***The German Ideology*** (b)

A detailed critical analysis of the well known and criticized passage containing the metaphor of the “camera obscura”:

The theme of inversion as central in the whole conception of ideology. Inversion seems to explain the detachment of ideas from reality.

The idea of reflection and the question/reservation against these analyses of *the German Ideology*: is human consciousness just a passive recorder of reality? This seems to be entailed by phrases such as “ideology has no history”, a phrase which could furthermore support an economistic interpretation of Marxism and its conception of ideology, as it indeed has done.

Thus, according to the whole above discussion, the position that ideology is equated to “false consciousness” does not deny an objective and necessary status to the falsity of ideology. But, there remains the question whether it attributes an over- reduced reality, weight, importance to ideas, whether it considers them as no more than reflections or shadows of reality with no weight and substance of their own (distinction here between the supporting of the independence of ideas and their relative autonomy, which the thinkers of western Marxism will try to underline)

Related to the above reservation, there is also the criticism that in this work one could detect elements of a positivist approach, not very far from the one supported from the American representatives of the “end of ideology” ideology in the sixties.

And the relevant criticism that Marx and Engels seem to fall themselves to the idea-trap that they want to combat, that is a dualistic separation between matter and ideas. However, this is not their conception, as it is made clear by many other texts which show that they do not separate sharply between the two eg see Marx’s *Critique to Hegel's Philosophy of Right* on the ideas that could become a “material power”, or see the Marxian idea of “praxis”. What they try to do is to conduct a theoretical fight not only against idealism but also against the “old” “mechanistic materialism”, but in this early work they have not yet clarified their own concepts and language.

Analysis of the political conception of ideology:

Central here is the excerpt which connects the ruling ideas of an epoch with the ruling class.

Eagleton poses several interesting questions here: do they mean that the ruling ideas necessarily stem from, are produced from, the ruling class, or that the ruling class rather interprets, regulates and arranges various ideas (regardless of their origin, the genetic dimension) according to a function that serves the reproduction of its being ruling? And does this functional dimension of ideas necessarily say something on the epistemic dimension, i.e. their truth status?

The other important subject here has to do with the phrase “eternal law”. According to Eagleton, in such passages from the *German Ideology* there could find support the position that a more general characteristic of ideology is a certain de-historizing tendency, or even a tendency to naturalise social phenomena. And, also, something relevant but not identical, the tendency to present the partial as general or even universal.

However, another point to keep here is that , especially with reference to the presentation of the partial as general, Marx/Engels say that at least during a certain period of time, this is not completely an illusion. From this one could extrapolate the conclusion that the ideological character of ideas does not depend solely on their content as such, but it is a matter of circumstances and thus it could differ in different historical periods.