

# Chapter 7

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## **Exercise 1**

The following passage attempts to define how the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser used the term *ideology*. Write a summary of this passage that captures this distinct sense of the term. In your summary, try to introduce details to exemplify or illustrate this definition of *ideology*.

### **PASSAGE 1**

Althusser's paper "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"—hereafter referred to as ISAs—is his attempt to state what these conditions of existence are. Althusser argues contrary to the empiricist conception that there are not given subjects with an experience of the real. Subjects are not essential but are constituted. There is no 'social reality' which can be present to experience. Men's conditions of existence cannot be manifest to them and in consequence they live their relation to these (absent) conditions in an imaginary mode. They live them in an imaginary presence, 'as if' they were given. Ideology is a representation of this 'imaginary' modality by which men live their relation to the (absent) totality of their conditions of existence. Ideology is not 'consciousness', it is a representation of the 'imaginary'. This 'imaginary' relation is not the experience or consciousness of an already constituted subject—it is in the imaginary that the subject is formed as a subject. The subject becomes what it is through the imaginary relation—it cannot be the pure subject of the empiricist notion of experience.

Paul Q. Hirst 1976 "Althusser and the theory of ideology." *Economy and Society* 5 (4): 385-412, 386-87.