.... we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history, the premise namely that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to "make history".

Karl Marx

Chapter - 3

ALTHUSSER'S 'NEO-POSITIVISM':
SCIENCE AND IDEOLOGY
In this chapter we deal with the 'neo-positivist' conception of knowledge and ideology by considering some of the major aspects of Louis Althusser's reading of Marx. Sociological-materialist theory of culture, as we have seen in the previous chapter, depends wholly on a positivist understanding of Marx's theory or, in other words, on a reductionist interpretation of Marx's notion of ideology. Method of reductionism results invariably in relativism, in the relativisation of human thought. Relativism, as we saw, contradicts itself with the non-positivist epistemological presuppositions of Marx's philosophy of praxis.

Althusser's major thrust in the course of his 'scientific' interpretation of Marxism is to provide a secure foundation for positivism by resolving the errors of relativism and reductionism of the conventional sociologism. In this precise sense, Althusser's is an attempt to revive positivism on a more secure ground — a ground which is not provided by the concepts of conventional sociologism, but by the 'new' concepts of a new 'sociological' theory. The aim of this chapter is to show that the fundamental concepts of Althusser's new scheme are not basically different from the concepts which form the basis of conventional sociologism. In the first section we will try to explore the conceptual scheme of Althusser's neo-positivism and to bring out its epistemological presuppositions. In the second section we shall attempt to analyse them critically and to show how they stand parallel to the concepts of conventional sociologism. The finding that the concepts of Althusser's new scheme are not fundamentally different from those of conventional sociologism would substantiate our claim that Althusser's reading of Marx is of the nature of a positivist reinterpretation of Marx's theory, especially of Marx's concepts of knowledge and ideology.
Three doctrines by means of which Althusser tries to resolve the ‘errors’ of conventional Marxism are, 1) The doctrine of ideology as the representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence, 2) the doctrine of overdetermination and 3) the doctrine of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology.

Althusser’s conception of ideology

In sociologism, ideology is the false (distorted) representation of the reality. Human subject, as being determined by the material/social circumstances, thinks or involves in the knowing process from a specific point of view, as Mannheim claims, from the perspective of his social group. Social group determines belief systems, ideas and all other mental activities. Every knowledge is biased towards the interests of the social group to which the knower belongs. Biased knowledge cannot be the true picture of the reality; it is a distorted picture, a false representation of the reality.

The thesis that ideology is the false representation of reality implies the representational concept of knowledge, i.e., the idea that knowledge is the representation of reality. The concept of false representation is possible only when it is assumed that the process of knowing is the process of representation. In order to defend the thesis that ideology is a distorted recognition of reality, it must be argued that the process of knowledge described by empiricism is a real process.¹

Therefore, to accept the sociologist thesis of ideology is to accept empiricism. The construction of a theoretical scheme which is methodologically free from empiricism and sociologism must, therefore, be based on the rejection of the representational theory of

¹Cf. Paul Hirst, On Law and Ideology. p. 23
knowledge. Precisely, this is the task which Althusser undertakes before proceeding to his constructive enterprise.

In his celebrated essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ Althusser advances the thesis of the ‘materiality of ideology’ which clearly implies the refusal of representational theory. Ideology, according to this thesis, is not to be understood in terms of the category of representation; it is not ‘ideal’ or ‘spiritual’ but ‘material’. Ideology does not consist of ideas as opposed to matter, precisely because, ideas are not something which belong to a spiritual realm separated from the material realm. They are material in the sense that they are fully expressed in the objective social forms; they are to be understood as the concrete forms of social practices and social relations.

To put it in Althusser’s own words, “......‘ideas’ or ‘representations’, etc., which seem to make up ideology do not have an ideal (ideale or ideelle) or spiritual existence, but a material existence”.2 The two expressions ‘ideal existence’ and ‘material existence’ need to be elaborated. Althusser seems to believe that ‘ideal’ is of the nature of something pure, isolated from the social practices and social relations. In other words, it is of the nature of ‘representation’ which ‘exists’ as an abstract realm. The term ‘material’ obviously refers to the objective social practices and social relations, in other words, to the concrete social phenomena. The thesis of the materiality of ideology, i.e., the view that ideology has the material existence, discards the possibility of a radical separation between ideal and material; it advances the idea that the so called ‘ideal’ is fully expressed in the concrete social practices and has a kind of materiality.

Althusser explains this thesis with the help of some examples. An individual who

believes in God behaves in certain ways, adopts certain corresponding practical attitudes; he goes to church to attend Mass, kneels, prays etc., and does follow certain conventions. Similarly, an individual who believes in justice, Althusser observes, will submit himself unconditionally to the rules of law and acts according to them. In both the cases, individual’s belief is expressed ‘objectively’ in certain practices. The practical attitude an individual adopts is not a matter of his voluntary choice but is the necessary condition of his belief. Believing in God is following certain conventions practically. To believe in justice is to act ‘according to the idea of justice’. If one does not act according to the idea he has, it is because he has other ideas in his head as well as those he proclaim, and that he acts according to these other ideas, as a man who is either ‘inconsistent’ or cynical, or perverse.\(^3\)

Ideas exist in actions. What is an action?. Althusser insists that an action is not to be understood in individualistic terms. It is not to be viewed in isolation from the social totality. An action is determined by the behavioral patterns, conventions of the given society. In short, it is to be conceived as being inserted into social practices. An individual’s belief in God is expressed in his actions which are conventional in the sense that they are followed collectively by a group of people as their social practices. They are determined by the behavioural patterns of the society. In Althusser’s language they are to be understood as material social practices.

Althusser further argues that these practices are ‘governed by rituals’. What does he mean by ‘ritual’?.

The expression ‘ritual’ commonly refers to a pattern of behaviours, the forms of

\(^3\)Cf. Ibid. p. 42.
thought and actions conventionally followed by a given community. The same meaning is expressed here when Althusser maintains that practices are governed by rituals. A practice is conventional in the sense that there are some conventional rules to be followed for performing that practice. A definite form of life is associated with every practice. Therefore, every practice is inscribed into a ritual and also governed by it. The same example of the believer can be pointed out here. A believer who belongs to a particular religion performs the actions according to the conventions followed by other members of his religion. In other words, he acts according to the rules and conventions of his religious life. Religion, here, is the form of life, the ritual which governs his actions. All the actions which are inserted into practices are, therefore, governed by the rituals.

The practices inscribed into rituals are objective social forms. They are no way abstract, but concrete. They have ‘materiality’. Althusser maintains that they are to be conceived as the instances of the ‘ideological apparatuses’; their existence is to be viewed in terms of the ‘material existence of an ideological apparatus’. To quote Althusser’s own words: “...practices are governed by rituals..., within the material existence of an ideological apparatus, be it only a small part of that apparatus: a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports club, school day, a political party meeting, etc.”.

What is an ideological apparatus?. To answer this question we have to go a little deep into Althusser’s theory of state apparatuses. In line with Marx’s analysis of social formations, Althusser argues that the process of production of every social system presupposes the process of the reproduction of the conditions of production. To put it in more clear terms, every social system, for its existence, has to reproduce its conditions of production.

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at the same time as it produces. What are the conditiones to be reproduced?. Althusser answers: One is the forces of production and the other is the relations of production. ‘Forces of production’ refers to the combination of three elements namely, labour, the material which is worked by the labourer and the tools which are used for the labour. In the other words, the reproduction of the forces of production means 1) the reproduction of the labour power 2) the reproduction of the materials and 3) the reproduction of the tools. We shall confine our study to the ‘reproduction of the labour power’, precisely for the reason that the other two are out of our concern especially when we discuss about ideological apparatus. What does the ‘reproduction of the labour power’ mean? Althusser would say that it primarily means the reproduction of the skills of the labour power, i.e., keeping labour power ‘skilled’ in order to be suitable enough for the process of production. The development of every system (of production) depends primarily on the development of the capacity of the labourers to work or, rather, on the efficiency of the available labour power. Every system, therefore, necessarily reproduces its conditions of production; it keeps the available labour power competent enough or, in other words, it reproduces the skills of the labour power. Althusser’s observation is that this process of reproduction of the skills is internally related to another process i.e., the reproduction of the relation of the labourers to the existing system of production.

This is to say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills but also, at the same time, reproduction of its relation to the established order. The relation that the labour power requires to have with the existing order is the relation of submission; the labour power should be submissive to the established order, (laboure should be ready to work according to the rules of the established order). So, a reproduction of the relation of the labour power to the established order means, in
Althusser's language, "a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order". Submission to the rules of the established order is the submission to ruling ideology. Every system reproduces this submission; it ensures through different institutions such as schools, church, army etc., the submission of the individuals to the ruling ideology. All the individuals must be 'steeped' in the ruling ideology; to put it in Althusser's own words, "all the agents of production, exploitation and repression....must in one way or another be steeped in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously' — the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the explitters, auxiliaries (the managers), or the high priests of the ruling ideology (its 'functionaries'), etc.,"\(^6\)

The institutions, through which the reproduction of the submission of the individuals to the rules of the established order is carried out are state apparatuses. For a better understanding of Althusser's theory of state apparatuses we shall illustrate the whole idea discussed above as follows:

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\(^5\)Ibid, p. 6.
\(^6\)Ibid, p. 7.
['A' refers to the institutions through which 'B' and 'C' take place. 'B' plus 'C' is equal to 'D'. 'D' along with 'E' and 'F' constitutes 'G'. 'I' follows from 'G' and 'H'. 'I' is the ultimate condition of every 'J'].

Reproduction of the skills of the labour power

Reproduction of the submission of the individuals to the rules of the established order

Reproduction of the labour power

Reproduction of materials

Reproduction of tools

Reproduction of the forces of production

Reproduction of the relations of production

Reproduction of the conditions of production

Process of production
Althusser argues further that there are two kinds of apparatuses: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). RSA contains the institutions such as Government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons etc., which function by force to guarantee the submission of the individuals to the rules of the established social order. ISA contains different religious, legal, political, educational, cultural institutions which function not by force but by 'ideology'.

What does Althusser mean by saying that ISA's function by ideology?. Let us follow his example: children at school learn different techniques and knowledges. In learning them they also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i.e., the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he 'destined' for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience which actually means the rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by the class domination. In short, the Educational ISA moulds the individuals as the good citizens of the established social order. Thereby, as Althusser assumes, it reproduces the submission of the individuals to the rules of the established order, to the ruling ideology. As different from other State apparatuses which use 'violence' to ensure the subjection of people to the ruling ideology, educational ISA functions by 'ideology', i.e., it imposes the rules of the established order upon the individuals and make them assimilated into the system.

We shall not go into the empirical details of the functioning of different ISAs, as it

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7Althusser lists the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses: The religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties), the trade union ISA, the communication ISA (Press, Radio and Television, etc.), the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, Sports, etc.) Ibid. p. 17.

8Cf. Ibid. p. 6.
is not our concern. What concerns us is the clarification of Althusser’s claim that the existence of an idea which is inscribed into, or governed by a ritual is to be conceived in terms of the material existence of an ideological apparatus. In the light of the above discussion, we shall explore the connection between ideas and ideological state apparatus.

We have seen that ideas exist in actions. Actions are inserted into social practices. Practices are governed by rituals within the material existence of an ideological state apparatus. Precisely, this is to say that an idea is to be understood as the instance of an ideological apparatus. For example an individual’s belief in God is inscribed into certain practices which are governed by a ‘form of life’, i.e., a religion. Religion, in Althusser’s account is an ISA; it functions as an ideological instrument of the state to ensure the subjection of the individuals to the established order. An individual’s belief in God therefore is to be understood as an instance of religious ISA. It ceases to be subjective and turns to be an objective practice, a concrete instance of an ideological apparatus. It becomes ‘material’. The whole content of Althusser’s thesis of the ‘materiality of ideas’ can be illustrated as follows:

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\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{A} & \text{Ideas} & \text{‘ideal’} & \text{‘Subjective’} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow & \\
\text{Actions} & \downarrow & \downarrow & \\
\text{Practices} & \downarrow & \downarrow & \\
\text{Rituals} & \downarrow & \downarrow & \\
\text{B} & \text{Ideological Apparatus} & \text{‘Material’} & \text{‘Objective’}
\end{array}
\]
Ideas are inscribed into rituals which are defined by the material ideological apparatus. ‘A’ therefore is ultimately defined by ‘B’. To put it in Althusser’s own words: “......Where only a single subject (such and such an individual) is concerned, the existence of the ideas of his belief is material in that *his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*.⁹ Obviously, the rejection of the subjectivity of ideas, in Althusser’s sense aims at the dismissal of the empiricist hypothesis that knowledge is the subjective representation of the reality. In other words, this rejection provides the methodological foundation for a non-representational view of knowledge in which ideas are not to be understood in terms of the category of representation, but as the concrete instances of different material ideological apparatuses.

To accept such a non-representational conception is to reject the sociologist mode of interpretation of ideology. That is, if ‘idea’ is not the representation of the reality, then ideology can never be the ‘distorted representation of the reality’. Then, what is ideology?. Althusser answers by putting forth a new theory according to which ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence.¹⁰ This theory, in its depth, is highly complex and thus, the assumptions implied in it need to be analysed thoroughly.

For the sake of convenience we shall break the above thesis into two premisses. 1) Ideology represents the relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence. 2) The relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence is ‘imaginary’. In considering the first, we would have to face the fundamental question, namely, what makes

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⁹Ibid, p. 43.
¹⁰Cf, Ibid, p. 36.
the differnece between 1) 'the representation of the reality' and 2) 'the representation of the relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence'? Perhaps, Althusser's conclusive break with sociologism lies in its answer. Because the theory of ideology that Althusser propounds advances the second idea as opposed to the first one. The first one, Althusser seems to assume, implies the sociologist hypothesis i.e., idea is the reflection of the reality, whereas, the second one presupposes the 'materiality of ideas', i.e., the thesis that ideas are to be understood as being inscribed into the social practices governed by the material existence of the ideological apparatus.

This becomes more clear when Althusser refutes the sociologist interpretation by arguing that ideology represents not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them) but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that are derived from them, that it represents not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but individual's relation to the real relations in which they live.¹¹

Ideology, thus, is a form of relationship of the individuals to the real relations of production. This relationship is not 'representational'. Individuals are related to the relations of production, not in an abstract manner, but in the concrete realm of their practical life process. To borrow the term from Paul Hirst, it is a 'lived relationship'.¹² To proceed from here on it is necessary for us to have a distinct view of this 'lived relationship'.

1. Lived relationship is not in the mode of 'reflection of the real'; it is a real relationship.

¹²Cf. Paul Hirst, On law and Ideology, p. 32.
2. It is not false or distorted, since it is a concrete form of individual’s existence in a society.

We shall reflect upon each of the above. The first one precisely says that ‘lived relationship’ is the real relationship. Obviously, the expression ‘real’, here, refers to that which excludes the abstract ‘reflection of the real’. Individuals’ relationship to the relations of production is not a representational one. It is a relationship in which they live. Individuals do not merely represent the reality; they ‘live’ the reality. Individuals and the relations of production are mediated through life in a concrete manner. Consequently, the question of falsity or distortion does not arise at all in such a relationship. X can be false or distorted in relation to Y, only when there exists a possibility for X to represent Y. In other words, the question of distortion arises only in a relation where X is the representation of Y. The relationship of the individuals to the relations of production is not that of an abstract form in which the former represents the latter, but that of a concrete necessity. For example, in a society where capitalist relations of production exist, an individual can live only by involving himself in it. More clearly, living in a capitalist society without being involved in wage-labour (which is the real relation) is virtually impossible. It is a concrete necessity for each individual to have a ‘lived relationship’ with the existing relations of production. Ideology, for Althusser, is this lived relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence.

A question naturally arises, namely, why should the relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence be called as ideology?, or why is the ‘relationship’ necessarily ideological?. Althusser has not tackled this question convincingly. He has introduced the concept of ‘imaginairiness’, according to which the relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence is necessarily ‘imaginary’. Althusser is not very precise on this
point and therefore the doctrine of ‘imaginariness’ remains a little obscure. We shall try to have a close look on it and see the implications behind this concept.

We have already seen that, in Althusser’s account, ideology is the real, lived relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence. This relationship, Althusser further argues, is necessarily in an imaginary mode. How can a real relationship be imaginary?. Althusser answers that the notion of ‘imaginariness’ does not in any way imply the ‘unreality’ of ideology. The relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence is real in the concrete sense of the term but, at the same time, it is imaginary because it does not reveal the most fundamental nature of that relation. In other words, it does not make explicit the real conditions of existence, but does reveal the relation of the individuals to their conditions of existence. “What is represented in ideology is therefore, not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals, to the real relations in which they live”. Ideology is imaginary, precisely because, the real nature of the relations which govern the existence of individuals is blurred and only the relation of individuals to their conditions of existence is represented.

We shall make this point clear with the help of an example which has been given by Althusser himself. For workers in a capitalist society freedom is a lived relation. They have to believe in freedom because it is a necessary condition for their existence as free labourers. Their existence under capitalist mode of production is dependent on their formal ability to sell their labour power to whoever they choose. Freedom, therefore, is not an ‘ideal’, but the lived relationship of the worker to his conditions of existence. But this relationship is in an ‘imaginary’ mode, because it conceals the fact that the labourer

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has been exploited by the very act of selling his labour-power; or, in other words, it does not reveal the real relations of production. It is clear here that freedom is both real and imaginary. It is real because, it is the lived relationship of the worker to his conditions of existence. It is imaginary because the worker lives in relation to his conditions of existence in such a way (imaginary mode) that he can never simply recognise these conditions.\textsuperscript{14}

For a better understanding, we shall make use of Paul Hirst’s interpretation regarding the imaginaryness of the individual’s relationship to their conditions of existence. Paul Hirst introduces the notion of ‘as if’, in order to make the implications of Althusser’s concept of imaginaryness explicit. Individuals ‘live’ their relation to the conditions of existence ‘as if’ they were true. It is not the case that the subject simply thinks that his conditions of existence are true. It is not a matter of reflection on the part of individuals of their conditions of existence, but it is their relation to them. “The imaginary does not represent anything other than what it is, and it can not be false since it is not an idea or conception of things, but it is a part of social relations which has a definite effect. In living ‘as if’, subjects do not live in illusion, this ‘as if’ is the reality of their existence as subjects”.\textsuperscript{15}

The following points can be derived from the above discussion.

1. Ideology is the relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence.

2. The relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence is an ‘imaginary’ mode.

3. It is ‘imaginary’ because, individuals live the relation to their conditions of existence in such a way that they can not simply recognize the real nature of these conditions.

\textsuperscript{14}See Louis Althusser, \textit{For Marx}, p. 234.

\textsuperscript{15}Paul Hirst, ‘\textit{On Law and Ideology}’, p. 34-35.
4. The 'imaginary' does not mean 'falsity' or illusion, since it is the reality of individuals' existence as subjects.

It is clear that Althusser's position of ideology is different from the conventional sociologist position. In sociological approach, ideology is the (distorted) representation of the 'real', which exists independently, outside the realm of representation. According to Althusser, ideology does not represent anything outside its realm, precisely because 'it has no outside'. It is not something apart from real, which consists simply in reflecting it, but real in itself, as it is the lived relationship of the individuals to the 'real' (conditions of existence). The so called 'real' is not something isolated from individual's recognition structure, since individuals are always in their relation to it. Reality for them is their relationship to their conditions of existence. There is no end to this relationship. As ideology is the form in which men relate to their world, there is no end to ideology. 'Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indespensable to their historical respiration and life'.

Ideology is the necessary form, in which individuals 'live' their relation to the conditions of existence. It is not the case that individuals 'represent' something in an imaginary mode, since individuals are already in the imaginary relation (ideological) to their conditions of existence. Therefore, in Althusser's analysis, ideology does not represent anything outside itself. Or, in other words, ideology represents nothing but itself. To say that 'A' represents nothing but itself is to say that A does not represent at all. Ideology, therefore, is not a representation. Therefore, the question of truth and falsity, or of distortion and reality does not arise at all. Thus, it can be very well said that the conventional sociological position of ideology as the distorted representation of the real

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clearly dissapears in Althusser's analysis.

The relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence is not determined by the individuals; they are necessarily in the relation in such a mode that they can never recognize it. It amounts to saying that the place they occupy in the social totality, or the relationship they have to the totality of their social conditions of existence is outside their choice. Then, what does determine their relation to their conditions of existence?. Althusser's answer is the 'process' i.e., the totality which provides their conditions of existence. Subject is not an 'essential' category in the totality, but a constituted category. He is recruited or assigned by 'process' to have a 'space', a specific relationship. But, it is quite clear that Althusser does not mean, when he argues that the relationship of the subject to the totality is determined by the totality, that social totality is something independent of the subject. What he implies is that subject is not the essence, but the effect. It is not the origin or the author of the process but only a support to the process. As a support of the process the subject becomes a part of the totality. ".....Social totality is not a process constituted by a subject, and that subjects occupy a place in it other than origin or author''.\textsuperscript{18} Precisely, this is the underlying meaning of Althusser's concept of social totality as a 'process without a subject'.

Concept of over-determination

Does the above idea correspond to the deterministic thesis of the conventional Marxism, that the forms of subjectivity are determined by the objective social conditions?. Althusser's answer would be undoubtedely in the negative, because, as a critic of sociological model, he wishes to avoid the idea of a determinat base. He is quite concious

\textsuperscript{18} Paul Hirst, \textit{On Law and Ideology}, p. 33.
of the fact that, to agree with the determination thesis is to argue in favour of the base/superstructure model i.e., the superstructure is determined by the economic base structure of the society, (which would amount to denying his own theory of ideology). For resolving this difficulty, Althusser develops the theory of over-determination, which precisely says that social totality is the unity of a structured whole containing what can be called levels or instances which are distinct and “relatively autonomous”, and co-exist within this complex structural unity, articulated with one another according specific determination, fixed in the last instance by the level of instance of the economy”.\textsuperscript{19}

The three points implied in the above passage can be stated separately, for a distinct view of Althusser’s theory of over-determination.

1. Social totality cannot be simply described as a whole which is composed of two structures, superstructure and basestructure, — in which the former is determined by the latter, but it is a complex relation of \textit{structures}, levels or instances.

2. The different structures which constitute the complex social whole are neither totally independent nor totally ‘determined’, but they are levels or instances which are ‘relatively’ autonomous, yet co-exist within the complex structural unity.

3. Different levels or instances of the social whole are ‘over-determined’, or they are articulated with one another according to specific determination, fixed in the last instance by the level or instance of the economy.

In the sociological model of Marxism, we have seen that society is the totality of relations which can be divided into realms. One is the realm of ideological relations, i.e., legal, political, cultural etc., and the other is the realm of economic relation i.e., the

\textsuperscript{19}Louis Althusser and E. Balibar, \textit{Reading capital}, p. 97.
relations of production. Economic relations constitute the base structure of the society which determines or conditions the ideological superstructure. All forms of ideological relations, forms of social consciousness, i.e., legal, political, cultural in a social system are, therefore, ultimately determined by the economic infrastructure of the society. The whole system can be explained in terms of the relations of production which form the real foundation of the society. Althusser tries to reject this position by arguing that social totality can never be explained as a system composed of two structures which are related in terms of fixed determination. The relation between different structures in a social whole is not that of simple correspondance, but of a complex nature. Each structure — each set of social relations, determines and is determined by other relations. It is not the case that one is always determined by the other. The idea of determination can be replaced by the idea of ‘over-determination’, according to which different social relations co-exist in a social totality in the way in which they both determine and are determined by each other. The position which regards one set of relations as the real foundation and the other as superstructural is untenable, precisely because, in a social totality, everything which forms the inseparable part of the whole is real, ideology is as real as economy, and nothing can be thought of by abstracting it from other forms, levels or instances.

The above argument entails that the social totality can never be divided into different water-tight compartments. Different sets of social relations are inseparable parts of the social whole. They are not different structures, but levels or instances of the complex structural unity or of the social totality. Ideology, therefore, is an instance of the social totality. What is an instance?. Surely it stands for a ‘level’ of social totality where a specific practice is involved. For example, the legal system of every social set-up forms a
level of social totality in which a specific practice is involved. The law of property and the
law of contract, 20 constitute the legal system of capitalist mode of production, and forms
the level or the instance of that particular social totality. Legal system is inconceivable
without other instances, i.e., political, economic instances of the social totality. It is
articulated in social totality in association with other instances. This ‘association’ is not
in the form of ‘determination’, but in the form of ‘over-determination’, that each instance
is being determined by, and determines, the other instances in the social totality. The
form of this relation differs in each society, according to the way in which the different
practices are articulated in each social totality. Feudal social relations are different from
capitalist relations, precisely because the way in which different practices, i.e., legal,
political, economic, are articulated in the feudal social set-up is different from that of
capitalism. Therefore, ‘instance’ can be defined as “the way in which a specific practice
is articulated into the social totality”.21

Ideology is the instance of the social totality. An instance is related to other instances
in the totality, in the way in which it is both determined by, and determines the other
instances. This idea, that an element in a social whole is both ‘determined’ and deter-
minant is what Althusser mean by the concept of over-determination. We shall see more
clearly, how different elements are related in a social totality, with the help of concrete
examples.

Every mode of production necessarily presupposes the existence of a legal system,
which not merely justifies the established social set-up, but provides its conditions of
existence. Economy of any social formation can not exist without presupposing the

20See Louis Althusser, Reading capital, - p. 230.
21Paul Hirst, On Law and Ideology, p. 28.
existence of a legal system. As Althusser points out, the capitalist economy is founded upon a specific legal system; the basic elements of which are the *law of property* and the *law of contract*. The idea of a capitalist mode of production is just impossible without presupposing the two above mentioned laws, precisely because they provide its conditions of existence. They cannot be considered as the expressions of the economic infrastructure, or as the superstructural phenomena determined by the base structure. They are as real as the economy itself. They play the fundamental role in the capitalist social system, that the economic practice is impossible without presupposing them.

Let us again take the concept of freedom as an example. The liberal ideas like freedom and equality are most fundamental to the moral, political and legal value system which provide the ideological conditions of existence of capitalist economy. As Althusser points out, it is a concrete necessity for a capitalist to have a 'living faith' in liberal ideology, precisely because the whole economic structure of the capitalist mode of production depends on the freedom of the labourer to sell his labour power to whoever he chooses. In a society where the workers are constrained by feudal ties, the capitalist mode of production is just impossible. Freedom, therefore is not merely an 'ideal', or an expression of the capitalist economy, but the ideological presupposition of its very existence. Capitalism presupposes liberal ideology as its condition of existence.

So, different practices, i.e., legal, political, ideological, economic, and the instances through which they are articulated in the social totality are mutually dependent, and necessarily related in the way in which each presupposes the existence of others as its conditions of existence. The whole superstructure of ideological and political relations is necessarily required for any mode of production in order to exist as a specific social system, as a social totality. Economy can never be 'pure', abstracted from its superstructural —
legal ideological, political — conditions of existence. Conventional sociological approach therefore is inadequate because it fails to notice the phenomenon of over-determination of all the elements in a social totality by all others, and it divides the social totality into two abstract ‘realms’ — superstructure and base structure. Althusser argues that the dualistic theory of sociological model presupposes the philosophical materialist or empiricist hypothesis that everything mental (ideology) can be ultimately reduced to material (economy). Determinism implies reductionism and the only way to get rid off the fallacy of determinism in social theory is to accept the doctrine of over-determination.

It may be rightly pointed out that the whole of Althusser’s break from conventional Marxism lies at this point, i.e., in his theory of over-determination. But from a deeper perspective, it will become clear that the theory of overdetermination neither denies the primacy of the economy nor it asserts the autonomy of the superstructure. Althusser retains the primacy of the economy by arguing that social totality is a complex relationship of levels, or instances, i.e., political, ideological etc., fixed in the last instance by the level or instance of the economy. Obviously, any theoretical position which establishes the determinatory primacy of one element over other elements in a totality, is incapable of advancing the idea of the the autonomy of different elements. But, Althusser’s theory is not sociological reductionism. The vital significance that Althusser gives to the political and ideological superstructure, should not be overlooked. As Abercrombie comments, “Althusser’s concept of mode of production is a systematic attempt to establish both the independent significance of the superstructure and the primacy of the economy”.22 Althusser’s concept of social totality will be critically examined in the last part of this section. Now we shall move to the next important contribution of Althusser’s neo-positivist

22Nicholas Abercrombie, Class, structure and knowledge, p. 99.
scheme, i.e., the doctrine of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology.

I ideological knowledge and scientific knowledge

We have seen that, in Althusser’s view, individual’s relation to their conditions of existence is in an imaginary mode. Ideology represents this imaginary relationship. We have also seen that the nature of their relationship with their conditions of existence, or the imaginary modality of their very life process, is not determined by the individuals, but by the social totality. Subject is not the origin of the process, but a part of it, or an element in the totality. He is not prior to the process. He is already in the process. In other words, subjectivity is inconceivable apart from the process. Subject becomes the subject only in terms of his concrete existence as an element in the social totality. So ‘imaginarity’ of his relationship to the conditions of existence is not dependent on ‘subject’, but rather “the subject exists through the imaginary relation — in recognition it becomes a subject”.23 To conceive the subjectivity as something prior to the ‘imaginary’, according to Althusser, is to agree with the classical philosophical category of ‘pure subject’, as the essence, or as the author and origin of social process.

So, the very concept of subject implies the imaginary modality in which an individual lives. A subject is the subject who exists through the imaginary relation. The impossibility of conceiving the pure subject necessarily follows that every knowledge, form of recognition by the subject, is imaginary and therefore ideological. Pure knowledge by the subject is a mere abstraction, because subject can never be outside the ‘imaginary’. Ideology is the very nature of the life process of the subject. Since the imaginary relation of individuals to their conditions of existence is the foundation of ideology, there is no

end to ideology. All knowledge, forms of reflection or of recognition by the subject are ideological. Precisely, this is the idea behind Althusser's notion of ideological knowledge.

One may question Althusser's thesis of ideological knowledge by pointing out that it is not fundamentally different from the sociological relativistic position of knowledge, according to which all knowledge is biased towards the class interest of the knower, and therefore is ideological and relative. Relativism, as we had discussed earlier, unavoidably involves the self-negatory conclusion that there can be no absolute criteria for determining truth and falsity of any knowledge or systems of belief. Althusser was well aware of these theoretical difficulties, and therefore he tried to reject relativism outrightly by introducing the doctrine of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology. Althusser's answer to the above objection would be that such an objection can be levelled only when we presuppose that every knowledge is ideological. The notion of ideological knowledge, in Althusser's sense, does not imply that all knowledge is ideological, or there can be no knowledge which is free from the imaginary mode. It only implies that all knowledge by the subject is ideological or, there can be no knowledge by the subject which is free from the imaginary mode. So, knowledge which is not essentially by the subject, can be free from 'imaginary' and also from 'ideology'. Such knowledge is 'scientific knowledge'. Scientific knowledge is radically different from ideological knowledge, because the former is 'autonomous', whereas latter is relative. Ideological knowledge presupposes a subject, whereas scientific knowledge does not presuppose a subject but a 'process without a subject'. More clearly, knowledge in the former category is always by the subject, while in the latter, it is by the process — i.e., by science which is a process without a subject.

The above idea can be expressed in the following way:
Subject, in Althusser's sense, is inconceivable without the imaginary relation, as it exists necessarily in the 'imaginary'. Every thing by the subject is in the 'imaginary'. Ideological knowledges are nothing but the forms of recognition that the subject has in the imaginary relation. They can not just go beyond the 'imaginary' precisely because of their inability to transcend the realm of subjectivity. They are necessarily closed, and "are condemned to repeat the closure which constitutes the recognition structure. They are condemned to repeat the forms of the imaginary in which the subject exists and lives as a subject".\textsuperscript{24} The feature of ideology, therefore, is its closed structure which does not permit any development beyond its structure. The way in which questions are asked in a closed system of ideology is simply to confirm the assumptions of the system. The problems which are tackled in the system are condemned to be inside the system, as they are not permitted to transcend the system. Science, on the other hand, Althusser argues, has an open structure, because it does not represent the forms of recognition which constitute the imaginary relation in which the subject lives. The system which

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid. p. 37.
does not represent the forms of the imaginary, in Althusser's sense, lies outside the realm of subjectivity, or in other words, it goes beyond subjectivity. Science transcends the imaginary, and therefore it goes beyond subjectivity. Thus, Althusser calls science as a process without a subject.

We shall have a close and distinct view of Althusser's conception of science as the process without a subject, as it is crucial to his doctrine of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology. The notion of 'process' corresponds to the notion of 'social totality' where the subjects are not 'essential' categories. Subjects are not the authors of the social totality; they act as agents of the different social practices in the historical process of production and reproduction. Social totality can not be reduced to the intersubjective relations.\textsuperscript{25} Because it is not constituted by the subjects. Subjects occupy a place in the totality, or act in the totality as the agents of different social practices. Subject becomes the part of the social totality (process) not as the author of it, but as a support of this process. In short, subjects are not constitutive, but they are to be considered as agents. They are not the essences, but the support of the process.

'Constitutive subject' is primarily a philosophical category, which, according to Althusser, has been used in the idealistic schemes for denoting the abstract concepts like, pure spirit, pure consciousness etc. 'Subject' in idealist philosophy is essentially 'pure', and free from all the determinations of the external world. It exists primarily as a pure internal substance, or as the transcendental ground of all experiences. In other words, idealism conceives subject as "Origin, Essence, and Cause; and responsible in its internality for all the determinations of the external 'object', of which it is said to be the internal subject".\textsuperscript{26} Althusser rejects this conception by arguing that individuals are not

\textsuperscript{25}Cf. Ibid - p. 33.
\textsuperscript{26}Louis Althusser, "Remark on the category: process without a subject or goal (s)", Essays on Ideology,
constitutive subjects; they do not constitute the social totality, but rather, they work in the social totality not freely, but as the agents of different social practices. They are not ‘free’, because the role which they occupy in the social whole is not determined by them, but by the totality. They act in the social process, and as a support of this process they become a part of the totality. So, the notion of ‘constitutive subject’, according to Althusser, is a philosophical myth.

Althusser broadens his attack on the idealist conception of subject as the pure essence by arguing that ‘subject-form’ is actually the form of historical existence of every individual of every agent of social practices.\(^\text{27}\) An individual, in a particular social system has a specific subject-form which has been imposed on him by the system. For example the imposed subject-form of the individuals in a slave-owning system is different from the subject-form of the proletariat in a capitalist system. In other words, the subject-form which has been imposed on the individuals in a slave-owning system is different from the subject-form which capitalist system imposes on each of its individuals. ‘The agent-individuals thus always act in the subject-form, as subjects.’\(^\text{28}\) Subjectivity is not something above, or beyond the system, or something unaffected by the system. On the other hand, it is formed by the system. Individuals act in a system, in a specific ‘subject-form’ which has been imposed by the system. This subject-form enables each individual to occupy a specific role in the process, and to support the process. As the support of the process they become the part of the process. Therefore, ‘subject’ is not the essence but the support of the process.

Now we shall come back to our discussion on science and scientific knowledge. What

\(^{27}\)Cf. Ibid. p. 134.

\(^{28}\)Ibid. p. 134-135.
does it mean when Althusser says that science is a process without a subject?. We have seen that, Althusser's notion of the 'process without a subject' positively implies the conception of 'subjects' as the supports of the process. This conception explicitly implies the negation of the 'constitutive subject'. Althusser's view of science is founded on this non-idealistic theory of subject, two fundamental themes of which are: one, subject is an agent and the support of the process, two, reality (totality) is a process where no essential or constitutive subjects are involved. It is quite natural when we claim that no essential subjects are involved in the field of science, that one may raise some doubts basing on common sense, like 'what is the status of a scientist?, and 'what is the nature of scientific discoveries?' etc.

Althusser's answer to these possible doubts would be as follows 1) Scientist is the support of the process called science, not the author of it. 2) Scientific discoveries do not belong to a 'subject', since there are no essential subjects involved in the process, but they belong to the process. The scientists are related to the process called science in such a way that the former acts in the latter, and as supporters of the process scientists become the part of the process. It naturally follows that, if 'subject' in the field of science is not the author of the process, then the scientific discoveries do not belong to the 'subject', but they belong to the totality - the process, of which subject is an element. Again, if it is admitted that subjects are the support of the process, and as support they become the inseparable part of the process, we have to agree that the category of subject has meaning only in the process. It has no meaning outside the process, because it exists as the element of the process, or it has reality only as the support of the process. To be a subject is to be a support of the process. So, the discoveries in the field of science belong only to the process, because there is no subject outside or beyond the process.
Scientific knowledge presupposes the process, rather than a subject. Ideological knowledge, as we have found, presupposes a subject who lives necessarily in an imaginary mode. Imaginariness is the foundation of ideology. All forms of recognition, forms of thought or of reflection by the subject, therefore are necessarily ideological. They can not transcend the imaginariness, as they can never go beyond subjectivity. Ideological knowledge, as Althusser argues is necessarily 'closed'. Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, is open, because it does not presuppose a subject, and therefore, it does not represent the forms of recognition by the subject. In other words, it lies completely outside the realm of subjectivity. Precisely, this is what Althusser implies when he says that there is an epistemological break between ideology and science. Science comes into existence, Althusser observes, through the epistemological break, i.e., by breaking the space of recognition, the imaginary, or the realm of subjectivity. "This process (science) begins with a critique of the forms of recognition, and goes beyond subjectivity and the imaginary, so that, because it is a process without a subject, it transcends the imaginary relation and therefore transcends closure".  

It is quite clear that, by introducing the doctrine of the epistemological distinction between science and ideology Althusser offers a theoretical solution to the problem of relativism. We have observed that, in the conventional sociological version of Marxism where the doctrine of the class determination of knowledge has been accepted as the methodological ground for analysing ideology, relativism is an unavoidable consequence, that, to argue that knowledge is determined by the class interest of the knower, is to argue that every knowledge is relative, since everybody belongs to a class and has class-interests. Relativism involves the self negatory conclusion that there are no criteria for

determining truth and falsity of any piece of knowledge, including those of the propositions of the theory which advocates the relativity of knowledge. Althusser offers a solution to overcome this theoretical difficulty.

For him there is a branch of knowledge which is not relative, i.e., scientific knowledge. Science, in direct contrast to ideology, is an autonomous practice. It is a process where no essential subjects are involved. Scientific knowledge does not represent the forms of recognition. It, on the other hand, breaks that. It comes into existence through the radical break, from the space of recognition or from the realm of subjectivity. It is completely outside the realm of subjectivity, or rather it is free from the imaginary. It is this break makes science an autonomous practice.

The science - ideology distinction is crucial not only in assessing Althusser's contributions to Marxist epistemology, but also to have a factual understanding of the peculiar nature of Althusser's reading of Marxism. What makes Althusser's reading peculiar, or characteristically different from that of conventional Marxist's? The answer is simple. Althusser's reading is not merely interpretative, but reconstructive. The programme of reconstruction is supposed to be consisting in rejecting the sociologistic and reductionist mode of analysis of social phenomena dominant in classical Marxist theories. Positively speaking, Althusser introduces a new Marxism which consists, not in providing new solutions to the classic problems, but in introducing a new set of problems and, also in providing a new mode of analysis (scientific) to these problems. For example, Althusser's conception of ideology as the structure of social relations, in contrast to the classic sociological theory of ideology, raises a new set of problems, i.e., "the problems of the investigation of a definite area of social relations which is relatively autonomous from the
other social relations and which has significant political consequences". Althusser calls his method, or his version of Marxism as ‘scientific’. The doctrine of ‘scientific Marxism’, as he claims, presupposes a radical distinction between the two phases of Marx’s thought, early and latter. The ‘early’ Marx is Hegelian, that is, the works written by young Marx are thoroughly under the influence of Hegelian metaphysics and therefore, they can be called as ‘ideological’. The latter Marx is scientific in the sense that the later stage of Marx’s thought can be brought out as the result of a methodological transition, or of an ‘epistemological break’ from Hegelian essentialist tradition. This transition is epistemological, because it breaks the space of recognition, the realm of ideology, and creates the possibility of openness, i.e., the science. Understanding the true nature of Marxism is impossible without taking into account the epistemological break in the thought of Marx. The Hegelian interpreters of Marxism, according to Althusser, fail to perceive this break, and they confuse the essentialist notions of negativity, human essence, alienation etc., with the scientific notions of later Marxism. The wrong synthesis of Hegelian and Marxist categories, Althusser observes, is due to these confusions.

There are lot of theoretical difficulties with this position which would become clear when we trace out the developments of the Hegelian interpretations of Marxism. Such interpretations are fundamentally based on the Hegelian categorical structure that Marx retains throughout his intellectual life. We have discussed the logical structure of Marx’s thought in the first chapter which we found as very much Hegelian in character. The discussion in the next chapter would be a re-assertion of the Hegelian foundation of Marxism, which would obviously be critical of Althusser’s doctrine of ‘discontinuity’ or break in Marx’s thought. Before that, we shall critically evaluate Althusser’s claims,

30Cf. Ibid. p. 39.
particularly his major claim that he has developed a new Marxist theory which escapes
the fallacies of sociological reductionism. A critical study would enable us to perceive
the true nature of Althusser's neo-positivist enterprise.

Critique of Althusser

In this section, we do not attempt to criticise Althusser's theoretical scheme in a
general perspective, as it is out of our concern. What matters to our interest here,
is Althusser's claim that the methodology which has been accepted in his neo-Marxist
scheme is anti-empiricist and anti-sociologist. As we have seen earlier, Althusser's major
attempt is to overcome the deterministic - reductionistic fallacies of classical Marxism.
This has been made possible by him through the introduction of the three fundamental
doctrines, namely 1) Doctrine of ideology as the representation of the 'lived' relationship
of the individuals to their conditions of existence. 2) Doctrine of over-determination i.e.,
the different structures in the social totality are 'overdetermined' by each other. 3) Doc-
trine of the 'epistemological break', i.e., the epistemological distinction between science
and ideology. Here, in this section, we shall critically evaluate these doctrines, and try to
bring out their fundamental presuppositions, which are epistemologically oriented towards
empiricism. Precisely, the objective of this critical study is to place Althusser within the
empiricist tradition of Marxism. But it will be too simple to argue that Althusser fol-
lows the same mode of analysis which has been followed by sociological Marxist's like
Manneheim, by overlooking the revolutionary implications of his theoretical scheme and
the new dimentions he gave to the theory of ideology, which turned Marxism away from
the simple deterministic modes of underlying ideology. What we intend to argue is that
Althusser's scheme is revolutionary in the sense that it rejected the simple determination
theories of classical Marxism, and it developed Marxism into a more complex theory,
but still it is not something unconventional, precisely because, the very methodological ground upon which his new scheme has been built is empiricist. So, Althusser’s theory can be rightly placed within the tradition of positivist Marxism, and also with respect of the dynamic contributions that Althusser made to overcome the reductionistic fallacies of positivistic Marxism, it can be named as neo-positivism.

**Ideology and representation**

We shall begin with the two theses which have been introduced by Althusser to refute the empiricist concept of ideology as the false representation of the reality, namely 1) ideology is not reflection in some realm of ‘ideas’; it is a social practice. 2) What is represented in ideology is not the real relations, but individuals relation to the real relations. The first thesis involves the idea of the materiality of ideology, according to which, ideas are not spiritual entities which consist merely in reflecting the real, but they are real in themselves, as they exist concretely in the form of objective social practices. The second thesis embodies Althusser’s rejection of the empiricist notion reflection/real or subject/object duality which, according to him, necessarily follows the deterministic thesis i.e., ideology is determined by the objective reality. Apparently, these two theses provides a characteristically different mode of analysis which would enable us to perceive ideas, not as isolated entities but as part of social practices, as objective social factors, and by this, to go against the compartmentalisation of reality into two structures, subjective and objective, (idea and Matter). But, do they really alter the whole problematic of matter/idea or object/subject dualism of the classical empiricism?. Do they really indicate the meaning that ideology (idea) is concretely real in the sense in which the material relations (Matter) are real, that the former is not epi-phenomenal or something always determined by the latter?. An affirmative answer to these questions
would undoubtedly enable us to agree with Althusser’s claim that his scheme is anti-empiricist in the strict sense of the term. But, that is not the case here, when we analyse Althusser’s concepts logically and get realised that they also retain certain empiricist categories which entail the classical subject/object structure of knowledge. This retention is apparently visible in Althusser’s definition of ideology itself. Ideology, Althusser argues, is the representation of individual’s relationship to their conditions of existence. In other words ideology represents the relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence. Obviously there is a separation between the process of representation/representation and the thing represented or reflected. In the epistemological sense, ideology which ‘represents’, and the relationship which is represented belong to two different realms.

Also, in Althusser’s observation, the nature of ideology is dependent on the nature of the ‘relationship’. The individuals, living in feudal relationships differ in their ideological ‘practices’ from the individuals of capitalist system of relations. Evidently, the process of representation is determined by the objects represented. More concretely, the ideology which represents individual’s relationship, is determined by what is represented, i.e., the relationships. Ideology, in this sense, becomes the epi-phenomenal reality, which exists as a realm of images and expressions of something more fundamental than itself, of something which is the source of these reflections and images, i.e., the determinant base.

We shall explain the above point some more clearly in the following way. Suppose ‘A’ is the representational mode, and ‘B’ is the ‘reality’. From the statement “what is represented in ‘A’ is always ‘B’, it logically follows that ‘A’ is nothing but the representation of ‘B’ and changes in the forms of ‘A’ (A¹, A², A³) correspond to the changes in the forms of ‘B’ (B¹, B², B³). (To say that ideology always represents the ‘relationships’ is to say that different forms of ideology correspond to the different forms of relationships).
If this necessary and universal relationship of correspondance is admitted, then there is nothing wrong in assuming that A is determined by ‘B’. The only way to avoid the idea of determination is either to deny the universality and necessity of the relationship of correspondance or to argue that both A and B are identical. Rejecting the necessity and the universality of the relationship between A and B amounts to the denial of the first premiss itself, i.e., what is represented in A is always B. The only possibility left for Althusserian’s to save their theory from the charges of determinism, is to argue that A and B are identical. Again, the problem arises that if they are dicentical, then why should the category of representation be inserted to signify the relationship between A and B?. If A and B are identical, and A represents nothing outside itself, then it amounts to say that ‘A’does not ‘represent’ at all. By inserting the category of ‘representation’,\(^{31}\) to signify the relationship between ideology and the individual’s relationship to their conditions of existence, Althusser retains the subject/object structure of empiricist epistemological tradition. “The subject (whether through experience or esoteric knowledge) recognises the represented in or through its representations. The representation becomes an image of the represented, a reflection of the object (motivated by or measured against the object)”.\(^{32}\)

The consequence of admitting the category of representation is to throw overboard Althusser’s concept of the materiality of ideology. The thesis of the materiality of ideology is originally meant to destroy the classical conception of ideology, i.e., as the superstructural phenomenon composed of ideas, images, mental reflections of something ‘objectively’ real. The so called ideas, according to this thesis, are necessarily inscribed into the objective


\(^{32}\)Ibid. p. 69.
social practices, and they exist 'within the material existence of an ideological apparatus'. They do not belong to a spiritual realm, a realm of abstract mental reflections; rather, they are to be understood as concrete social practices. Ideology, in this sense, is not the representation of the real, but real in itself, as the Matter/idea distinction is 'untenable' in describing different instances of the social totality. It is not the abstract reflection of the concrete social reality, but itself a reality - a concrete social practice, as the abstract/concrete distinction is out of question. But the concept of representation, as it entails the possibility that the 'represented' determines the process of representation and, therefore, that the representaiton becomes the 'image' or the reflection of the represented, practically denies the essence of the concept of the materiality of ideology. Obviously, the reflection is that which is necessarily dependent on the object reflected. Ideology, being placed under the category of representation, becomes identical with the realm of reflections or images which is not real in the sense in which the object reflected or represented is real. In short, ideology 'ceases to be' a social practice or a concrete form of social relationship, and becomes an image whose form is externally given, or merely a form of recognition.  

Althusser's argument that ideology is not the representation of the reality - i.e., the material conditions of existence of the individuals, but the representation of individuals relationship to their conditions of existence, do not, in any way, alter the classical subject/object structure of knowledge. Certainly, it provides a new dimension to the problem, by shifting the attention from the simple idea/reality structure to a more complicated representation/relationship structure. Obviously, what has been altered here is not the subject/object structure (representation/represented structure) of knowledge,
but the structure of the ‘represented’. In the simple theory of classical empiricism, what is represented in ideology is the material conditions of existence, whereas, in Althusser’s scheme it is ‘individual’s relationship to their conditions of existence’. In the former case, the ‘represented’ is a bare, dead object, while in the latter, it is ‘dynamic’. But, as far as the manner in which this ‘object’ is related to ‘ideology’ is concerned, both the former and latter do not differ, as both of them share the empiricist concept that knowledge presupposes the subject/object, or representation/represented structure, in other words, the ‘recognition structure’.

The theory which entails the ‘recognition structure’ of knowledge, i.e., the concept that knowledge is the experience of the subject of the object through ‘recognition’, leads to the sociologist mode of analysis in which the forms of subjectivity can be ultimately reduced to the objective social conditions. If knowledge is the experience of the subject, and the experience presupposes the representation/represented structure, then, as we found, the represented, the ‘object’, gets an autonomous status, in terms of which all the forms of its ‘representations’ can be explained. Obviously, in such a framework, knowledge becomes epi-phenomenal, that it becomes absolutely dependent on, or determined by the ‘object’ which exist independently, as merely an entity knowable to the subject through ‘recognition’. In conventional sociologism, the reductionist mode of analysis can be plainly observed, not as the remote consequence of its procedure, but as the very methodological ground of the whole procedure, because, the epistemological foundation of sociologism has been provided by the empiricist theory. We have seen, when we discussed the methodology of the sociology of knowledge, especially of Mannheim’s, that ideology according to sociologist Marxists is the distorted representation of the reality and that every knowledge is ideological in so far as knowledge is the experience of the
subject and all ‘subjects’ are biased towards their respective ‘class’ positions. Society, as they conceived, is the objective reality which determines the place of the subject within it. The experience of the subject is conditioned by its place, i.e., the class position in the society, and consequently every knowledge is biased towards the class positions of the subjects and therefore is necessarily ideological. This reductionist mode of analysis has been challenged by Althusser in a through going manner by introducing a relatively new mode of analysis of social relations which has provided the foundation for a new brand of Marxism i.e., ‘structural Marxism’. The central aspect of his structural Marxism is the substitution of the ‘essential subjects’ with the “constituted subjects”.

‘Constituted subject’ and sociologism

Althusser argues, that the idea of ‘subject’ as the ‘given’ category is a philosophical myth. Subjects do not exist prior to the social relations as the authors or the origin of any reality. The concept of human subject as the ‘pure ego’ endowed with an experience of the real, involves two absurd presuppositions, namely 1) Reality is something ‘out there’, existing objectively outside the ‘subject’ and 2) knowledge is the experience of the ‘subject’, of the real (object). Althusser’s rejection of empiricist and sociologist mode of analysis consists in eliminating the two above mentioned presuppositions from the Marxist scheme. This elimination is made possible primarily by assuming two contrary positions, namely 1) subject is not the essential category, but constituted. 2) The reality (subject’s conditions of existence) is not presented directly to experience, as the individuals are related to their conditions of existence (reality) in an imaginary mode. In short, the two doctrines, i.e., the doctrine of the ‘constituted’ subject and the doctrine of imaginariness provide the ground for Althusser’s break from empiricist and sociologist

34See the discussion on Mannheim’s Theory, Chapter II, p. 56-63.
mode of analysis and for the construction of his new scheme, which is called structural Marxism. But in a deep perspective, it can be pointed out that these two doctrines themselves involve certain assumptions which are, in a demonstrable way, empiricist and also sociologist. It can be shown clearly that Althusser’s position also is methodologically oriented towards the reductionist mode of analysis, and thus, in a broad sense, can not be claimed as anti-empiricist or anti-sociologist.

In contrast to the idealistic conception, Althusser argues that subject is not an ‘essential’ category but a ‘constituted’ category. All the idealistic theories, according to him, presuppose the category of subject as the starting point, the pure origin from which the social categories can be derived. Subject, thus, is said to be the author of social relationships, and these social relationships are constitutive of the social system, i.e., the totality. In other words, social totality, according to idealistic theories, can be reduced to inter subjective relationships. Althusser reverses the whole procedure by giving primacy to the social totality i.e., the process without a subject, and placing all the categories within it as the elements which are over-determined by each other. Thus, subject becomes a derivative category constituted by the social relationships; these relationships being constituted by the totality. The category of constitutive subject gets dissolved and the category of constituted subject takes its place. The conception of the subject as the author gets replaced with the conception of the subject as the element in the social totality. The whole idea involved in Althusser’s methodological reversal of the idealistic procedure can be illustrated more clearly in the following way
Social totality constitute a definite form of life, i.e., a form of relationship, through which alone the subject exists. This ‘form of life’ as we found, is in an imaginary modality because it does not reveal the real conditions of existence, but individual’s relation to their conditions of existence. This is to say that what is represented in the form of life is individual’s relationship to their conditions of existence. As the individuals are necessarily in the relationship to their condition of existence, they can not just stay away from the imaginary modality of living. They exist through it, act in it and become part of the totality. The very ‘subject-form’ of the individual is constituted by the form of life, i.e., the imaginary modality of relationship through which alone the individuals exist. Or, rather, the ‘subject-form’ is imposed on each individual by the social relation in such a way that by assuming that form the individual becomes the part of the system, and as the part of the system it becomes the support of it. “Ideological social relations.....impose the subject-form on each agent-individual. The agent-individuals always act in the subject-form, as subjects.”

According to Althusser, the social totality constitutes subjects through the process called interpellation. Ideology interpellates concrete individuals

as subjects. The subject-form therefore is that which is imposed on the individual by the totality through the ideological relations. Subjects necessarily act in the subject-form, and become the supporting element of the totality.³⁶

The agent-individual, therefore, is always within the 'subject-form' which has been imposed on it by the system. Obviously, the role of action of the individual in the totality is completely outside the choice of the individual; it is determined by the social totality. Just as an element in a system has no meaning outside the system or apart from the role it occupies in the system, the subject is what it is only in the totality. It is a meaningless category outside the totality. Subject therefore is constituted subject. It can be identified with its role i.e., the role of a supporting element in the totality, which is determined by the factors outside the realm of his subjectivity. Precisely, Althusser wishes to say that it is the totality which forms subjects or, in other words, the forms of subjectivity can be ultimately reduced to the totality. It is quite clear here that the dissolution of the category constitutive Subject presupposes the method of reductionism, certainly, not in the simplistic manner as with the case of sociological Marxists like Mannheim, but in a more subtle, and hence complex manner.

In conventional sociological mode of analysis, it is plain that the forms of subjectivity are the effects of the ground reality, i.e., the society. Society is conceived as a system of places or class positions. It is the primary determinant of the subjectivity or, the concrete base of all the forms of subjectivity. Because it creates the place, the social position from which experience is generated. Knowledge, in sociologist account, can be identified with subject’s experience of the real. As the experience is conditioned by the class positions of the subject, all the forms of knowledge, viz., ideas, concepts, patterns of thought and

theories are ‘biased’ and therefore are false or distorted. This distorted representation, i.e., the false knowledge of the real determined by the position of the subject in the real, is called ideology. All the forms of subjectivity then are ideological and therefore are reducible to the class positions of the subjects, which are determined by the society. Althusser modifies this version by arguing that subjectivity is not a pure form, but it is to be understood in terms of the subject-form which is imposed on each individual by the ideological social relations. It is to be understood in terms of the subject-form which is ‘constituted’ by the social structure — the ground reality. There is nothing wrong in arguing that the ground which constitutes has a primacy over the effects constituted. This primacy is, certainly a determinatory primacy, because the role of action of subject is absolutely determined by the ‘ground’. So, the determined/determinant structure can be very well observed in Althusser’s scheme. certainly, not in the conventional sense in which the former is abstract and the later is concrete, but at least in the sense that former is the effect of something more concrete than itself.

The view of human subject as a constituted category does not, in any way, alter the sociological mode of analysis, but on the other hand it reasserts it. The central presupposition of sociological approach is that the social relations can never be reduced to the realm of intra personal relations, but instead they are to be viewed as objective structures independent of the human subject. The role of subject in the social formation, according to the sociological analysis in general, is not of the nature of the origin of structures, but, precisely, of the nature of the product of the structures. That is to say that subject is the ‘effect’, and the ground or the structure which constitutes this effect has the causal priority; it has the status of a determinant base. In Althusser’s account, the constitutive ground is the mode of production, the social totality. The structure
of the mode of production produces a system of relationships which imposes a definite subject-form on each agent-individual, and, thereby constitute the ‘subject’. Thus, it can be rightly maintained that Althusser’s theory does not alter sociologism; it fundamentally presupposes the methodology of the sociological approach. It presents it in a relatively novel form, which we brand as neo-positivism.

‘Over-determination’ and determinism

The aim of Althusser’s neo-positivist scheme is to revive the sociological model of Marxism on a more secure ground. Central to this project is an opposition to any form of philosophical analysis which assumes the subject as its starting point. Social totality is not a system constituted by the subject, but is an objective reality — a process without a subject. Instead of considering the way in which social reality is constructed out of the actions of individuals, we should look at the manner in which subjects are constituted by society. Such a programme, as we found, necessarily involves the effect/cause structure, or the base/superstructure model which more or less defines the sociological Marxism, the central theme of which is that the superstructure is determined by the economic base structure of the society. It is true that Althusser does not favour the simple determination theory of conventional Marxism as his introduction of the doctrine of over-determination is intended to replace it. But, in a deep perspective, it can be pointed out that Althusser’s thesis of over-determination does not alter the principle of economic determinism, but it makes it more sophisticated. The concept of over-determination makes the base/superstructure relationship complex, by providing autonomy to the superstructure and, at the same time, retaining the primacy of the economy. The primacy of the economy is established by the concept of ‘determination in the last instance’, and the autonomy of the superstructure by the concept of ideology as the condition of existence
of the base.

Althusser argues that the superstructure is not merely the reflection of the base-structure, but, rather, it is the condition of its existence. Economic relations, in every social totality, presuppose certain ideological relations as the conditions of their peculiar existence. For example, in the capitalist mode of production, the elements of the economy, viz., the labourer, the means of production, and the non-labourer, are combined in such a way that the "non-labourer is the owner either of the means of production or labour power, or both, and is thus enabled to appropriate the surplus product". 37 Althusser calls this particular relation of elements, as 'relation of property'. What enables the non-laboures in the relation of property to appropriate the product is the 'legal system' which is implied in the economic structure itself. In other words, the relation of property, or the economic relations in the capitalist mode of production, presupposes certain kind of legal relations, through which alone they can exist. It is not the case that legal system reflects the economy, or the superstructure merely represents the base structure. Superstructure serves as the condition of existence of the economy. The conception of a pure economy is impossible, as every economic relations are always associated with certain legal, political and ideological structures. "...The relations of production cannot therefore be thought in their concept while abstracting from their specific super-structural conditions of existence". 38

Precisely, this is the central idea of Althusser's conception of over-determination.

Different relations, viz., economic, political, ideological, do not form different water-tight

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37 Nicholas Abercrombie, *Class, structure and knowledge*, p. 96.
38 Louis Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading capital*, p. 177.
compartments, but they constitute various instances in the social totality, which are over-determined by each other. Ideology is not the 'reflection' which is always determined by what is reflected. It has a concrete effect on the economy, as it provides the conditions of existence of the economy. As an instance in the social whole, it has an autonomous status but, as Althusser insists, this autonomy is a relative autonomy, because it cannot exist in absolute independence from the economy. It is fixed in the last instance by the level or instance of the economy.

The thesis that the ideology is the condition of existence of the economy does not in any way mean that ideology is primary, because that would definitely result in a position where the whole conception of the base — superstructure model would be upside down. Obviously, Althusser does not want to say that the legal system can be claimed as having causal primacy over the economy. Legal system, in a specific social totality serves as the condition of existence of the economy but, ultimately, the economy specifies what form the conditions take. For example, a particular legal system which enables the labourer to possess the product of his labour power does not serve the purpose of the economy of capitalism. Capitalist economy needs a legal system which involves the relation (property relation) where the non-labourer owns the product of the labour power. So, the form of its 'condition of existence', i.e., the nature of the ideological relations, is determined by the economy itself. Therefore, the ideological conditions are 'fixed' in the last instance by the level or the instance of the economy. It is clear that, in stressing the idea of the determination in the last instance by the economy, Althusser is at risk of disposing of a principle which more or less defines the sociological model of Marxism i.e., the principle of the primacy of the economy.

The whole idea of Althusser's principle of over-determination can be summarised
as follows: Every economy must have superstructural forms. Superstructural forms, viz., ideological, political instances, are not merely the 'reflections' of the economy, but, they have a concrete effect on the economy. The economy can not be thought of in abstraction from its superstructural forms. Ultimately, the economy is primary, because, all other instances in the social totality are fixed in the last instance by the level of the economy. Certainly, this conception modifies the simple-determination theory of conventional Marxism where ideology has been treated merely as a passive reflection of the economic-base. Althusser assigns a kind of autonomy to the ideology by treating it as a relatively free instance in the social totality, and thereby, a concrete form, in which it can be claimed to have a specific effectivity on the economy. So, Althusser's theory can be considered as the modified version of the sociological Marxism. Surely, his theory does not alter the basic presuppositions of the sociological Marxism such as the ideas of base-superstructural model, and the primacy of the economy, but retains them. Therefore, it can be very well maintained that Althusser is not an anti-sociologist thinker; his scheme is not against sociologism, but it is a new brand of sociologism.

Science-ideology distinction: A positivist mode of theorising

Relativism is one of the unavoidable consequences of any kind of sociological method. The theory of social determination of knowledge inevitably results in treating ideology either as a body of ideas systematically biased towards the interests of a particular social class, or as an imaginary relationship of the individuals to their conditions of existence (where what is represented is not the reality, but individual's relationship to the reality). In both the views, knowledge is something determined by the position of the subject in the society, and therefore, is necessarily relative. To argue that every knowledge is determined by the class position of the knower, or by the relationship of the knower to
his conditions of existence is to argue that every knowledge is relative, since everybody belongs to a class and has class position or, since every subject lives necessarily in a 'relationship' — relationship to his conditions of existence. As we had seen earlier, the relativistic theory logically follows the self-negatory conclusion that there are no criteria for determining truth and falsity of any proposition including those of the propositions of the theory which advocates the relativity of knowledge.

If every knowledge is ideological and relative, then what would be the nature of Marxist theory?. This has been a troubling problem for all sociologist interpreters of Marxism. Althusser offers a solution to this problem by introducing the doctrine of the epistemological break between science and ideology, and thereby, establishing Marxism as a science free from ideology. The basic tenet of Althusser's position is that scientific knowledge is produced by the totality — the process without a constitutive subject. It lies outside the realm of subjectivity, completely beyond the 'recognition-structure' of the subject whereas ideology is knowledge by the subject. Scientific knowledge is free from ideology.

If it is admitted that science lies outside the realm of ideology, then it follows that scientific knowledge is not superstructural or, is free from the determination of any other practice than itself. Science does not presuppose a subject, and therefore, knowledge in science is not by the subject; it is not produced through the process of recognition. So, scientific knowledge is not of the nature of 'perceptual knowledge', in which the subject recognises the external object and that the validity of the knowledge can be tested against the outside world. An alternative way of putting this is to say 'knowledge of the external world', presupposes a perceiving subject and a perceivable object, and thereby, a verifying procedure — i.e., testing the knowledge against the object. But,
since scientific knowledge does not presuppose a knowing subject, and an object known, it does not involve the procedure of testing the knowledge against the object which lies outside the system of knowledge. It has no outside in the sense in which the perceptual knowledge has an outside (object of perception). Science, therefore, as Althusser assumes, has a 'radical inwardness' in which the security of knowledge is defined by the internal procedures of vigour and systematicity, not by efficacy in dealing with the real world.\(^3^9\)

Althusser derives from this that there is a radical distinction, an epistemological break between scientific knowledge and ideological knowledge. Ideological knowledge, as it is of the nature of representation presupposes the subject/object structure; its constructions are based on social and practical experience in the real world. Science has nothing to do with practical observation, precisely because, it has no subject/object structure; it is a process without a subject. Science is autonomous and its concepts do not have any connection with those based on observation. In other words, science works on concepts, not on facts or objects. These concepts form the system — the objective internal reference system — through which alone the scientific theories can be viewed. It is purely an objective system, where there is no subject involved, as the author or origin of any concept or theory. Science, in this sense, is not a human practice; but it is to be understood as an objective structure of concepts where human-beings are only agents "who act out the role that is set for them by the concepts".\(^4^0\)

Althusser's concept of science as the process without a subject is to be understood on the basis of what we have already noted of the sociological idea of how the subject in society is to be viewed. Human beings, in Althusser's observation, do not have any

\(^3^9\)Nicholas Abercrombie, Class, structure and knowledge, p. 91.

\(^4^0\)Jack Lindsay, The crisis in Marxism, p. 93.
'creative' role in history; they do not make history. They act in history according to the roles assigned to them by the sturcture of relations in the social formation. The category of subject has no 'meaning' apart from its role in the total system. So there is no constitutive subject, but only constituted subject remains. There is no producing subject, but only the product of the process of social formation. In the field of science, subject does not exist as the creative source, but it remains as the effect of the process. Therefore, it can be very well maintained that, in Althusser's analysis, only the creative subject is removed, but the created subject remains. What has been altered by Althusser is not the subject-object analysis, but the rationalist mode of analysis in which subject is prior to the object. He has adopted an empiricist and sociologistic mode of analysis in which subject is an 'effect', not the source.

Althusser's analysis is epistemologically empiricistic, precisely because, it conceives 'subject' as a derivative category, an effect constituted of the objective ground. The 'effect' is seperated from the ground in such a manner that the latter gets the epistemological primacy over the former. This distinction corresposds to the classical empiricist problem of subject-object duality, also to the crude materialist thesis, i.e., all that is subjective — ideas, consciousness etc., can be ultimately reduced to matter, to the material social circumstances. So, it can be very well argued that Althusser's refutation of subjectivism is pregnent with the empiricist-materialist theoretical presuppositions, which have been rejected by Marx himself through the introduction of the concept of praxis. Althusser's theory fails to grasp the praxis element, the active interpenetration of the 'subjective' and the 'objective', and thereby, it results in treating them as two discrete, ahistorical categories.
Althusser’s claim that the social structure has to be understood as an objective system independent of subject, shares the methodological presuppositions of sociologicism. Every sociological approach, as we discussed earlier, starts with the basic assumption that the social reality can never be reduced to the realm of inter-subjective relationship, but it is to be understood as an objective structure independent of the human subject. Empiricism provides the epistemological ground for sociologicism, because, the conception of ‘subject’ as the product of social circumstances is the methodological necessity for the construction of every sociological theory. Without presupposing the ground/effect duality, which necessarily corresponds to the object/subject duality of classic empiricism, the construction of a sociological theory (in the positivist sense) is just impossible. Althusser’s construction of social theory depends primarily on the sociologist notion of subject, as the effect, not as the essence. His project of eliminating subject from the analysis of social structure therefore is not radically different from the sociologist’s programme of reducing subjectivity to the objective social reality.

So, Althusser’s conception of science as the system which is radically independent of all the subjective variables presupposes an ‘alienated mode of theorising’.41 ‘Alienated mode’ is nothing but the ahistorical manner of looking things, i.e., the manner in which the subject and object are treated as separate and independent of each other. As it has been pointed out by many, especially by the non-positivist critics, the alienated mode of theorising leads Althusser to a kind of objectivism which necessarily results in treating the ‘structure’ as purely an objective entity, alien to the subject. This criticism has been developed primarily from Marx’s conception of human praxis — the constitutive human activity, of how human beings practically construct their lives and thereby produce the

so called 'structures'. Althusser fails to see the importance of the praxis element, and this really, as non-positivist critics argue, leads him to the positivist camp where subject and object are treated as alien, ahistorical categories.

The positivistic orientation of Althusser's scheme becomes more clear when we look deep into his idea of the distinction between science and ideology. By separating science from ideology, as we saw, Althusser draws a strong epistemological line between perception and knowledge. Ideology depends wholly on the mechanism of perception, whereas true knowledge i.e., scientific knowledge, comes into existence through the epistemological break from ideology. This is to say not only that knowledge is distinct from ideology, but, more importantly, that knowledge is possible only when there is a 'break' from ideology. Obviously, it results in a scientistic position where science is treated as superior to any other disciplines, viz., ideology, metaphysics, religion etc.

Scientism is a positivist doctrine according to which science is 'the' form of human knowledge. True knowledge is necessarily scientific knowledge and that which is non-scientific is non-sensical. This is precisely to say that truth is identical with science. As Habermas says, the fundamental conviction involved in the scientistic approach is that "we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science".42 Obviously, such an identification follows that the non-scientific disciplines such as metaphysics, religion, ideology etc., do not represent knowledge in the true sense of the term. Therefore, necessarily they are to be considered as inferior to science which alone embodies the truth.

Positivism, as a science-oriented mode of philosophizing, is methodologically founded

42Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and human interests, p. 4.
upon the idea that science must be kept radically free from non-science. Certainly, the
scientific notion of science as the only genuine form of human knowledge underlies this
conception. Positivist’s critique of theological and metaphysical doctrines, as it is ob-
vious from the history of western positivism especially of Saint-Simon, August Comte,
Mill and Spencer, fundamentally shares the scientific assumption that there is a radical
distinction between the science and non-science. This assumption is more explicit in
modern positivist’s treatment of metaphysics, particularly in logical positivist’s project
of the elimination of metaphysics.\footnote{Saint Simon, Comte and the positivist movement in general advocated the development of a new, positive outlook, founded upon the conviction that there must be a demarcation between scientific and non-scientific statements. Spencer also tried to develop a system basing on the distinction between common-sense and scientific knowledge. It can be very well argued that it is this distinction that provided the ground for the logical positivist's demarcation between meaningful and meaningless sentences. The logical outcome of this scientific procedure is a kind of reductionism, the tendencies of which can be plainly observed in Neurath’s 'Physicalism' and in Carnap’s 'unity of science'.} Althusser’s science/ideology distinction runs paral-
lel to the science/metaphysics distinction of both classical and modern positivism, not
merely in the sense that he draws a dividing line between two levles discourse but, more
importantly, in the respect that he assigns a kind of supreme status to science, an ‘au-
tonomy’ within which it develops independently of the subjective variables, as ‘the’ form
of true knowledge.

By giving an autonomous status to science, Althusser is forced to be sharing most of
the fundamental assumptions of the positivist theory of science, especially the assump-
tions regarding the ‘value-freedom’ of scientific practice. Positivists in general, view
science as value-free. The criteria of validity for scientific theories, according to them,
involve no reference to the acceptance or rejection of particular moral or political com-
mitments: whether a theory is true or false can be determined independently of such
normative stand points.\footnote{Cf. Russell Keat, The politics of social theory, p. 18.} The reason is plain. That the problem of values comes only
when we establish a direct connection between science and the human subject (who lives in certain systems of value) or when we refer to a relation between the structure of science and the recognition structure of the human subject. Positivists clearly denies such a relation, and declares that the statements of scientific theories do not refer to what is directly observable; they are independent of the ‘subject’ and therefore, value-free. Althusser also, in the same vein, assumes that the scientific knowledge is non-ideological, because science is value-free. Scientific practice excludes ideology, because, while the latter depends on the values, perspectives and interests of any social group or social class, the former is independent of ‘subject’ and therefore its validity is not derived from human practice, but it is determined by its own structure, ‘the objective internal reference system’.

The conception of science as a self-subsistent world of facts, radically separated from the human subject, or from the human praxis, lead Althusser to an objectivistic position. Objectivism, as we mentioned earlier, is an alien mode of theorising in which subject and object are viewed as two discrete, unmediated categories. To conceive the object as independent of the subject is to conceive it as a positive unit, or as a ‘given unalterable fact. Such a conception, as Habermas puts, results in ‘concealing the apriori constitution of the fact’. Practically, it amounts to the denial of praxis — the practical life activity through which human beings shape the objective reality. The denial of ‘praxis’ leads Althusser to the denial of the dialectical content of Marx’s method. The result, as we found, is a ‘positivist’ reading of Marxism, a deterministic mode of interpretation in which Marx’s theory is nothing more than a materialist — sociological theory.

45Cf, Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human interests.