s ‘power model of society’. Moreover, the history of the ‘constitution of subjects’ was always, for Foucault, linked to the history of modern forms of power. That connection gave the Nietzschean bite to Foucault’s work.

9. Taylor’s version of Foucault, it seems to me, is more relativist and fatalist and more easily lends itself to nihilist attitudes than do the words of Foucault himself. But before considering a different (and more charitable) way of interpreting Foucault, I will present Taylor’s argument in order to assemble some reminders on issues relating to the critique of ideology; perhaps this could serve as an antidote to a version of relativism which is, though confused, often expressed.

10. Indirectly, Allen (2003) shows how implausible the strong Geertzian interpretation of Foucault is.

11. For a pragmatist critique of Habermas on this point, see Richard Rorty (2001a).

12. In (2003) I argue that Foucault should be understood as appealing to a particular ideal of autonomy, one that is common to liberal and socialist traditions.

13. Rorty thinks Taylor has a more inflated conception of truth; see Rorty’s critique of Taylor (1998, pp. 84–97).

14. See Ludwig Wittgenstein (1976).

15. It is not even clear why we need a theory of truth along non-traditional lines such as those adumbrated by Davidson (1990). Rorty has tried to deflate this aspect of Davidson’s work. Rorty asks: “Why is your new theory not an instance of changing the

subject rather than a theory of truth?" and "If you now say truth is not something to be pursued, but that it is what is preserved in valid inference, why should we think that you are talking about the same notion of truth that has been in our philosophical tradition since Plato?" and further, "If the concept of truth comes in a package with the concepts of belief, meaning, rationality, intention, and so on, and all these are necessary to explain linguistic behaviour, why call it a theory of truth? Why is it any more a theory of truth than of meaning, belief, or behaviour generally?" (2001d). Nevertheless, even if, contrary to Rorty, Davidson's model of triangulation can be said to help us model something like the 'structure and content of truth', it remains unclear what such a theory would be good for. Would it help us to discern what is ideological or distorting in our discourse? Does ideology-critique presuppose or imply any theory of truth? Does such a theory provide us a better grounding or justification for our practices and views of morality, politics, art, science or religion? There is certainly room for scepticism here.

16. We may acknowledge this point while also acknowledging that there is not likely to be a purely philosophical or non-contextual way to specify the appropriate norms and standards of justification for all domains of inquiry and reflection. It is possible to share Habermas' commitment to free discussion among democratic citizens while suppressing the urge — if it is there — for transcendence or for the 'unconditional' or noncontextual. On the topic of Habermas's theory of truth and justification I have found useful a rough draft of an article by Kai Nielsen, "Habermas and the Ambition of Transcendence" as well as Rorty (2001a).

17. Williams, in the course of defending a minimalist conception of truth, provides a strong argument — one which, I believe, has yet to be given a convincing rebuttal — against Richard Boyd and others who think that truth plays some explanatory or causal role and therefore that truth itself must be a substantial property which we might have an interesting theory about:

What does it come to to say that the success of our methods is explained by the truth of our theories? Simply this: that the methods we use to investigate elementary particles work as well as they do because the world is made of such particles behaving more or less the way we think they do; that the methods we use to investigate the transmission of inherited traits work as well as they do because heredity is controlled by genes in more or less the way we think it is; that the methods we use...etc. To spell out the explanation we should have to assert, in a qualified way, all the theories we currently accept, or all those belonging to 'mature' sciences. But the predicate 'true' saves us the trouble, for we can compress this tedious rehearsal of current views into a single sentence and say 'Our methods work because the theories that inform them are approximately true.' However, no difference has been shown between explaining the success of our methods in terms of the truth of our theories and simply explaining it in terms of the theories themselves. So, even if we concede that scientific realism has genuine explanatory power [though it is not clear what that means here], we are no nearer to establishing the need for a substantial notion of truth. (Williams 1986, 230)

18. A key target of these Foucauldian claims seems to be the French Marxian philosopher, Louis Althusser (see 1971, 11–67, 127–88). If so, I think that is a slightly uncharitable reading of Althusser. But historically, it has been the case that some

Marxist and other leftist writers (and activists) have too easily and without qualification contrasted truth and science to ideology (in a pejorative sense); but so too have non-Marxists and anti-Marxists such as Karl Popper. In Althusser's case, however, science is distinguished even from what Geuss calls 'ideology in a positive sense', for he regarded socialist ideology, to which he adhered, as being in a different realm from science. This is decidedly not a view shared by Marx.

19. For Geuss's (more nuanced) account of the functional and epistemic conceptions see (1985, 12–19).

20. Joseph Heath (2000) suggests that only by interpreting people uncharitably can we come up with the idea that ideology plays a role in maintaining oppressive systems. He finds it off-putting, elitist, and unDavidsonian of critical theorists to insinuate that they may know something about the oppression of 'ordinary' people that the people themselves do not know (or do not know as well or as thoroughly) and he suggests that the reproduction of oppression can be explained through an analysis of the 'coordination problems' of the oppressed and exploited rather than by attributing to them irrational beliefs expressive of a distorting ideology. I have insufficient space to argue against Heath on this point but it is worth pointing out here that (1) there is no reason in principle why people who study social theory and history cannot come to know more than those who do not put as much time and energy into these subject matters, as is the case with any subject matter; (2) that this fact does not entail that those who through careful inquiry have come to know more will become elitist, paternalistic vanguards imposing a top-down discipline on the less knowledgeable; (3) Davidson only said *most* of our beliefs must be true; if attributing false beliefs on *certain* matters helps us to gain a more coherent explanatory-interpretive-descriptive account of someone's behaviour then on Davidson's account of interpretation that is precisely what we must do; and (4) Heath provides no reason for the idea that we must choose between explaining the persistence of oppressive situations in terms of coordination problems and explaining them in terms of ideology; he does not tell us why these two things cannot, or do not, work in tandem — with ideology playing a larger role in some cases and free-rider problems doing so in other cases.

21. For Marxists and Leninists, 'ideology' is not necessarily a pejorative term denoting an inherently falsifying and/or morally objectionable perspective (see Mills 1985; McCarney 1980; and Nielsen 1989). Nevertheless, any critical theory, Marxian or Feminist or whatever, is likely to employ a conception of 'false consciousness' or 'ideological mystification' as I have specified it, as when Marxists speak in derogatory terms of 'bourgeois ideology' and feminists of 'patriarchal ideology'. These pejorative ways of speaking of ideology are what critics such as Foucault, Rorty and many postmodernists find problematic.

22. And no theory of the Subject need be presupposed either; see my (2003).

23. For an account of the development of slavery from a non-dominant to a dominant mode of production in the Greek and Roman Empires, see Lekas (1988) and de Ste. Croix (1981). These authors maintain that class struggle in the ancient Greek world was less overt between slaves and masters than between the poorer sections of the citizenry and the richer sections; but there was nevertheless sporadic slave resistance, though more so during the reign of Rome than that of Greece.

24. We can add ‘men and women’ to Engels’ list. One example of this attitude towards equality and inequality is Plutarch’s statement: “[The equality] the many aim at is the greatest of all injustices and God has removed it out of the world as being unattainable; but he protects and maintains the distribution of things according to merit” (cited in Lekas 1988, 251).

25. My use of the phrase ‘final vocabularies’ is an adaptation from Rorty that does not precisely fit the way he used the phrase. See Nielsen’s essay in this journal for a critical discussion of Rorty’s usage.

26. For a thorough account of the breakup of Yugoslavia up to and including the US-led NATO bombing campaign, see Parenti (2000).

27. See Chossudovsky (1998); but see also several (well-researched) articles in *Covert Action Quarterly* no. 68 (Fall-Winter 1999), as well as the previous two or three issues of that journal.

28. Nielsen could just as well have written of a “more extensively *justified* system of thought” so as to avoid connotations of truth being a substantial thing or property that is attached to systems of thought. Having discussed this matter with him, I am sure that now he would prefer to phrase things in terms of systems of thought being more or less coherent, more or less justified, more or less ideological, though he still could speak of such systems being more or less ‘truth-bearing’, given his deflationist conception of truth.

29. In Rorty (2000, p. 129), he chastises what he and Allan Bloom call “the Nietzscheanized left” for telling us that the US “is rotten to the core — that it is a racist, sexist, imperialist society, one which can’t be trusted an inch, one whose every utterance must be ruthlessly deconstructed.” But it is not only the ‘postmodern (Nietzscheanized) left’ that holds these views. The non-postmodern, socialist left does as well (Noam Chomsky, for example), and even liberals and conservatives all over the planet are coming to see the US as a very racist, sexist, and imperialist society, though of course not the only one. Of course that is not all the US is, but it is these things, is it not? What is Rorty saying, that the US is *not* imperialist, that it is *not* a racist or sexist society, that the plutocrats running the show *should* be trusted? Or that these problems, to the extent they exist, are just aberrations and not systematic, not rooted in the way the institutions are structured? Which is the more justified view, Chomsky’s or Rorty’s? One needn’t be an Enlightenment rationalist, as Chomsky is, to affirm that Chomsky’s version of US history and politics is more coherent and plausible than Rorty’s or, say, Michael Walzer’s. And if Chomsky’s is the better justified view, better by our own lights in terms of standards not alien to Rorty or Walzer, then it seems that it would be foolish to drop the notion of ideology from our vocabulary. *Manufacturing Consent* is all about the production and dissemination of ideology, for example, and it does not rely on any philosophical notions of truth, rationality, or goodness.

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