

Philosophy Colloquium

Fall 2020



Dr. Karen Ng

Vanderbilt
University

October 22 2020

2-3:30 pm

Zoom

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PHIL Colloquium

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Species-Being: In Defense of Humanistic Social Critique

Much recent work in social philosophy has turned its attention toward a renewed concept of ideology as a useful tool for analysis and social critique. Although the contemporary discussion of ideology is generally not wedded to the acknowledged Marxian origins of this concept, my aim in this paper is to provide an account of this background and defend it as important — even essential — for social critique.

Specifically, the background I have in mind concerns the connection between Marx's humanist commitments and the development of the concept of ideology, especially as it pertains to the idea of human species-being (*Gattungswesen*). For Marx, the harm of ideology consists primarily in its distortion of our historically developing human essence or nature such that living under its sway can impede, frustrate, pervert, and deprive the human potential for flourishing and freedom. The particular conditions justified and obscured by ideologies thus need to be overcome because these conditions inhibit individual and collective self-actualization, acting as forces of dehumanization. This connection between ideology and dehumanization is generally neglected in contemporary discussions, or else has been criticized as unhelpful as a model of social critique. In what follows, I will defend a Marx-inspired account of the connection between ideology and dehumanization and argue that it can respond to some of the characteristic objections against humanistic approaches to social critique, demonstrating some of its key advantages in contrast to rival approaches.



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
Department of Philosophy