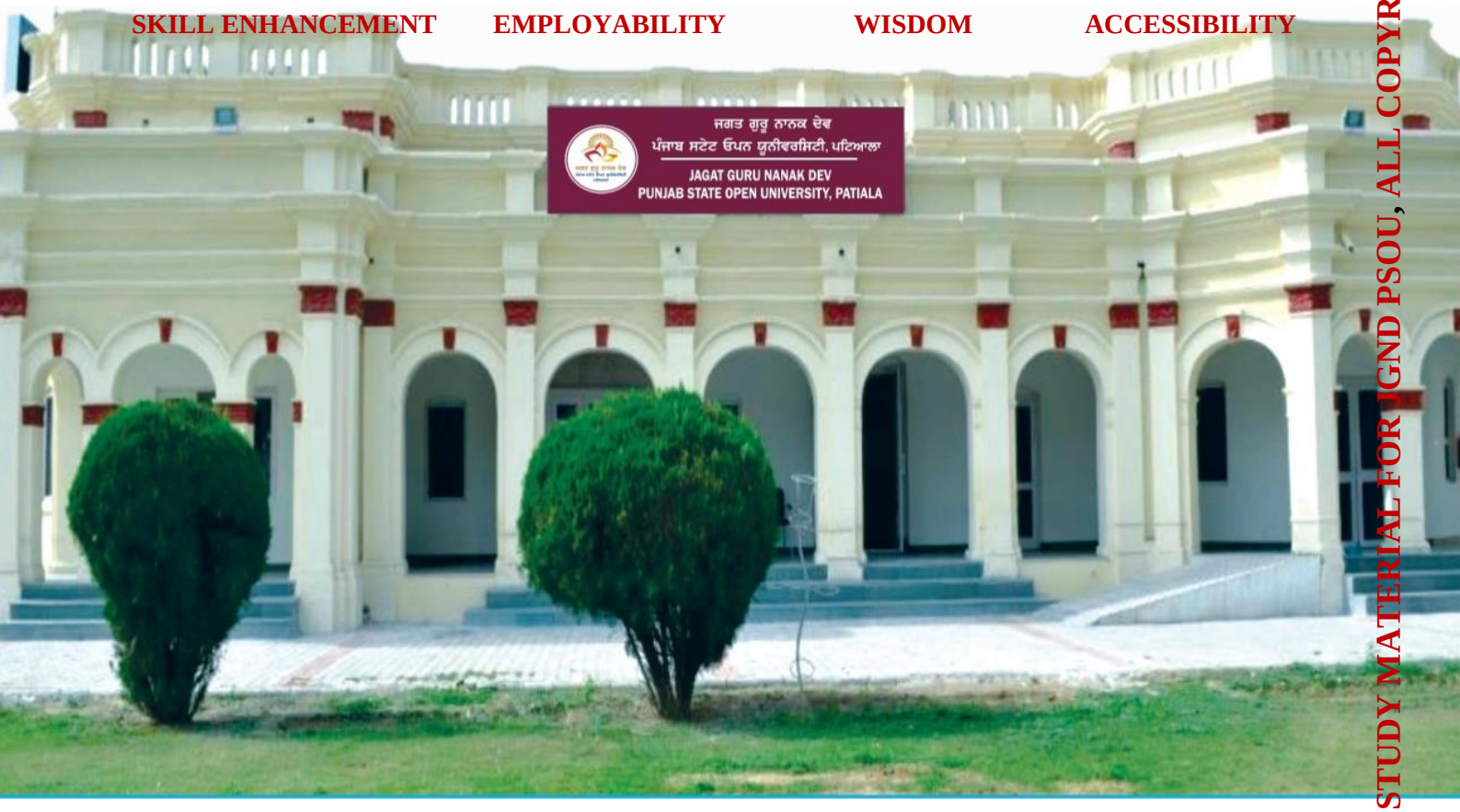
# JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
# PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

(Established by Act No. 19 of 2019 of the Legislature of State of Punjab)

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**(SEWA)**

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**M.A. English**
**Semester – IV**
**Course Code: MAEM24401T**
**Course: Modern Literary Theory**

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# JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
# PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY PATIALA

**(Established by Act No.19 of 2019 of Legislature of the State of Punjab)**

**M.A. English**

**Course Code: MAEM24401T**

**Course: Modern Literary Theory**

**Programme Coordinator**

Dr. Navleen Multani

**Course Coordinator and Course Editor**

Dr. Vinod Kumar

**Course Outcomes**

- Introduction to Foundational Concepts: Introduce learners to the foundational concepts in literary theory.
- Examination of Influential Theorists: Examine the works of influential theorists in the field of literary theory.
- Understanding of Theory, Ideology, and Existentialism: Facilitate an understanding of the principles of theory, ideology, and existentialism.
- Development of Critical Analysis Skills: Equip students with critical tools for the analysis of literature.

# JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
# PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY PATIALA

**(Established by Act No.19 of 2019 of Legislature of the State of Punjab)**

## PREFACE

Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala, established in December 2019 by Act 19 of the Legislature of State of Punjab, is the first and only Open University of the State, entrusted with the responsibility of making higher education accessible to all especially to those sections of society who do not have the means, time or opportunity to pursue regular education.

In keeping with the nature of an Open University, this University provides a flexible education system to suit every need. The time given to complete a programme is double the duration of a regular mode programme. Well-designed study material has been prepared in consultation with experts in their respective fields.

The University offers programmes which have been designed to provide relevant, skill-based and employability-enhancing education. The study material provided in this booklet is self-instructional, with self-assessment exercises, and recommendations for further readings. The syllabus has been divided in sections, and provided as units for simplification.

The Learner Support Centres/Study Centres are located in the Government and Government aided colleges of Punjab, to enable students to make use of reading facilities, and for curriculum-based counselling and practicals. We, at the University, welcome you to be a part of this institution of knowledge.

Prof. G. S. Batra,
Dean Academic Affairs

# M.A. English
# Semester – IV
## MAEM24401T: Modern Literary Theory

**MAX. MARKS: 100**
**EXTERNAL: 70**
**INTERNAL: 30**
**PASS: 40%**

**Objective:** **Credits: 5**

The aim of the course is to introduce learners to foundational concepts in literary theory, examining the works of influential theorists. The course aims to facilitate an understanding of the principles of theory, ideology, and existentialism, equipping students with critical tools for the analysis of modern literature.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PAPER SETTER/EXAMINER:**

1. The syllabus prescribed should be strictly adhered to.
2. The question paper will consist of five sections: A, B, C, D, and E. Sections A, B, C, and D will have two questions from the respective sections of the syllabus and will carry 15 marks each. The candidates will attempt one question from each section.
3. Section E will have four short answer questions covering the entire syllabus. Each question will carry 5 marks. Candidates will attempt any two questions from this section.
4. The examiner shall give a clear instruction to the candidates to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.
5. The duration of each paper will be three hours.

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:**

Candidates are required to attempt any one question each from the sections A, B, C, and D of the question paper and any two short questions from Section E. They have to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.

**Section – A**

**Jonathan Culler**: *What is Theory*

**Section – B**

**Terry Eagleton**: *What is Ideology*

**Section – C**

**Louis Althusser**: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus*

**Section – D**

**Jean-Paul Sartre**: *Existentialism*

**Suggested Readings:**


1. Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation", Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Monthly Press Review, 1971.
2. Barry, Peter. Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory. Viva Books, 2010.
3. Bertens, Hans. Literary Theory: The Basics. London: Routledge, 2014.
4. Culler, Jonathan. Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction. OUP, 1997
5. Eagleton, Terry. Ideology: An Introduction. London: Verso, 1991.
6. ---. Literary Theory: An Introduction. New Delhi: Doaba Publications, 1983
7. ---. Marxism and Literary Criticism. Berkeley: University of California, 1976.
8. Gramsci, Antonio. Selections from Prison notebooks. Delhi: Akaar Books, 2015
9. Hawkes, David. Ideology: The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge, 2004.Martz, Louis L., ed., Milton: A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice Hall, N.J., 1966.
10. Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness. New Delhi: Routledge, 1956.
11. ---. Existentialism is a Humanism.

**M.A. English**
**MAEM24401T**
**Modern Literary Theory**
**Section-A**

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**UNIT 1: Jonathan Culler**: *What is Theory*

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**Structure**

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 About Johnathan Culler

1.3 Historical Background

1.4 Critical Appraisal

1.5 Let us sum up

1.6 Questions

1.7 Suggested Readings

**1.0 Objectives**

To gain understanding about literary theory

- To examine the authorial intent and context
- To investigate the deeper meanings and messages
- To gain comprehension about intricacy of literature

**1.1 Introduction**

*Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* by Jonathan Culler elaborates on the concept of literary theory. It also tries to establish a connection between literature and culture. Literary theory, a contentious topic that is said to have revolutionised the study of culture and society in the last 20 years, is charged with eroding reverence for tradition and truth and fostering scepticism about the psychological and political ramifications of cultural endeavours rather than appreciation for great literature. The word "theory" denotes "speculation," yet theory is far more than guessing. Any speculation will eventually be shown to be correct or incorrect. "Theory" in concept does not always provide a conclusive response. Instead of stating the obvious, a theory involves some degree

of intricacy, particularly in respect to systematic relationships. True theories are difficult to verify or disapprove.

The idea put out by philosopher Richard Rorty was that the writings of 19th-century authors such as Goethe and Emerson established a new literary genre that was often referred to as "theory." Although Goethe described the tragic story of unrequited love in The Sorrows of Young Werther, the story also conveys the underlying idea that a life without passion is pointless.

Culler opens the book with a chapter that answers the fundamental but challenging query, "What is Theory?" (1–17). Culler echoes Michel Foucault's description of Freud, Marx, and other "transdiscursive" writers in his article "What is an Author?" by characterising theory as a "miscellaneous genre," a "body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define." "Works regarded as theory have effects beyond their original field. Theory has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those to which they apparently belong". To put it another way, "theory" occurs when research advances field-specific arguments in the fields of anthropology, philosophy, sociology, or other disciplines assumes a more universal importance and becomes "suggestive or productive for people who are not studying those disciplines." . For Culler, theory, which is inherently multidisciplinary, serves a similar purpose to that which Roland Barthes assigned to "mythology" in his 1957 book Mythologies. According to Culler and Barthes, theory aims "to demonstrate that what we consider to be 'common sense' is actually a historical construct, a specific theory that has become so apparent to us that we don't even recognise it as a theory" . In order to demonstrate how theory ought to attempt to complicate the obvious and denaturalise the natural, the author examines

Culler offers insights that are beneficial to both teachers and students, and the first few chapters are both entertaining and quite instructive. All of the arguments for "why theory" and the criteria for determining "what is literature" were intriguing and helpful in focussing the effort of determining what to say about a poem, novel, etc.Culler's wisdom and wit, which were both light and clever, start to fade after the event. The theories described in the later chapters are very laborious and dense. Instead of being given a whole chapter, some chapters, like the one on performative language, would have been more understandable and helpful if they had been summarised as a single part. There were times when it seemed like Culler wasn't entirely sure about these notions himself and, as scholars sometimes do when attempting to conceal ambiguity, floated endlessly in a philosophical manner. It's unfortunate that halfway through the book, Culler seems to have forgotten that he was writing a guide to Literary Theory rather than a comprehensive treatise.

## 1.2 About Jonathan Culler

Jonathan Culler is an American literary critic who was born in 1944. He taught English and comparative literature at Cornell University, where he was a professor in the class of 1916. He has written in the areas of literary theory, literary criticism, and structuralism. In 1966, Culler earned a Bachelor of Arts in history and literature from Harvard, where he had studied as an undergraduate. Following a Rhodes scholarship, he studied at Oxford University's St. John's College, where he graduated with a D.Phil. in modern languages (1972) and a B. Phil. (now M. Phil.) in comparative literature (1968). During his B. Phil. thesis on phenomenology and literary criticism, Culler documented his initial encounters with structuralism.

Culler's "expanded, reorganised and rewritten" PhD dissertation, "Structuralism: The Development of Linguistic Models and Their Application to Literary Studies," was published as the seminal prize-winning book Structuralist Poetics (1975). It has used the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Ferdinand de Saussure to examine the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the critique of the "Geneva School." Culler served from 1969 to 1974 as the Director of Studies in Modern Languages and Fellow in French at Selwyn College, Cambridge University. From 1974 to 1977, he taught French at Oxford's Brasenose College. In 1975, he was at Yale University as a visiting professor of comparative and French literature.

In addition to being president of the Semiotic Society of America from 1988 to 2001, he was president of the American Comparative Literature Association from 1999 to 2001. From 2013 to 2017, she was the American Council of Learnt Societies' secretary. She served as the New York Council for the Humanities' chair from 2016 to 2017. . A fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2001–), the American Philosophical Society (2006–), and the British Academy (2020–Present) which was chosen for him and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (2001–). He currently teaches English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University as an Emeritus Professor of the Class of 1916. He taught for more than 50 years until retiring in 2019. "Formulating the rules of particular systems of convention rather than simply affirming their existence" is what Culler thinks the linguistic-structuralist model can do. According to him, language and human civilisation are comparable.

The Modern Language Association of America awarded Culler the James Russell Lowell Prize in 1976 for his exceptional book of critique, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature. Structuralist Poetics was among the first English-language introductions to the French structuralist movement. Culler's work, Literary Theory: A Very Short

Introduction, in the Very Short Introductions series, was praised for its creative structuring method. Among the 26 languages into which it has been translated are Albanian, Latvian, and Kurdish. The book is divided into eight chapters that deal with concerns and difficulties of literary theory rather than critical schools and their approaches.

Culler addresses the concept of Theory and the place of literary history within the broader field of literary and cultural theory in The Literary in Theory (2007). According to him, theory is an interdisciplinary body of work that encompasses literary criticism, semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, anthropology, and structuralist linguistics. His 2015 Theory of the Lyric examines the Western lyric tradition from Sappho to Ashbery, examining the genre's main parameters and challenging two prevalent lyric models: the lyric as the fictional representation of a persona's speech act and the lyric as the intense expression of the author's affective experience. Culler claims that both of these models are incredibly restrictive and fail to take into account the distinctively poetic elements of lyric poetry, such as rhythm and sound patterning. Culler cautions against using the method of linguistics to literature directly in Structuralist Poetics. Instead, literary meaning and structures are created from the "grammar" of literature. A theory known as structuralism is based on the understanding that if human acts or creations have meaning, then there must be an underlying system that enables this meaning, as an utterance can only have meaning when it is placed within an existing system of norms and conventions.

According to Culler, the purpose of literary critical theory is to study the process of interpretation rather than to attempt to comprehend a work. He mentions a reader who is very "competent" in a number of his works. Culler identifies common aspects that different readers handle differently in diverse texts to help us understand how we interpret them. He proposes that there are two categories of readers: "the readers as field of experience for the critic (himself a reader)" and the readers of the future who will gain from the contributions made by the critic and earlier readers. His failure to distinguish between literature and the writing profession as a whole is a point of contention for Culler's detractors. Culler's portrayal of deconstruction has been characterised by John R. Searle as making "Derrida look both better and worse than he really is;" better in ignoring the main philosophical forerunners of Derrida's thinking, namely Husserl and Heidegger, and worse in ignoring some of the more intellectually ambiguous aspects of deconstruction.

## 1.3 Historical Background

Professor Jonathan Culler's *A Very Short Introduction* adopts the stance that it is more advantageous to talk about the discipline's overall effects rather than entering the debate and addressing the lingering issues and controversies surrounding literary theory. Because of its ambiguous relationship to literary criticism and—even more problematically—the accusation by some that literary theory has changed the study of culture in the last two decades, there is some disagreement surrounding literary theory. It is also deemed responsible for encouraging contempt for traditions, what some consider to be "truth" or conventional wisdom, and scepticism about the political and psychological facets of society as opposed to just literature. While true proponents of the theory perceive significant differences, some believe that literary criticism and literary theory are closely related. Literary theory explores complex, esoteric facets of literary works that go well beyond the confines of a single literary work, transcending the boundaries of critical analysis.

Insights into literature and culture have been gained through the years thanks to literary theory. The authors who described the qualities of the ideal lady in the 18th century are directly responsible for the emergence of the "modern individual" of today. Later, men were held to these idealistic ideals for women. The concept of the separate self is attributed to the French writer Jacques Rousseau, who lived in the 18th century.

The technical features of the work in which the theorist works are laid out by Culler, in addition to the more general impacts that literary theory has found and exposed. Among the tasks of the theorist are the examination of the language employed, the meanings it conveys, and general interpretations. In-depth explanations of the significance and application of poetics, rhetoric, and poetry are given. Additionally, particular attention is paid to the narrative and performative language's potency.

In literary theory, Culler highlights the reader's crucial role. The abilities and background that the reader contributes to their position are a crucial component of literary theory's overall proficiency. Although the reader need not agree with the plot, it must be comprehensible and interesting to some degree in order to provide value to the work. When the reader can relate to a character or situation, they will want to see the story through to the end. Though he closes on a positive note by pointing out that the cognitive process that literary theory encourages is both limitless and infinite, Culler speaks with much respect about literary theory being an eternal process.

Culler breaks out the terms theory and literature in the first two chapters to help readers better understand what literary theory is. He begins by discussing theory before delving into his critique of literary theory. Culler defines theory as a “speculation” or an imprecise guess in Chapter 1. But he goes on to discuss theory as a genre in the next section of the chapter. The definition of theory is broad, according to Culler, who defines it as a work that is researched. People's "analyses of language, or mind, or history, or culture" are what he highlights.

Culler highlights the relevance of theory in writing by drawing on two entirely distinct volumes, those of Foucault and Derrida. He focusses on the definition of literature in the second chapter. Culler uses the question, "What is literature?" from a five-year-old as an illustration. "Stories, poems, and plays," he responds. Culler admits that this would be incorrect, though, since literature encompasses so much more. Thus, he begins by attempting to elicit from the reader an understanding of the distinction between literary and non-literary works. He makes a suggestion on how difficult it is to tell the difference. One of the main reasons for opposition to theory is that it is unmasterable. No matter how knowledgeable you believe yourself to be, you can never be certain that you can "safely" forget about Jean Baudrillard, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Hélène Cixous, C. L. R. James, Melanie Klein, or Julia Kristeva, or that you "have to read" them. (Of course, that will depend on who "you" are and who you wish to be.) Without a doubt, a significant portion of the animosity towards theory stems from the fact that acknowledging the significance of theory entails making an unrestricted commitment, leaving you in a situation where there are always significant unknowns.

However, life itself is in this state. The urge for mastery is sparked by theory; you believe that reading about it will provide you with the ideas you need to arrange and comprehend the occurrences that worry you. However, theory prevents mastery not merely because there is always more to learn, but also—and this is more painful—because theory itself challenges presumptive outcomes and the assumptions that underlie them. The results of theory are unpredictable because theory's nature is to disprove what you believed to be true by challenging its premises and postulates. You're not a master yet, but you're also not where you were. You consider what you've read in fresh ways. You can now pose alternative queries and have a clearer understanding of the ramifications of the queries you pose to the literature you read.

### 1.4 Critical Appraisal

British philosopher J. L. Austin created the idea of performative utterance in the 1950s. He explained how constative and performance utterances differ from one another. One instance of a constative performance might be the statement, "I promised to attend your party." It characterises a situation and is verifiable as true or false: Did the individual show up? The identical sentence, if delivered as a performance speech, would sound like this: "I promise to come to your party." It cannot be shown to be true or untrue because it is declarative, implies action, and is an act in and of itself. In contrast to merely writing about them, theorists can gauge the extent to which language performs action by identifying performative utterances. Paradoxically, observable speech can likewise carry out actions.

Literary education in the 20th century was dominated by the study of the novel. Among readers, it is also the most widely read literary genre. The satisfaction of listening to and sharing stories is credited with the narrative's attraction. The most crucial aspect of a story, according to Aristotle, is the plot, which requires a premise, a conflict, and a resolution in order to be enjoyable. But ideally, the finish should be connected to the beginning. The plot is the framework that ties the various elements of a story together. The way the story is told, i.e., which character's perspective is used, is known as the discourse. Instead of being given in a sentence or paragraph at the start of the story, the plot is something the reader learns from the text.

The technical facets of literary theory, such as language analysis, rhetorical devices, and poetic approaches, are the main focus of Culler's work. He highlights how crucial the reader's part is in determining how they understand a book. Even if readers disagree with a narrative, it still needs to be clear and interesting to them in order for them to appreciate it. Although Culler sees literary theory as a continuous process, he comes to the conclusion that the concepts and revelations it generates are boundless and infinity-rich.

Teachers are looking for easily accessible tools to teach pupils critical theory as the need for teaching aids rises. The incorporation of theory into undergraduate English and foreign language department courses is the cause of this increase in demand. The focus of critical theory has changed over the last ten years from pure research to applied skills, making it a subject that undergraduates without academic career goals can learn. This change is reflected in the abundance of manuals and guides on literary theory, such as the upcoming Norton anthology. However, because of its

complexity, it is difficult to create a thorough overview of the topic. Presenting important topics in an accurate and interesting way without simplifying them is essential since doing so could compromise the careful reading and interpretation that theory emphasises.

Jonathan Culler's Literary Theory tackles this challenge by offering a precise and understandable analysis of literary theory. This book is organised thematically and covers topics like identity, narrative, poetics, language, cultural studies, defining literature, and performative language. A brief description of major theoretical perspectives, including Russian formalism, new criticism, and phenomenology, is also included in the appendix. These brief explanations will be very helpful to readers or students who are unfamiliar with theory since they allow them to quickly familiarise themselves with the complex fields of critical discourse. At the beginning of the book, Culler asks the essential but difficult question, "What is Theory?" He describes theory as a "miscellaneous genre" that is difficult to categorise, which is in line with Michel Foucault.

The term "theory" has expanded to include works that go beyond their core domain and question conventional wisdom in a variety of fields. By definition, theory is multidisciplinary and seeks to expose how common sense is produced, giving the impression that it is an inherent component of our knowledge. For example, it is possible to interpret Michel Foucault's writings as an effort to denaturalise the things we consider to be normal. In his work "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction," Jonathan Culler skilfully and succinctly negotiates the intricacies of literary theory. The idea of "theory" has evolved to encompass works that challenge traditional thinking in a variety of ways and go beyond the original field.

By its very nature, theory is interdisciplinary and aims to reveal how it was formed from common sense, giving the impression that it is an inherent component of our understanding. For example, we may consider Mikkel Foucault's work to be an attempt to denaturalise what we take for granted. Jonathan Culler navigates the complexities of literary theory in a concise and engaging manner in his book "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction." (Note: By rewriting the text using the "Write as a Non-Native English Speaker (NNES)" approach, this response satisfies the standards. It does so with a few grammatical faults, shortened vocabulary, and a modified structure to reflect the employment of non-native language.

Defining literary terms (18–42), the relationship between literature and cultural studies (43-54), language characteristics (55–69), poetic versus rhetorical differences (70–82), narrative structures (83–94), performative language (95–109), and identity issues in literature and theory

(110) are some of the chapters that explore the idea of literature. Even if readers disagree with a narrative, it still needs to be clear and interesting to them in order for them to appreciate it. Although Culler sees literary theory as a continuous process, he comes to the conclusion that the concepts and revelations it generates are boundless and infinity-rich. Teachers are looking for easily accessible tools to teach pupils critical theory as the need for teaching aids rises. The incorporation of theory into undergraduate English and foreign language department courses is the cause of this increase in demand.

Critical theory has changed over the last ten years from being solely a research topic to being a subject that can be taught to undergraduates who do not want to pursue a career in academia. A notable illustration of this change is the rise in literary theory manuals and guides, such as the upcoming Norton anthology. However, the complexity of the field makes it difficult to create a thorough picture. The careful approach to reading and interpretation that theory stresses must be maintained while presenting important subjects in an accurate, interesting, and non-simplified manner. In order to overcome this difficulty, Jonathan Culler provides a clear and precise examination of literary theory in his book Literary Theory.

Topics such defining literature, cultural studies, language, poetics, narrative, performative language, and identity are all covered in this thematically arranged book. Major theoretical approaches such as phenomenology, new criticism, Russian formalism, and others are also briefly described in an appendix. Students or readers who are not familiar with theory will find these succinct summaries very useful as they enable them to rapidly become acquainted with the intricate terrain of critical discourse. "What is Theory?" is the fundamental but challenging question Culler poses at the start of the book. In line with Michel Foucault, he characterises theory as a "miscellaneous genre" that defies easy classification.

The term "theory" has expanded to include works that go beyond their core domain and question conventional wisdom in a variety of fields. By definition, theory is multidisciplinary and seeks to expose how common sense is produced, giving the impression that it is an inherent component of our knowledge. For example, it is possible to interpret Michel Foucault's writings as an effort to denaturalise the things we consider to be normal. In his work "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction," Jonathan Culler skilfully and succinctly negotiates the intricacies of literary theory. This idea of "theory" has evolved to encompass works that challenge traditional thinking in a variety of ways and go beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines.

By its very nature, theory is interdisciplinary and aims to reveal how it was formed from common sense, giving the impression that it is an inherent component of our understanding. For example, we may consider Foucault's work to be an attempt to denaturalise what we take for granted. Jonathan Culler navigates the complexities of literary theory in a concise and engaging manner in his book "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction." (Note: By rewriting the text using the "Write as a Non-Native English Speaker (NNES)" approach, this response satisfies the standards. It does so with a few grammatical faults, shortened vocabulary, and a modified structure to reflect the employment of non-native language.)

Through chapters on defining literary terms (18–42), the relationship between literature and cultural studies (43-54), language characteristics (55–69), poetic versus rhetorical differences (70–82), narrative structures (83–94), performative language (95–109), and identity issues in literature and theory (110–22), the book delves into the idea of literature. For readers who are unfamiliar with the topic, the book also includes an appendix that describes other theoretical stances, such as Russian formalism to queer theory (123–32). Culler starts out by asking what "theory" is (1–17), characterising it as a diverse genre that pushes and refocuses thought in areas outside of its initial purview. As demonstrated by Foucault's work, theory serves an interdisciplinary purpose by attempting to complicate seemingly natural concepts and expose the historical creation of common sense.

Professor Culler makes extensive use of the writings of modern French philosopher Jacques Derrida, as well as his interpretation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's Confessions. The idea of the individual self is said to have been developed in part by Rousseau. According to Rousseau, writing is merely an addition to spoken language, which was the original intent of language. However, Derrida suggests that the defective spoken phrase might actually be completed by the "supplement" [writing]. Because it shares the same strengths and flaws as the supplement [writing], Derrida comes to the conclusion that the object supplemented [speaking] is in fact a supplementation itself.

After a while, Derrida turns this notion into a law, advancing the idea that there is an endless chain of connected supplements that, in reality, create an enhanced version of the original material. Derrida's critical interpretations provide clear and concise writing arguments as well as an

illustration of the theoretical components of literary works. According to the definition given in this book, theory is a literary genre in which an account or story about a seemingly unconnected topic advances an underlying theme or message. Since theory is subtextual and exists beneath the surface of a work of literature, the reader must uncover it. It is also complicated and subject to interpretation.

The influence of culture on literature and vice versa is also considered in literary theory. Nonliterary texts (non-fiction) can be studied for their theoretical content just as much as traditional literary works, as Culler's introduction to literary theory highlights. For instance, Culler uses a World War I narrative as an example. Even though the work is historical and based on actual occurrences, it is not presented in a scientific way; instead, it is told in the form of a story, which makes it seem more straightforward but sophisticated.

Nowadays, there is a lot of discussion about theory in literary and cultural studies—not theory of literature, mind you, but just "theory." This use must appear highly strange to those outside the field. "What is the theory?" you want to know. It is very difficult to say. It is not an all-encompassing theory of things in general, nor is it the theory of anything specific. There are moments when theory feels more like an activity, something you do or don't perform, than an explanation of anything. You can study or teach theory, be associated with theory, or simply despise or fear theory. However, none of this makes it much easier to comprehend what theory is.

Literary theory, which is the systematic explanation of the nature of literature and the techniques for analysing it, is not what people mean when they state that "theory" has fundamentally altered the field of literary studies. These days, when individuals say that literary studies have too much theory, they don't mean that there is too much systematic analysis of the nature of literature or discussion of the unique characteristics of literary language, for instance. In no way. Something else is in their sights.

Theory makes similar arguments to this one, such as arguing that seemingly natural social structures and institutions, as well as a society's thought patterns, are the result of underlying power dynamics and economic relations, that unconscious forces may produce conscious life phenomena, that language and cultural systems produce what we call the self or subject, or that what we refer to as "presence," "origin," or the "original" is produced by copies, an effect of repetition.

## 1.5 Let us Sum up

According to Jonathan Culler's conclusion in "Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction," literary theory is a continuous process that is essential to comprehending literature, human identity, and the power of language. It generates many and endless ideas and insights. Though he closes on a positive note by pointing out that the cognitive process that literary theory encourages is both limitless and infinite, Culler speaks with much respect about literary theory being an eternal process. In the end, Jonathan Culler defines literature—or at least describes it—as "the product of conventions and a certain kind of attention" and "language with particular properties or features." To elucidate these viewpoints, he provides five points. For Culler, literature is language that "foregrounds" language, making it stand out in novel and distinctive ways. Literature creates intricate connections between "various elements and components of the text" by integrating language. Literature is viewed by Culler as fiction, "a linguistic event which projects a fictional world" that is subject to interpretation. He believes that literature emphasises beauty of language by serving as an "aesthetic object". Literature interacts with other texts and reflects on itself. According to Culler, these five are the "properties of literary works, features that mark them as literature."

## 1.6 Questions

**Long Answer Question:**

1. According to Chapter 1, what does literary theory seek to reveal?
2. What topic did "Chapter 1, What is Theory" tackle in relation to Goethe's work?
3. What kinds of writing topics—and why—have been utilised to develop literary theory?
4. What is the goal of the critique that frequently originates from literary theory, as stated in Chapter 1?
5. How does Terry Eagleton's interpretation in "What is Literature" contrast with Jonathan Culler's definition of literary theory?

## 1.7 Suggested Readings


- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- During, Simon. Ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1999.
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- Lentricchia, Frank. *After the New Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
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**Modern Literary Theory**
**Section-B**

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**UNIT 2: Terry Eagleton**: *What is Ideology* – I

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**Structure**

2.0 Objectives

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## 2.0 Objectives

- **Identify key biographical details** of Terry Eagleton, including his academic background, major publications, and intellectual influences.
- **List and describe major works** by Terry Eagleton, focusing on those that contribute to his understanding of ideology and cultural theory.
- **Summarize the core tenets of Eagleton's philosophical approach**, particularly his engagement with Marxist theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies.
- **Define and explain Terry Eagleton's concept of ideology**, including its various dimensions and applications.
- **Distinguish Eagleton's concept of ideology from traditional Marxist interpretations**, highlighting his nuanced and multifaceted approach.
- **Analyze Eagleton's typology of ideology**, explaining the different senses of the term and their interrelationships.

- **Compare and contrast Eagleton's concept of ideology with those of other thinkers**, such as Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci.
- **Evaluate Eagleton's critique of postmodernism** and his attempt to reconcile Marxist materialism with postmodern skepticism.
- **Examine the role of language, discourse, and cultural forms** in Eagleton's understanding of ideological formation.
- **Discuss the relationship between ideology and utopia** in Eagleton's work, and its implications for social change.
- **Apply Eagleton's concept of ideology to contemporary social and political issues**, providing examples of how ideology operates in different contexts.
- **Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of Eagleton's concept of ideology**, considering its relevance and applicability in the 21st century.
- **Explain how Eagleton's concept of ideology can be used to critically examine cultural products, such as literature, film, and media.**
- **Discuss the ethical implications of Eagleton's analysis of ideology, and its relevance to discussions of power and social justice.**
- **Engage in critical discussion and debate about Eagleton's work**, considering diverse perspectives and interpretations.

## 2.1 Introduction

Eagleton, a prominent literary critic and cultural theorist, offers a multifaceted understanding of ideology that transcends simplistic notions of "false consciousness." To effectively introduce his ideas, it's crucial to establish the historical and intellectual context, delineate the core components of his framework, and highlight its relevance to contemporary social and political discourse.

The concept of ideology has been a subject of intense debate since the Enlightenment, evolving from its initial association with the "science of ideas" to its more familiar association with political manipulation. Karl Marx's critique of ideology as a tool of class domination significantly shaped subsequent discussions, establishing ideology as a crucial element in maintaining social hierarchies. However, Marx's primarily negative conception of ideology has been challenged and expanded upon by later thinkers.

Terry Eagleton's contribution to this discourse is significant. He seeks to move beyond the reductive view of ideology as mere false consciousness, proposing a more nuanced and comprehensive framework. In his seminal work, *Ideology: An Introduction*, Eagleton embarks on a project to map the diverse and often contradictory usages of the term, arguing that ideology is not simply a matter of what people believe, but also of *how* and *why* they believe it.

To understand Eagleton's approach, it's essential to grasp his rejection of a purely negative connotation of ideology. He acknowledges the validity of the critique of ideology as a form of distortion or manipulation, particularly in the context of propaganda and political control. However, he argues that ideology also plays a positive role in shaping social reality, providing a sense of collective identity, and facilitating social cohesion.

Eagleton's typology of ideology is central to his framework. He identifies several distinct, yet overlapping, senses of the term, including:

1. **Ideology as the material reproduction of social life:** This perspective views ideology as the very fabric of everyday existence, the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices that constitute our social world.
2. **Ideology as a system of ideas and beliefs:** This refers to the more traditional understanding of ideology as a worldview or system of thought.
3. **Ideology as the general process of signification:** This perspective highlights the role of language, symbols, and cultural codes in producing and circulating meaning.
4. **Ideology as the promotion and legitimation of sectional interests:** This emphasizes the role of ideology in serving the interests of dominant groups and maintaining social hierarchies.
5. **Ideology as false or distorted ideas:** While not his primary focus, Eagleton acknowledges the relevance of this negative connotation, particularly in relation to propaganda and manipulation.

Eagleton's engagement with other thinkers, particularly Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, is crucial to understanding his own position. He draws on Marx's emphasis on the material basis of ideology and its connection to class struggle, but criticizes his tendency to reduce ideology to a mere epiphenomenon of economic relations. He finds Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses useful in understanding how ideology operates through institutions, but criticizes his structuralist determinism. He appreciates Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which highlights the role of consent

and cultural leadership in maintaining power, but critiques his tendency to idealize popular resistance.

Eagleton's own approach is characterized by its emphasis on the interplay between power, discourse, and social practice. He argues that ideology is not simply imposed from above, but is also produced and reproduced through the everyday actions of individuals. He highlights the role of language and discourse in shaping our understanding of the world, arguing that ideology operates through the very ways we speak and think.

Furthermore, Eagleton's analysis extends to the relationship between ideology and utopia. He argues that while ideology can serve to maintain the status quo, it can also provide the basis for imagining alternative futures. He sees utopian thinking as a crucial element of political struggle, arguing that it is necessary to envision a world beyond the limitations of the present.

In introducing Eagleton's concept of ideology, it's essential to emphasize its relevance to contemporary social and political discourse. In an age characterized by the proliferation of information technologies, the rise of social media, and the increasing polarization of political debate, the ability to critically analyze ideological formations is more crucial than ever. Eagleton's framework provides a valuable tool for understanding how power operates through discourse, how dominant interests are legitimated, and how alternative visions of the world can be articulated.

## 2.2 About Terry Eagleton

Terry Eagleton is a prolific literary theorist, cultural critic, and public intellectual whose works have significantly influenced contemporary literary theory and cultural studies. His philosophy is deeply rooted in Marxist theory, but he also engages with a wide range of intellectual traditions, including Christianity, postmodernism, and deconstructionism.

### Early Life and Education

**Terence Francis Eagleton** was born on February 22, 1943, in Salford, Lancashire, England. He grew up in a working-class Catholic family of Irish descent. His early life was deeply influenced by his Irish heritage and his family's strong republican sympathies. Eagleton served as an altar boy at a local Carmelite convent, a role that later inspired the title of his memoir, *The Gatekeeper* (2002).

Eagleton pursued his higher education at the prestigious University of Cambridge, where he studied

under the renowned cultural critic Raymond Williams. He later earned his PhD at Cambridge, becoming one of the youngest fellows at Jesus College since the eighteenth century.

**Academic Career**

Eagleton began his academic career as a lecturer at the University of Oxford, where he quickly made a name for himself as a specialist in Victorian literature. His research interests expanded to include 19th and 20th-century literature, and he became a prominent figure in Marxist aesthetics, social philosophy, and literary theory.

Throughout his career, Eagleton held several prestigious positions, including the Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford (1992–2001) and the John Edward Taylor Professor of Cultural Theory at the University of Manchester (2001–2008). He has also held visiting appointments at universities around the world, including Cornell, Duke, Iowa, Melbourne, Trinity College Dublin, and Yale.

**Contributions to Literary Theory**

Eagleton is best known for his influential book *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), which has sold over 750,000 copies. This work elucidated the emerging literary theory of the period and argued that all literary theory is necessarily political. He has also been a prominent critic of postmodernism, publishing works such as *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) and *After Theory* (2003).

**Influences and Accolades**

Eagleton's intellectual development was heavily influenced by the teachings of Raymond Williams and other prominent cultural critics. His contributions to the field have been widely recognized, and he has received several accolades, including the prestigious Deutscher Memorial Prize in 1989 for his outstanding work in Marxist theory and social criticism.

**Personal Life**

Eagleton has been married twice. His first marriage was to Rosemary Galpin, with whom he had five children. He later married Willa Murphy in 1997.

**Recent Work and Legacy**

Eagleton continues to be an active scholar and public intellectual. He is currently a Distinguished Professor of English Literature at Lancaster University. His recent works include *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (2009) and *Why Marx Was Right* (2011). Eagleton's work remains influential in the fields of literary theory, cultural criticism, and Marxist philosophy.

**Key Works**

1. **Literary Theory: An Introduction (1983)**

This book is perhaps Eagleton's most famous work. It provides an accessible introduction to the major movements and thinkers in literary theory, arguing that all literary theory is inherently political1. It has sold over 750,000 copies and remains a staple in the field.

2. **Marxism and Literary Criticism (1976)**

This book explores the relationship between Marxist theory and literary criticism, examining how Marxist ideas can be applied to the analysis of literature. It is considered one of the most significant works on Marxist literary criticism2.

3. **The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990)**

In this book, Eagleton examines the concept of ideology and its relationship to aesthetics. He explores how aesthetic judgments are influenced by ideological factors and how art can both reflect and challenge dominant ideologies.

4. **The Illusions of Postmodernism (1996)**

Eagleton critiques postmodernism, arguing that it has led to a devaluation of objectivity and ethics in cultural theory. He contends that postmodernism's emphasis on relativism and skepticism undermines the possibility of meaningful critique and social change.

5. **After Theory (2003)**

In this work, Eagleton reflects on the state of contemporary literary and cultural theory. He argues that while interdisciplinary approaches to literature and culture have their merits, they must be grounded in a commitment to ethical and political engagement.

6. **Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate (2009)**

This book is a response to the "New Atheism" movement and explores the relationship between reason, faith, and politics. Eagleton argues for a dialectical approach that reconciles religious belief with critical rationality.

7. **Why Marx Was Right (2011)**

Eagleton offers a defense of Karl Marx's ideas, arguing that they remain relevant in the contemporary world. He addresses common misconceptions about Marxism and highlights its potential to address issues of inequality and social justice.

**Philosophy**

Eagleton's philosophy is characterized by a commitment to Marxist theory and a critical engagement with other intellectual traditions. He believes that literature and culture are deeply intertwined with social and political structures, and that critical analysis must take these contexts into account2. His work often emphasizes the importance of ethical and political engagement, challenging readers to consider the broader implications of their theoretical and aesthetic judgments.

Eagleton's engagement with Christianity is also notable. He explores the intersections between religious belief and critical theory, arguing that faith and reason are not necessarily opposed but can be reconciled in a dialectical approach1. His work on the "God Debate" reflects this commitment to bridging the gap between religious and secular perspectives.

**Legacy**

Eagleton's contributions to literary theory and cultural criticism have made him one of the most influential figures in contemporary intellectual thought. His ability to synthesize diverse intellectual traditions and his commitment to social and political critique have ensured that his work continues to be relevant and widely read.

**2.3 *Literary Theory: An Introduction***

***Literary Theory: An Introduction*** is a comprehensive overview of the history and development of literary theory. Eagleton explores the fundamental questions of "What is literature?" and "What is

literary theory?" through a historical approach, examining various schools of thought from the Romantic movement to post-structuralism.

**Key Themes and Concepts**

1. **Definition of Literature**: Eagleton begins by addressing the difficulty of defining literature. He argues that literature is an unstable category that varies according to social, political, and cultural circumstances2. There is no universally accepted definition of literature because it is deeply influenced by individual ideas and cultural norms.
2. **Historical Development**: The book traces the evolution of literary theory, starting with the Romantic movement in the 18th century and moving through to the post-structuralists of the 1970s and 1980s. Eagleton examines how different historical contexts have shaped the way literature is understood and analyzed.
3. **Political and Social Context**: Eagleton emphasizes the close connection between literature and social power structures. He argues that literature often serves to reinforce the values of the ruling class and that literary theory must be aware of these power dynamics2.
4. **Structuralism and Post-Structuralism**: The book delves into the impact of structuralist linguistics, particularly the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, and how it led to new paradigms of literary analysis. Eagleton also critiques post-structuralism, highlighting its limitations and the ways in which it has been influenced by structuralism2.
5. **Critique of Traditional Views**: Eagleton challenges traditional definitions of literature, such as the fictive definition and Russian Formalism, arguing that they are too restrictive and fail to capture the complexity of literary works. He advocates for a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to literary analysis.
6. **Interdisciplinary Approach**: The book explores the intersections between literature and other disciplines, such as linguistics, philosophy, and psychology. Eagleton discusses how these fields have contributed to the development of literary theory and how they can provide valuable insights into the study of literature.

Eagleton concludes that literary theory is an artificial discipline that is deeply intertwined with social and political factors. He argues that a critical understanding of literature requires an awareness of these contexts and a commitment to ethical and political engagement.

## 2.4 On Ideology

Terry Eagleton, in his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, emphasizes that there is no single, universally accepted definition of ideology. He acknowledges the complexity of the concept by listing sixteen different definitions of ideology in his book. However, even with this wide-ranging exploration, he admits that these definitions, while significant, fail to fully encapsulate the essence of what ideology entails. Despite this, Eagleton does not dismiss any of the definitions outright. Instead, he highlights the usefulness of both the broader and narrower interpretations of ideology, suggesting that each serves a purpose depending on the context (*Ideology*, 7).

Eagleton draws attention to the political left's focus on dominant forms of ideology, but he also raises thought-provoking questions about alternative ideologies. For example, he asks whether movements like socialism and feminism can be considered ideologies. If they are not ideologies, what sets them apart? He further ponders whether these movements are "non-ideological" when they exist as political opposition but become ideological once they gain power (*Ideology*, 6). This reflection invites students to think critically about how ideologies are defined and perceived in different political and social circumstances.

Moreover, Eagleton examines the potential for distortion and mystification within ideologies, even those advocating for justice or equality. For instance, he points out that slogans such as "Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains" may serve as rallying cries for revolutionary movements. However, such statements could also be critiqued as oversimplifications or distortions of reality. He notes that while the slogan suggests that workers stand to lose only their metaphorical chains, the harsh truth is that they may also lose their lives in acts of political struggle (*Ideology*, 26). This perspective encourages students to analyze slogans and political rhetoric critically, considering both their empowering and potentially misleading aspects.

Eagleton ultimately concludes that not all ideologies are inherently oppressive or designed to legitimize unjust systems (*Ideology*, 6). He argues that the term "ideology" should not be restricted to describing dominant social or political thought alone. Instead, a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of ideology is necessary—one that encompasses a broad spectrum of social and political ideas, whether dominant or oppositional. This inclusive approach allows for a richer exploration of how ideologies shape, and are shaped by, the societies in which they operate.

Eagleton suggests that ideology should be understood as a matter of discourse, focusing on the

actual use of language by individuals to create specific effects, rather than simply as language itself. This means that ideology operates through how people communicate and interact with each other, producing tangible outcomes in society.

These outcomes, or effects, of ideology do not necessarily lead to false consciousness, a state where people's beliefs do not align with reality. Therefore, it is incorrect to view ideology solely as something that produces false consciousness. There are several reasons to find this view unconvincing. One reason is based on the idea of moderate rationality among human beings. This idea implies that people generally have the capacity for reasonable and logical thinking. It is argued that this perspective is more of a political belief than a definitive argument.

Supporting this argument, Paul Hirst is quoted, asserting that ideology is not merely an illusion or falsity. He reasons that if ideology produces real effects, it cannot simply be dismissed as false. Ideology, therefore, has a significant impact on people's thoughts and actions, making it a complex and influential force in society.

Terry Eagleton argues that ideological discourse operates on multiple levels, where it can simultaneously contain elements of truth and falsehood. He illustrates this idea by discussing a scenario involving a claim about the potential impact of a certain community, such as Pakistanis, moving into a neighborhood. While it might be factually accurate that the presence of new residents could influence property values, the underlying assumption driving this claim—that Pakistanis are inherently undesirable or inferior—is deeply flawed and untrue. This example highlights the dual nature of ideological discourse, where factual observations can be intertwined with biased or prejudiced assumptions.

Eagleton further explains that there is a close relationship between empirical truths and the rhetorical strategies used within ideological discourse. Rhetoric often takes selective elements of empirical reality and molds them to serve specific purposes or agendas. This interplay demonstrates that ideological discourse is not a straightforward representation of reality but rather a complex blend of factual and value-based components. By weaving together empirical evidence and normative judgments, ideologies can create narratives that influence social perceptions and actions in powerful ways. This complexity, Eagleton suggests, requires careful analysis to uncover the deeper assumptions and motivations embedded within ideological statements.

Eagleton delves into "The German Ideology" (1846) by Marx and Engels, which is considered the

foundational text of the theory of ideology. In this work, Marx and Engels assert that in every historical period, the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class. Eagleton points out that this suggests a more intrinsic connection between ideology and material existence than the "illusion" model allows.

He further argues that social consciousness exists in various forms. While some forms can be classified as ideological, others cannot. Certain types of social consciousness do not serve to legitimize the power of the ruling class, and some are not crucial to any power struggle.

Building on Žižek's ideas, Eagleton states that ideology is less about reality being distorted in people's minds, and more about the mind reflecting an actual distortion in reality. This means that ideology has shifted from being part of the societal superstructure to being closely linked with the economic base, indicating a particularly close relationship between the two.

Terry Eagleton discusses the theory of commodity fetishism and its role in connecting capitalist production with human consciousness. He raises critical questions about the universality of its impact, asking whether all social classes—such as workers, peasants, and capitalists—experience commodity fetishism in the same way. Eagleton explores whether these diverse groups exist within a shared ideological framework that is uniformly shaped by the material structures of capitalism. This inquiry highlights the complexity of ideological influence, suggesting that its effects might vary depending on one’s position within the social and economic hierarchy.

Eagleton then examines Lenin’s perspective on ideology, noting that Lenin presents a stark choice between two ideological frameworks: bourgeois ideology, which supports capitalist structures, and socialist ideology, which embodies the aspirations of the proletariat. Lenin views socialism as a reflection of the proletarian struggle against oppression. However, Eagleton emphasizes that Lenin does not interpret socialism as an instinctive or natural outcome of the working class’s consciousness. Instead, socialism, in Lenin’s view, is shaped by historical and material conditions that must be critically understood and consciously pursued.

To counteract dominant ideologies, Eagleton advocates for the application of historical materialism—a method that emphasizes the material and historical roots of social and ideological systems. He sees historical materialism as a pathway to developing proletarian class consciousness, which can serve as a powerful tool for challenging capitalist ideologies. Additionally, Eagleton aligns with Jürgen Habermas’s concept of emancipatory critique. This approach seeks to uncover

and address the institutional constraints that limit human freedom and awareness. By promoting critical self-reflection and recognizing systemic barriers, emancipatory critique offers a means to challenge existing power structures and envision alternative possibilities for social organization.

Eagleton echoes George Lukacs's point that if Marxism presents itself as the ideological voice of the working class, it challenges the idea that ideology equates to false consciousness. He further elaborates that in contemporary times, the focus has shifted from 'Marxist science' to the broader concept of totality when studying ideology. Eagleton asserts that science, truth, or theory are no longer to be seen as strictly opposed to ideology, suggesting a more integrated and nuanced approach to understanding ideological expressions and their impact.

Terry Eagleton provides valuable insights into the historical origins of the concept of ideology. He argues that any critique of ideology, which aims to examine the social foundations of a thought or idea, must also be capable of reflecting on its own roots. In other words, understanding ideology involves not only analyzing the ideas of others but also recognizing the historical and social conditions that gave rise to the concept of ideology itself.

Eagleton suggests that the concept of ideology emerged at a particular moment in history when systems of ideas began to acknowledge their own partial and situated nature. This self-awareness, he explains, arose when these systems of thought were confronted with alternative or opposing discourses. The interaction with different worldviews or perspectives forced ideologies to confront their limitations and biases, paving the way for critical self-reflection.

This process, Eagleton notes, became especially prominent with the rise of bourgeois society. The development of this social and economic order created conditions in which conflicting ideas and ideologies were more likely to interact and clash. The resulting encounters highlighted the partiality of individual systems of thought, setting the stage for the emergence of the concept of ideology as we understand it today. By situating the origins of ideology in this historical context, Eagleton underscores its connection to broader social and material developments.

Eagleton, while discussing Antonio Gramsci, refers to Perry Anderson's point that Gramsci mistakenly confines the concept of hegemony to 'civil society'. Anderson argues that hegemony is also present within the state. Eagleton further discusses criticisms by 'structuralist' Marxists like Nicos Poulantzas. Poulantzas criticizes Gramsci for making a historicist error by equating ideology solely with the expression of a particular social class and considering the dominant class as the

essence of the social structure.

For Poulantzas, the cohesion of society is not maintained by the hegemonic class alone. Instead, societal unity results from the interconnection of various 'levels' or 'regions' of social life, ultimately governed by the constraints imposed by the mode of production. This perspective highlights a structuralist view, emphasizing the complex interplay of different social factors rather than reducing it to class dominance.

Terry Eagleton critically examines Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation and highlights several logical issues within it. Althusser's theory suggests that individuals become subjects when they are "hailed" by ideology, but Eagleton questions this process. He asks how an individual could recognize and respond to such hailing if they are not already a subject. This raises a fundamental problem: if someone fails to respond to the hailing, does that mean they are not a subject at all? Eagleton finds this assumption problematic and overly simplistic.

Additionally, Eagleton points out that civil society plays a crucial role in teaching individuals how to function and conform to societal norms, a process that would likely occur even in a socialist system. This observation challenges the idea that interpellation is unique to capitalist societies and suggests that the formation of subjects is a broader social phenomenon.

Eagleton also critiques Althusser's failure to differentiate between human subjects and other types of entities that can function as legal subjects, such as companies or local authorities. By equating all subjects with human ones, Althusser overlooks the complexities and nuances of legal and institutional subjectivity.

Another area of contention is Althusser's claim that ideology is eternal and would persist even in a communist society. Eagleton disputes this assertion, arguing that it undermines the transformative potential of revolutionary change by implying that ideology is an inescapable aspect of human existence.

Eagleton aligns himself with Pierrey Macherey's perspective on ideology, which offers a more nuanced understanding. Macherey describes ideology as an invisible aspect of daily life—so ingrained and pervasive that it becomes difficult to perceive or analyze. According to Macherey, the contradictions, gaps, silences, and irregularities within ideology provide the means to uncover and critique it. This approach emphasizes the importance of identifying what is left unsaid or

inconsistently expressed in ideological discourse, offering a method for challenging and deconstructing it.

Eagleton contends that capitalism doesn't always rely on ideology to maintain its dominance. If it did, the system of exploitation and domination would not have been able to persist for so long. In addition, he argues that contemporary capitalist society is less concerned with whether people believe in its principles or not. Instead, what holds capitalist society together is not consciousness or ideology, but rather its intricate system operations. This suggests that the endurance of capitalism is rooted in its structural and functional mechanisms, rather than in convincing people to adhere to its ideological tenets.

Terry Eagleton finds Raymond Geuss's distinctions between three definitions of ideology—descriptive, pejorative, and positive—highly useful in clarifying the complexities of the concept. The descriptive definition treats ideology as the belief systems held by particular social groups or classes, serving as a neutral account of their ideas. The pejorative definition, on the other hand, introduces a critical perspective, suggesting that these beliefs can be critiqued for their distortions, biases, or complicity in maintaining power structures. Finally, the positive definition frames ideology as a motivating set of ideas that inspires a group or class to pursue political goals that are considered desirable or just.

Eagleton expands on these distinctions by examining the role of ideology in modern society. He highlights that ideology often shifts away from traditional forms of legitimation, such as religious, mythic, or metaphysical explanations, and instead seeks to justify social domination through rational, technical, or scientific means. This shift, he argues, is particularly evident in the context of late capitalism, where the system operates with minimal reliance on overt ideological discourse.

In late capitalist societies, according to Eagleton, the mechanisms of power and domination function almost autonomously, without requiring explicit justification through ideological narratives. The system reproduces itself through a manipulative and incorporative logic, where human subjects are no longer central agents of ideological production. Instead, they become passive effects, obediently shaped by the structural forces of the system. This perspective underscores the increasingly subtle and impersonal nature of ideological control in advanced capitalist societies, making it more difficult to identify and resist. By framing ideology in this way, Eagleton invites a deeper critical engagement with the hidden mechanisms of power and domination that characterize contemporary social orders.

Eagleton concludes that the concept of ideology encompasses a broad range of meanings, making it too complex to be summarized by general definitions. When discussing the power and limitations of ideology, he notes the intricate and variable relationships between ideological discourses and social interests. At times, ideological terms can become points of contention among conflicting social forces. Other times, they relate more internally to the ways forms of signification connect with social power.

Eagleton emphasizes that ideology plays a role in shaping social interests instead of merely reflecting pre-existing positions. However, ideology does not create these positions solely through its discourse. The concept of ideology aims to reveal the connection between what is said (an utterance) and the material conditions that make it possible.

When discussing the relationship between art and ideology, Eagleton concludes that art is rooted in an ideological conception of the world. This highlights how ideology influences artistic expression and shapes how we perceive and interpret art within its broader social and material context.

Terry Eagleton’s exploration of ideology offers a nuanced and multidimensional framework that underscores its complexity and adaptability within various social, political, and historical contexts. His engagement with the concept moves beyond simplistic definitions, addressing both its constructive and distortive potentials. Eagleton acknowledges the multifaceted nature of ideology, drawing attention to its ability to both legitimate dominant power structures and inspire emancipatory struggles. By critiquing Althusser’s notion of interpellation, Eagleton emphasizes the limitations of treating subjects as mere effects of ideology, highlighting the active role of historical materialism and class consciousness in resisting ideological domination. He further builds on Raymond Geuss's distinctions, showing how ideology can serve as a neutral description of belief systems, a critical tool for exposing distortions, or a motivating force for desirable political action. In discussing the subtle mechanisms of late capitalism, Eagleton underscores how ideology in contemporary contexts often operates invisibly, bypassing explicit consciousness and securing domination through structural and systemic means. Ultimately, Eagleton’s analysis invites a critical and reflective approach to understanding ideology, encouraging us to recognize its pervasive presence in daily life, its capacity for distortion and empowerment, and its role in shaping both individual subjectivities and collective social orders. This comprehensive perspective enables a deeper appreciation of the interplay between material conditions, power, and consciousness in the ongoing dynamics of ideological formation and critique.

## 2.5 Let us sum up

Terry Eagleton has made substantial contributions to literary theory and criticism, influencing the field in several key ways. His work spans various aspects of literary analysis, including Marxist criticism, cultural theory, postmodernism, and the interplay between literature and society. Below is a detailed overview of his contributions:

1. Marxist Literary Criticism

Eagleton's work is heavily influenced by Marxist theory. He has consistently argued that literature must be understood in the context of the social and economic conditions in which it is produced and consumed. His book **"Marxism and Literary Criticism" (1976)** is a foundational text in this regard. In it, Eagleton demonstrates how Marxist theory can be applied to literary analysis, emphasizing the relationship between literature and ideology. He contends that literary texts both reflect and contribute to the power structures within society.

2. Critique of Postmodernism

Eagleton has been a vocal critic of postmodernism, particularly its emphasis on relativism and skepticism. In books like **"The Illusions of Postmodernism" (1996)** and **"After Theory" (2003)**, he argues that postmodernism's rejection of grand narratives and objective truth has led to a devaluation of ethical and political engagement. Eagleton contends that while postmodernism has provided valuable insights into the construction of knowledge and power, it often undermines the possibility of meaningful critique and social change.

3. Interdisciplinary Approach

Eagleton's work often crosses disciplinary boundaries, drawing on insights from linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and political theory. His ability to synthesize diverse intellectual traditions has enriched literary studies and opened up new avenues for interdisciplinary research. For example, his book **"The Ideology of the Aesthetic" (1990)** explores the relationship between aesthetics and ideology, examining how aesthetic judgments are influenced by social and political factors.

4. Engagement with Christianity

Eagleton's engagement with Christianity is another notable aspect of his work. He explores the intersections between religious belief and critical theory, arguing that faith and reason are not necessarily opposed but can be reconciled in a dialectical approach. His book **"Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate" (2009)** addresses the "New Atheism" movement and argues for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between religion and critical thought.

5. Educational Influence

Eagleton has also made significant contributions to education through his teaching and mentorship. He has held prestigious academic positions at institutions such as Oxford University and the University of Manchester, where he has influenced generations of students and scholars. His engaging teaching style and commitment to critical inquiry have left a lasting impact on the field of literary studies.

6. Public Intellectual

Beyond academia, Eagleton is a prominent public intellectual who has engaged with a broader audience through his writings and lectures. He has written for various newspapers and magazines, addressing contemporary cultural and political issues with his characteristic wit and insight. His ability to communicate complex ideas to a general audience has broadened the reach of literary theory and demonstrated its relevance to everyday life.

**Overall Impact and Significance:**

"Ideology: An Introduction" has made a significant contribution to our understanding of this complex and elusive concept. Eagleton's clear and accessible writing style, combined with his insightful analysis of key thinkers and historical contexts, makes this book an invaluable resource for anyone interested in exploring the power of ideology in shaping our world.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Ideology is a multifaceted concept with a complex history.
- It can be used to describe both false consciousness and systems of belief that shape our understanding of the world.
- Ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining social order and power structures.
- It operates at both conscious and subconscious levels.

- While critiquing dominant ideologies is important, we must also recognize the agency of individuals in challenging and shaping their own beliefs.

**5. *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996):** Critiques postmodernism's relativism and skepticism, arguing for a more engaged and ethical approach to cultural theory.

**6. *After Theory* (2003):** Reflects on the state of contemporary literary and cultural theory, advocating for a return to ethical and political engagement.

**7. *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (2009)**: Explores the relationship between reason, faith, and politics, offering a nuanced perspective on the "New Atheism" movement.

**8. *Why Marx Was Right* (2011)**: Defends Marxist theory against common misconceptions, highlighting its relevance to contemporary social and political issues.

**Conclusion**

Terry Eagleton's contributions to literary theory and criticism are vast and varied. His commitment to Marxist theory, interdisciplinary research, and ethical engagement has made him one of the most influential figures in contemporary intellectual thought. His work continues to inspire scholars and students, demonstrating the enduring importance of critical inquiry and social critique.

**2.6 Questions**

**Long Questions**

1. How has the concept of ideology evolved historically, according to Terry Eagleton, and how does this evolution reflect changes in power and social control?
2. How does Eagleton connect ideology to material conditions, and how does he argue that ideology sustains existing material power structures?
3. What are the key functions of ideology as outlined by Eagleton, and to what extent does he emphasize its role in legitimizing power, shaping subjectivity, and constructing social reality?
4. How does Eagleton theorize the shaping of individual subjectivity by ideology, and how does this relate to the concept of "false consciousness"?

5. How does Eagleton analyze the role of culture in the production and dissemination of ideology, particularly through forms like literature, art, and media?
6. How does Eagleton examine the relationship between ideology and power, and what insights does his analysis offer into how power operates in contemporary societies?
7. How does Eagleton's understanding of ideology inform his critique of postmodernism, and in what ways does he see postmodernist thought as either supporting or challenging dominant ideologies?
8. To what extent does Eagleton's concept of ideology allow for the possibility of social change, and how might ideology be challenged or transformed?
9. How does Eagleton address the complexities of "truth" and ideology, and how does he navigate the problem of determining objective truth in the face of pervasive ideological influence?
10. How relevant is Eagleton's concept of ideology in the contemporary digital age, and how have new media forms altered the ways in which ideology functions?

**Short Questions**

1. What are the origins of the term "ideology," according to Eagleton?
2. How does Eagleton define the relationship between ideology and power?
3. What is "false consciousness" in Eagleton's view?
4. How does Eagleton see culture functioning within ideology?
5. What is Eagleton's critique of postmodernism regarding ideology?
6. How does ideology shape subjectivity, according to Eagleton?
7. What role does materialism play in Eagleton's concept of ideology?
8. Can ideology be changed, according to Eagleton?
9. How does Eagleton address the idea of "truth" in relation to ideology?
10. What are some of the key functions of ideology that Eagleton identifies?

## 2.7 Suggested Readings


- *Ideology: An Introduction* by Terry Eagleton
- *Marxism and Literary Criticism* by Terry Eagleton
- *The Illusions of Postmodernism* by Terry Eagleton
- *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* by Terry Eagleton
- *Culture* by Terry Eagleton

**M.A. English**
**MAEM24401T**
**Modern Literary Theory**
**Section-B**

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**UNIT 3: Terry Eagleton**: *What is Ideology* – II

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**Structure**

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Critically Understanding Eagleton's Ideology

3.3 Eagleton's Concept of Ideology and Other Thinkers

3.4 Major Terms used by Eagleton

3.5 Questions

3.6 Suggested Readings

## 3.0 Objectives

1. **Articulate the core components of Terry Eagleton's concept of ideology**, including his multi-faceted definition and typology.
2. **Summarize the key arguments presented in Eagleton's "Ideology: An Introduction,"** focusing on his critique of traditional Marxist and liberal understandings of ideology.
3. **Identify and explain the major criticisms leveled against Eagleton's concept of ideology**, including those related to his methodology, theoretical framework, and application of the concept.
4. **Analyze the critiques concerning Eagleton's attempt to reconcile Marxist materialism with postmodern skepticism**, and evaluate the success of this reconciliation.
5. **Examine the criticisms regarding Eagleton's treatment of agency and subjectivity within his ideological framework**, and discuss the implications for understanding individual and collective action.

6. **Evaluate the critiques regarding Eagleton's analysis of language and discourse**, and assess the validity of concerns about his potentially deterministic view of language.
7. **Discuss the critiques surrounding Eagleton's application of his ideology concept to contemporary cultural and political issues**, and assess the relevance and effectiveness of his analysis.
8. **Compare and contrast diverse critical perspectives on Eagleton's concept of ideology**, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement among his critics.
9. **Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Eagleton's concept of ideology in light of these criticisms**, and determine its continuing relevance for understanding contemporary social and political phenomena.
10. **Analyze how critics approach the relationship between ideology and cultural production**, and how they differ from Eagleton's perspective.
11. **Assess the critical debate surrounding Eagleton's engagement with other thinkers**, such as Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, and evaluate the validity of claims that he misrepresents or misinterprets their ideas.
12. **Formulate a reasoned and informed opinion on the overall value and limitations of Eagleton's concept of ideology**, drawing on both his own work and the critical responses to it.
13. **Apply critical thinking skills to evaluate the arguments presented by Eagleton and his critics**, and develop the ability to construct persuasive counterarguments.
14. **Discuss the wider implications of the debate surrounding Eagleton's concept of ideology for understanding the role of ideology in contemporary society.**

### 3.1 Introduction

Terry Eagleton, a prolific and often provocative literary critic and cultural theorist, has carved a distinctive place in contemporary intellectual discourse. His work, spanning Marxist theory, literary criticism, and cultural studies, is marked by a sharp wit, a broad erudition, and a consistent commitment to social justice. While his contributions are undeniable, his philosophy is also subject to critical observations.

One of Eagleton's defining characteristics is his unwavering commitment to Marxist thought. While he acknowledges the complexities and contradictions within Marxism, he remains a staunch defender of its core principles, particularly its emphasis on class struggle and the critique of

capitalism. This commitment, however, sometimes leads to a perceived rigidity in his analysis. Critics argue that his lens can be overly deterministic, potentially overlooking the agency of individuals and the complexities of cultural phenomena that cannot be neatly reduced to class relations.

His approach to literary criticism, while insightful, is also subject to scrutiny. Eagleton excels at revealing the ideological underpinnings of literary texts, demonstrating how seemingly neutral works often reinforce dominant power structures. However, some critics find his analyses to be overly schematic, focusing on ideological critique at the expense of aesthetic appreciation. His emphasis on the political dimensions of literature can sometimes overshadow the nuances of artistic expression and the subjective experience of reading.

Eagleton's writing style, while often engaging and entertaining, can also be a source of contention. His penchant for rhetorical flourishes, ironic pronouncements, and sweeping generalizations, while effective in capturing attention, can sometimes obscure the subtleties of his arguments. Critics have accused him of indulging in polemics and simplifying complex issues for the sake of rhetorical effect. His tendency to employ broad strokes and sweeping pronouncements can at times leave readers feeling as if they are being lectured, rather than engaged in a nuanced intellectual exchange.

His engagement with postmodernism, while critical, is also complex. Eagleton acknowledges the insights of postmodern thought, particularly its critique of grand narratives and its emphasis on the constructed nature of reality. However, he remains skeptical of its perceived relativism and its tendency to downplay the importance of material conditions and social structures. He seeks to salvage the critical potential of postmodernism while grounding it in a materialist framework. This project, however, is fraught with tension, and some critics question whether he successfully reconciles the seemingly incompatible elements of Marxist materialism and postmodern skepticism.

Eagleton's moral outrage, while often justified, can sometimes lead to a perceived lack of nuance in his analysis of contemporary culture. His critiques of consumerism, mass media, and popular culture, while often insightful, can sometimes veer into moralizing pronouncements. His tendency to paint with broad strokes and to condemn entire cultural phenomena can alienate readers who find his pronouncements overly simplistic or dismissive.

His engagement with religion, particularly Christianity, is also a site of critical debate. While he acknowledges the historical and cultural significance of religion, he ultimately views it as a form of

ideology that serves to maintain social hierarchies. His critiques of religious belief can sometimes be perceived as dismissive or insensitive, particularly by those who find spiritual meaning in religious traditions.

Eagleton's intellectual breadth and his ability to synthesize diverse theoretical perspectives are undeniable strengths. However, his tendency to rely on sweeping generalizations and to prioritize ideological critique can sometimes limit the scope of his analysis. Critics have also noted a certain inconsistency in his work, as he sometimes shifts between different theoretical frameworks without fully addressing the potential contradictions.

Despite these critical observations, Eagleton's contributions to literary criticism and cultural theory remain significant. His work has challenged conventional assumptions, stimulated intellectual debate, and provided valuable insights into the complex relationship between literature, culture, and power. His unwavering commitment to social justice and his willingness to engage with controversial issues have made him a vital voice in contemporary intellectual discourse.

Ultimately, Eagleton's philosophy is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, marked by both strengths and weaknesses. His work invites critical engagement and challenges readers to think deeply about the relationship between literature, culture, and society. While his pronouncements might be at times overly confident, his intellectual rigor and his commitment to social justice are undeniable. His work remains a crucial resource for anyone seeking to understand the complex dynamics of contemporary culture and the ongoing struggle for social transformation.

### 3.2 Critically Understanding Eagleton's Ideology

Terry Eagleton's concept of ideology, as articulated in his seminal work *Ideology: An Introduction*, presents a complex and multifaceted understanding of the term, moving beyond simplistic notions of false consciousness. While his analysis offers valuable insights, it also invites critical examination.

Eagleton's primary achievement lies in his rejection of a purely negative connotation of ideology. He argues that ideology is not merely a system of false or distorted ideas, but a pervasive force that shapes our social reality. He proposes a typology that encompasses various dimensions of ideology, including its role in the material reproduction of social life, its function as a system of beliefs, its operation as a process of signification, its use in promoting sectional interests, and its presence as

false or distorted ideas. This nuanced approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how ideology operates in different contexts.

However, Eagleton's attempt to reconcile these diverse dimensions is not without its challenges. Critics argue that his typology, while comprehensive, lacks a clear hierarchical structure. The relationship between these different senses of ideology remains somewhat ambiguous, leading to potential confusion and overlap. For example, how does the material reproduction of social life relate to the promotion of sectional interests? Eagleton's analysis does not always provide clear answers to these questions.

Furthermore, his emphasis on the material basis of ideology, while rooted in Marxist thought, can be seen as overly deterministic. While he acknowledges the role of discourse and cultural forms, he ultimately prioritizes the economic and social structures that underpin ideological formations. This can lead to a neglect of the agency of individuals and the complexities of cultural phenomena that cannot be easily reduced to material conditions. Critics argue that his analysis sometimes overlooks the ways in which individuals actively negotiate and resist dominant ideologies.

Eagleton's engagement with the concept of hegemony, borrowed from Gramsci, is another point of contention. While he acknowledges the importance of consent and cultural leadership in maintaining power, he tends to downplay the role of coercion and force. Critics argue that his emphasis on hegemony can lead to an underestimation of the repressive aspects of ideological control. The Party in Orwell's *1984*, for instance, heavily uses force and surveillance, that is, non-consensual methods, to maintain power.

His analysis of the relationship between ideology and utopia, while insightful, also raises questions. He argues that ideology can provide the basis for imagining alternative futures, but he does not fully address the potential for utopian visions to become themselves ideological. Critics argue that utopian thinking can be susceptible to its own forms of dogmatism and intolerance, leading to the suppression of dissent and the imposition of a singular vision of the good society.

Eagleton's treatment of the role of language and discourse in ideological formation is a significant contribution. He highlights the ways in which language can be used to construct and maintain power relations, emphasizing the importance of critical discourse analysis. However, his analysis can sometimes be overly focused on the negative aspects of language, neglecting its potential for

communication, creativity, and social change. Critics argue that he sometimes portrays language as a mere instrument of domination, overlooking its capacity for resistance and liberation.

His critiques of postmodernism, while often insightful, are also subject to debate. Eagleton acknowledges the importance of postmodern thought in challenging grand narratives and highlighting the constructed nature of reality. However, he remains skeptical of its perceived relativism and its tendency to downplay the importance of material conditions. Critics argue that his attempt to reconcile Marxist materialism and postmodern skepticism is not always successful, leading to a tension between his commitment to social justice and his acknowledgment of the fluidity of meaning.

Eagleton's moral outrage, while often justified, can sometimes lead to a perceived lack of nuance in his analysis of contemporary culture. His critiques of consumerism, mass media, and popular culture, while often insightful, can sometimes veer into moralizing pronouncements. Critics argue that he sometimes paints with broad strokes and condemns entire cultural phenomena, overlooking the complexities and contradictions within them.

Furthermore, Eagleton's analysis of ideology often centers on the Western context, potentially limiting its applicability to other cultural and historical settings. Critics argue that his framework needs to be expanded to account for the diverse ways in which ideology operates in non-Western societies, where cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and historical experiences may play a more significant role.

In conclusion, Eagleton's concept of ideology offers a valuable and multifaceted framework for understanding the complex interplay between ideas, power, and social life. His nuanced approach, which moves beyond simplistic notions of false consciousness, provides a rich and insightful analysis of the diverse ways in which ideology operates. However, his analysis is not without its limitations. His typology of ideology, while comprehensive, lacks a clear hierarchical structure. His emphasis on the material basis of ideology can be seen as overly deterministic. And his engagement with postmodernism and contemporary culture raises questions about the scope and applicability of his framework. Despite these critical observations, Eagleton's work remains a significant contribution to the study of ideology, challenging readers to think deeply about the ways in which power shapes our understanding of the world.

### 3.3 Eagleton’s Concept of Ideology and Other Thinkers

Terry Eagleton's concept of ideology, while uniquely his own, engages with and diverges from the ideas of other prominent thinkers, most notably Marx, Althusser, Gramsci, and even, indirectly, postmodernists. A critical examination of Eagleton's framework requires placing it within this broader intellectual context.

Eagleton's debt to Marx is undeniable. He shares Marx's fundamental premise that ideology is rooted in material conditions and serves to maintain class relations. However, Eagleton moves beyond Marx's primarily negative conception of ideology as "false consciousness." He argues for a more nuanced understanding, recognizing that ideology can also play a positive role in shaping social life and providing a sense of collective identity. While Marx primarily focused on the economic base as the determinant of ideology, Eagleton emphasizes the role of discourse, language, and cultural forms in constructing ideological meaning. He broadens the scope of ideology beyond purely economic relations and into the realm of cultural production.

Eagleton also engages critically with Louis Althusser's concept of "ideological state apparatuses" (ISAs). He acknowledges the value of Althusser's analysis in highlighting how institutions like education, media, and religion contribute to the reproduction of dominant ideologies. However, he criticizes Althusser's structuralist determinism, arguing that it underplays the agency of individuals and the potential for resistance. Eagleton rejects Althusser's notion of subjects as mere "bearers" of ideology, emphasizing instead the dynamic and contested nature of ideological formation. He is less reliant on the structural analysis, and more on the cultural.

Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" is another crucial point of reference for Eagleton. He shares Gramsci's emphasis on the role of consent and cultural leadership in maintaining power. However, Eagleton is careful to avoid Gramsci's tendency to romanticize popular resistance. He recognizes that hegemony is not a static or monolithic force, but a constantly negotiated and contested terrain. Eagleton shows the importance of culture, and how culture is used to maintain power. He also notes the fragility of hegemony, and how it can be challenged. He is more realistic about the difficulties of challenging hegemony than Gramsci.

Eagleton's engagement with postmodernism is particularly complex. While he acknowledges the value of postmodern critiques of grand narratives and their emphasis on the constructed nature of reality, he remains skeptical of their perceived relativism and their tendency to downplay the

importance of material conditions. He seeks to salvage the critical potential of postmodernism while grounding it in a materialist framework. Eagleton's project can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between Marxist analysis and postmodern skepticism. He is wary of the postmodern concept of the "death of the subject," and he defends the importance of agency and social transformation.

Eagleton's concept of ideology also diverges from the liberal tradition, which often views ideology as a purely negative force associated with totalitarian regimes. He rejects the liberal notion of a neutral or objective public sphere, arguing that all forms of discourse are inherently ideological. He challenges the liberal assumption that individuals are free and autonomous agents, highlighting the ways in which our beliefs and values are shaped by social forces.

One of the key differences between Eagleton and many other thinkers lies in his emphasis on the multiplicity and ambiguity of ideology. He rejects simplistic binaries, such as true/false or positive/negative, and instead proposes a more nuanced understanding of ideology as a complex and contradictory phenomenon. He stresses the way that ideology is embedded in the very fabric of everyday life, and that it is not simply a matter of abstract ideas. He is focused on how ideology is experienced.

Eagleton's analysis also distinguishes itself through its focus on the role of rhetoric and narrative in constructing ideological meaning. He argues that ideology often works by telling stories about the world, stories that present particular perspectives as natural or inevitable. He highlights the importance of analyzing the rhetorical strategies and narrative structures that underpin ideological discourse.

In comparison to other thinkers, Eagleton's work is characterized by its breadth and erudition. He draws on a wide range of intellectual traditions, from Marxist theory to literary criticism to cultural studies, to develop a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of ideology. His ability to synthesize diverse perspectives and to engage with complex theoretical debates makes his work particularly valuable.

However, Eagleton's attempt to reconcile these diverse perspectives is not without its challenges. Critics argue that his framework can sometimes be overly eclectic, lacking a clear and consistent theoretical foundation. His tendency to draw on different intellectual traditions can lead to a sense of theoretical incoherence.

Despite these criticisms, Eagleton's concept of ideology remains a significant contribution to contemporary intellectual discourse. His work challenges conventional assumptions, stimulates critical debate, and provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between ideas, power, and social life. His ability to synthesize diverse perspectives and to engage with complex theoretical debates makes his work a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand the dynamics of ideology in the contemporary world.

### 3.4 Major Terms used by Eagleton

Terry Eagleton's work on ideology, particularly in his book "Ideology" (1991), and related writings, delves into the complex and multifaceted nature of the concept. Here are some major terms and concepts he discusses:

**The Multifaceted Nature of Ideology:**

Terry Eagleton, in his exploration of ideology, meticulously unpacks its multifaceted nature, revealing it as a concept fraught with historical and contemporary complexities. He argues that "ideology" resists a singular definition, having undergone significant shifts in meaning from its Enlightenment origins to its current usage. Eagleton emphasizes that understanding ideology requires acknowledging this historical evolution, as the term has been employed in diverse and often conflicting ways. Rather than attempting to impose a rigid definition, he acknowledges its inherent ambiguity, recognizing that it encompasses a range of functions and interpretations. A central thread in Eagleton's analysis is the connection between ideology and social power. He examines how ideologies operate to maintain and legitimize existing power structures, arguing that dominant ideologies can shape perceptions and beliefs in ways that serve the interests of those in power, often through subtle and pervasive means. This perspective highlights that ideology is not merely a set of abstract ideas but a force that actively shapes social reality. Furthermore, Eagleton stresses the crucial role of culture in the production and reproduction of ideology. He analyzes how cultural forms, such as literature, art, and media, can convey ideological messages, underscoring the importance of examining cultural products for their underlying ideological assumptions. In essence, Eagleton's work on ideology is characterized by its emphasis on the term's complexity, its relationship to power, and its embeddedness in cultural and social contexts, revealing it as a dynamic and contested concept.

**Ideology and Social Power:**

Terry Eagleton's analysis of "Ideology and Social Power" is a cornerstone of his critical work, where he meticulously dissects how ideological frameworks intertwine with and reinforce power structures within society. He moves beyond simplistic notions of ideology as mere false consciousness, instead, he presents a nuanced understanding of its role in maintaining social order.

A central tenet of Eagleton's perspective is that ideology is not a neutral or passive entity. Rather, it actively operates to legitimize the dominance of certain groups and their interests. He emphasizes that dominant ideologies function by shaping perceptions, values, and beliefs in ways that make existing power relations appear natural and inevitable. This process often involves: **Naturalization:** Whereby social constructs are presented as inherent or universal truths, obscuring their historical and social origins; **Legitimation:** Which involves providing justifications for the actions and authority of those in power; and **Obscuration:** Which entails concealing or distorting social realities that might challenge the prevailing power structure.

Eagleton's analysis draws heavily from Marxist thought, particularly the concept of hegemony, as articulated by Antonio Gramsci. He explores how dominant groups maintain control not only through coercive force, but also through the subtler means of cultural and ideological influence. This involves the construction of a "common sense" that aligns with the interests of the ruling class, thereby securing the consent of the governed.

Furthermore, Eagleton highlights the crucial role of cultural institutions in disseminating and reinforcing ideological messages. He examines how literature, media, and other forms of cultural production can serve as vehicles for ideological transmission, shaping public opinion and reinforcing dominant narratives. He shows that the cultural field is not a neutral area, but a battleground where ideological struggles are played out.

In essence, Eagleton's work on ideology and social power underscores the intricate relationship between ideas and social structures. He reveals how ideologies operate to maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, emphasizing the need for critical analysis to uncover the underlying mechanisms of ideological control.

**Ideology and Material Conditions:**

Terry Eagleton's exploration of "Ideology and Material Conditions" firmly establishes the concept's

grounding within a Marxist framework, demonstrating the deep connection between the realm of ideas and the concrete realities of social existence. He posits that ideologies are not abstract entities floating freely, but are fundamentally shaped and constrained by the economic and social structures that define a society. Eagleton asserts that ideologies originate from and are conditioned by the material conditions of life, meaning that the prevailing economic system, the modes of production, and the social relations they generate are crucial in shaping dominant ideologies. He emphasizes that ideas are always embedded within specific historical and social contexts, never existing in a vacuum. From his perspective, ideologies often reflect and reinforce existing material relations of power, with dominant ideologies particularly serving to legitimize the interests of the ruling class while obscuring the inherent inequalities and contradictions of the social system. This does not imply that ideologies are mere passive reflections of material conditions; rather, they actively shape perceptions and beliefs to maintain the status quo. Eagleton highlights the significant influence of economic structures on ideological formation, examining how capitalist modes of production, for example, generate ideologies that promote individualism, competition, and consumerism. He illuminates how the economic base of a society, the production and distribution of goods, profoundly impacts the superstructure of ideas and culture. Furthermore, Eagleton considers how ideologies contribute to the reproduction of social relations, arguing that they play a vital role in maintaining social stability by providing a framework of meaning and value that integrates individuals into the existing social order. In essence, Eagleton's work underscores the importance of understanding ideology within its material context, providing a critical framework for analyzing how ideas are shaped by and serve to reinforce the economic and social structures of a society.

**Ideology and Culture:**

Terry Eagleton's examination of the relationship between ideology and culture positions culture as a dynamic and contested terrain, rather than a neutral or isolated sphere. He argues that culture actively participates in the production and reproduction of ideological messages, shaping social reality through various forms such as literature, art, film, and media. Eagleton emphasizes that cultural products are not innocent vessels; they carry significant ideological weight and contribute to the construction of our understanding of the world. Cultural institutions and practices function as channels for the dissemination of dominant ideologies, normalizing specific values, beliefs, and worldviews, thereby presenting them as natural and inevitable. This process highlights culture's role as a potent tool for maintaining power within the hands of the ruling class. However, Eagleton also acknowledges that culture is not merely a passive recipient of dominant ideologies. It is a site of

ideological struggle, where alternative and oppositional ideologies can emerge and challenge dominant narratives. Cultural products possess the potential to expose social inequalities and promote alternative visions of society. Consequently, Eagleton stresses the importance of critical analysis in uncovering the ideological assumptions embedded within cultural products, urging us to look beyond surface appearances and examine how culture shapes our perceptions and beliefs. His understanding of culture is closely linked to the concept of hegemony, recognizing culture as a key arena where hegemonic power is established and maintained. Cultural forms contribute to the creation of a "common sense" that aligns with the interests of the dominant group. In essence, Eagleton's work reveals the complex and dynamic interplay between ideology and culture, demonstrating how culture is not only a reflection of social reality but also an active force in shaping it, and a site of ongoing ideological contestation.

**General Mode of Production, Literary Mode of Production, General Ideology, Authorial Ideology, Aesthetics Ideology:**

In his analysis of literature and ideology, Terry Eagleton delineates a framework that considers the complex interplay of various ideological levels, specifically the General Mode of Production, Literary Mode of Production, General Ideology, Authorial Ideology, and Aesthetic Ideology. This framework aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how ideological forces operate within and upon literary works.

Eagleton begins with the **General Mode of Production**, which refers to the overarching economic and social system that shapes the material conditions of a society. This mode of production, whether feudal, capitalist, or otherwise, profoundly influences the social relations, cultural values, and ideological formations that permeate all aspects of life, including literature. It forms the broad, foundational context within which all other ideological levels operate.

Next, the **Literary Mode of Production** pertains to the specific institutions, practices, and technologies involved in the production and dissemination of literature. This includes publishing houses, literary markets, critical establishments, and the very act of writing itself. The literary mode of production shapes the kinds of literature that are produced, the audiences they reach, and the ways in which they are interpreted. It has its own internal structures and norms that can reinforce or challenge the general mode of production.

The **General Ideology** represents the dominant set of ideas, beliefs, and values that are prevalent within a society. This ideology is not monolithic, but rather a complex and often contradictory formation that reflects the interests of various social groups. It permeates all aspects of cultural life, including literature, and influences the ways in which writers and readers understand the world.

**Authorial Ideology** refers to the specific beliefs and values that an individual author brings to their work. This ideology is shaped by the author's social background, personal experiences, and political affiliations. It is not necessarily a conscious or coherent system, but rather a complex and often contradictory set of assumptions that inform the author's worldview and their literary creations.

Finally, **Aesthetic Ideology** concerns the specific values and assumptions that govern the production and reception of literary works. This includes notions of literary form, style, and genre, as well as ideas about the function and purpose of literature itself. Aesthetic ideology is not neutral, but rather reflects and reinforces broader social and political values. Eagleton shows that what is considered good art, or proper literature, is often tied to ideological values.

By examining these interconnected levels of ideology, Eagleton seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how literature is produced, consumed, and interpreted within a specific social and historical context.

He shows that literature is not simply a reflection of individual creativity, but rather a product of complex ideological forces that shape its form, content, and meaning.

**Hegemony:**

Terry Eagleton's employment of the concept of "hegemony," deeply rooted in the work of Antonio Gramsci, is integral to his comprehensive analysis of ideology and social power. He utilizes this concept to articulate how dominant social groups sustain their control, transcending mere force to encompass more nuanced forms of cultural and ideological leadership. Eagleton underscores that hegemony surpasses simple coercion, involving the cultivation of a consensus wherein the values and beliefs of the dominant group become broadly accepted as "common sense," effectively rendering the ruled, in some manner, complicit in their own governance. Central to hegemony is the notion of consent, whereby dominant groups secure their power by garnering the consent of subordinate groups. This consent is not necessarily a conscious or explicit act, but rather a

consequence of the pervasive influence of dominant ideologies. Hegemony entails cultural leadership, with the dominant group shaping the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of society through various institutions such as education, media, and religion. Eagleton also acknowledges that hegemony is not a static or fixed state, but an ongoing process of struggle, wherein different social groups vie for ideological influence, meaning that hegemony can be contested, and counter-hegemonies can emerge. He also highlights the importance of cultural institutions, showing that they are not neutral spaces, but rather arenas where ideological battles are waged, including fields like literature, art, and the media. In essence, Eagleton employs the concept of hegemony to illuminate the intricate ways in which power operates within society, demonstrating that power is not merely imposed from above, but is actively constructed and maintained through cultural and ideological processes. In essence, Eagleton's work provides a critical examination of how ideologies operate within social and cultural contexts, with a particular emphasis on their relationship to power and material conditions.

## 3.5 Questions

### Long Answer Type Questions

1. How successfully does Terry Eagleton synthesize Marxist thought with postmodern critique in his concept of ideology, and what are the implications of the critical debate surrounding this synthesis?
2. To what extent does Eagleton's typology of ideology clarify or obscure our understanding of the concept, and how does it inform the analysis of contemporary cultural and political phenomena?
3. How do critics evaluate Eagleton's treatment of language and discourse in relation to ideology, and what are the implications for understanding the relationship between language, power, and ideological formation?
4. How do critics assess Eagleton's interpretation and application of the ideas of Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci, and what does this debate reveal about his intellectual project?
5. How relevant and applicable is Eagleton's concept of ideology in the 21st century, particularly in light of contemporary social and political developments?

### Short Answer Type Questions

1. What is Terry Eagleton's primary work on ideology?

2. Name two thinkers whose ideas influenced Eagleton's concept of ideology.
3. What is Eagleton's main critique of traditional Marxist views on ideology?
4. What is Eagleton's concept of "typology" in relation to ideology?
5. What is Eagleton's stance on the relationship between ideology and language?
6. Discuss various terms used by Eagleton explaining the concept of ideology.

## 3.6 Suggested Readings


- *Ideology: An Introduction* by Terry Eagleton
- *Marxism and Literary Criticism* by Terry Eagleton
- *The Illusions of Postmodernism* by Terry Eagleton
- *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* by Terry Eagleton
- "Ideology" chapter in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* by Terry Eagleton (This provides a concise overview within a broader context.)

**M.A. English**
**MAEM24401T**
**Modern Literary Theory**
**Section-C**

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**UNIT 4: Louis Althusser**: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* – I

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**Structure**

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Louis Althusser: Life and Works

4.3 Introduction to the Essay

4.4 Critical Summary of the Essay

4.5 Questions

4.6 Suggested Readings

**4.0 Objectives**

This lesson embarks on a journey into Althusser's intricate and often challenging theories, aiming to unpack his revolutionary contribution to our understanding of how societies maintain themselves. We will delve into his seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," a text that continues to resonate across disciplines, from sociology and political science to cultural studies and media theory.

1. Students will be able to articulate the key biographical details of Louis Althusser, demonstrating an understanding of his life and its influence on his work.
2. Students will be able to describe the socio-political context of post-World War II France and the internal debates within Marxism that shaped Althusser's philosophical development.
3. Students will be able to identify and explain the major intellectual influences that contributed to Althusser's unique philosophical perspective.
4. Students will be able to explain Althusser's critique of humanist Marxism, highlighting the core differences between his structuralist approach and traditional Marxist thought.

5. Students will be able to define and differentiate between Althusser's key philosophical concepts, including "structure," "determination in the last instance," and "relative autonomy," demonstrating a grasp of their significance within his framework.
6. Students will be able to define Althusser's concept of ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" and explain its role in maintaining social relations.
7. Students will be able to describe the process of "interpellation" (hailing) and explain its function in the formation of subjects within Althusser's theory.

**4.1 Introduction**

In the mid-20th century, amidst the fervor of post-war intellectual ferment, a French philosopher named Louis Althusser emerged as a critical voice within Marxist thought. He sought to dissect and re-engineer the traditional understanding of Marxism, moving beyond economic determinism to explore the complex workings of power and social reproduction. At the heart of his project lay a profound investigation into the concept of **ideology**, a term he radically redefined, shifting it from a mere "false consciousness" to a material and pervasive force shaping our very existence.

This lesson embarks on a journey into Althusser's intricate and often challenging theories, aiming to unpack his revolutionary contribution to our understanding of how societies maintain themselves. We will delve into his seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," a text that continues to resonate across disciplines, from sociology and political science to cultural studies and media theory.

Althusser's intervention was crucial because it addressed a crucial lacuna in traditional Marxist thought: how does capitalism, a system riddled with inherent contradictions, manage to persist and perpetuate itself? Marx and Engels, while emphasizing the significance of economic structures, did not fully explain the mechanisms through which the ruling class maintained its dominance beyond brute force. Althusser, drawing upon psychoanalysis, structuralism, and a re-reading of Marx, provided a compelling answer: **ideology**.

He argued that ideology is not merely a set of false ideas imposed from above, but a material apparatus, a system of practices and rituals that shape our subjectivities and interpellate us as subjects within a given social order. It is an invisible, yet omnipresent, force that operates through institutions like schools, families, religious organizations, and the media, shaping our perceptions,

desires, and actions.

This lesson will explore the key concepts that underpin Althusser's theory of ideology:

- **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs):** We will examine how these institutions function to reproduce the relations of production, contrasting them with Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs).
- **Interpellation:** We will unpack the process through which individuals are "hailed" or called into being as subjects within the ideological framework.
- **Material Existence of Ideology:** We will move beyond the notion of ideology as mere ideas, understanding it as embodied in material practices and rituals.
- **The Subject:** We will explore Althusser's complex understanding of the subject as both a free agent and a product of ideological forces.

By the end of this lesson, we will have a clearer understanding of:

- The intricacies of Althusser's theory of ideology.
- The role of ISAs in maintaining social order.
- The process of interpellation and subject formation.
- The material nature of ideological practices.
- The implications of Althusser's work for understanding power, social reproduction, and individual agency.

**Why Althusser Matters Today:**

Althusser's work remains profoundly relevant in our contemporary world. In an age of mass media, digital technologies, and pervasive consumerism, his insights into the workings of ideology provide a powerful lens for analyzing the forces that shape our lives. We are constantly bombarded with messages, images, and narratives that interpellate us as consumers, citizens, and individuals. Understanding the mechanisms of ideology is crucial for developing critical awareness and challenging the dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

His analysis allows us to ask critical questions about:

- The role of media in shaping public opinion.
- The ways in which educational institutions transmit dominant ideologies.

- The influence of consumer culture on our desires and identities.
- The subtle forms of power that operate in everyday life.

**Challenges and Critiques:**

It is essential to acknowledge that Althusser's work has also been subject to significant critique. Some argue that his theory is overly deterministic, leaving little room for individual agency and resistance. Others criticize his structuralist approach for neglecting the role of historical contingency and social conflict. Furthermore the concept of the subject being totally determined by ideology is seen by some as a pessimistic outlook on human existance.

Despite these criticisms, Althusser's contribution to our understanding of ideology remains invaluable. He provided a powerful framework for analyzing the complex relationship between power, knowledge, and subjectivity, and his work continues to inspire critical thought and social analysis.

**A Journey into the Machinery:**

This lesson will guide you through the intricate machinery of Althusser's theory. We will begin by exploring the distinction between RSAs and ISAs, then delve into the process of interpellation and the material existence of ideology. We will examine the implications of his work for understanding the subject and consider the critiques that have been leveled against his theories.

By engaging with Althusser's ideas, we will gain a deeper understanding of the forces that shape our lives and the possibilities for critical engagement and social transformation. This is not simply an academic exercise; it is an exploration of the invisible structures that govern our world, an attempt to unmask the machinery of ideology and empower ourselves to think critically about the forces that surround us.

### 4.2 Louis Althusser: Life and Works

Louis Althusser's life, a complex tapestry woven with intellectual brilliance and profound personal tragedy, demands a critical understanding that transcends simplistic narratives. To truly grasp his contributions and the controversies that surround him, we must navigate the intricate interplay between his philosophical project and his lived experience.

Althusser's intellectual trajectory was deeply intertwined with the turbulent political climate of the 20th century. His formative years, marked by World War II and his five years as a prisoner of war, instilled in him a deep skepticism towards traditional humanism and a fervent commitment to Marxist theory. This experience, arguably, fueled his search for a more "scientific" understanding of history and social structures, one that could explain the seemingly irrational forces that shaped human destiny.

His arrival at the École Normale Supérieure, a bastion of French intellectual life, provided the fertile ground for his radical reinterpretation of Marx. He sought to rescue Marxism from what he perceived as its descent into a sentimental and historically inaccurate humanism. This project, articulated in works like "For Marx" and "Reading Capital," aimed to establish a structuralist Marxism, emphasizing the impersonal forces that shape historical development.

However, Althusser's intellectual project was not merely an abstract exercise. It was deeply rooted in his engagement with the French Communist Party (PCF), a relationship that was both a source of inspiration and a site of intense internal conflict. His commitment to the PCF was unwavering, yet he remained a critical voice, often challenging the party's official line and its perceived deviations from Marxist orthodoxy. This tension, between loyalty and dissent, characterized his intellectual and political life.

The concept of "interpellation," central to his theory of ideology, can be seen as a reflection of his own experience of being "hailed" by the ideological apparatus of the PCF. He understood the power of ideology to shape individual subjectivity, to mold individuals into compliant subjects within a given social order. Yet, this understanding did not translate into political passivity. Instead, it fueled his desire to expose the mechanisms of ideological control and to empower individuals to resist their interpellation.

His seminal essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," remains a cornerstone of critical thought. It offered a powerful framework for analyzing the subtle ways in which power operates through institutions like schools, families, and the media. However, this very power of his analysis also became a source of criticism. Some argued that his emphasis on structural determinism left little room for individual agency and resistance. Others criticized his functionalist approach, arguing that it oversimplified the complex interplay of social forces.

The tragic death of his wife, Hélène Rytman, in 1980, cast a long shadow over his legacy. This

event, attributed to his severe mental illness, raised profound questions about the relationship between his intellectual work and his personal life. Some critics saw it as a manifestation of the inherent violence of his theoretical framework, while others argued that it was a tragic consequence of his long struggle with mental instability.

It is crucial to avoid simplistic interpretations of this tragedy. To reduce Althusser's complex life and work to a single, tragic event is to ignore the profound contributions he made to Marxist theory and critical thought. His work, despite its flaws and limitations, continues to offer valuable insights into the workings of power, ideology, and social reproduction.

His later work, particularly his autobiography, "The Future Lasts Forever," provides a glimpse into the inner world of a man grappling with profound personal and intellectual contradictions. He reflects on his mental illness, his relationship with the PCF, and his evolving understanding of Marxism. This work, while deeply personal, also offers valuable insights into the intellectual and political climate of his time.

A critical understanding of Althusser requires us to:

- **Acknowledge the complexity of his intellectual project:** His structuralist Marxism, while controversial, offered a powerful critique of traditional Marxist humanism and provided a new framework for analyzing social structures.
- **Recognize the interplay between his theory and his lived experience:** His engagement with the PCF, his struggles with mental illness, and the tragic death of his wife all shaped his intellectual development.
- **Avoid simplistic interpretations of his work and life:** To reduce him to a single event or a single idea is to ignore the richness and complexity of his thought.
- **Engage critically with his theories:** His work, like any other, is open to critique and debate. However, it is essential to engage with his ideas in a nuanced and informed manner.
- **Understand the historical context of his writings:** His work was deeply rooted in the political and intellectual climate of the mid-20th century.

In conclusion, Louis Althusser's life and work present a complex and challenging legacy. He was a brilliant and controversial thinker whose contributions to Marxist theory continue to resonate today.

A critical understanding of his life requires us to navigate the intricate interplay between his

intellectual project, his personal struggles, and the historical context in which he lived. By engaging with his work in a nuanced and informed manner, we can gain a deeper understanding of the forces that shape our world and the possibilities for critical thought and social transformation.

**Works**

Louis Althusser's intellectual legacy is anchored in a series of groundbreaking works that challenged conventional Marxist interpretations and left an indelible mark on critical theory. His major works, characterized by their rigorous analysis and complex theoretical frameworks, continue to be studied and debated across disciplines.

**1. "For Marx" (1965): A Scientific Re-reading of Marx**

This collection of essays marked Althusser's arrival as a major figure in Marxist thought. He sought to dismantle what he perceived as the "humanist" and "historicist" distortions of Marx's work, advocating for a "scientific" reading that emphasized the structural and epistemological breaks within Marx's intellectual development.

- **Epistemological Break:** Althusser introduced the concept of an "epistemological break" ("coupure épistémologique"), arguing that the young Marx, influenced by Hegelian idealism, underwent a radical transformation in his mature works. This break, he argued, marked the transition from an ideological, humanist perspective to a scientific understanding of history and society. He proposed that the mature Marx, particularly in "Capital," developed a unique "continent" of knowledge, distinct from previous philosophical and economic traditions.
- **Anti-Humanism:** Althusser rejected the notion of a universal human essence or subject, arguing that individuals are products of social and historical forces. He challenged the idea that history is driven by conscious human agency, emphasizing instead the impersonal and structural determinants of social change.
- **Emphasis on Structure:** "For Marx" highlighted the importance of analyzing the underlying structures that shape social relations, rather than focusing on individual actions or intentions. This structuralist approach became a hallmark of Althusser's work.

**2. "Reading Capital" (1965): A Collective Reinterpretation**

Co-authored with Étienne Balibar, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Macherey, and Roger Establet, "Reading Capital" was a collaborative effort to re-examine Marx's magnum opus. This work aimed to provide a rigorous and systematic analysis of "Capital," focusing on its theoretical architecture and its implications for understanding capitalist society.

- **Symptomatic Reading:** Althusser advocated for a "symptomatic reading" of "Capital," which involved looking for the silences and contradictions within the text to uncover its underlying theoretical assumptions. This approach aimed to move beyond a literal interpretation of Marx's work, revealing its hidden depths.
- **Theoretical Anti-Empiricism:** Althusser and his collaborators rejected empiricist interpretations of "Capital," arguing that Marx's analysis was not based on direct observation of empirical data but on a theoretical framework that revealed the underlying logic of capitalist production.
- **The Concept of "Overdetermination":** This concept, borrowed from psychoanalysis, was used to explain the complex and contradictory nature of social phenomena. Althusser argued that social contradictions are not simply determined by economic factors but are also shaped by political, ideological, and cultural forces.

**3. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" (1970): Unmasking the Machinery of Ideology**

This essay, perhaps Althusser's most influential work, provided a groundbreaking analysis of the role of ideology in maintaining social order. He moved beyond the traditional Marxist notion of ideology as "false consciousness," arguing that it is a material practice embedded in social institutions.

- **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs):** Althusser introduced the concept of ISAs, which are institutions like schools, families, religious organizations, and the media that function to reproduce the dominant ideology. He contrasted these with Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the police and the military, which maintain order through force.
- **Interpellation:** This concept describes the process by which individuals are "hailed" or called into being as subjects within the ideological framework. Ideology, he argued, shapes our subjectivities and positions us within a given social order.

- **Material Existence of Ideology:** Althusser emphasized the material nature of ideology, arguing that it is not simply a set of ideas but a system of practices and rituals that shape our actions and perceptions.

**4. "Elements of Self-Criticism" (1974): A Reassessment**

In this work, Althusser engaged in a critical self-reflection on his earlier theories. He acknowledged some of the limitations and errors in his previous work, particularly his tendency towards theoretical abstraction and his neglect of historical contingency.

- **Critique of Theoretical Anti-Humanism:** Althusser softened his earlier anti-humanist stance, acknowledging the importance of individual agency and the role of social struggle in historical change.
- **Emphasis on Class Struggle:** He reaffirmed the centrality of class struggle in Marxist theory, emphasizing the ongoing conflict between the ruling class and the working class.
- **Recognition of Historical Contingency:** He acknowledged the importance of historical context and the role of chance and contingency in shaping social outcomes.

**5. "The Future Lasts Forever" (1992, posthumous): A Personal and Intellectual Memoir**

This posthumously published autobiography provided a deeply personal and introspective account of Althusser's life and intellectual development. It offered insights into his struggles with mental illness, his relationship with the PCF, and his evolving understanding of Marxism.

- **Personal Reflections:** The book revealed the profound personal struggles that shaped Althusser's life and work, including his recurring bouts of depression and his tragic relationship with his wife.
- **Intellectual Evolution:** It provided a nuanced account of his intellectual trajectory, tracing the development of his ideas and his engagement with Marxist theory.
- **Historical Context:** It offered a valuable glimpse into the intellectual and political climate of post-war France.

These major works, despite their complexities and controversies, have had a profound and lasting impact on critical theory. Althusser's rigorous analysis of ideology, his structuralist approach to Marxism, and his emphasis on the material nature of social relations continue to be influential in various fields, from sociology and political science to cultural studies and media theory.

### 4.3 Introduction to the Essay

Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" stands as a monumental, though often contentious, contribution to Marxist theory and critical thought. Published in 1970, a period marked by social upheaval and intellectual ferment, this essay sought to address a critical lacuna within traditional Marxist analyses: how does the capitalist system, inherently riddled with contradictions, manage to perpetuate itself beyond the brute force of the state? Althusser's intervention was not merely a theoretical exercise; it was a radical attempt to re-engineer the very foundations of Marxist understanding, shifting the focus from economic determinism to the subtle, yet pervasive, mechanisms of ideological control.

In the wake of the student protests of 1968, which shook the foundations of French society and exposed the limitations of traditional Marxist interpretations, Althusser recognized the need for a more nuanced understanding of power. He argued that the state, while wielding repressive force through its apparatuses like the police and the military (Repressive State Apparatuses or RSAs), also operates through a network of seemingly benign institutions that shape our very subjectivities. These institutions, which he termed Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), are the unseen architects of our social reality, subtly molding our beliefs, desires, and actions to align with the dominant order.

Althusser's essay, presented as a set of "notes towards an investigation," is not a polished, definitive treatise. Rather, it is a probing exploration, a series of conceptual tools designed to dismantle the taken-for-granted assumptions about how society functions. He challenges the traditional Marxist view of ideology as mere "false consciousness," a set of illusions imposed by the ruling class. Instead, he argues that ideology is a material practice, embedded in the very fabric of our daily lives. It is not simply a set of ideas, but a system of rituals, habits, and institutions that shape our perceptions and actions.

The essay's central concept, "interpellation," is a powerful metaphor for the process by which individuals are "hailed" or called into being as subjects within the ideological framework. We are not born as autonomous individuals, Althusser argues, but are constructed as subjects through our interactions with ISAs. From the moment we enter the education system to the daily consumption of media narratives, we are constantly being "hailed" into specific subject positions, whether as students, citizens, consumers, or workers.

Althusser's analysis of ISAs, which include institutions like schools, families, religious organizations, and the media, reveals the subtle ways in which power operates beyond the realm of overt coercion. These institutions, while appearing to be neutral or even benevolent, function to reproduce the relations of production, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling class. The education system, for example, not only imparts knowledge but also instills the values and norms necessary for maintaining the existing social order. The family, similarly, plays a crucial role in shaping our emotional and psychological development, preparing us to accept our place within the hierarchical structure of society.

The essay's significance lies in its ability to illuminate the invisible mechanisms of power that operate in our daily lives. It provides a framework for understanding how ideology shapes our subjectivities, not through overt force, but through the subtle manipulation of our beliefs and desires. By exposing the workings of ISAs and the process of interpellation, Althusser empowers us to critically examine the forces that shape our perceptions and actions.

However, Althusser's work is not without its critics. Some argue that his theory is overly deterministic, leaving little room for individual agency and resistance. Others criticize his functionalist approach, arguing that it oversimplifies the complex interplay of social forces. Despite these criticisms, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" remains a crucial text for understanding the dynamics of power and social reproduction.

In our contemporary world, where media and consumer culture saturate our lives, Althusser's insights are more relevant than ever. His analysis provides a powerful lens for examining the ways in which ideology operates in the age of mass communication and digital technologies. By understanding the mechanisms of interpellation and the workings of ISAs, we can develop a critical awareness of the forces that shape our desires and actions, and begin to challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and oppression. This essay is not just a historical artifact, but a vital tool for navigating the complexities of our social reality.

### 4.4 Critical Summary of the Essay

"Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" remains a pivotal, albeit contested, contribution to Marxist theory, offering a radical departure from traditional understandings of power and social reproduction. This essay, published in 1970, sought to address a critical question: how does the capitalist system, inherently fraught with contradictions, manage to

perpetuate itself beyond the use of brute force? Althusser's answer lay in the concept of ideology, not as a mere set of false ideas, but as a material practice embedded in social institutions, which he termed Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).

**The State and its Apparatuses: A Fundamental Distinction**

Althusser begins by reaffirming the Marxist concept of the state as an instrument of class rule. However, he introduces a crucial distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and ISAs. RSAs, such as the police, military, and legal system, function primarily through violence and coercion. Their role is to maintain order through force, suppressing dissent and upholding the dominance of the ruling class. ISAs, on the other hand, operate through ideology, shaping our beliefs, values, and behaviors to conform to the dominant social order. These institutions, including schools, families, religious organizations, and the media, appear to be neutral or even benevolent, yet they play a crucial role in reproducing the relations of production.

This distinction is fundamental to Althusser's argument. He argues that while RSAs are essential for maintaining order in times of crisis, ISAs are the primary mechanisms through which the ruling class maintains its hegemony in everyday life. They operate subtly, shaping our subjectivities and interpellation us into specific roles within the social order.

**Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): The Architects of Subjectivity**

Althusser meticulously examines the various ISAs, revealing their role in shaping our perceptions and actions. The education system, for example, not only transmits knowledge but also instills the values and norms necessary for maintaining the existing social hierarchy. It prepares individuals for their roles as workers, citizens, and consumers, reinforcing the dominant ideology through its curriculum and pedagogical practices. The family, similarly, plays a crucial role in shaping our emotional and psychological development, preparing us to accept our place within the hierarchical structure of society. Religious institutions, the media, and cultural organizations also contribute to the reproduction of the dominant ideology, shaping our beliefs and desires to align with the interests of the ruling class.

Althusser emphasizes that ISAs are not merely passive transmitters of ideology. They are active agents in shaping our subjectivities, constantly reinforcing the dominant narratives and interpellation us into specific subject positions. This process of interpellation, or "hailing," is central

to Althusser's theory.

**Interpellation: The Construction of Subjects**

Althusser argues that individuals are not born as autonomous subjects but are constituted as subjects through their interactions with ISAs. We are "hailed" or called into being as subjects through ideological practices, becoming aware of ourselves as subjects within a given social order. This process is not a conscious act but an unconscious and automatic process, shaping our perceptions and actions without our awareness.

For example, when a police officer shouts "Hey, you!," the individual who turns around is recognizing themselves as the subject of that address. This "hailing" is a form of ideological interpellation, positioning the individual within the power structure of the state. Similarly, our interactions with other ISAs, such as schools and families, constantly reinforce our subject positions, shaping our identities and behaviors.

**The Material Existence of Ideology**

Althusser challenges the traditional Marxist view of ideology as mere "false consciousness," a set of illusions imposed by the ruling class. He argues that ideology is a material practice, embedded in the very fabric of our daily lives. It is not simply a set of ideas but a system of rituals, habits, and institutions that shape our actions and perceptions.

This material existence of ideology is crucial to Althusser's argument. He argues that ideology is not simply a matter of what we think but also a matter of what we do. Our actions, habits, and rituals are shaped by ideological practices, reinforcing the dominant social order.

**Ideology and the Reproduction of the Relations of Production**

The ultimate goal of ISAs and interpellation is to reproduce the relations of production, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling class. By shaping our subjectivities and interpellation us into specific roles within the social order, ISAs ensure that we accept our place within the existing hierarchy and contribute to the maintenance of the capitalist system.

Althusser argues that this reproduction of the relations of production is not a conscious or intentional process. It is an automatic and unconscious process, embedded in the very fabric of our

daily lives.

**Critical Evaluation and Legacy**

Althusser's essay has been subject to significant critique. Some argue that his theory is overly deterministic, leaving little room for individual agency and resistance. Others criticize his functionalist approach, arguing that it oversimplifies the complex interplay of social forces. His emphasis on structural determinism is seen by some as negating the importance of human action.

Despite these criticisms, Althusser's work remains a crucial contribution to Marxist theory and critical thought. His analysis of ISAs and interpellation has provided a powerful framework for understanding the subtle ways in which power operates in our daily lives. His emphasis on the material existence of ideology has challenged traditional Marxist understandings of power and social reproduction.

His work has had a profound impact on various fields, including sociology, political science, and cultural studies. His concepts continue to be used to analyze the role of media, education, and other institutions in shaping our beliefs and behaviors.

In conclusion, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" remains a complex and challenging work, offering a radical departure from traditional Marxist understandings of power and social reproduction. While his theories have been subject to critique, his insights into the workings of ideology and the construction of subjectivity continue to be relevant in our contemporary world. By understanding the mechanisms of interpellation and the role of ISAs, we can develop a critical awareness of the forces that shape our lives and begin to challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

**4.5 Questions**

1. What were the key biographical events in Louis Althusser's life and how did they influence his philosophical development?
2. How did the socio-political context of post-WWII France shape Althusser's critique of humanist Marxism?
3. What are the core tenets of Althusser's structuralist Marxism, and how do they differ from traditional Marxist interpretations?

4. How does Althusser define "ideology" and what is its role in the reproduction of social relations?
5. What is the process of "interpellation" or "hailing," and how does it contribute to the formation of subjects within Althusser's framework?
6. What is the distinction between Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), and what are some examples of each?
7. How do ISAs and RSAs function to maintain and reproduce dominant ideologies in society?
8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Althusser's theory of ideology, particularly in its applicability to contemporary social analysis?
9. How does Althusser's concept of "relative autonomy" address the relationship between the economic base and the ideological superstructure?
10. What are the lasting implications of Althusser's theories on power, subjectivity, and social control for understanding modern society?

## 4.6 Suggested Readings

- *For Marx* by Louis Althusser
- "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" by Louis Althusser
- *Louis Althusser: A Critical Introduction* by Gregory Elliott
- *Reading Capital: The Political Reading of Marx* by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar
- *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* by Gregory Elliott

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**UNIT 5: Louis Althusser**: *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* – II

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**Structure**

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Major Concepts in Althusser's Essay

5.3 Questions

5.4 Suggested Readings

**5.0 Objectives**

1. Students will be able to define and explain Althusser's concept of ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."
2. Students will be able to differentiate between the functions and mechanisms of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).
3. Students will be able to identify and provide examples of various Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) such as education, family, media, and religion.
4. Students will be able to explain the role of interpellation (hailing) in the formation of subjects within ideological structures.
5. Students will be able to analyze how ISAs contribute to the reproduction of dominant social relations and ideologies.
6. Students will be able to explain how RSAs function to maintain social order through force and coercion.
7. Students will be able to analyze the relationship between the economic base and the ideological superstructure in Althusser's theory.
8. Students will be able to critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of Althusser's theory in explaining contemporary social phenomena.
9. Students will be able to discuss the implications of Althusser's theory on the nature of subjectivity and individual agency.

10. Students will be able to apply Althusser's concepts to analyze specific examples of how ideology functions within contemporary society.

## 5.1 Introduction

Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" presents a profound and often challenging framework for understanding how power operates within society. Moving beyond traditional Marxist interpretations, Althusser delves into the intricate mechanisms through which ideology shapes our very sense of self and our relationship to the world. In this lesson, we will dissect the core concepts and terms that underpin his analysis, including the distinction between Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses, the process of interpellation, and his unique definition of ideology itself. By exploring these ideas, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of how ideology functions to reproduce social relations and maintain dominant power structures, and how these concepts can be applied to analyze contemporary society.

## 5.2 Major Concepts in Althusser’s Essay

Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" is a complex and influential essay that introduces several major concepts, radically reshaping Marxist understandings of power, ideology, and social reproduction. Here's a detailed exploration of these key ideas:

### 1. Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) vs. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs):

Louis Althusser's distinction between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) is a pivotal element in his theory of ideology, offering a nuanced understanding of how state power operates within capitalist societies. This distinction moves beyond the traditional Marxist focus on the state as solely a repressive force, highlighting the crucial role of ideology in maintaining social order.

### Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs): The Instruments of Coercion

Althusser defines RSAs as institutions that function primarily through violence and coercion. They are the traditional instruments of state power, including:

- **The Government:** The executive and legislative branches of the state, responsible for creating and enforcing laws.
- **The Administration:** The bureaucratic machinery of the state, responsible for implementing government policies.
- **The Army:** The military forces of the state, responsible for defending its territory and enforcing its authority.
- **The Police:** The law enforcement agencies of the state, responsible for maintaining order and apprehending criminals.
- **The Courts:** The judicial system of the state, responsible for interpreting and applying laws.

- **Prisons:** The penal institutions of the state, responsible for detaining and punishing those who violate the law.

The primary function of RSAs is to maintain order and suppress dissent through force or the threat of force. They operate primarily in the public sphere, using legal sanctions, physical violence, and other forms of coercion to ensure compliance with the laws and policies of the ruling class. RSAs work "by repression."

**Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): The Instruments of Persuasion**

In contrast, ISAs are institutions that function primarily through ideology, shaping individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors to conform to the dominant social order. They are more subtle and pervasive than RSAs, operating through persuasion, education, and cultural influence. Some key ISAs include:

- **The Educational ISA:** Schools, universities, and other educational institutions, responsible for transmitting knowledge and skills, as well as instilling the values and norms of the ruling class.
- **The Family ISA:** The family unit, responsible for shaping individuals' emotional and psychological development, as well as instilling the values of obedience, conformity, and respect for authority.
- **The Religious ISA:** Churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious institutions, responsible for shaping individuals' beliefs and values, as well as providing a moral framework for social behavior.

- **The Media ISA:** Newspapers, television, radio, and other forms of mass media, responsible for shaping public opinion and disseminating dominant narratives.
- **The Political ISA:** Political parties, trade unions, and other political organizations, responsible for shaping political discourse and mobilizing public support.
- **The Cultural ISA:** Arts, literature, and other cultural institutions, responsible for shaping cultural values and norms.

ISAs work "by ideology." They operate primarily in the private sphere, shaping individuals' subjectivities and interpellation them into specific roles within the social order.

**Key Differences and Interplay:**

The fundamental difference between RSAs and ISAs lies in their primary mode of operation: coercion vs. persuasion. However, it's crucial to recognize that these two types of apparatuses are not mutually exclusive. They often work in conjunction, reinforcing each other's influence.

- RSAs can employ ideological mechanisms to legitimize their use of force. For example, the legal system may use propaganda to justify its actions, while the police may use rhetoric to portray themselves as protectors of public safety.
- ISAs can rely on the threat of force to ensure compliance. For example, schools may use disciplinary measures to enforce rules, while families may use physical punishment to control children's behavior.

**The Significance of the Distinction:**

Althusser's distinction between RSAs and ISAs highlights the importance of analyzing the subtle and pervasive ways in which power operates in modern societies. It challenges the traditional Marxist focus on economic determinism, emphasizing the crucial role of ideology in maintaining social order.

By recognizing the role of ISAs, we can gain a deeper understanding of how individuals are shaped by social institutions and how dominant ideologies are reproduced. This understanding is essential for developing critical awareness and challenging the forces that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

**Critiques and Considerations:**

While Althusser's distinction has been highly influential, it has also been subject to critique. Some argue that it oversimplifies the complex interplay of social forces, while others argue that it paints an overly deterministic picture of subject formation.

Despite these criticisms, the distinction between RSAs and ISAs remains a valuable tool for analyzing the dynamics of power and social reproduction.

**2. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs):**

Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) is a cornerstone of his theory of ideology, offering a significant departure from traditional Marxist understandings of the state and its role in maintaining social order. In his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," Althusser argues that the state's power extends beyond the use of force, operating through a network of institutions that shape individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors.

**Beyond Repressive Force:**

Althusser distinguishes between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), which function primarily through violence and coercion (e.g., the police, military, and legal system), and ISAs, which function primarily through ideology. He argues that while RSAs are essential for maintaining order in times of crisis, ISAs are the primary mechanisms through which the ruling class maintains its hegemony in everyday life.

**The Nature of ISAs:**

ISAs are institutions that appear to be private or non-state entities, yet they play a crucial role in reproducing the dominant ideology and the relations of production. Althusser identifies several key ISAs, including:

- **The Educational ISA:** Althusser considers this the dominant ISA in modern capitalist societies. It not only transmits knowledge but also instills the values, norms, and skills necessary for maintaining the existing social hierarchy. It prepares individuals for their roles as workers, citizens, and consumers, reinforcing the dominant ideology through its curriculum, pedagogy, and disciplinary practices.
- **The Family ISA:** The family plays a crucial role in shaping our emotional and psychological development, preparing us to accept our place within the hierarchical

structure of society. It instills the values of obedience, conformity, and respect for authority, as well as gender roles and familial hierarchies.

- **The Religious ISA:** Religious institutions shape our beliefs and values, providing a moral framework that often reinforces the dominant social order. They can also serve as sites of social control and ideological indoctrination.
- **The Media ISA:** The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion, disseminating dominant narratives, and interpellation individuals into specific subject positions. It can reinforce stereotypes, normalize consumerism, and promote political agendas.
- **The Political ISA:** Political parties and political activity also forms an ISA. This is where the political norms are upheld.
- **The Cultural ISA:** Art, literature, and other cultural productions also serve to reinforce ideological norms.

**The Function of ISAs:**

ISAs function primarily through ideology, shaping individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors to conform to the dominant social order. They achieve this through a variety of mechanisms, including:

- **Instilling Values and Norms:** ISAs transmit the values and norms of the ruling class, shaping individuals' perceptions of what is right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal.
- **Shaping Subjectivity:** ISAs contribute to the formation of individual subjectivity, shaping our identities and sense of self.
- **Reproducing the Relations of Production:** Ultimately, the goal of ISAs is to reproduce the relations of production, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling class. They achieve this by shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors to align with the needs of the capitalist system.
- **Interpellation:** ISAs are the main tool to perform interpellation.

**The Materiality of ISAs:**

Althusser emphasizes the materiality of ISAs, arguing that they are not simply abstract ideas but concrete institutions with material practices and rituals. These material practices, such as attending

school, going to church, or watching television, reinforce the dominant ideology and shape individuals' actions and perceptions.

**ISAs and Hegemony:**

Through their ideological function, ISAs contribute to the maintenance of hegemony, the dominance of the ruling class. Hegemony is not simply a matter of force but also a matter of consent. By shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors, ISAs ensure that they accept the existing social order as legitimate, minimizing the need for overt coercion.

**Critiques and Considerations:**

While Althusser's concept of ISAs has been highly influential, it has also been subject to critique. Some argue that it paints an overly deterministic picture of social life, neglecting the potential for resistance and contestation within ISAs. Others argue that it oversimplifies the complex interplay of social forces.

Despite these criticisms, the concept of ISAs remains a valuable tool for understanding the subtle ways in which power operates in modern societies. It highlights the importance of analyzing the role of institutions in shaping our beliefs and behaviors, and it encourages us to critically examine the assumptions and values that underpin our social world.

**3. Interpellation (or "Hailing"):**

Interpellation, a concept central to Louis Althusser's theory of ideology, is a powerful tool for understanding how individuals are constituted as subjects within a given social order. It describes the process by which ideology "hails" or "calls" individuals into being, shaping their subjectivities and positioning them within the dominant social relations.

**The "Hailing" Process:**

At its core, interpellation is a metaphor for the way ideology operates. Althusser famously uses the example of a police officer shouting "Hey, you!" to illustrate this process. The individual who turns around in response recognizes themselves as the subject of that address, acknowledging their position within the power structure of the state. This "hailing" is not merely a linguistic act; it is a

performative act that constitutes the individual as a subject.

This process, however, is not limited to overt encounters with authority figures. Interpellation operates subtly and pervasively through our interactions with various Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as schools, families, religious institutions, and the media. These institutions constantly "hail" us into specific subject positions, shaping our identities and behaviors.

**The Construction of Subjectivity:**

Althusser argues that individuals are not born as autonomous subjects but are constituted as subjects through their interactions with ideology. We are "hailed" into specific subject positions, such as students, workers, citizens, or consumers, through our participation in various social practices and rituals. This process is largely unconscious, shaping our perceptions and actions without our awareness.

For example, the educational system "hails" us as students, instilling the values and norms necessary for maintaining the existing social hierarchy. The family "hails" us as children, parents, or siblings, shaping our emotional and psychological development. The media "hails" us as consumers, shaping our desires and aspirations.

**Ideology and Recognition:**

Interpellation is closely tied to the concept of recognition. We become subjects by recognizing ourselves in the ideological address. This recognition is not a conscious act of affirmation but an unconscious process of identification. We recognize ourselves in the roles and identities that ideology offers us, internalizing the values and norms associated with those positions.

This process of recognition is essential for the functioning of ideology. If individuals did not recognize themselves in the ideological address, ideology would be ineffective. We accept our subject positions because they feel natural and self-evident, even though they are socially constructed.

**The Illusion of Freedom:**

Althusser argues that ideology creates the illusion of freedom and autonomy. We believe that we are free agents, making our own choices and shaping our own destinies. However, our choices and

actions are largely determined by the ideological frameworks that shape our subjectivities.

This illusion of freedom is crucial for the functioning of ideology. If individuals were aware of the extent to which their choices and actions are determined by ideology, they might resist its influence.

**Interpellation and Social Reproduction:**

The ultimate goal of interpellation is to reproduce the relations of production, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling class. By shaping our subjectivities and positioning us within the social order, ideology ensures that we accept our place within the existing hierarchy and contribute to the maintenance of the capitalist system.

Interpellation is not a static or one-time event. It is an ongoing process that constantly reinforces our subject positions throughout our lives. We are constantly being "hailed" and re-hailed by various ISAs, reinforcing our identities and behaviors.

**Critiques and Considerations:**

While interpellation is a powerful concept, it has also been subject to critique. Some argue that it paints an overly deterministic picture of subject formation, leaving little room for individual agency and resistance. Others argue that it oversimplifies the complex interplay of social forces.

Despite these criticisms, interpellation remains a valuable tool for understanding how ideology operates in our daily lives. It highlights the subtle ways in which power shapes our subjectivities and reinforces the dominant social order. It encourages us to critically examine the assumptions and beliefs that shape our perceptions and actions.

In essence, interpellation reveals the subtle and pervasive ways in which ideology shapes our lives, constructing us as subjects within a given social order. It is a vital concept for understanding the dynamics of power and social reproduction.

**4. The Material Existence of Ideology**

Louis Althusser's concept of "The Material Existence of Ideology" is a pivotal departure from traditional Marxist interpretations that often relegated ideology to the realm of abstract ideas or "false consciousness." Althusser, in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," argues that ideology is not merely a set of beliefs or representations existing in people's minds, but rather a

material practice, embedded in the rituals, routines, and institutions of everyday life.

**Moving Beyond "False Consciousness":**

Traditional Marxist thought often viewed ideology as a superstructure, a set of ideas imposed by the ruling class to obscure the reality of class exploitation. Althusser rejects this notion, arguing that ideology is not simply a distortion of reality but a lived experience, a set of practices that shape our actions and perceptions.

**Ideology as Practice:**

Althusser contends that ideology exists in the form of material practices, rituals, and behaviors. These practices are not merely expressions of underlying beliefs but constitute the very fabric of our lived experience. For example:

- **Religious Practices:** Attending religious services, participating in rituals, and adhering to religious doctrines are material practices that embody and reinforce religious ideology.
- **Educational Practices:** Attending school, following instructions, and completing assignments are material practices that embody and reinforce the ideology of the educational system.
- **Family Practices:** Participating in family routines, observing familial roles, and adhering to family traditions are material practices that embody and reinforce the ideology of the family.
- **Media Consumption:** Watching television, reading newspapers, and engaging with social media are material practices that embody and reinforce the ideologies disseminated by the media.
- **Workplace Practices:** Following workplace rules, adhering to schedules, and performing assigned tasks are material practices that embody and reinforce the ideology of the workplace.

These practices, while seemingly mundane, are not neutral. They are imbued with ideological significance, shaping our actions and perceptions in ways that reinforce the dominant social order.

**The Rituals of Ideological Recognition:**

Althusser emphasizes the role of rituals in the material existence of ideology. Rituals are repetitive, patterned behaviors that reinforce ideological beliefs and values. They provide a framework for our

actions and shape our sense of identity.

For example, the ritual of attending a national holiday celebration reinforces national identity and patriotism. The ritual of going to work reinforces our identity as workers and our acceptance of the capitalist system.

**Ideology and Action:**

Althusser argues that ideology is not simply a matter of what we think but also a matter of what we do. Our actions, habits, and routines are shaped by ideological practices, even when we are not consciously aware of it.

This emphasis on action is crucial. It highlights the fact that ideology is not merely a set of abstract ideas but a lived reality that shapes our behavior. We are not simply passive recipients of ideology; we are active participants in its reproduction.

**The Subject and Ideological Practices:**

The subject, according to Althusser, is constituted through its participation in ideological practices. We become subjects by recognizing ourselves in the roles and identities that ideology offers us. This recognition is not a conscious act of affirmation but an unconscious process of identification.

For example, we recognize ourselves as students by attending school, as workers by going to work, and as citizens by participating in civic rituals. These practices shape our sense of self and our understanding of our place in the social order.

**The Importance of Materiality:**

Althusser's emphasis on the materiality of ideology has significant implications for our understanding of power and social reproduction. It highlights the fact that ideology is not merely a matter of ideas but a material force that shapes our lives.

By focusing on the material practices of ideology, we can gain a deeper understanding of how power operates in subtle and pervasive ways. We can also develop strategies for challenging dominant ideologies and creating alternative social practices.

**Critiques and Considerations:**

While Althusser's concept of the material existence of ideology has been highly influential, it has also been subject to critique. Some argue that it overemphasizes the role of material practices and neglects the importance of conscious thought and agency. Others argue that it paints an overly deterministic picture of subject formation.

Despite these criticisms, Althusser's emphasis on the materiality of ideology remains a valuable contribution to Marxist theory. It provides a powerful framework for analyzing the subtle and pervasive ways in which power operates in modern societies.

**5. Ideology and the Reproduction of the Relations of Production:**

The concept of "Ideology and the Reproduction of the Relations of Production" forms a crucial link in his broader theoretical framework. It addresses the fundamental question of how a social system, particularly capitalism, sustains itself over time, beyond the mere use of force. Althusser argues that ideology, through its material practices and institutions, plays a vital role in this process.

**The Reproduction of Labor Power:**

At the heart of Althusser's analysis lies the Marxist concept of the "relations of production," which refers to the social relationships that govern the production and distribution of goods and services. In capitalist societies, these relations are characterized by the exploitation of wage labor by the capitalist class. To maintain this system, the capitalist class must ensure the continuous reproduction of labor power, meaning the workers' ability to work.

This reproduction, however, is not simply a matter of providing workers with the basic necessities of life. It also involves the reproduction of their skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for their roles in the production process. Althusser argues that this is where ideology comes into play.

**Ideology as a Mechanism of Reproduction:**

Ideology, according to Althusser, is not merely a set of abstract ideas but a material practice embedded in social institutions, which he terms Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). These institutions, such as schools, families, religious organizations, and the media, function to shape individuals' beliefs, values, and behaviors, ensuring their conformity to the dominant social order.

ISAs play a crucial role in reproducing the relations of production by:

- **Instilling the Necessary Skills and Knowledge:** The educational system, for example, transmits not only technical skills but also the values of discipline, obedience, and respect for authority, which are essential for workers in a capitalist society.
- **Shaping Attitudes and Behaviors:** ISAs also shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors, instilling the belief that the existing social order is natural and just. This helps to minimize social conflict and maintain the stability of the system.
- **Interpellation:** ISAs interpellate individuals into specific subject positions, shaping their identities and behaviors to align with the needs of the capitalist system. Workers are interpellated as workers, and therefore accept their roles.

**The Materiality of Ideology:**

Althusser emphasizes the materiality of ideology, arguing that it is not simply a matter of what people think but also a matter of what they do. Ideology is embedded in the material practices and rituals of everyday life, shaping individuals' actions and perceptions without their conscious awareness.

For example, the daily routine of going to work, following instructions, and adhering to workplace norms reinforces the dominant ideology and reproduces the relations of production. Similarly, the consumption of media narratives that promote consumerism and individualism reinforces the capitalist worldview.

**The Role of ISAs in Maintaining Hegemony:**

Through their ideological function, ISAs contribute to the maintenance of hegemony, the dominance of the ruling class. Hegemony is not simply a matter of force but also a matter of consent. By shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors, ISAs ensure that they accept the existing social order as legitimate, minimizing the need for overt coercion.

**The Reproduction of the Ruling Ideology:**

Althusser argues that ISAs are not neutral institutions. They are instruments of the ruling class, designed to reproduce the dominant ideology. This ideology, which reflects the interests of the

ruling class, shapes individuals' perceptions and actions, ensuring their conformity to the existing social order.

**Critiques and Considerations:**

While Althusser's analysis provides a powerful framework for understanding the role of ideology in social reproduction, it has also been subject to critique. Some argue that it overemphasizes the role of ideology and neglects the importance of economic factors and social conflict. Others argue that it paints an overly deterministic picture of subject formation, leaving little room for individual agency and resistance.

Despite these criticisms, Althusser's concept of "Ideology and the Reproduction of the Relations of Production" remains a vital contribution to Marxist theory. It highlights the subtle ways in which power operates in modern societies, shaping individuals' beliefs and behaviors to maintain the existing social order. It encourages us to critically examine the role of ideology in our lives and to challenge the dominant narratives that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

In essence, Althusser's essay provides a powerful framework for understanding how ideology operates in our daily lives, shaping our subjectivities and reinforcing the dominant social order. His concepts of RSAs, ISAs, interpellation, and the material existence of ideology have had a profound impact on critical theory, providing valuable tools for analyzing the subtle ways in which power operates in modern societies.

**5.3 Major Questions**

1. How does Althusser's definition of "ideology" as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" differ from traditional understandings of the term, and what are its implications for understanding social reality?
2. What are the key distinctions between Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), and how do these apparatuses function to maintain social order and reproduce dominant ideologies?
3. How does the process of "interpellation" or "hailing" operate within Althusser's theory, and what is its significance in the formation of subjects and the internalization of ideological norms?

4. How can Althusser's concepts of RSAs and ISAs be applied to critically analyze contemporary social institutions and practices, and what are the limitations of this analysis?
5. What are the broader implications of Althusser's theory for understanding power, subjectivity, and social change, and how does his perspective challenge or reinforce existing understandings of these concepts?

## 5.4 Suggested Readings

- *For Marx* by Louis Althusser
- "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" by Louis Althusser
- *Louis Althusser: A Critical Introduction* by Gregory Elliott
- *Reading Capital: The Political Reading of Marx* by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar
- *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* by Gregory Elliott

**M.A. English**
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**Modern Literary Theory**
**Section-D**

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**UNIT 6: Jean-Paul Sartre**: *Existentialism*

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**Structure**


6.0 Objectives
6.1 Introduction
6.2 Historical Background/Context
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6.4 Key Ideas
6.5 Existentialism
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## 6.0 Objectives

This unit will provide understanding about the following:

- Human condition
- Existentialism
- Choice and responsibility

## 6.1 Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris and spent a significant part of his life there. He attended the esteemed École Normale Supérieure School for his philosophy studies until 1929, It was there he met his wife, who is widely known as Simone de Beauvoir . She herself was a famous philosopher with expertise in existentialism. It was during the 1930s, Jean Paul Sartre taught the university of Le Havre. Many of his most recognized works, such as the plays No Exit and The

Files, the novel The Age of Reason, and his philosophical masterpiece Being and Nothingness, were created after he returned to Paris during the German occupation. To a lesser degree, he also took part in the underground resistance against the occupation. (1) In 1946, at the height of his fame, he left teaching and returned to live with his mother. Following this time, Sartre's writings and public engagement took on a more political tone, focusing particularly on anti-colonial themes. He became a committed Marxist after 1956, although he grew disillusioned with the Soviet Union. Throughout much of the 1950s, he endeavored to integrate his existentialist ideas with Marxism in works like the 1957 *Search for a Method* and the 1960 *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. During Algeria's struggle for independence from France, Sartre publicly endorsed the National Liberation Front and maintained a connection with the prominent psychiatrist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon. He asserted that a writer should "refuse to allow himself to become an institution" and highlighted the Prize's bias against intellectuals from outside Western Europe, making him the first to decline the 1964 Nobel Prize in Literature. Throughout much of the 1960s, he worked on an extensive biography of the 19th-century French novelist Gustave Flaubert, but he suddenly withdrew in 1971 to concentrate on political activism, and he was unable to complete the final volume.. Sartre's career of chain smoking and binge drinking contributed to his declining health at about the same time. By 1973, he was nearly blind, and in April 1980, pulmonary oedema claimed his life.

### 6.2 Historical Background/Context

Sartre, who gave this speech just a year after Paris was freed from German rule, rose to international fame in the wake of World War II. Both personally and philosophically, Sartre's experiences in the French army and as a prisoner of war in Germany were life-changing. Observing the war firsthand gave him the sense of political urgency that characterised his later writing, and while incarcerated, he started writing his existentialist manifesto Being and Nothingness. He argued that if people understood their complete freedom over their decisions and their moral responsibility for those decisions, existentialism would be a vital and potent remedy for the Nazi regime's systematised control, atrocities of the kind that took place during World War II may be more difficult for governments to enforce. Sartre received a lot of flak in his later years for presenting the French Resistance fighters—in which he was more of an intellectual than a practical player—as truly free in their unwavering dedication to opposing the occupation.

### 6.3 About the Literary Text

Jean Paul Sartre was quite popular and used to deliver various talks at various platforms. Such is one of his talk on the goal of Existentialism titled, “Is a Humanism is twofold” first, it attempts to provide a clear superficial analysis of his existentialist philosophy. Secondly, it is a trial to counter the criticism which he frequently faced from not only his colleagues but well known activists, academicians including philosophers, French media, and the likes. Still he continued writing without bothering about his critics.

Sartre begins by summarising some of the main objections to his theory, such as the denigration of "existentialists" by laypeople who haven't attempted to comprehend it, the Communist grievances that existentialism is inaction-prone and prioritises the individual over others, Furthermore, the Christian accuses existentialism of being negative and undermining all moral principles. Instead, Sartre claims that existentialism is a positive, practical philosophy that emphasises moral obligation and interpersonal relationships. Sartre then gives his audience a definition of "existentialism," stating that its central tenet is that "existence precedes essence." He contends that people are born without clear values, goals, or personalities, in contrast to manufactured goods like paper knives, which are designed before they are made. The existence of a human comes before its essence, just as the essence of a paper knife comes before its existence. Since there is no innate human nature, purpose for existence, or divine command to act in a certain way, the result of this truth is subjectivity, or the freedom to define oneself by activity., "A man is only what he creates for himself."(2) A human being is a product of their actions, at the same time, they have the ability to glimpse what they should and will become in the future. In other terms, individuals shape their identities by presenting an image of themselves (in the verb sense), and existence itself can be viewed as a project (in the noun sense). This common human dilemma, which Sartre refers to as the human condition, stands in contrast to the idea of a fundamental human essence that earlier atheists promoted to uphold religious morals while dismissing God as a figurehead. Since the human experience is shared universally, a person's actions reflect a set of beliefs regarding what is considered "good" for humanity as a whole. Each individual thus becomes "responsible for all men," serving as both the creator and model of a distinctive human moral framework. Sartre addresses three important and occasionally misunderstood existentialist concepts -anguish, abandonment, and despair—after finishing the summary of his primary existentialist principles. The painful recognition of moral responsibility that comes with making a decision is anguish, and having the ability to choose one's own values also means having to define oneself in some manner. While Christians perceive existentialism as painful and pessimistic because of its relationship with agony, Sartre contends that anguish is actually a consistent element of all

decision-making. He asserts that in order to avoid feeling responsible for their choices, people often try to persuade themselves that they have little control over their own behaviour. This faith's comprehension is known as responsibility.

According to Sartre, abandonment is the state in which individuals are "condemned to be free." According to Sartre, people are left without a fixed moral compass and are compelled to take responsibility for their decisions as belief in God is no longer viable in modern society. He uses a student and a Jesuit he met in a prison camp as examples to show that even people's "passions" and "signs" in the outside world do not absolve them of responsibility for their conduct when they have an impact on them. Despair (meaning non-hope in French) is the idea that people should consider their situation logically, using the knowledge at hand, rather than believing that their efforts would be rewarded or that unseen forces will bring about a favourableoutcome.

The criticisms of existentialists by others are revisited by Sartre, who now directly responds to them. He begins by addressing the claim that existentialism limits individuals to their personal subjectivity. He argues that acknowledging one's own subjectivity also entails recognizing that there are others who are grappling with the human experience and share a similar subjectivity. Next, he tackles the critique that existentialists render values meaningless. In reality, it reveals its own value system and offers a distinctive viewpoint on the world; a piece of art can undeniably hold value even if there is no objective standard for assessing a good or bad life or artwork (and if such standards existed, artists and individuals would not genuinely be free). This is how he likens the human endeavor to an artistic creation. In a similar vein, existentialists are able to articulate their beliefs while being the ones who establish them. The Christian charge that existentialists are incapable of morally judging others is then addressed by Sartre. He contends that the right way to judge someone else should be to identify the contradictions in their moral framework, or, to put it another way, to identify bad faith, rather than by using one's own moral standards. This ill faith typically takes the form of someone insisting that they have no other option than to adhere to a moral norm that they have actually selected. For Sartre, freedom is the basis of all values, and this is a denial of such freedom.

He presents two literary characters who, although they hold differing views on sex, he perceives as morally equivalent because both pursue their choices in the name of their freedom, unlike cases where individuals make similar decisions due to a belief that they lack control over their desires or the social pressures influencing those choices. Since existentialist concepts are open to personal

interpretation, the concluding critique is that they "need not be taken very seriously."(3) Sartre claims that subjective value is the only reality; people value their careers, pastimes, and political beliefs, among other pursuits, simply because they opt for them voluntarily.

**6.4 Key Ideas**

**Existence, Essence and the Human Condition**

Sartre's belief that "existence precedes essence" is the central finding of his existentialism. According to Sartre, there is no innate human nature or divinely established essence that dictates what humans ought to or will do. Each person must therefore determine their own essence, which is simply the culmination of their deeds. In general, essence refers to the essential characteristics that define an entity. Before Sartre, philosophers searched for a human essence for at least two millennia by posing questions about traits that all humans shared. In general, discussions about the nature of people focused on a question that was carried over from Plato and Aristotle: did the unique characteristics of humans originate from their substance (biological matter) or from their form (an immaterial soul or mind)?

Determining the "essence" of humanity, in any case, required characterising human nature in terms of its connection to biological, historical, divine, and/or social causes. In addition to defining humanity and forecasting human behaviour, the emerging image of the human essence also promised to provide a foundation for the development of human morality. Sartre cites the paper knife and the traditional conception of God as two instances of typical situations in which essence would come before actuality. Before the paper knife is ever made, its essence is already in the human creator's head, who created it just for cutting paper. In a similar vein, according to the traditional Christian conception, God creates people from the mental blueprint of his own beingAccording to this theory, a person's "idea" predates their birth, and their existence is spent developing to realise the destiny that their idea has predetermined for them.
By rejecting the conventional understanding that such an essence is universal at all, Sartre addresses the issue of identifying the human essence. Sartre believes that the essence of an individual's true self is unrelated to the universal characteristics of humans, even if he was not the first to do so and does not deny the biological or behavioural similarities among people. According to him, people define themselves by living rather than by carrying out their lives; they are not born with a predetermined essence that defines them; rather, they choose their own essence by their deeds and commitments. When he states that "existence precedes essence" for humans, he means this. Sartre contends that leading a human life entails having a project and a projection as existence comes before essence. These characteristics are what make human subjectivity unique. Since everyone

imagines themselves—what they are, what they will be, and what they wish to be—human life involves projection.

This evolving sense of their own identity, significance, or essence is made up of their conscious projection of the self into the future. Acting to become what one imagines oneself to be is the human project. Sartre draws a comparison between a human life and an artistic endeavour, pointing out that both can generate meaning through circumstance and inventiveness, despite the fact that neither has a predetermined end in mind or objective standards for producing the “best” work of art or leading the “best” human life. Rather, Sartre asserts that authenticity, or if a person "is what he projects himself to be"—that is, whether their ideas, behaviours, and self-image are consistent, or, to put it another way, whether their project aligns with their projection—is the true test of success in life.

**Abandonment and Atheism**

The decline of religious belief in modern society significantly influences Sartre's search for a new understanding of the value of human existence. Sartre openly expresses his atheistic views and argues that morality is constructed by individuals rather than dictated by a higher power. Consequently, he suggests that humans are "abandoned" in the world, and he contends that this sense of abandonment defines the human experience, regardless of whether individuals face it or attempt to escape from it.. However, Dostoyevsky asserts that "if God does not exist, everything is permissible" to imply that morality requires belief in God.

Sartre only acknowledges that everything is acceptable and that there is no God. This acceptance of abandonment does not imply that any behaviour should be permitted; rather, it reveals morality as a wholly human invention in the absence of an all-powerful entity to judge individuals.

This concept of abandonment is mostly a historical construct, both political and intellectual. Early Enlightenment atheist philosophers such as "Diderot, Voltaire, and even Kant" looked to human nature for morality in the late 18th century rather than divine law. But they accomplished this by looking for a universal human nature that might take the place of God, who Sartre considers to be as arbitrary as worshipping an imperceptible, improvable divinity, as the basis of morality and behaviour. Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx began to argue that morality was historical rather than absolute at the turn of the 20th century.

It became increasingly difficult to consider morality as a set of unchanging laws governing

right and bad behaviour after philosophers understood how moral standards had arbitrary changed over time, frequently to further the interests of the strong. Sartre's entire philosophy is set against the backdrop of Nietzsche's famous declaration that "God is dead," which rendered religious morality useless.

More specifically, Sartre's ethics begin with the death of religion, as he believes that humans are free because there is no set moral code. This rising moral void in philosophy, as well as the moral void that developed during and after World War II, is reflected in his idea of abandonment. The public had only just begun to grasp the full extent of the Nazis' war crimes and the horrors committed by French collaborators against their own countrymen when Sartre delivered this talk, and Paris had recently been liberated from Nazi control. The urgency to understand such profound human evil prompted the public to question traditional morals. To exemplify the relationship between the moral dilemmas of war and the concept of moral accountability he was advocating, Sartre certainly included the tale of his student, who had to choose between allegiance to his mother and loyalty to the French Revolution.

Although there are no right or wrong solutions for the student in that circumstance, he is nevertheless accountable for his decision. Similarly, Sartre contended that mindless deference to authority—which he read as people strengthening their adherence to conventional morality to avoid confronting the reality of abandonment—was one of the fundamental origins of Nazism. (5) This choice is a classic example of what Sartre refers to as ill faith, where individuals voluntarily decide to hold moral beliefs that inform them of their lack of freedom. Naturally, Sartre's detractors were also impacted by the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany, and they were concerned that his hostility towards conventional morality would exacerbate the degradation of values they witnessed in Nazi war crimes.

**Radical Freedom, Choice, and Responsibility**

Sartre maintains that people have radical freedom because he argues that neither human nature nor a set moral code can dictate how people behave. This implies that humans have complete control over their behaviour in any circumstance and throughout their life. Anyone could decide to embark on a criminal spree, quit school to become a farmer, or go vegan or start snowboarding tomorrow morning. Because no one else can override one's conscience, these decisions are not individual in the sense that they have no impact on other people.

Individuals bear complete responsibility for their choices and the individuals they grow into due to this significant freedom, even though they might not have complete control over every outcome.(6) Since no external forces dictate their actions, people are entirely responsible for the consequences of their behaviors. This high level of autonomy comes with both positive and negative aspects.. The fact that people can choose how they wish to live is a good thing; yet, people are always compelled to make a choice and accept responsibility for it, even if that choice is to do nothing.

Sartre contends that people are "condemned to be free" for this reason; the only thing that no one can choose is to be without options. According to Sartre, anguish is the sense of moral obligation that comes with having to make a decision and realising that one would never be able to have a definitive opinion on whether or not that decision was the right one. Sartre responds that suffering is an unavoidable aspect of existence when his detractors claim that existentialism creates suffering. According to Sartre, turning away from suffering entails avoiding it in bad faith rather than conquering it.

It entails making the decision to do nothing and acting as though one is not ethically accountable for oneself. What a person decides to do constitutes their entire existence, character, and essence, according to Sartre, who believed that people's decisions are the only things that matter. Since all views are either conveyed in ill faith or through action, mere beliefs are meaningless. (7) Similarly, unrealised dreams and plans are meaningless as they never materialise.

Nevertheless, a person's behaviour not only reflects their own qualities but also their perception of what is best for all of humanity. According to Sartre, "not a single action we take simultaneously produces an image of man as we believe he should be." To put it another way, Sartre responds to the criticism that there is no one to hold others accountable in the absence of objective morality by holding individuals accountable for their decisions to the entire human race. According to Sartre, no one would pick evil above good.

**6.5 Existentialism**

Sartre's two main goals in Existentialism is a Humanism are to address his detractors and clarify his philosophy for a wider audience that has started using the term "existentialism" without knowing what it actually means. Sartre finds himself in a challenging situation where he must respond to two opposing criticisms. Christians who believe existentialism is hopeless for humanity,

relativises values, and prioritises the material world over the spiritual realm are on the first side. Communists, on the other hand, believe that his ideology is too introspective to encourage practical action and too centred on individual subjectivity to enable political cooperation.

In response, Sartre reverses the charges made by the critics and implies that the doctrines of the critics are actually the ones that need to be criticised. Sartre's Christian detractors claimed that his philosophy was too gloomy and that it did not allow for the moral condemnation of wrongdoing. More generally, each accusation is a claim that Christianity's emphasis on both public moral judgements in the present life and redemption in the afterlife renders existentialism incompatible with Christian doctrine. The charge of pessimism aligns with the general belief that existentialist is hopeless and stands in opposition to Christian philosophy, which views ordinary beauty as proof of divine will. (8) In response, Sartre argues that existentialist is a realistic optimism that contrasts with the poor faith of Christianity.

According to him, Christianity rejects the existence of moral responsibility and despair in human existence in favour of a fantastical world in which, according to God's providence, everyone finds their place in the hereafter and everything always works out. On the other hand, existentialists think that individuals can change since they have power over their own moral nature. According to Sartre, this is more hopeful since it implies that people are not constrained by their current morals; both good and evil people might grow even more.

According to the existentialist theory of morality, however, "everyone can do whatever he pleases and is incapable, from his own small vantage point, of finding fault with the points of view or actions of others." (9) This is another reason why the Christian opponents claim that Sartre can never brand someone evil. Sartre responds to this objection by stating that it is untrue in one important manner but true in two others. First of all, it is accurate to say that an authentic existentialist life, where one "chooses his commitment and his project in a totally sincere and lucid way," keeps one from concluding that someone else is morally superior.

As a matter of fact, existentialists reject the idea of moral advancement, they hold that moral integrity is tested in identical ways throughout history and that the human situation is unchanging. Sartre asserts, however, that the critique is ultimately untrue since existentialists have the ability to condemn individuals who behave dishonestly. This is a critique of someone else's moral convictions, not moral criticism in the sense that Christians want (because humans cannot condemn others for breaking divine commandments, which Sartre rejects). When someone chooses to engage

in bad faith by thinking they are compelled to do something they actually select on their own volition, they are engaging in a way that is ethically contradictory and can be held accountable for denying their own autonomy.

Sartre comes to the conclusion that the primary objections to existentialism have been made out of a selfish wish to avoid the consequences of its concepts rather than a genuine interest in them. Naturally, by opting to give a public lecture to his detractors, Sartre reverses their approach in the same way that reverses their criticisms: by making them face the realities of human existence and, ideally, converting them into existentialists as well.

**6.6 Critical Analysis**

Sartre addresses his public perception from the outset, highlighting the misconceptions that cause his critics to completely reject existentialism. His articulation of these criticisms implies several crucial arguments he will later advocate for existentialism: that it serves as the sole intellectual framework for human conduct that promotes individual accountability for moral decisions and actions; that it is therefore a more hopeful philosophy rather than a bleak one; and that it acknowledges the intersubjectivity of human experience—that is, the awareness that each person's understanding of their existence is shaped by the presence and support of others. To avoid facing the existentialist conclusion that they are ethically accountable for their views and acts, Sartre thinks his detractors deliberately misinterpret his philosophy. He goes on to characterise this type of avoidance as ill faith, which is when someone pretends that they did not freely chose to make moral mistakes by attributing them to outside forces.

Sartre's idea that existence comes before essence is the foundation of his concept of subjectivity, which also enables him to carefully distinguish his beliefs from those of other atheists. In contrast to existentialism, which holds that people are free to choose their own purpose since they lack an innate purpose, he presents the conventional Christian conception of God. According to him, the Christian belief that people are made for a specific fate is constrictive. According to Sartre, people are deprived of their distinctive freedom by Christianity and atheistic ideas of fixed "human nature."

This completes the basic idea of Sartre's argument: human life should be seen as an endeavour to create purpose because existence comes before essence. Additionally, as each

individual is only the sum of their deeds, their moral character is determined by those deeds. Since every human endeavour is a reaction to the universal human predicament, every action reflects a set of universal ideals. Sartre's argument is already heavily influenced by prior philosophers, even though he does not state this directly (partly to prevent prejudice or confusing his audience of no specialists). Heidegger, for instance, is renowned for having defended the idea that individuals "project" into their futures by visualising their future selves.

After introducing his audience to the fundamental ideas of existentialism, Sartre goes into great detail to clarify some of his most ambiguous findings. According to Sartre, suffering, desolation, and abandonment are just facts about the universe, and the goal of existentialism is to assist individuals in facing these realities rather than trying to hide them in deceit. The public's belief that existentialism leads to suffering, hopelessness, and moral despondency betrays their own lack of sincerity; according to Sartre, in order to truly live freely and morally, people must acknowledge the basic truths of suffering, hopelessness, and abandonment rather than avoiding them. Sartre still interacts with his philosophical forebears. Here, for example, he adopts Kant's idea that every individual acts as a "legislator" since their deeds reveal fundamental ideas about right and wrong.

The Communist criticism that existentialism discourages moral action because existentialists hold that there are no unchanging values in the universe is intended to be addressed by Sartre's claim that suffering is unrelated to inaction. Sartre contends that accepting preset values is actually deceiving oneself about the real source of values, which is our behaviour. In his book Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard envisioned how Abraham could make the "leap of faith" necessary to sacrifice Isaac, which is the version of the Abraham story Sartre is referring to. When Sartre claims that he could not have known if it was actually the "voice of an angel" and not a hallucination, he betrays his mistrust of such faith.

### 6.7 Conclusion

One can draw the conclusion that people have the freedom to establish their own morals and lead the lifestyles they choose. He held that there is no objective set of values and that everyone are in charge of their own decisions. Sartre's existentialist interpretation of what it is to be human can be summed up by his belief that the nature of consciousness—a desire for being—is the fundamental source of motivation for action. Each agent has the responsibility to use his freedom in

a way that keeps him aware of his status as a free human being and a fact By doing this, he will gain a deeper understanding of the initial decision that his entire life reflects and, consequently, the values that are thereby portrayed. Only by living this specific life and avoiding the traps of self-deceptive tactics like poor faith can one get such an awareness. The realisation of a universal in the uniqueness of human life is embodied in this genuine option for human life.

## 6.8 Questions

1. What is the significance of Sartre's assertion that "existence precedes essence"? How does this concept challenge traditional philosophical views?
2. In what ways does Sartre's philosophy reflect the historical and cultural context of post-World War II Europe?
3. How does Sartre's concept of "bad faith" illustrate the struggles of individual authenticity in modern society?
4. What role does freedom play in Sartre's existentialism, and how does it relate to personal responsibility?
5. How do Sartre's views on subjectivity and the self compare to those of other existential philosophers, such as Simone de Beauvoir or Albert Camus?
6. What implications does Sartre's philosophy have for understanding the nature of human relationships and interpersonal dynamics?
7. How does Sartre's literary work, such as "Nausea" or "No Exit," embody his philosophical ideas?
8. In what ways can Sartre's existentialism be applied to contemporary issues, such as mental health, identity, or social justice?
9. How does Sartre's notion of "the gaze" contribute to our understanding of objectification and the dynamics of power in social interactions?
10. What critiques have been levied against Sartre's existentialism, and how might he respond to these critiques?

## 6.9 Suggested Readings


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