

Reading Response Week 4

In “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser argues that although ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) are separate from repressive state apparatuses (SAs), ISAs serve a similar function to SAs in maintaining the dominant class’s power. Althusser asserts that ideology provides a believable but nevertheless imaginary system of concealment that masks real conditions of existence. Lastly, Althusser proposes that ideology constitutes individuals as subjects that can only recognize themselves within the realm of ideology.

In “Woman as Other,” Simone de Beauvoir proposes an explanation as to why women have not disputed male sovereignty in the same way other oppressed groups have disputed oppressing sovereignty. Beauvoir argues that because the separation between man and woman is biological, women do not have a concrete means, like shared history, culture, or religion, to argue for their equality. Moreover, Beauvoir asserts that women are inextricably tied to men as secondary and subject, tied as the latter in the relation between the Absolute and the Other.

In “The Black Plague,” Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor highlights the disparate impact of the coronavirus on African Americans, which Taylor asserts are fundamentally due to institutional neglect in medical care and the inextricable linkage of race and class. Because the problem is not simply one of exclusion, but of the underpinnings of U.S. society itself, Taylor argues that change must not just take the form of lip service, but in material and transformational reform.

In “Black Reconstruction and the Racial Wage,” W.E.B. Du Bois argues that Reconstruction was not merely a dispute over race, but an economic conflict inflamed and stratified by racial divide. Although many whites and blacks were lower-class, even poor whites were paid with a “psychological wage” that elevated their social standing and quality of life. Du

Bois asserts that this psychological wage propagated racial disunity of the white and black working class prevents a proletarian movement from emerging to reform the capitalist system.

Simone de Beauvoir highlights women as a group separate from other minority groups in that they are more “scattered” and have no form of sharedness that bolsters collective effort. In her comparison between different groups – Jews, black Americans, proletariats, and so on – and women, Beauvoir implicitly assumes in the independence of each group in arguing for its fair treatment. “The parallel ... between women and the proletariat,” Beauvoir writes, “is valid in that neither ever formed a minority or a separate collective unit of mankind ... But proletariats have not always existed, whereas there have always been women.”¹ Yet, the advancement of one group’s condition often also advances the condition of others by intersectionality. Many women are also proletariats not by coincidence but *because* of their gender; the long-running positioning of women as the Other to the Absolute man that Beauvoir proposes directly contributed to, for example, the disproportionately high employment of women in industrial factories, pursued to take advantage of their cheap labor. Thinkers like Crystal Eastman and Sandra Harding have explored other meaningful relationships between gender and class, too. Advances for the proletariat have aided women, advances for the woman have aided the cause against slavery, vice versa for each, and so on; the challenging of dominant institutions is not one stratified by group lines but instead a dynamic, reciprocated, and networked process. While this statement about the relationship between women and intersectionality somewhat affirms Beauvoir’s distinction between women and other groups, it is primarily a reframing from Beauvoir’s “independent group” approach to incorporate entrenched crossings and parallels across groups.

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Random House UK Ltd., 1953), 341.