

## Schaff's Theory of Meaning, Knowledge and Ideology

To free ourselves from what Adam Schaff calls "sign fetishism" (referring to the Marxist notion of the "fetishism of commodities"), we must view signs in connection with the question of the human individual and of social relations. To give up a reified conception of the relations between signs as well as between signifier and signified, it is necessary to consider the sign-relation as a relation among men who use and produce signs in specific social conditions. All analyses should start from the "social condition of the individual" and from the notion of the individual as a social product. This would prevent us from considering communication as a set of relations among originally separate and abstract subjects, while removing idealistic and materialistic-mechanistic explanations of the communication process.

The subjective-idealistic and materialistic-dialectic models differ from each other in their interpretation of the active role, which both (in contrast to mechanistic materialism) assign to the subject and consequently to language in the cognitive process. Schaff believes that, in comparison to naive materialism, materialistic-dialectic theory recognizes the superiority of language theories that stress the active function of language in the cognitive process (even if from an idealistic viewpoint) and the connection between language and *Weltanschauung*, between language and the "image of reality" (think of Humboldt, Sapir, and Whorf). However, in a Marxist perspective, the human being should be considered as the result of social relations and language as the product of social praxis. This interpretation recognizes the active function of the cognitive subject and at the same time maintains that, far from being the starting point of the cognitive process, the subjective element is the result—and a complex one at that—of specific social influences. In a certain sense, the subject may be considered as the resultant construction of cognitive processes.

The connection between language theory and knowledge theory is evident if we acknowledge interaction between language and thought, as well as the indivisibility of meaning and concept. Schaff recalls Lenin's "On dialectic" (in which the latter outlines the program for Marxist gnoseology with reference to the history of language) as sufficient evidence of this, maintaining that

when in accordance with the materialistic analysis of the cognitive process we consider thought and human consciousness as linguistic thought, as thought made of language (Marx maintained that language is "my consciousness and that of others"), it is evident that any analysis of the cognitive process must also be the analysis of the linguistic process, without which thought is simply impossible. (1969: 20-21)

"Pure" thought which subsequently finds expression in a given language does not exist; on the contrary, there exists a language-thought process. Any form of human speech implies the use of a particular language; thinking always takes place in a certain language. By contrast with the school of Wurzburg, Vygotsky demonstrated the unity of thought and language, and of meaning and concept, through experimental research in the formulation and development of conceptual thought.

Semantics and theory of knowledge are both implied whenever we ask the following questions: "What is meaning?", "What is the relation between meaning and the sign-vehicle?", "What is the relation between meaning and object?", "What kind of existence do we refer to when we say that meaning exists?", and so forth. On the other hand, all the problems dealt with by knowledge theory imply semantics insofar as they are problems concerning language. This does not imply that theory of knowledge should be exclusively a semantic analysis, or that language should be the sole object of philosophical research, as maintained by semantic philosophy. The Marxist theory of reflection clearly evidences all the implications existing between semantics and theory of knowledge, rejecting schematic attitudes typical of conventional and idealistic relativistic standpoints. Certain philosophical trends—Cassirer's neo-Kantism, neopositivism, Russell's logical atomism, the linguistic philosophy of the school of Oxford connected to Wittgenstein's later production, the

semantic analysis of the school of Warsaw, etc.— deserve recognition for having maintained and demonstrated that language is not merely the instrument, but also the object of philosophical research.

The theory of knowledge is not the only theory in need of support from studies on language. The philosophy of the human individual—to the extent that it deals with the function of the individual in social relations and with problems of traditional ethics, though rejecting any form of moralism—must inevitably consider that individual behavior is conditioned by society mainly through the influence of language. This leads us to a new vision of issues related to language: the problem of the connection between language and ideology, concept and stereotype, language and social praxis. On considering the concepts of "choice", "responsibility", and "individual freedom", we need to take into account the "tyranny of words", the problem of "linguistic alienation". We should reject the idealistic and conservative viewpoint which refers contradictions and individual alienation to a semantic origin, thus maintaining (like the young Hegelians) that man can be "set free" by simply clarifying the meaning of words and replacing false ideas with true ones.

The relation between Marxist dialectic and formal logic clearly evidences the connection between theory of knowledge and language analysis. Schaff shows how the word "contradiction" has two different meanings, depending on whether it is considered from a Marxist dialectical or formal logical viewpoint; this implies that Marxist dialectic does not exclude the logical principle of non-contradiction. From the viewpoint of formal logic, the term "contradiction" signifies a relation between two sentences or utterances, one of which maintains that something is in a given relation with an object at a given moment, while the other denies the relation. On the contrary, from the viewpoint of Marxist dialectic "contradiction" means "unity of antithesis"—that is, unity of contrasting tendencies, aspects and forces; in this way, dialectic is the constitutive element of every phenomenon.

When Marx maintains that at a certain level of development the productive material forces of society contradict existing relations of production, the word "contradiction" does not express the relation between a positive and negative judgment (as in formal logic); rather, it implies the juxtaposition of opposed and yet complementary tendencies which simultaneously form the unity of a certain system and function as the mainspring of its transformation. In this case, the word "contradiction"—notwithstanding the misunderstandings to which it can give rise—when intended as an objective rejection of the logical principle of non-contradiction, has a specific meaning which justifies its use. In this particular case, the word "contradiction" underlies a contrast characterized by inadequacy and discordance such as to interfere with the functioning of the social mechanism to the point of causing its collapse.

A central point in Schaff's analysis of the relation between dialectic and the principle of non-contradiction is his thesis that to consider movement as a confutation of the logical principle of non-contradiction is unfounded. Engels too falls into this trap. Schaff observes that the following dilemma is a false dilemma: either we acknowledge the existence of the fundamental laws of formal logic and deny movement or we acknowledge movement and deny these laws. This dilemma ensues from interpreting movement as an objective confutation of the logical principle of non-contradiction, as something which is and is not at the same time in the same place. Schaff establishes a connection between the fact that Marx and Engels accepted the Hegelian interpretation of movement (as something which is and is not at the same time in the same place) and the level of development of mathematics, particularly differential calculus. Newton's and Leibniz's conception of the infinitesimal entity, considered to be a quantity equal to and different from zero, strengthened the influence on Marx and Engels of the Eleatic-Hegelian principles concerning movement.

Today we know that the relation between Marx and mathematics in his day was not that described by Schaff in 1955. Thanks to the publication of Marx's *Mathematical Manuscripts* (It. trans. by Ponzio 1975), we are now familiar with Marx's critical analyzes of Newton's and Leibniz's "mystical" differential calculus, of D'Alembert's and Euler's rationalistic method, and of Lagrange's purely algebraic method. On criticizing Newton's and Leibniz's differential calculus, Marx highlights the presence of metaphysical notions in their theory and the use of procedures which oppose the laws of mathematics. Though making use of Lagrange's work, Marx through such criticism reaches positions on his own account attained by such nineteenth-century mathematicians as Cauchy and Weierstrass, who accomplished the transition from a simple to a more profound and scientific stage of calculus.

According to Schaff, concept and meaning are two faces of the same phenomenon: thought and language. There is no meaning outside natural language or independently of linguistic signs. However, the verbal sign is closely connected not only to concept, but also to what Schaff calls the *stereotype*. It is related to beliefs, established opinion, emotional tendencies, group and class interests, and so forth. The stereotype is a specific reflection of reality related to specific linguistic signs; but since it involves emotional, volitive, and valuational elements, it plays a particular role not only in relation to cognitive processes, but also to praxis. The stereotype is not simply a category of logical thought; it is also a pragmatic category. From language we receive concepts from a given society in the course of history; in the same way we receive stereotypes which convey specific tendencies, behavioral patterns, and reactions. This means that speech is always more or less ideological, since it is connected to social praxis.

Schaff maintains that reflexion on the stereotype is characterized by a high degree of "intrusion of the subjective factor" in the form of emotional, volitive, and evaluative elements. This "subjective factor", however, is social and not individual in nature; it is linked to interests of social groups (social classes, ethnic groups which speak the same language, and so forth). Seen in these terms, the "subjective factor" is present in any form of reflexion on reality as well as in scientific knowledge. Schaff writes:

Science and ideology are closely connected to each other, in spite of those pedants who would like to separate them. In any case, since social praxis, which produces and promotes the development of language, is the common basis for both the relatively objective knowledge of the world and for attitudes of evaluation, a genetic link exists. (1969: 127)

Schaff singles out the following relation between stereotypes and ideology: it is not possible to identify stereotypes with ideology directly, but the latter could not subsist without stereotypes.

We may also deal with problems concerning ideology and the "subjective factor" of human knowledge—where the subject, as we have seen, is viewed as a social rather than an individual product—from the viewpoint of the sociology of knowledge. The latter, in fact, acknowledges the subject as a socially produced and conditioned individual. As Schaff frequently states, the sociology of knowledge derives from Marxism, and particularly from structure and superstructure theory. It is also directly related to gnoseology and theory of knowledge.

Schaff divides definition of the concept of ideology into three groups to avoid ambiguity and equivocation: (a) the genetic definition which examines the conditions of development of ideology; (b) the structural definition which attempts to define the specific character of ideology (and therefore to establish the differences, from the logical viewpoint, between the structure of ideological discourse and the structure of scientific discourse); and (c) the functional definition which underlines the functions fulfilled by ideology in relation to social, group, and class interests, etc.

Furthermore, Schaff believes in the necessity of distinguishing between the problem of the definition of ideology, on one hand, and of the value of ideology in relation to objective truth, on the other. Though related, these problems are different and should not be confused: definition of ideology is one thing, while its value in relation to the question of objective knowledge is another. Therefore, though apparently a definition, the statement "ideology is false consciousness" is not, in fact, a definition; rather, it is an answer to the question of the value of ideology. The main error made by Mannheim in his theory of ideology and his criticism of Marxism lies in his having mistaken the statement "ideology is false consciousness" for a definition of ideology.

We must also distinguish between the meaning Marx and Engels gave to the word "ideology" and the meaning it subsequently acquired in the Marxist tradition (especially from Lenin onward). Such expressions as "bourgeois ideology" and "ideological science" are very much in use; they characterize ideology on the basis of its function. In Schaff's opinion, therefore, we may give the following functional definition of ideology: by ideology we mean a system of opinions related to social development founded on a system of values; these opinions subtend specific attitudes and behavioral patterns in different objective situations.

Marx and Engels employed the word "ideology" in a narrow sense—that is, for bourgeoisie "ideology". Ruling class ideology aims at the preservation of society divided into classes. Consequently, it aims at concealing those contradictions that reveal the need of transformation in the current structures of productive relations. Bourgeois ideology is thus characterized by Marx and Engels as false consciousness with respect to objective consciousness. Marx and Engels consider ideology as false consciousness because they use the word in a narrow sense—that is, for bourgeois ideology—rather than in the broad sense where reference is to "ideology of the proletariat", "scientific ideology", etc. When Mannheim maintains that if ideology is false consciousness, then Marxist ideology is also false, he makes the mistake of identifying ideology in the narrow sense with ideology in the broad sense (cf. Schaff 1970).

We may summarize the above in the following points: (1) the statement "ideology is false consciousness" is not a definition; (2) when we speak of ideology as false consciousness, we are referring to bourgeois ideology which aims at the reproduction of class society and of social inequalities; and (3) use of such expressions as "ideology of the proletariat" and "bourgeois ideology" is now widespread. In Schaff's opinion, to consider these points means to be aware of the need to define the word ideology in such a way as to explain its different meanings, on one hand, and to suit the Marxist perspective, on the other. In this sense, ideology may be defined as either all those opinions formed under the influence of the interests of a specific class (genetic definition, or as those opinions useful to the defense of the interests of a specific class (functional definition).

It is by considering ideology in relation to its genesis and function that we can face the problem of the value of ideology better as related to the objective and scientific knowledge of reality.

We must say immediately that according to Schaff this problem cannot be dealt with on the basis of a linguistic-structural definition. Ideological discourse does not have a specific structure that distinguishes it from scientific discourse; it is an error to maintain that the difference between science and ideology lies in the structure of their propositions. According to this opinion, ideological discourse would mainly consist in evaluative and normative propositions, while scientific discourse would consist in descriptive propositions. Schaff severely criticizes the neopositivist dichotomy between judgments of fact and judgments of value, which appears in Marxism in the form of the division between science and ideology.

The difference between science and ideology is not that the "subjective factor" (which, as seen, is social and not individual) is present in science and absent in ideology; rather it concerns the different role played by the "subjective factor", which is present in both science and ideology.

Scientific analysis and sociology of knowledge have significantly contributed to destroying the myth of the pure objectivity of scientific propositions. Given that both science and ideology are conditioned by society both are in a certain sense subjective (at least because language without which human thought is impossible introduces subjective elements in all forms of human knowledge). Therefore, in Schaff's words,

another thesis is presented here contrasting that which sets science against ideology. It maintains that not only are the propositions of science and ideology linked, in some cases they are even identical. (1967: 51)

This is true even to the point that we may speak of "ideological science" and of "scientific ideologies".

Schaff stresses that to recognize that any discourse is more or less ideological because of social and historical conditioning does not imply that all ideologies are distorted and must therefore be considered in the same terms. A distinction must be made between true ideologies and ideologies as distortions of reality; between scientific ideologies and forms of false consciousness. This distinction is determined by the different genesis and the different function of ideologies.