Summary of course C.5.5: Ideology Analysis

General: *This course examines the tension between tradition and revolution and analyses how Western culture transformed from seventeenth-century thinking based on authority and dogma into an eighteenth-century Enlightenment culture focused on individual rights, criticism and social change. This historical dynamic is explored philosophically through Kant's critical reason and Hegel's dialectics, in which the established order is systematically subjected to criticism.*

Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx reinterpret this dialectic in materialist terms as a mathesis universalis, in which reality is understood as a complex of changing processes. Within this framework, an ideology is defined as a system of representations that appears universal or rational but in fact conceals historical class relations and material exploitation.

The course approaches the 'new' dialectic through four universal premises or lemmata — totality, movement, qualitative leap and internal contradiction — whose roots extend back to mythical and ancient sources. Ultimately, ideology analysis functions not as a rigid dogmatic scheme, but as an open, descriptive method of foundational inquiry for critically understanding contemporary social processes.

Summary

1. Historical and Philosophical Background: Tradition and Revolution

The course places the theme of tradition and revolution at its centre, with the French Revolution of 1789 serving as a turning point for understanding the modern era.

Where the seventeenth century was dominated by religious and political authority and unchanging dogmas, the eighteenth century, with thinkers such as Voltaire, moved towards an ideal appreciation of individual rights, civil liberty and the right to criticize.

However, this profound cultural shift also brought sharp social tensions. François de Salignac (Fénelon), for example, warned that freedom without order degenerates into despotic free-thinking, whereas order without freedom leads to anarchistic slavery.

Thinkers such as Jacob Burckhardt and Henri Joly also pointed out how the pursuit of equality and popular sovereignty can easily give rise to an all-powerful state and the emergence of domineering Caesarism. This social revolution found its philosophical expression in Enlightenment rationalism.

Immanuel Kant sets "critical reason" against inherited metaphysics, which he characterizes as a form of dogmatism that refuses all foundational inquiry. This critical reason operates both transitively (testing religion and legislation) and reflexively (subjecting reason itself to self-criticism).

Along the same lines, G.W.F. Hegel sets philosophy against "the positive" - the established, sacred and unchanging order that cloaks itself in the maintenance of power - as a form of ethical and political social criticism that assesses existing conditions against a legitimate order.

2. The 'New' Dialectic: Rationality, Reality and Materialism

The core of the course concerns an analysis of the modern, 'new' dialectic. Building on Hegel's famous dictum, "Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig" ("What is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational"), Friedrich Engels demonstrates that, for Hegel, "actual" does not simply refer to everything that factually exists, but to what is rationally necessary and justifiable within a specific historical situation. Once a social order loses its necessity, it becomes "non-actual" and must give way to a new, rational phase. Dialectics is therefore, in essence, a revolutionary philosophy that exposes the supposedly definitive or 'sacred' character of human institutions as temporary and transient.

Karl Marx enriches this framework by showing that general concepts (universals), such as 'production in general', are reasonable abstractions that capture what different things have in common. A dialectical theory of abstraction, however, requires that the universal essential form (the means of production and accumulated labour) not be confused with historically specific relations (capital). This is where Marxist materialism fundamentally differs from liberal materialism. While liberal thinkers locate property in an unchanging "human nature" (physicalism), Marx interprets property relations as a historically developed process of social exploitation (historicism).

This confrontation leads to the precise definition of an ideology: a system of ideas or representations that presents itself as a universal, rational justification of the social order, but in reality serves to conceal or suppress the underlying material interests, exploitation and historical consequences.

3. The Four Main Premises (Lemmata) of Dialectics

Dialectics functions as a *mathesis universalis*: a comprehensive, coherent system of thought that seeks to understand reality as a whole in its dynamic development. The historian W.B. Kristensen demonstrates that the Hegelian triad (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) has its deepest roots in an ancient mythical-religious pattern in which divine totality encompasses the interweaving of opposing forces (ascent and decline, salvation and misfortune). Within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, this method is structured around four fundamental lemmata or premises:

- *The Lemma of Totality:* Reality is an organic, interconnected whole in which the whole is the principle governing its parts. In economics and sociology, the isolated individual is an abstraction; concrete thinking means grasping the concrete as a synthesis of many determinations and social relations. Bertrand Russell introduces an important corrective here by reminding us of the individual's autonomous value and rights.

- *The Lemma of Movement (Mobilism):* Reality is not a collection of finished things, but a complex of dynamic processes (*kinèsis*) in which everything comes into being and passes away. Following in the footsteps of the ancient historian Herodotus, dialectics requires both *historiè* (information and investigation) and *logos* (the structuring narrative or insight) to make historical change intelligible.

- *The Lemma of the Qualitative Leap:* Change does not occur exclusively through gradual progression. Steady quantitative increases reach a critical threshold at a certain point, at which an abrupt qualitative leap takes place. This phenomenon is evident both in physics (the boiling of water) and in economics (the accumulation of money into capital or the emergence of overproduction crises). In social theory, this underpins the distinction between gradual reforms (reformism) and revolutionary transformation.

- *The Lemma of Contradiction:* Internal contradictions and sources of division form the true driving force of all development. Development proceeds through affirmation (thesis), negation/alienation (antithesis or *Entfremdung*) and the negation of the negation (synthesis or *Aufhebung*). This is illustrated by Hegel's well-known dialectic of master and servant (*Herr und Knecht*), in which the servant attains self-consciousness through labor, and by Marx's class dialectic, in which social exploitation is ultimately overcome in a classless society.

4. Ideology Analysis as a Dialectical Method

In the final section, the course emphasises that ideology analysis must not degenerate into rigid, dogmatic schematism in which facts are forcibly squeezed into a ready-made idea. Dialectics is first and foremost an applied method of critical foundational inquiry. This is illustrated by contemporary social developments, such as the relativisation of Marxist dogma in China under Deng Xiaoping, where it was acknowledged that texts written a hundred years earlier must be adapted to new historical realities. Ideology analysis thus enables people to expose specious arguments and understand social processes of change in terms of their deeper causes.