

# CULTURAL SOFTWARE

A THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

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## 6 AMBIVALENCE AND SELF-REFERENCE

Theories of ideology take different normative attitudes toward the object of their study. Generally speaking, these theories fall into two categories, pejorative or neutral. A pejorative conception of ideology sees ideology as necessarily opposed to truth or science. To have an ideology is necessarily to suffer from some distortion of belief, because ideological belief disguises, mystifies, or conceals what is true or what is just. In addition, pejorative conceptions of ideology are usually epistemological, because they oppose ideology to knowledge. A pejorative conception of ideology is sometimes called a “critical” conception, but I use the former term because I wish to reserve the word *critical* to mean self-referential or self-questioning.<sup>1</sup>

A neutral conception of ideology, on the other hand, sees ideology as a ubiquitous feature of human thought. Neutral conceptions are historicist or sociological because they connect one’s ideology with one’s position in a particular culture and history. Neutral conceptions contend that all of us have an ideology of some sort, and that our understanding of the social world is necessarily ideological. The ubiquity of ideology does not mean that ideological thought is distorted or false. As its name implies, a neutral conception of ideology describes ideology in nonpejorative terms. To say that thought is ideological is simply to say that it has certain characteristic features. Truth occurs within ideology, rather than being ineluctably opposed to it.

The distinction between pejorative and neutral conceptions of ideology is sometimes associated with different strands of Marxist thought.<sup>2</sup> Claims that the proletariat fail to understand their true class interests because they are under the thrall of a dominant ideology employ a pejorative conception of

ideology, as do theories that oppose ideology to science (like Althusser's) or make use of the concept of "false consciousness." In contrast, theories like Lukacs's or Lenin's, which identify ideology with the consciousness appropriate to a class given its position in history, might be thought of as neutral conceptions. In fact, they are neutral more in the sense of being historicist than in the sense of being nonjudgmental.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as Raymond Geuss has pointed out, the neutral conception associated with Lenin and Lukacs actually combines a historicist conception of ideology with a positive conception of a particular ideology—the proletarian revolutionary consciousness.<sup>4</sup> At a particular point in history, the proletariat must have a special revolutionary consciousness. (Whether it in fact possesses it is another matter.) This class consciousness allows the proletariat to understand social conditions as they really are and allows it to fulfill its appropriate role in history. According to Lenin, it is necessary for a revolutionary vanguard to instill this consciousness in the proletariat.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, unlike the class consciousness of other groups, the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat is regarded positively. Note that in a pejorative conception of ideology, there is no need for a special positive conception of ideology because ideology is already opposed to truth or science.

Marxist theories of ideology usually define ideology in terms of membership in an economic class and the objective interests of that class. But theories of ideology do not have to be based on economic class membership or economic class interests. John Thompson's and Clifford Geertz's theories of ideology, for example, are pejorative and neutral, respectively, although neither defines ideology in traditional Marxist class terms. Thompson retains the pejorative perspective that he finds in Marxism but applies it to any form of social domination or exploitation, including domination based on race, class, or gender. Similarly, Geertz identifies ideology with general features of cultural understanding, which are in no way limited to or organized around Marxist conceptions of class membership.<sup>6</sup>

Both the pejorative and the neutral conceptions of ideology have symmetrical advantages and difficulties: each is better at dealing with the problems created by the other. Neutral conceptions of ideology are attractive precisely because they seem nonjudgmental: By noting the existence of different and conflicting ways of understanding the social world and their relationships to people's historical and social situation, neutral conceptions appear to embrace the detached objectivity of the social scientist or the fairness and openness of liberal inquiry. The great advantage of pejorative conceptions, on the other hand, is that they are more compatible with the reasons why people have traditionally been interested in developing a theory of ideology: a concern with how people are led to believe in false or unjust things, and how people's ways

of thinking contribute to or sustain injustice. By their own terms, neutral conceptions of ideology prevent the analyst from focusing on these issues, or force her to do so either unwittingly or *sub rosa*.

In fact, conceptions of ideology that claim to be neutral usually cannot retain their neutrality for very long. A scrupulously neutral approach to conflicting ideologies would make it impossible for the analyst to pronounce one as accurate and another as distorted. The analyst could not even report that each side has grasped part of the truth, for this would mean that the view of the opposite side is to that extent false and distorted. She would simply have to report that the two ways of understanding social reality disagree and to describe the terms of their disagreement. Even then, it may often prove extremely difficult to articulate the nature of this disagreement in a neutral fashion—that is, without ascribing truth or falsity to one side or the other—because of the interpretive character of judgments about social conditions.

Furthermore, a perfectly neutral conception would make it impossible for the analyst to explain how particular beliefs lead to oppression or injustice, for oppression and injustice are themselves contested terms between competing ideologies. Judgments about what is unjust and oppressive (and to whom) look very different from the perspective of different conceptions of social reality. Indeed, these are the very sorts of questions about which competing ideologies disagree most heatedly. The question of whether and to what extent blacks in America are treated unjustly, for example, looks very different to members of the Nation of Islam and the Ku Klux Klan.

This places the neutral theorist of ideology in a difficult position. Describing the effects of competing ideologies becomes virtually impossible if true neutrality is to be retained. Karl Mannheim, for example, attempted to show that competing ideologies had comparative advantages and disadvantages. Mannheim argued that traditional conservatives could see things about social reality that liberals could not understand as easily, and vice versa.<sup>7</sup> But this approach assumes a perspective from which things are understood correctly and one from which they are understood incorrectly, and this leads us back to a distinction between truth and ideology that is characteristic of the pejorative conception. In the same way, a scrupulously neutral conception makes it difficult to articulate how particular ways of thinking sustain unjust power or are self-serving. These descriptions implicitly rely on conceptions of what is socially real and what is just, conceptions that cannot be neutral with regard to competing ways of understanding the social world.

Thus, although Mannheim's broadest conception of ideology, which he calls a total conception, begins as a nonevaluative study of the forms of thought of a given age, it quickly becomes evaluative and normative. Mannheim recognized this fact explicitly: The "diagnosi[s] of [the thought of] an epoch," he

argued, “though it may begin non-evaluatively, will not long remain so.” The ideological analyst will “be forced eventually to assume an evaluative position” because of the evaluative nature of historical understanding: “History is unintelligible unless certain of its aspects are emphasized in contrast to others.”<sup>8</sup> A fortiori, if one hopes to understand historical phenomena like oppression or domination, evaluative judgments become unavoidable.

Pejorative theories of ideology do not share these difficulties. They permit (and even require) the analyst to argue that the ideological beliefs of others are false, distorted, or self-serving, or that they lead to injustice or oppression. These theories distinguish between ideological understandings of social conditions and the truth about social conditions; they happily offer normative judgments about the thought of others.

While neutral conceptions have difficulty expressing themselves without reference to concepts like truth or justice, pejorative conceptions generally founder on the problem of self-reference. The problem arises as soon as the tools of ideological analysis are applied to the analyst’s own thought. If the beliefs of others are affected by their historical and social position, their apparatus of cultural understanding, and their psychological needs to reduce cognitive dissonance, the same is likely to be true of the beliefs of the analyst. The social and causal explanations of belief formation that the analyst applies to others are no less relevant to the analyst’s own mental processes. The relation between ideological analyst and analysand is symmetrical; every ideological analyst can be an analysand to someone else.

The phenomenon of self-reference leads to various versions of what has come to be called Mannheim’s paradox: if all discourse is ideological, how is it possible to have anything other than an ideological discourse on ideology?<sup>9</sup> The problem arises because, unlike the neutral conception, the pejorative conception defines ideology in terms of falsity or distortion. If ideology is false or distorted belief, the analyst’s understanding of the beliefs of others and the nature of social conditions will be warped and limited by her own ideological thinking. She may view social conditions in a self-serving way, for example, and conclude that people who see things differently labor under ideological delusion.

At first glance, Mannheim’s paradox seems irrelevant to the pejorative conception of ideology because this conception denies that all thought about ideology is ideological. Discourse about ideology can be nonideological if it is scientific or true. Some thought accurately grasps what is going on in society, and hence accurately comprehends the distorting character of the ideological thought of others. When an analyst is not laboring under the influence of ideology, her analysis of the ideology of others is not distorted and hence is reliable.



Unfortunately, the distinction between truth and ideology does not solve the problem of self-reference but merely restates it in another way. Our judgments about what is true and what is assigned to the realm of the ideological are no less subject to ideological analysis than any other set of judgments. The analyst's judgments about what is a true account of social conditions and what is ideological distortion may also be distorted or self-serving. The boundaries that separate ideology from truth are themselves an object of ideological disputation.

Pejorative conceptions usually assume a unidirectional model of ideological analysis: the ideology-free analyst locates and criticizes ideology in the ideologically deluded analysand. Disagreements between analyst and analysand about social reality are explained as ideological delusion on the part of the analysand. As Terry Eagleton puts it, under this approach, ideology is like halitosis—it is what the other fellow has.<sup>10</sup> But this unidirectional model cannot be sustained, for as Mannheim recognized, the relationship between analyst and analysand is fully symmetrical.<sup>11</sup> The pejorative conception of ideology thus becomes a two-edged sword, which threatens to undermine the analyst's views as well as those of the analysand.

When we dissolve the study of ideology into the study of cultural software, these questions and these problems still remain. Is our conception of cultural software neutral or pejorative, and how does it hope to resolve the difficulties associated with either approach? In fact, the theory of cultural software is based on a third conception, which endeavors to combine the advantages of the neutral and the pejorative conceptions without their disadvantages. This is an *ambivalent* conception. An ambivalent conception of cultural software views cultural software as simultaneously empowering, useful, and adaptive on the one hand, and disempowering, distorting, and maladaptive on the other. We are ambivalent about our cultural software because we see both its good and its bad points, and we see how these arise from the same sources. An ambivalent conception of cultural software differs from a neutral conception because it does not attempt to be neutral or nonjudgmental with regard to competing ways of understanding the social world; it differs from a pejorative conception because it does not see historically generated tools of understanding as uniformly bad or maladaptive in the sense of promoting injustice. Rather, it views our cultural software as both empowering and distorting, as both enabling and hindering justice.

The ambivalent conception of ideology flows from our earlier discussion of how cultural software is produced through cultural evolution. The tools of understanding are produced through recursion and bricolage; they are cumulative and jerry-built. They are never perfectly designed for the understanding the social world or the many kinds of problems that human beings face,

although they may be good enough for the purpose at hand. The same mixture of advantage and disadvantage occurs when we consider the consequences of our understanding for social justice. The adequacy of our tools of understanding with respect to the promotion of justice depends upon the context in which they are employed; a tool that is more appropriate in one context may be less useful or wildly inadequate in another. Conversely, a way of understanding the social world that is completely misguided as a general strategy (and therefore may tend to promote injustice when so used) may be quite helpful and appropriate in dealing with specific features of the cultural world.

Mannheim's insight about the advantages and disadvantages of contrasting modes of thought anticipates the ambivalent conception. Mannheim argued that even ways of thinking that largely limit our imaginations may be helpful to understand some features of social conditions; what narrows our vision may sometimes also sharpen it.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, this narrowing of understanding proves unhelpful and distorting if we apply it indiscriminately to other features of social life; it may lead us to misunderstand or overlook important features of social conditions. When Mannheim spoke of the adequacy or inadequacy of thought, he did not specifically have in mind the question of justice; he seemed to mean some combination of serving the interests of a particular group and being appropriate to the historical development of society viewed as a totality. By contrast, the kind of adequacy I am concerned with is the adequacy of our thoughts and actions specifically in promoting justice and avoiding injustice. This distinction is important, for ways of thinking about the social world that are helpful in assisting a particular group to gain economic or political power may nevertheless foster or sustain injustice.

Ambivalence is the appropriate attitude to take toward cultural software because it is the appropriate attitude to take toward culture and cultural understanding generally. The tools of understanding are the preconditions of understanding the social world. Yet they also are sources of misunderstanding. Hence the study of cultural software is the study of the curious and unexpected linkages between benefit and disadvantage, empowerment and distortion. It is the study of how the tools of understanding simultaneously create conditions of freedom and domination.

How does an ambivalent conception of ideology deal with the problem of self-reference, or Mannheim's paradox? It accepts the inevitability of self-reference but argues—consistent with the general conception of ambivalence—that this feature of our thought does not necessarily make ideological analysis futile or unhelpful. Quite the contrary: the ability of thought to turn upon itself is a prerequisite for an adequate analysis of ideological thinking.

The problem of self-reference is unavoidable in ideological analysis because this analysis must always be performed by somebody or someone. It must be

performed by a subject constituted by certain tools of understanding and not others. Ideological analysis always occurs within the forms of cultural understanding, not outside of them. Cultural software is necessary for the analyst to understand the social world, the thought of others, and her own thought. Thus the analyst's cultural software is not an impediment to her understanding; it is a precondition of her understanding.<sup>13</sup>

In this way, Mannheim's paradox is transformed when it is stated in terms of cultural software. The theory of cultural software accepts—indeed insists—that all discourse about cultural software must involve the use of cultural software, that all thought about the tools of understanding must employ the tools of understanding. Not all such thought is limiting or distorting for the purpose at hand, however, and not all limitations or distortions are relevant in all contexts of judgment. The possibility of self-reference does not raise an insurmountable obstacle to ideological analysis, because the tools of understanding are empowering as well as limiting, enabling as well as distorting. They are not simply the enemies of comprehension but also the conditions of its possibility. They are not merely hindrances to autonomy and self-understanding but also make autonomy and self-understanding possible. Their dual role forms the essence of the ambivalent conception.

Mannheim's paradox is thus no paradox at all; rather, it explicates the conditions under which ideological analysis must necessarily proceed: the tools of social understanding must be used in order to understand social understanding. Self-reference is not a difficulty that must be neutralized or avoided in order to sustain a study of ideology. It is not an exceptional or subsidiary feature of this study. Rather, it is the central predicament of ideological analysis. Like the story of the tongs mentioned in Pirke Avot, the analysis of cultural software can proceed only through the use of cultural software. The study of cultural software is not unavoidably self-referential, it is fundamentally self-referential.

When we employ the tools of our understanding to think about our own tools of understanding, our thought becomes reflexive and recursive. Human thought is thinking about itself, considering the conditions of its own possibility, and the forms and limits of its own adequacy. A subject constituted by cultural software is thinking about the cultural software that constitutes her. It is important to recognize that this recursion in and of itself involves no contradiction, anomaly, or logical difficulty. Nothing in the nature of cultural software prevents us from using it to think about itself. To the contrary, the reflexiveness or self-applicability of cultural software is one of its most significant features. Human understanding—hence human understanding about understanding—is essentially reflexive and self-referential. It can use its own tools to think about its own tools, and equally important, it does use its own

tools to think about its own tools. Our examination of our cultural software is a reflexive study of a phenomenon already reflexive by nature.

### Self-Reference and Self-Criticism

This recognition does not make the difficulties of self-reference magically disappear. It may be true that our cultural software is not uniformly distorting or maladaptive. Nevertheless, our conception of cultural software is ambivalent, not uniformly positive. If the tools that we employ to understand social reality are heuristic and have unexpected side effects and limitations, our own understanding of cultural software—either our own or that of others—may be affected by these features. Our understanding and our analysis may turn out to be unacceptably partial, counterproductive, misleading, or unhelpful. Moreover, the positions of the ideological analyst and the analysand are still symmetrical. We may still question the analyst's understanding using the same tools she applies to the analysand. When we examine the thought of another person, the tools of understanding we employ may, in the relevant context in which we use them, be badly suited for the task and may have ideological effects on our own thought. Thus if we disagree with another person about what is going on in society, we must recognize that this disagreement may not be due wholly to ideological effects on her thought but may also be due to ideological effects on our own.

The symmetry of analyst and analysand means that in an ambivalent conception, the analyst must attempt to examine her own thought along with that of the person she analyzes. Thus, if a pro-choice feminist discovers that a large number of blue-collar women in the United States are opposed to abortion, she must not immediately rush to pronounce the thought of these women as ideologically deluded. Rather, she must, as a part of the process of ideological analysis, consider what she might learn from these women about the social conditions they face. She must consider the insights into social reality that they might have, and reevaluate her own views in light of them. Without such an inquiry, she has no way of knowing whether the disagreement between her and the analysand is due to distortions or limitations in the analysand's thinking or in her own.

This obligation flows directly from an ambivalent conception. This conception postulates that the tools of understanding do not uniformly limit and distort the thought of subjects. If so, this must be true for both analyst and analysand. If the analyst is empowered and enabled by her cultural software, she must consider the possibility that the analysand is also enabled and empowered by hers, although in different ways and perhaps to a different degree.<sup>14</sup>

Successful ideological analysis is possible because and to the extent that the analyst's tools of understanding enable her to understand social conditions well enough to perform the analysis. For precisely the same reason, however, it is possible that the analysand has a grasp of social conditions that conflicts with the analyst's but is nevertheless equally adequate or even more valid. The analysand may in fact see something that the analyst does not see as clearly. By considering how the analysand's thought might have elements of truth or justice in it, the analyst can attempt to analyze and modify her own views. By using the beliefs and opinions of others as a partial check on the analyst's own, ideological analysis attempts to improve social understanding not only for the analysand but for the analyst as well.

I call this dialectical approach to the study of ideology or cultural software a critical approach. By *critical* I do not mean the discovery of flaws or defects in the thought of another person but rather a process of self-reflection and self-discovery that is part and parcel of the ideological analysis of the thought of other persons. A critical approach is inevitably a self-critical approach.

Although critical examination must always become critical self-examination, most people find it easier to see ideological effects in others than in themselves. In fact, they may be able to grasp limitations in their own thought only by transferring their observations about the limitations of the thought of others and wondering how analogous effects could occur in their own thinking. Alternatively, they may critically examine their own thought only after they have been criticized or attacked by others. Once we begin the process of critical self-examination, our views of the other, and her limitations, may change correspondingly. Thus critical thought returns to the self, although it begins in the examination of the other. Critical self-examination is not, strictly speaking, introspection but rather a process of comparative examination between the self and others. It looks inward by first looking outward.

A critical approach involves critical self-examination, but it is not for this reason a private or individual practice. It is the result of interaction with others in the world, an interaction that may be agonistic as well as cooperative. We may not reexamine our own beliefs until others put them in question. Because of the fallibility of our own cognitive processes, we must, to a large degree, depend upon others for the impetus to critical self-examination, just as we often rely on others for other kinds of knowledge. Thus critical practice is fallible and dependent on contingent circumstance (for example, who we happen to interact with) rather than a source of certainty.

A recurring problem with traditional conceptions of ideology has been that they are unidirectional. They are "critical" only in the sense of taking a pejorative view of the beliefs of others but not in the sense of being self-critical

and self-reflective. As a result, these approaches fail to acknowledge the symmetrical positions of the analyst and the analysand. They project the sources of disagreement between analyst and analysand onto the mental processes of the analysand and locate their cause in distortions in the analysand's thought. A unidirectional approach conceives ideological analysis as a critique of defects in the thought of an Other, who is either despised or pitied for them.

Ironically, by failing to understand the views of another as anything other than a distortion, we fail to understand ourselves. The unidirectional approach is the loss of a double opportunity. In contrast, a critical approach recognizes that ideological analysis is not merely the analysis of defects in an Other, in which the existence of such defects is presumed and preordained; it is an analysis of a disagreement with an Other about the nature and justice of social conditions. The disagreement between analyst and analysand is produced by the juxtaposition of contending understandings. These understandings are produced by the use of different tools of understanding or by the use of similar tools in different contexts of judgment. To understand how the disagreement arises, we must try to trace the source of these beliefs in cultural software. Properly performed, the process of ideological analysis must call the analyst's beliefs into question and place them on the table for analysis and scrutiny—a task that can be performed only by using the analyst's own cultural software.

Ideological analysis asks how a particular disagreement about social conditions between analyst and analysand is produced. The answer to this question is not necessarily that the analysand was completely wrong and the analyst was completely right. Rather, the process of understanding how this disagreement arises may affect the analyst's own beliefs and opinions.<sup>15</sup> It may lead her to a deeper and richer understanding of the social world. Yet this process cannot have salutary effects unless the analyst is open to the possibility that her own views are in need of improvement and that the encounter with the analysand has something to teach her. Thus ideological analysis, properly performed, always "risks understanding."<sup>16</sup> To risk understanding is always to risk changes in one's own cultural software. Thus ideological analysis, rather than a form of power or mastery over the analysand, is also a potential source of power over the analyst.

The critical process is by no means foolproof. The study of the causes of disagreement between ourselves and the analysand is not a royal road to truth or an algorithm for intellectual improvement. Indeed, the process of ideological analysis can produce its own ideological effects. One is the possibility that we will not put our own ways of thinking in question—this is the danger of unidirectional analysis, which projects the source of disagreement wholly onto imagined distortions in the analysand's thought processes, and thus preserves

our own thought from ideological scrutiny. Two other types of ideological effects are equally serious. I call these ideological effects hermeneutic conformation and hermeneutic co-optation.<sup>17</sup>

Hermeneutic conformation occurs when we interpret the analysand's views in such a way that we believe that she agrees with us. There is no check on our beliefs because we do not think that there is any serious disagreement. Hermeneutic conformation is the production of a false consensus between ourselves and the analysand.

Hermeneutic co-optation arises when we are too eager to assume that the analysand's beliefs are true or more justified than our own. If we too readily assume that disagreements between the analysand and ourselves are due to inadequacies in our own belief, we may come to believe things that are unjust or untrue. We may be co-opted into believing things that we should not believe; our cultural software may be rewritten by this encounter in ways that produce ideological effects in our thought. Hermeneutic co-optation is the achievement of a consensus about the wrong things. It is a special case of the power that understanding can have over a subject.<sup>18</sup>

Although these ideological effects are real dangers, they are a necessary risk. Unless we are willing to reconsider our own beliefs through ideological analysis, we can never achieve a critical approach. In any case, our refusal to engage in this process hardly avoids the possibility of ideological effects on our own thought. Quite the contrary, for as we have noted, such a refusal simply projects all sources of disagreement onto imagined distortions in the thought of the analysand; this projection is itself an ideological effect of our own thought.

Among theorists of ideology, Karl Mannheim was the first to emphasize the failings of an insufficiently self-critical conception of ideology; his sociology of knowledge may be viewed as a critical response to the unidirectional analysis inherent in Marxist theories of ideology. Mannheim claimed that the sociology of knowledge must inevitably proceed to the questioning of the analyst's own beliefs and ways of thinking. He argued that knowledge of society was relational—the product of a relationship between the subject, her experiences and position in society, and the object of her knowledge. It follows that the knowledge of the ideological analyst is no less relational. Hence, Mannheim argued, the analyst must put all beliefs, including her own, into question, and ask how their content is related to the thinker's experience and position in society.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Mannheim's answer to the problem of self-reference was not fully satisfactory. As John Thompson has pointed out, Mannheim's concept of relational knowledge restates the difficulty rather than resolves it.<sup>20</sup> Mannheim's other solution argued that the intellectual class would be able to synthesize the competing perspectives of different social groups and hence would

be able to offer a relatively undistorted view of social reality.<sup>21</sup> This solution was surely unpersuasive when Mannheim first formulated it, and it seems even less persuasive as time passes. As a class, intellectuals seem to be no less prone to ideological effects in their thought than any other group. If they have any special talent in this regard it seems rather to be a special penchant for developing abstract and high-sounding rationalizations for their beliefs and conduct.

The critical approach to ideological analysis is a helpful step toward dealing with problems of self-reference. We can try to use the beliefs of others as a partial check on our own. When we do this, our goal is not necessarily to reach agreement with others; rather, it is to use the project of explaining disagreement as a means of broadening our understanding of the social world. Nevertheless, this solution is hardly foolproof. It does not make the problem of self-reference go away, because many kinds of ideological effects are still possible. Any self-critical practice, no matter how well intentioned, may still be self-serving and hindered by our ways of thinking.

Indeed, I would argue that any approach to ideological analysis that promises to eliminate the problem of self-reference is probably suspect for that very reason. This problem is inherent in the nature of ideological analysis. The best proof of the ubiquity of the problem is the practice of ideological analysts themselves. Ideological analysis almost always has significant blind spots and ideological effects. The history of Marxism is a classic example. By focusing on questions of social class, Marxist analyses of ideology have often overlooked or deemphasized the importance of race, ethnicity, and gender in explaining social injustices. Even Marxist analyses of class relations have often engaged in wishful thinking about the nature of social conditions, the beliefs and interests of the working class, and the likely course of historical development.

This realization places ideological analysis in the same situation as much of our knowledge about the social world. As with all such knowledge, we learn through interaction with the social world and with others in the world. We learn through a process of trial and error. In the final analysis there is nothing special about ideological analysis—directed either at others or at ourselves—that distinguishes it from many other attempts to understand the social world, the thought of others, or our own thought. It, too, is a process of grappling with the world using the tools that lie to hand. Thus we must accept the fallibility of our knowledge about our mental processes (and those of others) just as we accept the fallibility of other knowledge about the social world. Conversely, we must be willing to accept the possibility that our knowledge can be good enough for the purpose at hand if we are willing to subject it to critical scrutiny.

Perhaps the single greatest mistake that we can make in offering an account of ideological analysis is assuming that this form of inquiry (or the form of



knowledge derived from it) rests on a higher plane or uses tools more pure and impartial than other forms of cultural understanding. It does not, it need not, and in any case, it cannot. Ideological critique does not stand above other forms of knowledge creation or acquisition. It is not a master form of knowing. It is not the most important or most sure or most perfect form of thinking. Indeed, there is nothing special about it whatsoever; its most distinctive feature may be its utter ordinariness. It uses the same basic tools of understanding that all other social understanding uses. Ideological analysis, and in particular self-critical analysis, employs the tools of ordinary understanding to think about themselves. It is not pure but reflexive and recursive. Even its recursion is not extraordinary, for the tools of understanding are always developed reflexively and cumulatively.

Here once again we may offer an analogy to computers. When a computer boots up, one of the first programs it runs is a diagnostic—a program that checks the adequacy of its informational capacities. The computer can do this only because the nature of its operations allows such recursion—allows various aspects of the software, firmware, and hardware to act as checks against themselves. Far from being a special sort of program, a diagnostic program is in some sense the most ordinary example of a computer program.

There are perhaps no metaphors more misleading than those we often employ to describe the process of self-reflection and self-criticism. These are metaphors of separation and isolation, removal and ascent: we step back, we distance ourselves, we place ourselves above the fray, we rise above our prejudices, we employ disinterested analysis. Given such descriptions, it is no wonder that people assume that ideological analysis is a higher, purer form of thinking. But these metaphors are seriously misleading. Although the study of ideology is necessarily a self-critical study, it does not involve a special method of distancing ourselves from the tools of understanding in order to reflect upon them critically. That is because our tools of understanding are a precondition to understanding and therefore to any reflection on their own adequacy or inadequacy. We are always using some tools of understanding to evaluate the usefulness of others in particular contexts. Our judgments of adaptability and adequacy are necessarily jerry-built and provisional in the same way that all bricolage is.

A critical approach uses our understanding to study our understanding. It tests the adequacy of our tools by the use of our tools. All that we do or can do in these cases is use some of our tools to understand others, and to fashion new tools of understanding in the process. Yet there is no point at which we abandon the tools of understanding so that we might critically reflect upon all of them. Such an attempt misunderstands what a critical approach entails, and

the effort would be impossible in any case. One does not get outside of one's self to understand oneself. If anything, one gets more inside oneself.

Finally, the practice of self-criticism is not disinterested in the sense of being impartial. It is partial by dint of its very constitution by particular tools of understanding. It seeks to be disinterested not in the sense of neutrality but in the sense of fairness or accuracy; yet its fairness is a fairness judged through the use of the analyst's cultural software, and its accuracy is an accuracy measured through the analyst's tools of understanding. Nor is self-critique uninterested or dispassionate; on the contrary, it is a fully motivated understanding—motivated to improve the subject's tools of understanding.

The upshot of this analysis is not a claim that we are not wrong about our ideological analyses of others or even of ourselves. We are sometimes wrong. The point is that we are also sometimes right, or right enough to effect some improvement in our understanding. And we are right not because we somehow escape our cultural construction but because we put it to good use.

We might contrast this account of ideological self-criticism with Stanley Fish's recent attacks on the concept of critical self-consciousness.<sup>22</sup> Fish has argued that the idea of critical self-analysis is both sentimental and conceptually incoherent, because it postulates the existence of critical self-consciousness. Fish argues that critical self-consciousness is impossible because it requires one to get outside the forms of one's own thinking in order to reflect critically on what one thinks. Yet one never gets outside the forms of one's own understanding. One is always already understanding oneself using the forms of thought that one currently possesses.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, Fish's argument does not prove that critical self-consciousness is impossible. It simply directs us toward a more careful consideration of what a critical self-consciousness might be. Fish's argument gains rhetorical force precisely from the assumption I have been attacking—the notion that critical self-consciousness is a special form of thought that we must develop specifically for the purpose of ideological analysis. This assumption is linked to the metaphor of stepping outside our accustomed ways of thinking in order to reflect on them, and this metaphor is misleading in turn because it suggests a false notion of a self that exists separate and apart from its forms of understanding.

But when we reflect on our own thought processes or consider the adequacy of our own beliefs, we do not need to stand outside ourselves or abandon our tools of understanding. Fish is quite right that we could not do this even if we wanted to. Rather, using our cultural software, we think about what we are feeling, consider what we believe, question our own motives, and compare our views with those of others. We do all these things with the goal of trying to figure out how we think about the social world and how our thought might be improved.

Critical self-consciousness does not employ any special form of cognition outside of the ordinary tools of everyday thought. It is a kind of thought that we are familiar with in everyday life, one that we employ in our most routine dealings with others. We think about the adequacy of our mental processes and our beliefs all the time. We ask ourselves questions like “Was I being polite?” “Did I understand what she said?” or “Am I upset because I am jealous?” We often criticize ourselves for such bad habits of thought as rushing to judgment or forming misleading first impressions. Introspection and self-criticism are ubiquitous features of our mental life. They are so common that they even have pathological forms, like obsessive self-doubt and refusal to make judgments. Yet we do not introspect by standing outside of ourselves and reflecting on the thing we stand outside of. Rather, cultural software is reflexive: the tools of understanding are tools of self-understanding. To be sure, we have all sorts of mechanisms that are designed to obfuscate and hinder self-understanding—for example, mechanisms of ego defense. But this does not mean that self-referential inquiry is not possible. It simply means that it must take place using the tools available and encountering the forms of ego defense that currently exist.

The attack on critical self-consciousness might be taken even further than Fish’s version. It might be read as the claim that we cannot improve our understanding of the social world through any process of critical self-reflection. This claim in turn consists of two different assertions. The first is that we cannot change our ways of thinking through critical self-consciousness because we are trapped inside the ways of thinking we currently have. The second is that the idea of improvement seems to refer to a standard of judgment outside of our own current standards, and this is impossible because we can judge only from our current perspective.

It is not true that we cannot and do not change our ways of thinking by thinking about our own thought. The metaphor of software explains why this is so. Our cultural software is constantly being rewritten. It is rewritten through acts of understanding, which means that (among other things) it is continually rewriting itself. Its reflexive features guarantee that it is always the object of its own manipulation. Moreover, our participation in the economy of cultural software described in Chapter 4 presupposes the continual possibility of changes in our cultural software. We change our minds, and our minds change. We have new experiences, and we experience things anew. Because we exist in history, our selves are part of the flux of change, not merely witnesses to it.

We should not offer too sanguine a view of the process of change in our cultural software. If maturity and growth are possible, so are senescence and corruption. If we can be educated, we can also be manipulated. Moreover, the

claim that our cultural software changes over time should not be taken to mean that it changes wholly in accord with our conscious design. Just as people make history, but not as they intend, we also fashion new tools of understanding, but not as we design them. The phrase “critical self-consciousness” may tempt us to assume that the mechanisms of critical self-consciousness are wholly within our conscious control. Yet critical self-consciousness is possible only because a great many of our mental operations remain beyond our deliberate control. We cannot consciously control all aspects of our consciousness because the very elements of control must themselves be preconscious. Paradoxically, then, we might say of critical self-consciousness that it can be critical only if it is not fully self-conscious.

The second critique of the notion of critical self-consciousness questions the possibility of improvement. Notions of improvement or regression must be made by some observer. If the observer is ourselves, we are using the tools of understanding we currently have to think about the difference between our past self and the self we are now. Such a notion of improvement is always internal to the way we currently understand the world; we do not employ a transhistorical perspective to make this judgment. Yet this does not show that change does not happen, that people cannot necessarily understand the existence of this change, or that they cannot make acceptable judgments about it. They will simply understand it given the tools of understanding they currently possess. A person who understands Milton better than she did before can also understand that she understands him better. Conversely, a person who has lost the ability to speak Spanish can also understand that she has lost this ability. In other cases, however, the change in our cultural software may blind us to the nature and extent of change. Indeed, this may be so even in the two cases just mentioned.

The critique of critical self-consciousness is valuable not because it shows that ideological analysis is a hopeless endeavor. Rather, it is valuable because it emphasizes the ordinariness and even the banality of the processes by which we understand ourselves and the social world around us. Ideological analysis seems to be special because it is a kind of knowledge about knowledge. Rather than viewing this reflexivity as special, we should recognize it as commonplace. Ideological analysis is not a master discipline that can promise to regulate or direct our understanding of the social world. Rather, it is a form of knowledge acquisition just like the forms it purports to study and critique. It does not regulate the process of discovery without forming part of that process. Its reflexivity is proof not of its special nature but its ordinariness. This is perhaps the most salutary conclusion of the critique of critical self-consciousness. Once we recognize that ideological analysis is on the same footing as other kinds of

knowledge acquisition, uses the same tools, and even makes the same kinds of mistakes, we will have a more appropriate attitude toward its shortcomings and its possibilities.

### Reason as Cultural Heuristic Developed Through History

The theory of cultural software that we have been developing presupposes a conception of reason. Its basic outlines should by now be familiar: Human beings have an innate biological capacity both to reason and to incorporate and develop tools of reasoning, or what I call cultural software. Nevertheless, much of what we call human reason is a cultural product. It is the development of skills and capacities that allow us to make judgments about (among other things) values and social life. The kind of reason we develop through culture is not merely a formal or instrumental rationality; it is a substantive rationality that enables us to make judgments about what is reasonable and unreasonable.

The faculty of human reason is a historical artifact, developed through a collective and cumulative writing and rewriting of cultural software through history. We might call this part of human reasoning abilities the historical or cultural component of reason. It is the result of processes that are both cooperative and agonistic. Through joint effort and struggle human beings strive to name the good and the bad, the true and the false, and to convince others or otherwise impose their beliefs upon them.

In his historical writings, Kant claimed that humanity develops its rational faculties through struggle, a struggle that ends up being cooperative and cumulative without intentionally being so. Kant's conception anticipates the idea of the cumulative creation of cultural software through conceptual bricolage. One should not confuse this process with Kant's generally optimistic view of history. Many useful and noble ideas may be perverted or completely wiped out in the process of cultural change. As we saw in Chapter 2, the development of human reason is an evolutionary process, which makes use of the ability of human beings to possess, use, develop, and proliferate idea-programs or cultural software. We do not know, however, whether this historical process is ultimately a tragedy or a comedy. All that we can say is that it happens.

We have also noted that human beings are partly constituted by their cultural software. Hence what human beings are doing in the historical process of cultural bricolage is constructing both themselves and reason itself. We construct ourselves because we are composed of cultural software. We construct reason because reason has a cultural and historical component: part of what we call "reason"—and indeed, part of what we call "human"—consists of certain tools of understanding that human beings have collectively created over time from more primitive reasoning abilities.

Finally, we have noted that the human capacity for reason is reflexive; that is to say, it can be turned upon itself to change and develop itself. Hegel's anthropomorphism of reason in the form of Spirit can be understood in this way. We can say, along with him, that reason is a historical product that is continually interrogating itself.

The theory of cultural software proposes that understanding of the social world occurs through tools of understanding. We might call these tools heuristics, or aids to understanding. Such an account, of course, must also be a tool of understanding, and it must also be heuristic. There is nothing self-contradictory about such an explanation, however. A problem arises only if one assumes that heuristics are always or necessarily false, that they only or predominantly hinder understanding rather than serve as aids to understanding. The same might be said of symbol or metaphor. Our understanding of the social world occurs through symbol, metaphor, and figural language. Our account of how this occurs must also be described in symbolic, metaphoric, and figural terms. Yet this poses a problem only if such accounts are misleading for the purposes for which they are employed.

The conception of reason that emerges from the theory of cultural software is a notion of reflexive and recursive reason, where software is applied to its own operations. Human understanding about understanding is essentially self-referential. Self-reference can occur with respect to concepts that apply to themselves (the concepts of metaphor and heuristic, for example) or to theories about the thought of subjects that apply to the theorist who pronounces them.

Consider, for example, the present discussion of cultural software. In order to articulate the claims I am making, I have to use heuristics, metaphors, and figures, not only to convey what I mean to the reader but also to understand and express my views on the subject. These tools of understanding, however, are just like all other tools. They are helpful in some contexts and less helpful in others. They are simultaneously empowering and limiting. Moreover, even articulating and explaining this feature of cultural software must make use of heuristics and metaphors. Consider, for example, the figural nature of the terms *empower* and *limit*. To empower is to endow with power or force; to limit is to impose an endpoint or a boundary. Ironically, the same phenomenon occurs if we wish to critique the notion of tools of understanding. We might argue that this is an inadequate metaphor or heuristic to explain what we mean by understanding. But in explaining why the theory is inadequate, we must make use of figure and heuristic to express our dissatisfaction. We might say that the theory fails to "correspond," "match," "portray," "capture," or "express" what is really going on.

Thus there is no point in the process of human understanding when one abandons the tools of understanding in order to describe or critique under-

standing, to articulate or express how these tools operate or malfunction, advantage us or disadvantage us. One does not, in other words, articulate something that is unmediated by tools of understanding and then articulate its relationship to these tools. Rather, one expresses a relation between something already understood through cultural software and the cultural software that one uses to understand it. This relation is itself expressed, articulated, and understood through tools of understanding. What one always has is understanding—which is to say that what one always has is the employment of cultural software.

Nevertheless, I wish specifically to distance myself from the simple assertion that all thought or all reasoning is “just metaphor” or “just heuristic.” The problem with such statements is that they too easily devolve into what Ernest Gellner has called “reason bashing.”<sup>24</sup> Such interpretations delight in showing the limitations of reason without considering why such a sorry faculty would be sufficiently capable of recognizing its own limitations. By contrast, the theory of cultural software tries to understand how the complex is made from the simple, how the adequate is manufactured from the inadequate, while nevertheless recognizing the side effects and limitations that such a process of development necessarily comprehends.

The terms *metaphor* and *heuristic* have traditionally been freighted with pejorative connotations, perhaps especially so in the case of metaphor and the figural. Before we announce that human thought is just metaphor or just heuristic, we must first understand how it might be possible for thought to involve *just* metaphors and *just* heuristics—that is, metaphors and heuristics that are apt and appropriate, that enable understanding rather than hindering it.

This brings me to a second difficulty with the simplistic claim that thought is only metaphor or only heuristic. Although such a claim seems radical and even dangerous in its pretensions, in fact it is deeply conventional and mired in the same ways of thinking that it purports fearlessly to reject. The use of the words *only* or *just* is especially telling. This suggests that there is some other thing that understanding could involve that, unfortunately, poor human reason fails to match. It implies that there are two kinds of understanding, a good, nonmetaphorical or nonheuristic understanding, and a decrepit, figural and heuristic one. It preserves the possibility of a cultural understanding that involves no symbolic intervention but that is direct, unmediated, unalloyed, and unshaped—an understanding that brings no baggage to the act of conception, that does nothing but receives everything, that experiences things as they are, that simply absorbs what is. It preserves the possibility of a reason that uses no tools or devices, that is not a fashioning and weighing, a judging and making sense—and, because it uses no tools, escapes all limitation. In short, such claims dream of an understanding that is not understanding, of a reason that is not reason. And the great irony of this dream is that it is conducted—from start

to finish—through understanding and through reasoning, which is to say that it is conducted through the symbolic and the heuristic, through metaphors like “direct,” “unalloyed,” “unmediated,” and “unshaped.” The dream of a cultural understanding without cultural software is the dream of escaping the conditions of understanding; it is the dream of escaping what understanding is.

We should not say that reason is just heuristic and just metaphor. Rather we should say that when reason operates well it employs just heuristics and just metaphors. In the latter sentence the terms *heuristic* and *metaphor* are themselves heuristics and metaphors that attempt to convey the mechanisms of cultural understanding. One of the most intriguing features of the concepts of heuristic and metaphor is that they simultaneously convey the notion of being adequate and inadequate, of being true and false. A heuristic is an aid to understanding rather than understanding itself; a metaphor is a figural description rather than an accurate one. A heuristic is most helpful when it simplifies, which means that under certain conditions it oversimplifies, fails to take into account all relevant conditions, and therefore misleads. A metaphor is most helpful when it reveals an important quality through an expression of similarity, which means that under certain conditions it will emphasize this similarity to the detriment of important differences and will therefore mislead.

The terms *metaphor* and *heuristic* are themselves aids to understanding understanding, figures that illuminate the process of understanding. They are thus simultaneously adequate to this task in some ways and inadequate in others; indeed, this characteristic makes them instances of the very kind of things they purport to articulate. The term *heuristic* is both good and bad at enabling us to understand the kinds of things that are both good and bad at enabling understanding. The term *metaphor* is both similar and different to what it is compared to—things that express similarity among what is also different. Indeed, the key concepts of this book—those of tool, software, meme, virus, metaphor, and heuristic—all are examples of themselves, and apply both to themselves and to the ways in which they are used. Hence we might expect that they are both helpful in some situations and harmful in others, enabling understanding in some contexts and unduly limiting understanding in different ones. This realization is part and parcel of an ambivalent conception. The concept of ambivalence in the theory of ideology is not simply a claim about good resting on previous evil, or benefits resting on previous harm, and vice versa. It is also a claim about the simultaneous benefits and problems that arise from the heuristic and adaptive features of understanding. And not surprisingly, the ambivalent conception of cultural software—and indeed, the theory of cultural software itself—applies to itself in this way: it has its own benefits and disadvantages, historically created and linked together.





subordinate groups that he calls “incipient forms of the critique of ideology.” See Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 68.

19. See, e.g., Elizabeth V. Spellman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (London: Women’s Press, 1988); Martha R. Mahoney, “Whiteness and Women, in Practice and Theory: A Reply to Catharine MacKinnon,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 5 (1993): 217–51.

## 6. Ambivalence and Self-Reference

1. See Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 19; Jorge Larraín, *The Concept of Ideology* (London: Hutchison, 1979).

2. See, e.g., Barrett, *The Politics of Truth*, 18–26.

3. Lukacs also sometimes speaks of bourgeois consciousness as “false.” See, e.g., Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 53–54. Jorge Larraín has insisted that despite these remarks, Lukacs’s basic conception of ideology is neutral because it does “not pass judgment on the validity or adequacy of ideas.” Jorge Larraín, *Marxism and Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 73, 239 n. 73.

4. Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22–26.

5. V. I. Lenin, “What Is to Be Done?” in *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker, ed. (New York: Norton, 1975), 50.

6. John Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 95; Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 193–233.

7. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1936), 120–24, 149–51.

8. *Ibid.*, 88–89, 93–94.

9. The expression “Mannheim’s paradox” comes from Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 194. I borrow this particular formulation of the paradox from Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, George H. Taylor, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 157.

10. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), 2.

11. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 76–77. The recognition of this symmetry produces what Mannheim calls the general conception of ideology; Mannheim argues that this development transforms the simple theory of ideology into the sociology of knowledge (77–78).

12. See, e.g., his discussion of fascism, *ibid.*, 134–46.

13. This is in accord with Gadamer’s argument about the necessity of prejudgments and foreunderstandings as preconditions for understanding an Other, whether this Other is a text or a person. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 245–67.

14. The obligations imposed by the ambivalent conception are similar to those imposed by the hermeneutic circle as recast in Gadamer’s ontological hermeneutics. Gad-

amer argues that we must assume that a text has some truth to convey to us; otherwise we cannot be certain whether our conclusions that the text is false or incoherent are due to the text or to our misunderstanding of it. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 261–63. For a helpful discussion, see Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 86–91. Like Gadamer’s hermeneutics, the ambivalent conception of ideology recognizes that human beings are fallible and finite creatures produced by circumstance and existing in a historical moment. This recognition produces the duty of understanding imposed by the hermeneutic circle.

Although there are important similarities, it is important not to confuse this argument for hermeneutic charity with Donald Davidson’s arguments for radical interpretation according to the Principle of Charity. To begin with, Davidson is attempting a very different sort of project. He is trying to construct a theory of meaning: he wants to give an account of what goes on when a person means something in a natural language like English. Davidson argues that the idea of meaning is inextricably tied to concepts of belief, rationality, and truth. Because Davidson argues that truth is a primitive concept, he explains meaning, belief, and rationality in terms of it.

Davidson argues that when we try to understand another person, our sense of what she believes, the truth of what she is saying, and the meaning of what she is saying are interdependent. If we vary the meaning of the words, our ascriptions of belief to the speaker and the truth of those beliefs will also vary. Hence his Principle of Charity holds the truth of other people’s beliefs constant and then interprets their meaning in light of this assumption. “This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right.” Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 137.

The task of ideological analysis is quite different. In ideological analysis, we assume (1) that others have beliefs quite different from ours, (2) that much of what we regard as obvious they do not, and (3) that part of our task is to learn something new from them in the task of critiquing them. The goal of Davidson’s radical interpretation is not to have his ethics or political morality enlightened by an encounter with the natives; it is rather to provide a translation manual for their language. Radical interpretation does not seek substantive knowledge about what is good or true but rather semantic knowledge about what the terms of another person’s language mean.

Although Davidsonian interpretation seems charitable in that it tries to make the statements of other persons true, it is really a charity that begins at home. It assumes that our own beliefs are true and then tries to vary the meanings of what others are saying so that their statements conform to our beliefs. The hermeneutic charity required by ideological analysis assumes that the truth lies somewhere between ourselves and the analysand and that it is our job to discover it. Davidsonian charity does not put our own beliefs into question to interpret the beliefs of others; hermeneutic charity requires that we do so.

Finally, Davidson’s theory of meaning and his paradigmatic examples are primarily directed to questions of fact rather than questions of value. If a native reports that the statuette on my desk is “ugly” and I believe it is beautiful, Davidson does not apply the

Principle of Charity to conclude that the word *ugly* means “beautiful” to the native. Rather, Davidson suggests that we would accommodate this evidence in other ways; we would call this a “difference of opinion” (197). Such “differences of opinion” are often conflicts of values and value judgments. They are the primary concern of the hermeneutic charity involved in ideological analysis.

15. Hence an important difference between a critical approach and Gadamer’s hermeneutics is that we do not engage in this approach with the goal of reaching an agreement with the analysand. Rather, we are interested in discovering both what we can learn from the analysand and what we ultimately cannot agree with because of the ideological effects we perceive in the analysand’s thought.

16. The analogous point in the hermeneutical tradition is Gadamer’s claim that understanding requires hermeneutic openness to the truth contained within a text. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 262; Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*, 89.

17. These phenomena are discussed more fully, and in the context of legal judgments, in J. M. Balkin, “Understanding Legal Understanding: The Legal Subject and the Problem of Legal Coherence,” *Yale Law Journal* 103 (1993): 105–76.

18. Hermeneutic co-optation is an obvious danger in Gadamer’s theory of understanding because he insists that understanding seeks not only openness to but also agreement with the Other; see, e.g., Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*, 90–91. It would be more correct to say that Gadamer’s account of understanding permits the phenomena of hermeneutic conformation and co-optation as well as more benign forms of understanding. In short, Gadamer gives us an account of understanding that, while designed to show how understanding is possible, also shows how various ideological effects in our understanding can occur. For further discussion see Balkin, “Understanding Legal Understanding,” 159–66.

19. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 77.

20. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, 49.

21. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 153–64.

22. Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 436–67.

23. For the most succinct statement of this ubiquitous trope in Fish’s work, see Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech (and It’s a Good Thing Too)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 295–96.

24. Ernest Gellner, *Reason and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132.

## 7. Transcendence

1. The most obvious candidate for a transcendent value other than truth and justice would be beauty, although it is unclear to what extent aesthetic order and normative order are fully separate in many different cultures, including our own.

My colleague Owen Fiss has suggested to me that human solidarity is also a transcendent value. Solidarity, however, is only a special case of a more fundamental value,