

PHILOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGIES

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When we try to approach the history of philosophy, that is, when we examine and investigate the organized thought of any philosopher, structured in those environmental conditions which favored precisely the rise of that philosophy, we are almost immediately impressed by the stability of human nature throughout history.

In assuming this point of view, we see how man is stationary in his own essence. The dynamics of those forces which determine human progress present, only apparently, each cycle of man's history as something new. Actually, every human being has faced the same problems, pursued the same ideals, and suffered the same disappointments. But not all people recognize this, for circumstances, which are in reality the changing elements, acquire an intrinsic value for people; thus it is difficult for some to identify with preceding generations. Through the teaching of history, however, we can make the present man confront the historically remote man. And despite the profound scorn the former feels towards his ancestor, we can discover the elements necessary for such encounters. And we can also create in the present man a feeling of solidarity with his historical past.

Human tragedy is, in its essence, endless. In spite of his personal characteristics, man can revive the past, because it belongs to him: it is the only heredity he receives, it is the only basis for his development and his improvement. A famous Italian thinker, Francisco Guicciardini, said, "Past things enlighten the future, because the world was always the same, and everything which is and will be—was in another time and the same things return but under different names. Not everybody recognizes it, but only he who is wise and can observe them carefully."¹

This human tragedy consists in the fact that man has developed, throughout his history, two kinds of progress. The first type of progress is linear and almost optimistic. It refers to science and technology. This type of progress might be considered real progress, for science and technology have brought us to the discovery of natural laws and thus have contributed to our survival. The second kind of progress refers to human attitudes toward life and to radical changes in our habits. This kind of progress has been almost insignificant. The lack of such progress has produced the greatest problem of our day. When the mind is not fully prepared to accept and take advantage of the immense scientific and technological progress, when we have not yet learned how to make appreciative judgments on everything our scientific progress has discovered; then,

sometimes truth destroys us. Continuity in human essence could be inferred from the fact that the only situation which becomes permanent in man's conscience, as something absurdly stationary, is doubt. Doubt gave origin to philosophy as an activity and converted it into a source for any certainty.

But there is something more which might be taken as a coordinate element within the history of the human race: the institutionization of ideas, the reduction of the intrinsic value of human life to that of an instrument for serving created interests. Within the attempts made by all thinkers to individualize evil and make it objective, the first basic element which one encounters—the indiscussible one—is *fanaticism* (no matter what the "ism" may be called). This element, fanaticism, can crush a man to powder, nullify his dignity, and, let me point out again, *instrumentalize* him.

Doubt is a serious problem for man. In order to resolve it, there are two paths which he can choose. The first is to accept the challenge and use the reflexive power of his mind in order to try to penetrate the mystery which surrounds him. In other words, the first way affirms scientific investigation to establish truth and philosophical activity to protect us from that truth. The second way converts doubt into an absolute truth. In order to do this, man has discovered a simple, plain way—the way to ideologies.

What I want to say is that when man first faced the great questions about his life and was frightened by their magnitude because so many doubts were raised in his soul, he discovered that the easiest way to solve his problem, and so to regain his tranquillity, was precisely to follow those people who were more powerful or much smarter than he.

The importance of the answers given to such questions as man's origin and final destiny, or man's place in the total scheme of things, was attached to the fact that upon the answers depended a new way of living, a new attitude toward life, and a new set of interests. Thus it was easy for an intelligent man in such primitive communities (and, to a certain extent, it is still easy in our days) to identify his own interests with the new and to impose the new values upon his fellows.

Early ideologies were all religious, and a religious element has been retained in subsequent ideologies throughout the history of mankind, for ideologies have always promised to sustain people in this world, free from a state of misery, and to lead them to a state of happiness by religious means. Further, the proponents of ideologies have always had at hand the means for subjecting people to their will because of the force exerted both on mind and body.

Now let me try to characterize an ideology. We might define an ideology as a doctrine with little objective validity, maintained for the interests, evident or hidden, of those who use it. It is nonscientific, that is, nonlogical and nonempirical. In order to evaluate its degree of objectivity, the only criterion to be used should be the positive experience obtained on the basis of its evolution. On the other hand, persuasion would be the criterion for its subjective aspect, and, in regard to its social aspect, the usefulness for those who produce or accept it. Therefore, an ideology must be distinguished from a scientific theory, because scientific theories are objectively evaluated; their goal is not persuasion. Ideologies belong to the arena of feeling and faith, and science to the field of observation and reasoning. Then, the function of an ideology is to persuade, that is, to lead the action of people toward a goal; consequently, an ideology must have the capacity to control and lead human behavior. So, any belief adopted as a control of collective behavior can be considered an ideology—when we take the word "belief" in its most general sense, that is, in the sense of a notion which compromises conduct. Beliefs, in this sense, may or may not have objective validity.²

If we are right, then, the major function of an ideology is to provide political and social establishments with ethical justification for their interests and consequent action. And political and social establishments feel safer when buttressed by an ethical establishment.

Ideologists are terrible simplifiers. An ideology makes it unnecessary for people to confront individual issues in individual situations. One simply turns to the ideological computer, feeds the machine with questions, and out comes the prepared formula. Thus, the method used by ideologists to impose their will is, first, to structure a "creed," that is, a system of beliefs characterized as an absolute truth which represents the necessities and the corresponding desires to be fulfilled by men. These beliefs are not the genuine ones, of course, but those which must be realized in order to pursue the interests of the ideology itself.

Of course, if all men agreed that their necessities, aims, and goals were the same, there would be no problem. But since this is impossible, ideologists must induce others to desire what they desire. It is irrelevant here whether what the ideologists desire is something they believe to be good for their interests alone, or something they believe to be good for mankind; the point is that ideologists are trying to bring others to desire whatever they need to be desired.

According to Russell,³ there are two chief ways of accomplishing this "unification" of desires, and both show the two moments in the evolution of an ideology. When the ideology "does not control the machinery of the state," it uses the "way of the preacher," and, in such case, it appeals to

“evidence” in which emotions are disguised in the appeal; it knows how to arouse feelings similar to the desired ones in other men’s minds. If, on the contrary, the ideology controls the machinery of the state, it uses the “way of the legislator” by persuading people to follow its way of thinking, by promulgating a code of laws and punishments, and, generally, by instituting a “system of moral instruction.” Insofar as the ideologist makes men feel wicked if they pursue other purposes than his own, he is successful. Therefore, men who, by accepting an ideology, have adopted the easy way of organizing their doubts, with the evil consequence of losing their own personality, have given up the capacity to think by themselves and the courage to face their own responsibilities.

On the other hand, as was said at the beginning of this paper, there is another way to achieve a solution to this problem inherent in human nature, and this way is philosophy.

How can philosophy fulfill this task without converting itself into an ideology? I think that, first of all, philosophy must be characterized as an attitude toward problems rather than as a specifiable set of beliefs. An attitude which conditions man to search for the meaning of human life produces in man the capacity to experience perplexity about such meaning, about his relationship to others, and about the nature of the world.

Thus, philosophy can enrich man’s ordinary reflection and show him how to balance his different sets of needs.

A philosophical attitude, as we described it before, is, after all, a prudent attitude toward change and a true preparation for it. Scientific revolutions have invalidated prior research; they have changed men’s ways of looking at things. Philosophy tried to repair the damage that these revolutions have inflicted on older views of life by helping men to re-examine these views, rather than by attacking scientists.

Ideologies, however, have always acted in a contrary fashion. Ideologists have tried to minimize the scientific results when these threatened the consistency of the ideology. Or, worse, ideologists have forced their followers to face radical change with no preparation at all. In this latter situation, many men for whom a particular ideology was the *ideal*, found themselves facing a meaningless life; men have suffered, and are suffering—the process is far from being concluded—a strange martyrdom.⁴

If philosophy is said to be the “love of wisdom,” this word “wisdom” is to be understood as an attitude of valuing and weighing courses of action so that they will fit into a reasonable interpretation of our human situation. Now, the question is, how can this attitude be reached without openness of mind, without freedom from any kind of conditioning? It is strictly necessary to attempt to keep our minds free from any possible sort

of mental imposition, even if we are not sure to what extent we may do such a thing. It is impossible to philosophize without accepting the opportunity that such an activity offers for self-examination and an examination of society. If this freedom is not attained, there is no distinction between philosophy and ideology, and in such a case, philosophy becomes only a complicated method for justifying the hidden interests of ideologies, which are the hidden, unconfessible interests of some organized group which is seeking power.

An example of free thought converted to ideology can be found in Luther. Unwillingly perhaps, Luther gave his support to two kinds of interests: first, the German princes used his immense popular following because they saw that they could use the religious revolt to free themselves from the Pope’s control and thus to extend their power in their own states; second, he founded a new church—and so gave the dissidents a strength they lacked as individuals. Thus, Luther found himself in the position of the earliest Christians, who had to choose between individual religion and the requirements of institutionalism. Because he chose the second alternative, he created a new theology as inflexible and as orthodox as the old; and by doing so, he used ideological methods in his struggle against another ideology. One episode clearly illustrates ideologically conditioned behavior. The Anabaptists, who denied the need for infant baptism on the reasonable ground that “God would not damn a little child for the sake of a drop of water,” were treated without mercy and sentenced to death by Luther’s followers.⁵

Without freedom from institutional constraints, philosophy would continue being what it was, unfortunately, throughout many centuries—an endless discussion based only on speculations, a discussion of abstractions which only existed in the minds of philosophers uselessly engaged in solving useless problems.

The enterprise of philosophy is not just to struggle against ideologies, though, of course, this is certainly one of its noblest tasks. On the other hand, man cannot live without a planned scheme which is built up by our inner urges and molded by environmental conditions. The point is that man must not fall into the nets of an ideology and allow it to think and act for him. The important point is to accept the notion that if we want to change our society, and then the world, we must first change ourselves; for we are part of the world. The fact is that we must not intervene in ideological revolutions, because they represent only a change in the method of brainwashing. When ideologists say, “stop thinking in this way; start thinking in this other way,” they are insisting on presenting changes as if they were novelties, when in reality they are old things disguised as new.

We have now to present some final considerations. If we accept the descriptions of philosophy and ideologies we have just made, we might infer that philosophy is especially addressed to those people who need more than economic security and more than an endless succession of technological miracles to make them feel at home in this world. Such people want to be confronted with their individual situations—as individuals who are capable of thinking and who want to realize personal action according to real possibilities.

Ideology, on the contrary, is especially shaped for those who prefer to let other people make decisions for them, or who prefer to convert their real possibilities of action into long-term ideals which are never realized—much as a dog might chase a mechanical rabbit. Such people live on the basis of vain hopes and strange illusions. Their alternative is to follow institutionalism, to change their attitudes according to the evolutions of ideological interests, and to magnify the poor results of ideological action. Thus, they feel much safer and think not only that they have accomplished their duties as men but also that they have provided a great service to human progress.

Of course, we are not speaking of those people who have accepted some ideology in a rational way, that is, as the result of personal decision and with the belief that they have found a truth which will resolve their doubts and will give meaning to their way of living. These people, however, are not useful for those who promote ideologies because they are constantly testing the corresponding results in their experience, thus sometimes producing the refutation of the ideology itself.

We must also observe that man cannot completely escape the influence of ideologies, especially in their more subtle propaganda, but man should avoid being converted into an instrument. We should add, too, that a man can find compatibility between his ideas and the ideas maintained by an institution; of course, this does not make him a follower. What we have just said is particularly true in the case of religious ideologies, but in this case it is important to distinguish between personal religion as a way of feeling and formal historical religions.

NOTES

¹ Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi Politici e Civili*, Sansoni, Firenze.

² Vilfredo Pareto, *Trattato di Sociologia Generale*, Laterza, Bari.

³ Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science* (London and New York: 1935).

⁴ Enrique Macín, "El extraño martirio del Padre Ruíz" (unpublished).

⁵ Charles Beard, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century In Relation to Modern Thought and Knowledge* (London: 1885).