

LONGMAN CRITICAL READERS

IDEOLOGY

Edited and introduced by Terry Eagleton



IDEOLOGY

Edited and Introduced by

TERRY EAGLETON



LONGMAN
LONDON AND NEW YORK

Addison Wesley Longman Limited,
Edinburgh Gate,
Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE, England
and Associated Companies throughout the world.

*Published in the United States of America
by Addison Wesley Longman Inc, New York*

© Longman Group UK Limited 1994

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the Publishers or a licence permitting restricted copying in the United Kingdom issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd., 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

First published 1994
Second impression 1996

ISBN 0 582 23715 7 CSD
ISBN 0 582 23716 5 PPR

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Set by 14 in 8\10 Palatino
Produced by Longman Singapore Publishers (Pte) Ltd.
Printed in Singapore

Ideology / edited and introduced by Terry Eagleton.

p. cm. — (Longman critical readers)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-582-23715-7. — ISBN 0-582-23716-5 (pbk.)

1. Ideology. I. Eagleton, Terry, 1943– .II. Series.

B823.3.I346 1994

140—dc20

93-48939
CIP

LONGMAN CRITICAL READERS

General Editor:

STAN SMITH, Professor of English, University of Dundee

Published titles:

K.M. NEWTON, *George Eliot*

MARY EAGLETON, *Feminist Literary Criticism*

GARY WALLER, *Shakespeare's Comedies*

JOHN DRAKAKIS, *Shakespearean Tragedy*

RICHARD WILSON AND RICHARD DUTTON, *New Historicism and Renaissance
Drama*

PETER BROOKER, *Modernism/Postmodernism*

PETER WIDDOWSON, *D. H. Lawrence*

RACHEL BOWLBY, *Virginia Woolf*

FRANCIS MULHERN, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*

ANNABEL PATTERSON, *John Milton*

CYNTHIA CHASE, *Romanticism*

MICHAEL O'NEILL, *Shelley*

STEPHANIE TRIGG, *Medieval English Poetry*

ANTONY EASTHOPE, *Contemporary Film Theory*

TERRY EAGLETON, *Ideology*

General Editors' Preface

The outlines of contemporary critical theory are now often taught as a standard feature of a degree in literary studies. The development of particular theories has seen a thorough transformation of literary criticism. For example, Marxist and Foucauldian theories have revolutionised Shakespeare studies, and 'deconstruction' has led to a complete reassessment of Romantic poetry. Feminist criticism has left scarcely any period of literature unaffected by its searching critiques. Teachers of literary studies can no longer fall back on a standardised, received, methodology.

Lecturers and teachers are now urgently looking for guidance in a rapidly changing critical environment. They need help in understanding the latest revisions in literary theory, and especially in grasping the practical effects of the new theories in the form of theoretically sensitised new readings. A number of volumes in the series anthologise important essays on particular theories. However, in order to grasp the full implications and possible uses of particular theories it is essential to see them put to work. This series provides substantial volumes of new readings, presented in an accessible form and with a significant amount of editorial guidance.

Each volume includes a substantial introduction which explores the theoretical issues and conflicts embodied in the essays selected and locates areas of disagreement between positions. The pluralism of theories has to be put on the agenda of literary studies. We can no longer pretend that we all tacitly accept the same practices in literary studies. Neither is a *laissez-faire* attitude any longer tenable. Literature departments need to go beyond the mere toleration of theoretical differences: it is not enough merely to agree to differ; they need actually to 'stage' the differences openly. The volumes in this series all attempt to dramatise the differences, not necessarily with a view to resolving them but in order to foreground the choices presented by different theories or to argue for a particular route through the impasses the differences present.

The theory 'revolution' has had real effects. It has loosened the grip of traditional empiricist and romantic assumptions about language and literature. It is not always clear what is being proposed as the new agenda for literary studies, and indeed the very notion of 'literature' is questioned by the post-structuralist strain in theory. However, the uncertainties and obscurities of contemporary theories appear much less worrying when we see what the best critics have been able to do with them in practice. This series aims to disseminate the best of recent criticism and to show that it is

possible to re-read the canonical texts of literature in new and challenging ways.

RAMAN SELDEN AND STAN SMITH

The Publishers and fellow Series Editor regret to record that Raman Selden died after a short illness in May 1991 at the age of fifty-three. Ray Selden was a fine scholar and a lovely man. All those he has worked with will remember him with much affection and respect.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

Basil Blackwell Ltd for 'Ideology' by Jurgen Habermas from *Interpretations of Marx* edited by Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) pp. 299–309, 'Marxism & Literary History' by Professor John Frow from *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 62–7, 'Belief, Bias and Ideology' by Jon Elster from *Rationality and Relativism* edited by Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) pp. 123–148; Cambridge University Press and the author for 'Ideology' by Raymond Cuesc from *The Idea of a Critical Theory* pp. 4–22; Janet Walker Gouldner for 'Ideological Discourse as Rationality and False Consciousness' from *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology* by the late Alvin Gouldner (London: Macmillan, 1976); Harper Collins Ltd for Fontana and the editor, Professor David E. Apter for 'Ideology as a Cultural System' by Clifford Geertz from both *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Fontana) pp. 208–233 and *Ideology and Discontent* edited by D. Apter (Copyright 1964 by The Free Press of Glencoe – a division of Macmillan & Co) pp. 47–56; The Macmillan Press Ltd for 'Problems and Advances in the Theory of Ideology' from *On Law and Ideology* by Paul Hirst (London: Macmillan, 1979) pp. 29–39; the author, John Mepham and the editor of *Radical Philosophy* for 'The Theory of Ideology in Capital' from *Radical Philosophy* 2, Summer 1972, pp. 12–19; MIT Press for 'Class Consciousness' by George Lukacs from *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1971) pp. 46–70; Oxford University Press for 'Ideology' by Raymond Williams from *Marxism and Literature*. © Oxford University Press 1977; the editor of *Radical Philosophy* for 'On the theory of Ideology – Althusser's Politics' by Jacques Ranciere from *Radical Philosophy* 7, Spring 1974, pp. 2–15; Random House UK Ltd/Hill & Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc. for extracts from 'Myth Today' by Roland Barthes from *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers. Translation copyright © 1972 by Jonathan Cape Ltd; Routledge for extracts from *Ideology and Utopia* by Karl Mannheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936) pp. 49–74; Telos Press Ltd for 'The Epistemology of Sociology' from *Method in the Sociology of Literature* by Lucien Goldman; Verso Ltd for extracts by Louis Althusser from *For Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1969) pp. 232–4, 'On Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus' by Louis Althusser from *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books, 1971) pp. 136–65, 'The Capitalist State and Ideologies' by Nicos Poulantzas from *Political Power and Social*

Ideology

Classes (London: New Left Books, 1973) pp. 195–210.

Contents

<i>General Editors' Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	1
 PART ONE: THE CLASSICAL TRADITION	
1 MARX and ENGELS Selected Texts	23
2 GEORG LUKÁCS Class Consciousness	31
3 KARL MANNHEIM Ideology and Utopia	50
4 LUCIEN GOLDMANN The Epistemology of Sociology	69
 PART TWO: ALTHUSSER AND AFTER	
5 LOUIS ALTHUSSER Selected Texts	87
6 PAUL HIRST Problems and Advances in the Theory of Ideology	112
7 NICOS POULANTZAS The Capitalist State and Ideologies	126
8 JACQUES RANCIÈRE On the Theory of Ideology – Althusser's Politics	141
9 ROLAND BARTHES Myth Today	162
 PART THREE: MODERN DEBATES	
10 RAYMOND WILLIAMS Ideology	175
11 JÜRGEN HABERMAS Ideology	190
12 ALVIN GOULDNER Ideological Discourse as Rationality and False Consciousness	202
13 JOHN MEPHAM The Theory of Ideology in <i>Capital</i>	211
14 JON ELSTER Belief, Bias and Ideology	238
15 RAYMOND GEUSS Ideology	260
16 CLIFFORD GEERTZ Ideology as a Cultural System	279
17 JOHN FROW Marxism and Literary History	295
 <i>Further Reading</i>	 303
<i>Index</i>	309

Introduction

1 Ideology and Enlightenment

Like much else in the modern world, the concept of ideology is a child of the Enlightenment. For most of us nowadays 'ideology' has something of a pejorative ring to it, evoking as it does a whole array of negative notions from false consciousness to fanaticism, mental blockage to mystification. In ordinary conversation, to claim that someone is thinking or speaking 'ideologically' is usually to suggest that their view of things is skewed by a set of rigid preconceptions. If only they were to shuck off this conceptual straitjacket, they might begin to see the world as it truly is. But this is not at all how the term 'ideology' started life. 'Ideology' means, literally, the study or knowledge of ideas; and as such it belongs to the great dream of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that it might somehow be possible to chart the human mind with the sort of delicate precision with which we can map the motions of the body. What if that most obscure and elusive of realities, consciousness itself, could be *scientifically* known? What if it were possible to demonstrate a certain lawful regularity in its operations – in the way we generate ideas from sensations, in the manner in which those ideas are permuted, and so on all the way up to our loftiest spiritual conceptions? Can there be a materialism of the mind – of that which seems the very opposite of matter?

In this sense, the nearest modern equivalent to the classical notion of ideology would be the science of psychology. But there is an important difference between the two. Ideology, in its Enlightenment sense, is concerned with ideas as *social* phenomena, as modern-day psychology is usually not. Its aim is not just to map some abstraction known as 'consciousness', but (at least for some Enlightenment theorists) to uncover the laws of a system of social thought. And to this extent it hovers ambiguously between what we know as psychology, and what nowadays would be termed the 'sociology of knowledge'. Ideologists believed that particular social ideas could be traced back to certain universal operations of the mind; but the point of doing this was to give them the capacity to

alter men's and women's ways of thinking. If, for example, we could show that the mind worked by certain principles of association, then it might be possible to alter our social environment so that we associated x with y rather than a with b , and so developed ideas which were conducive to human dignity, freedom and justice rather than to superstition and oppression. All this, to be sure, has something of a quaint ring for us today; but it reflects the naive utopianism of a revolutionary age, which was busy sweeping away idols and fetishes of various kinds, and which did not hesitate to carry this campaign into the very inner sanctum of humanity. Ideology, then, begins life as nothing less than an ambitious project of mental engineering, which will sweep clean the Augean stables of mind and society together, and in doing so free men and women from the taboos and mystifications under which they have languished. The hardest form of emancipation is always self-emancipation; and the science of ideology, flushed with all the euphoria of an age of Reason, believes that the revolution against false gods must be carried into the inmost recesses of consciousness itself.

What this amounts to is that ideology is the equivalent in the mental realm of the overthrow of priest and king in the political one. And to this extent, ironically enough, the science of ideology is itself ideological – a reflex in the sphere of consciousness of real material conditions. The man who actually coined the term, the French revolutionary aristocrat Destutt de Tracy, did so in a prison cell during the Reign of Terror, firm in his belief that reason, not violence, was the key to social reconstruction. Reason must replace religion: which is to say that custodianship of the mind and soul must be wrested from the priests and invested instead in an élite of scientific specialists who would be, so to speak, technicians of social consciousness. As Antonio Gramsci recognised in his celebrated concept of 'hegemony', no successful transformation in the sphere of politics can neglect the business of influencing hearts and minds; and the science of ideology, born in the blood and turmoil of the French revolution, was the first attempt to systematise this project in the modern age. Ideology, then, belongs to modernity – to the brave new epoch of secular, scientific rationality which aims to liberate men and women from their mystifications and irrationalisms, their false reverence for God, aristocrat and absolute monarch, and restore to them instead their dignity as fully rational, self-determining beings. It is the bourgeois revolution at the level of the mind itself; and its ambition is nothing less than to reconstruct that mind from the ground up, dissecting the ways we receive and combine our sense-data so as to intervene in this process and deflect it to desirable political ends.

If this bold enterprise scandalised the reactionaries, it was because it represented an impious meddling with sacred mysteries. For surely the mind is the one place where we are free – free of the drearily determining

laws which govern our physiological life, and perhaps our social existence as well. Ideology for its opponents is a form of vulgar reductionism, seeking to model the very pith of our dignity and autonomy – consciousness itself – on all that threatens to enslave it. Intoxicated with a mythology of pure reason, it sets out to purge humanity of its essential mystery, converting the mind itself into a sort of material object as mechanically predictable as the circulation of the blood. It is, in short, a kind of madness of Reason – a hubristic campaign to blueprint our elusive spiritual being, and to do so, moreover, for the purposes of controlling and manipulating it. Those traditional guardians of the human psyche – the priests – knew at least that it was inviolable and irreducible, as the inscription of God himself in humanity; now this last bastion of our freedom is to be rudely invaded by the same grubby hands which broke open the Bastille. In its own day, then, the new science of ideology attracted all the virulent opposition which has been reserved in our own time for psychoanalysis. For the scandal of Freud is not finally his embarrassing revelations about infantile sexuality or the precariousness of gender; it is the fact that the human psyche itself can now, apparently, be scientifically dissected like a muscle, and this not just in its topmost, more socially obvious layer ('consciousness') but in its murkiest unconscious depths.

The conflict in our own time between 'theorists' and 'humanists' is a legacy of these eighteenth-century quarrels. 'System', Roland Barthes once commented, 'is the enemy of Man' – meaning that the 'Man' of the humanist is all that cannot be analysed and tabulated, all that slips through the net of theoretical enquiry. In late eighteenth-century England, the names for this running battle were Paine and Burke: Thomas Paine, with his revolutionary fervour and serene confidence in reason; Edmund Burke, for whom the whole notion that the social order can be submitted to rational critique is a kind of blasphemy. For Burke, human affairs are too intricate, intuitive and opaque, too much the product of immemorial custom and spontaneous habit, to be charted with any certainty; and this belief is inevitably coupled with a conservative politics. For if the skein of social life is so elusively tangled, then only those delicate refurbishings and readjustments we know as reform can avoid shearing brutally through it. For this standpoint, we cannot put our social life into radical question precisely because we are the products of it, because we bear in our bones and fibres the very traditions we are foolishly seeking to objectify. Radical critique would thus involve some impossible hauling of ourselves up by our own bootstraps, some doomed attempt to examine ourselves as though we were not present on the scene of enquiry. And where exactly would we have to be standing to perform such an operation? A rejection of ideology is thus an endorsement of the political status quo, just as the opponents of 'theory' today tend to be conservative. In modern English history, 'ideologists' have generally been known as 'intellectuals', and the term

carries a significantly disparaging resonance. Intellectuals are bloodless, clinical creatures bereft of the ordinary human affections, crushing spontaneity and intuition with their cerebral convolutions. They are *alien* animals because they strive to 'estrangle' our familiar forms of life, casting upon them the coldly critical eye of a Martian or a visiting anthropologist. Like the early French ideologues, they try to uncover the laws or 'deep structures' by which our most taken-for-granted institutions work; and this might only succeed in disabling those institutions, exposing them to a rigorous scepticism under whose baleful glare they might wilt and wither. The traditional quarrel between ideologue and conservative is being rehearsed today in the battle between those radical theorists who believe that a fundamental critique of a particular social order is both possible and necessary, and those pragmatist descendants of Nietzsche or Heidegger or Wittgenstein or John Dewey for whom this is mere intellectualist fantasy.¹ For if human beings are actually constituted to their roots by their social practices, how could they ever hope to leap out of them in imagination and subject them to thoroughgoing critical analysis? Would this not be like the eye trying to catch itself seeing something, or trying to shin up a rope you are yourself holding?

The pragmatist case against the 'ideologist' is that to do what she aims to do, she would have to be standing at some Archimedean point outside the culture she hopes to criticise. Not only does no such point exist, but even if it did it would be far too remote from our form of life to gain any effective hold upon it. This, in my view, is a misguided notion: it is perfectly possible, as with the Marxist concept of an 'immanent' critique, to launch a radical critique of a culture from somewhere inside it, not least from those internal fissures or fault-lines which betray its underlying contradictions. But if the pragmatist charge is not generally valid, it would certainly seem to apply to the early French ideologues. These men sought to submit their societies to the gaze of Reason; but whose reason, and reason of what kind? For them reason really was a 'transcendental' faculty, sublimely untainted by social factors. Yet this, ironically, contradicts the whole spirit of their project, which sets out precisely to examine how the human mind is conditioned by its social and material environment. How come that *their* minds – their notions of reason – are so immune from their own doctrine? What if the grand science of ideology was no more than a socially conditioned reflex in the head of its founder? If everything is to be exposed to the clear light of reason, must this not include reason itself? And would we not then discover that this supposedly timeless, transcendental faculty was no more than the style of rationality of a particular, newly dominant social class at a specific historical time? What we might find, in short, is that ideology in the classical sense of the word is ideology in one contemporary sense: the partisan perspective of a social group or class, which then mistakes itself as universal and eternal.

For some theorists of our time, notably the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and his progeny, ideology is the opposite of science; so it is ironic that the concept was born precisely as an exciting new science. For some other thinkers, notably the early Marx and Engels of *The German Ideology*, ideology means ideas which have floated free of their material foundation and deny its existence; so it is a further irony that ideology in its infancy was part of a more general materialist enquiry into society as a whole. Indeed for the founder of the discipline, Destutt de Tracy, it was part of 'zoology': of a science of humanity in general. How then did it come about that, not long after its inception, 'ideology' came to mean idle abstractions, illusions and chimeras with no root in the real world? The answer, in a word, may be Napoleon. As Napoleon tightened his authoritarian political control, the French ideologues rapidly became his *bêtes noires*; and the concept of ideology itself entered the field of ideological struggle. Tracy and his kind, so he complained, were 'dreamers' and 'windbags', intent on destroying the consoling illusions by which men and women lived. Before long he was seeing ideologues under every bed, and even blamed them for his defeat in Russia. The ideologues, he charged, had substituted a 'diffuse metaphysics' for a 'knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history' – an ironic enough accusation, since it was precisely 'metaphysics' that the materialistically-minded ideologues were out to combat. The confrontation between Napoleon and Tracy, then, is an early instance of the conflict between the pragmatist who appeals to custom, piety, intuition and concrete experience, and the sinister 'intellectual' who puts all of this in brackets in his remorseless rationalism. The French exponents of ideology were not in fact metaphysicians; as we have seen, they believed in a close interrelation between ideas and material circumstances. But they did believe that ideas were at the very foundation of social life, and so were an odd mixture of materialist and idealist. It is this belief in the primacy of ideas which Napoleon, who claimed to have invented the term 'ideologue' himself as a derogatory label for his opponents, seized on in his campaign to discredit them. The kernel of his accusation is that there is something irrational about excessive rationalism. In his eyes, these thinkers have pursued their enquiry into the laws of reason to the point where they have become locked within their own abstract space, as divorced from material reality as a psychotic. So it is that the term ideology veers on its axis, as a word originally synonymous with scientific rationalism ends up denoting an idle and speculative idealism.

2 The Marxist heritage

The belief that ideas are socially conditioned is now so obvious to us that it

requires a leap of imagination to envisage how anyone might think differently. But the belief is not of course obvious at all, not least for those brands of philosophical dualism or idealism for which consciousness is one thing and the material world quite another. Before the French ideologues, a good many thinkers had speculated in a rather crudely materialist vein on the influence on our minds of climate, or physiology, or national character; and for English empiricism it is sense-perception which lies at the source of all our concepts. But none of this is quite what the modern sense of the term 'ideology' is trying to capture. The study of ideology is more than just some sociology of ideas; more particularly, it claims to show how ideas are related to real material conditions by masking or dissembling them, displacing them into other terms, speciously resolving their conflicts and contradictions, converting these situations into apparently natural, immutable, universal ones. Ideas, in short, are here granted an active political force, rather than being grasped as mere reflections of their world; and in its day the Marxist tradition has sought to describe ideology in terms of any or all of these various strategies. The source text for this tradition is Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*, in which the authors see ideology as essentially an inversion of the relation between consciousness and reality as they themselves conceive it. For a materialist like Marx, consciousness is inseparably bound up with social practice, and is secondary to it; for the Hegelian philosophers whom they oppose, ideas are thought to be both autonomous of such practice, and to be the root cause of social existence. By granting such primacy to ideas, Marx's antagonists would seem to suggest that if you change people's minds, you change their conditions of life. Marx himself wants to insist that you could only transform human consciousness by transforming the material conditions which create it. A materialist analysis, in short, goes hand in hand with a revolutionary politics. The rationalist creed that one should combat false ideas with true ones is decisively rejected; and so is the related idealist doctrine that consciousness is the key to social reality. In a pathbreaking move, then, *The German Ideology* rejects rationalism, idealism and any mere 'sociology of knowledge'; instead, in an audacious reformulation, it insists that consciousness is essentially *practical*, and that one of its practical uses is to distract men and women from their oppression and exploitation by generating illusions and mystifications. Paradoxically, then, ideas *are* practically related to real life; but that relation takes the mystifying form of a non-relation, in the shape of the idealist fantasy that consciousness is grandly independent of all material determinants. To put the point another way: there is an apparent non-correspondence between ideas and reality in class society, but this non-correspondence is structural to that form of life, and fulfils an important function within it.

It would appear, then, that to dub an idea 'ideological' is not just to call

it false or deceptive, but to claim that it fulfils a particular kind of deceptive or mystifying function within social life as a whole. And as far as that goes, it might be thought that true ideas might do just as well as false ones. In the end, for this style of thought, an ideological notion is one which is somehow convenient for our rulers – one which conceals or naturalises or otherwise legitimates an unjust form of power. And in *The German Ideology*, given the thinkers the authors are out to assail, these ideas are most often metaphysical fantasies and chimeras of various sorts which downgrade the importance of material struggle. But this means that there is, from the outset, a tension in Marx's thought between two rather different senses of the term ideology. On the one hand, ideology has a point, a function, a practical political force; on the other hand it would seem a mere set of illusions, a set of ideas which have come unstuck from reality and now conduct an apparently autonomous life in isolation from it. This tension is not exactly a contradiction: one can see well enough how encouraging certain religious or metaphysical illusions may serve to mystify men and women as to their real material interests, and so have some practical force. But to see ideology just as 'illusion' has seemed to many later thinkers to deny its materiality, as well as to overlook the fact that many of the notions which we call ideological may succeed as well as they do precisely because they are true. People who enjoy dwelling upon Winston Churchill's dogged resilience and powers of leadership are probably speaking ideologically, but they are not thereby lying. *The German Ideology* makes it sound as though all ideology is idealist; but this is plainly not the case. The thought of the French ideologues or English empiricists is certainly in some sense materialist, but it is not hard to point out its ideological functions. So, at the very origin of the tradition we are examining, there is a revealing ambiguity: is ideology primarily an *epistemological* affair, concerned with what Theodor Adorno once termed 'socially necessary illusion', or is it a *sociological* matter, insisting on the way certain ideas intersect with power? Can thought have a firm anchorage in material life and still be ideological? And if ideology, as with the early Marx and Engels, means ideas independent of that life, how can this be so if all consciousness is in truth practical consciousness?

Whatever these difficulties, the early Marxian claim that 'the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' is a remarkably bold and original formulation. For this is to assert a startlingly direct hook-up between consciousness and power, which goes far beyond any mere insistence that ideas are socially conditioned. We are moving instead towards the proposition, more fully elaborated by later Marxists, that ideas are weapons in a field of struggle – that an 'ideological' discourse, properly understood, means one which, deciphered and decoded in certain ways, will betray in its limits and emphases, its silences, gaps and internal contradictions, the imprint of real material conflicts. On this view, ideology

is a form of thought generated or skewed out of shape by the exigencies of power; but if it is therefore traced through with significant tensions and inconsistencies, it also represents an attempt to mask the very conflicts from which it springs, either by denying that they exist, or by asserting their unimportance or inevitability. Ideologies are sets of discursive strategies for displacing, recasting or spuriously accounting for realities which prove embarrassing to a ruling power; and in doing so, they contribute to that power's self-legitimation.

Such, at least, is one strong contemporary understanding of ideology. It is not one without its problems, as we shall see in this book. For some thinkers, like the later Karl Marx, ideology is less a matter of thought or discourse than of the very objective structure of class society itself. For others like Althusser, it is less consciousness than unconsciousness; for others again, ideology is less a 'tool' of a ruling power than an effect of a social and political situation as a whole, a complex field in which different groups and classes ceaselessly negotiate their relations rather than a well-bounded form of consciousness which can be neatly assigned to this group or the other. There are difficulties, too, about the fact that 'ideology' is sometimes used to cover radical or oppositional ideas: if ideology means the ideas of the ruling class, why does Lenin speak approvingly of 'socialist ideology', and why would many people want to claim that feminism or anarchism or republicanism were 'ideological'? For the moment, however, we can stay with the conception of ideology as a set of discursive strategies for legitimating a dominant power, and enquire more precisely into what these strategies consist in. We should note before we do, however, that the concept of a 'dominant ideology', as a coherent bloc of ideas which effectively secures the power of a governing group, has been greeted with scepticism in certain quarters, a view made plain by the work of Nicholas Abercrombie and his colleagues.²

Ideologies are often seen as *rationalisations* of a set of (normally unjust) social interests. I say 'normally unjust', because one would think that a set of just social interests would hardly need rationalising. But some plainly unjust views do not need rationalising either: ancient society saw nothing reprehensible in slave-owning, and felt no need to dress it up in some plausible apologia as we would have to do today. For one extreme sort of contemporary free marketeer, there is no reason to justify the suffering that *laissez-faire* generates: for him, the weak can simply go to the wall. But much ideological rationalisation does of course go on; and rationalisation, which is essentially a psychoanalytic category, can be defined as 'a procedure whereby the subject attempts to present an explanation that is either logically consistent or ethically acceptable for attitudes, ideas, feelings, etc., whose true motives are not perceived'.³ Whether all ruling powers fail to perceive how discreditable their true motives really are is in fact questionable. Someone who behaves disreputably but conceals the fact