

# Discourse and Context of Marginalism through *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* by Louis Althusser

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## Abstract

In his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*, Louis Althusser speaks on the structure and functioning of ideology. Before he presents a discussion on ideology, Althusser defines the term as a Theologico-Philosophy and practice of the same which was different from the modern philosophy. So, beyond the growth of economical thoughts in nineteenth century, there lies many social institutions such as education, the churches, family, media, trade unions and law, which served to transmit. To denote institutions, the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser developed a term called *Ideological State Apparatus*. Such ideologies lead humans to marginalize and to be marginalizing through the institutions. Among the mentioned ISAs, religion has a prominent role in influencing human ideas. In primitive societies, religion had its sway over each individual and thereon the society as a whole. From the birth of the child to the death, till the body was cremated or buried, the religious rituals had its clutches on every individual. Those who did not obeyed the church or the priest, was either punished or ostracized from the community. Ideologies are paving the way in every individual's mind to create an illusion order of living, which made them to see other people by means of their class, creed, education, gender, religion, nationality. In order to prove their existence, those ideologized individuals handling the tool called marginalism.

**Keywords:** Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*, structure and functions of ideology, ISA, Marginalization, Existence.

## Introduction

*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* is a small but effective essay written by Louis Althusser. In this essay, he discusses the medieval nineteenth century's Feuerbach School of thought on Theologico-philosophy and the theory of production by Karl Marx, both being the contemporaries from the land of Germany. Feuerbach had stronger conviction in the faith of god as responsible for all worldly order including production and labor. Another connection with Feuerbach's mind is the religion is a wishful thinking, which is known as 'felicity principle', is also a kind of assuming the point of being religious to secure the well-being of individuals both here and hereafter. Thus, attaining peace lies in the unquestionable faith in the almighty. Throwing the light on the Theologico-philosophy and its practice, Althusser defines the term

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'Ideology'. He acknowledges that, the development of such Theologico-philosophical thoughts gave birth to a number of ideologies. In this essay, Althusser analyses the exact attachment of realities that implicit and latent to an ideology.

Althusser depicts that the real conditions of the existence of an individual is represented by ideologies. By this definition, he classifies the ideologies into two types as 'positive and 'negative' for each of which he formulated his thesis. He defines that the positive ideology represented by the abstract form of man whereas the materiality of man concerned by negative ideology. The ultimate conviction of Althusser is, the ideologies do not correspond to the reality.

Before referring to the Althusserian definitions of ideologies, there is another term we have to think about: ideology. Ideology is a crucial concept in the study of popular culture. Graeme Turner (1996) calls it 'the most important conceptual category in cultural studies' (182). James Carey (1996) has even suggested that 'British cultural studies could be described just as easily and perhaps more accurately as ideological studies' (65). Like culture, ideology has many competing meanings. An understanding of this concept is often complicated by the fact that in much cultural analysis the concept is used interchangeably with culture itself, and especially popular culture. The fact that ideology has been used to refer to the same conceptual terrain as culture and popular culture makes it an important term in any understanding of the nature of popular culture. What follows is a brief discussion of just five of the many ways of understanding ideology. We will consider only those meanings that have a bearing on the study of popular culture.

First, ideology can refer to a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people. For example, we could speak of 'professional ideology' to refer to the ideas which inform the practices of particular professional groups. We could also speak of the 'ideology of the Labor Party'. Here we would be referring to the collection of political, economic and social ideas that inform the aspirations and activities of the Party.

A second definition suggests a certain masking, distortion, or concealment. Ideology is used here to indicate how some texts and practices present distorted images of reality. They produce what is sometimes called 'false consciousnesses'. Such distortions, it is argued, work in the interests of the powerful against the interests of the powerless. Using this definition, we might speak of capitalist ideology. What would be intimated by this usage would be the way in which ideology conceals the reality of domination from those in power: the dominant class do not see themselves as exploiters or oppressors. And, perhaps more importantly, the way in which ideology conceals the reality of subordination from those who are powerless: the subordinate classes do not see themselves as oppressed or exploited.

This definition derives from certain assumptions about the circumstances of the production of texts and practices. It is argued that they are the superstructural ‘reflections’ or ‘expressions’ of the power relations of the economic base of society. This is one of the fundamental assumptions of classical Marxism. According to the first thesis of Althusser, the ideology or the notions represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. The world order and the outlooks have formed a number of ideologies like religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology, political ideology and so on.

These set of ideologies are generally not followed but discussed from a critical point of view by a person who studies about human race and also examining about the myths of a primitive society, according to the beliefs of Althusser. He is of the opinion that the world outlooks are largely imaginary, and it does not correspond to reality.

Ideologies are labeled as illusions as it makes allusion to the reality. It needs to be interpreted to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation. The mechanic types and the hermeneutic interpretation of 18<sup>th</sup> century as these are the many types of interpretations. Among the types of interpretation, the mechanical type interpretation states that the representation of the real king is God.

Hermeneutic interpretation reaffirms the identical statement as the essence of the real man is God and this belongs to Feuerbach. In essence, the imaginary transposition of ideology paves the way for a determination that the humans represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form. Althusser explains the need of imaginary transposition in two ways. His first answer is the priests and the despots i.e. the cruel defined by Althusser, created a beautiful lie (i.e. god) and made people believe that they were obeying god in order to make them obey. To him, the priests acted according to the political positions of the small number of cynical men dominating and exploiting the people in the name of the concept, god.

The second answer of Althusser lies in the exclusive threadbare presentation of Karl Marx on the analysis of Feuerbach. Marx rejected the theory of Feuerbach on the concept of god as utterly false. Marx did not accept the active imagination of the priests or the passive imagination of the victims i.e. the common man. Thus, it is according to Marx, the superstitious or the godly beliefs is a material alienation otherwise termed as alienated labor, thus generating a labor class in society to work and contribute to the church in the name of god. The conditions of existence of men in the real world represents the imaging of the world thought in ideologies is resulting in the claims of this section.

So, this is the relation, which is the centre of any ideological, imaginary representation of the real world. It is the imaginary nature of the relation that underlies all the imaginary distortion in all the ideologies. Althusser considers every ideology is an imaginary distortion otherwise a false account. Man has been taught to consider ideology as a higher order of thinking and made to believe ideology in one's action. There is a class of men in the posts of agents of production, exploitation, repression, the process of ideology and scientific practice. The presence of these posts is the results of the relations of production. The real conditions of existence of individuals are not real as presumed in the imaginary relations described in ideologies.

Ideology is not just a phenomenon that exists and functions in the minds of human beings, is the thing which Althusser tries to explain further in his essay time and again. He reveals that ideology is always present in apparatus and the practices rather than it has material existence that has associated with it. Here Althusser traces the reason behind certain beliefs of people in the presence of some or the other *Ideological State Apparatuses*. These beliefs are in turn governed by the institutions that form the material apparatuses. Thus, it can be said for Althusser, ideas are the consequence of the situations of the individual subjects in a society within specific ISAs (Ideological state apparatuses).

We can also use ideology in this general sense to refer to power relations outside those of class. For instance, feminists speak of the power of patriarchal ideology, and how it operates to conceal, mask and distort gender relations in our society. How it operates to conceal, mask and distort gender relations in our society. Principally, what Althusser has in mind is the way in which certain rituals and customs have the effect of binding us to the social order: a social order that is marked by enormous inequalities of wealth, status and power.

Using this definition, we could describe the seaside holiday or the celebration of Christmas as examples of ideological practices. This would point to the way in which they offer pleasure and release from the usual demands of the social order, but that, ultimately, they return us to our places in the social order, refreshed and ready to tolerate our exploitation and oppression until the next official break comes along. In this sense, ideology works to reproduce the social conditions and social relations necessary for the economic conditions and economic relations of capitalism to continue.

Ideological subjects are produced by acts of 'hailing' or 'interpellation'. Althusser uses the analogy of a police officer hailing an individual: 'Hey, you there!' When the individual hailed turns in response, he or she has been interpellated, has become a subject of the police officer's discourse. In this way, ideology is a material practice that creates subjects who are in turn subjected to its specific patterns of thought and modes of behavior. This definition of

ideology has had a significant effect on the field of cultural studies and the study of popular culture. Instead of class distinctions based on our role in the process of production, advertising continually suggests that what really matters are distinctions based on the consumption of particular goods. Thus, social identity becomes a question of what we consume rather than what we produce.

Like all ideology, advertising functions by interpellation: it creates subjects who in turn are subjected to its meanings and its patterns of consumption. The consumer is interpellated to make meaning and ultimately to purchase and consume and purchase and consume again. For example, the people of popular culture considering themselves as 'self' and points the remaining people as 'Others'. Althusser's concept of ideology can be related to any type of the contexts and discourses of marginalism of contemporary society. The family ideological concept of Althusser is an example for the hegemonic patriarchal society and the trade union ISAs is a representation of the contemporary corporal tricks whereas the cultural ISAs stands for the geographical, gender and the considering social tabooed (LGBT) marginalism and racial and ethnical marginalism, also his concept of educational ISAs is an example for linguistic marginalism. Thus, the ultimate concept of either ideology or marginalism is used as a tool by every individual at least once in their lifetime in order to prove their existence.

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**Abbreviation:** ISAs - Ideological State Apparatuses