

The End of Ideology Revisited—Part II

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The End of Ideology Revisited — Part II*

INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES STILL
RELEVANT TODAY

In the twenty-five years since *The End of Ideology* was published, the concept of ideology has unravelled completely. What is not considered an ideology today? Ideas, ideals, beliefs, creeds, passions, values, *Weltanschauungen*, religions, political philosophies, moral systems, linguistic discourses — all have been pressed into service. One hears about ‘communism and capitalism as competing ideologies’, and ‘the failure of the United States [before Reagan] to develop an ideology’. In an essay in the *Partisan Review*, ideology is defined as ‘fantasy cast in the form of assertion’, a loose and associative form of thought, ‘sharing qualities with pornography ...’. A front-page essay in the *Times Literary Supplement* on pre-Christian religious thought talks of the effects of ‘hostile ideologies (i.e. early Epicureanism) on Christian apologists’. And a book on military strategy is entitled *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disaster of 1914*.¹

And then there is the clotted verbiage of Marxian scholasticism.

*This is the second part of the 1987 *Government and Opposition*/Leonard Schapiro Lecture given at the London School of Economics on 29 October 1987. Part I was published in the Spring issue.

¹What is striking is that certain words, by their lexical fluency, quickly achieve a linguistic universality, so one finds, with minor orthographic variation, the words *ideology*, *idéologie*, *Ideologie*, *ideologia* permeating virtually all European languages. Can one imagine what would have been the fate of the idea if Marx had used the term *ideationalism* as the counterpart to material practice?

For a recent effort to establish some typologies for these diverse usages, see the papers of Dearthé, Bachelar and von Leyden, at the colloquium in Florence of the European University Institute, *Ideology and Politics*, edited by Maurice Cranston and Peter Mair, and published in 1980 by four publishers: Sijthoff (Alphen aan den Rijn), Klett-Cotta (Stuttgart), Bruylant (Brussels) and Le Monnier (Florence).

A book on 'social representation in the cinema' defines ideology as that which 'reproduces the existing relations of production'. Ideology 'uses the fabrication of images ... to persuade us how things are, how they ought to be, and that the place provided for us is the place we ought to have. Such a definition stresses the interconnection of base and superstructure or of social existence and consciousness'. Yet the Marxist historian George Rudé writes a book, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, which defines ideology 'as the full range of ideas or beliefs that underlie social and political action, whether of old-style rulers, "rising" bourgeois or of "inferior" social groups'.²

In respect to Marxism, there is a singular reason for these contradictory usages. As is true with almost all his sociological concepts, Marx rarely clarified his terms or kept to a consistent usage. If one reads through his corpus one finds a stupefying set of confusions and substitutions between the words *ideas*, *ideology*, *consciousness* and *superstructure* — and in the latter instance we often do not know when *superstructure* applies to institutions or ideas. At times in *The German Ideology* the use of 'ideological superstructure' suggests all forms of social consciousness that are determined by or vary from material practice. In another instance (*The 18th Brumaire*), Marx uses the term *superstructure* to refer to the 'distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life which the entire class creates and forms ... out of its material foundations'. In the 1859 preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*, the *fons et origo* of all subsequent discussion of Marx's formulation, he writes about 'the economic *structure* of society — the real foundation, on which rise legal and political *superstructures* and to which *correspond* definite forms of social consciousness'. (Emphasis added.) But are there, thus, two sets of parallel relations: the relation of structure to structure and of material practices to ideological ideas? And what then, of the relation of structure to ideas, and how does this come about; how does the material base or social location 'determine' or shape the ideas? On these questions of 'micro' social processes, Marx — and Marxists — have never given an answer.³

²See, Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image*, Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1981, p. 1, and George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 7–9.

³See, Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology*, London, Macmillan, 1983, especially pp. 170–1.

How does one make one's way through this bramble bush? Are there any boundaries that one can establish? One strategy has been to enlarge the term so as to include any and all beliefs that impose some obligations upon their adherents. Thus the philosopher Patrick Corbett writes:

By 'ideology', therefore, is meant here any intellectual structure consisting of a set of beliefs about man's nature and the world in which he lives; a claim that the two sets are interdependent; and a demand that those beliefs should be professed ... by anyone who is to be considered as a full member of a certain social group.... On this usage, Ghandism, Catholicism, Leninism, Nazism, American Democracy, and the Divine Right of Kings are, or were ideologies; and so on a similar scale, are the myths of English Public Schools or Amazonian tribes. The Theory of Relativity is not, since it has no implications for conduct.⁴

But since almost all beliefs, from vegetarianism to monasticism, entail some consequences for conduct — in fact any creed to which the suffix *ism* can be added — a definition this broad simply blurs all distinctions. And even on the Theory of Relativity, Mr Corbett was wrong, for to orthodox Leninists, relativity theory (and quantum mechanics) contradicted the simple copy-theory of knowledge and the strict determinism of Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, and so constituted an 'idealist cosmology'; thus for several decades, these theories were denounced as 'bourgeois physics' and could not be taught openly in the physics curriculum in the Soviet Union!

In the efforts to stipulate a generic or formal definition, one forgets that the concept of ideology is an *historical* term to be understood contextually, to see how it emerged and how it has been used. As Reinhard Bendix has written:

... the term [ideology] is not properly applicable to Western civilization prior to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, somehow in the way that terms like 'economy' or 'society' or 'intellectuals' do not fit the 'premodern' period either. All these terms are applicable to the ways in which men think about their society. The shift is one of cultural patterns and intellectual perspective although relations between these levels are important also.⁵

In the perspective of culture, ideology is one of the dimensions of

⁴Patrick Corbett, *Ideology*, London, Hutchinson, 1965, p. 12.

⁵Reinhard Bendix, 'The Age of Ideology: Persistent and Changing', in David Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p. 295.

modernity. In the past several hundred years, the Western world has witnessed an extraordinary sea-change in consciousness. Modernity, that great galvanizing force, is more than the emergence of science, the explosion of technology, the idea of revolution, the entry of masses of people into society — though it is all of these. Modernity is the inchoate Promethean aspiration, now made flesh, of men to transform nature and transform themselves: to make man the master of change, and the re-designer of the world to conscious plan and purpose.

In the Marxian and Mannheimian tradition, ideology is an epiphenomenon, the symbolic expression of economic interests, the fusion of class and politics. In the broader argument that I have sought to elaborate, ideology is the interplay of culture and politics. In that great crossover which took place in the eighteenth century, ideology emerged with the break-up of chiliastic religious movements as a political force. The play of politics in religious terms that one saw in aspects of the wars of religion or the English Puritan revolution, now became the political expression of eschatological creeds ('religions of virtue' and 'religions of humanity') played out in secular terms.⁶ Ideology, then, as I have used the term, deals with social movements that seek to mobilize men for the realisation of such beliefs, and in this fusion of political formulas and passions, ideology provides a faith and a set of moral certitudes — in the case of Marxism, the view that history will judge — by which ends are used to justify immoral means. The disillusion of individuals with such movements results in the dissipation of ideology among the adherents; or, when such movements are in power, ideology becomes a coercive force used by the rulers to maintain conformity.

⁶The theme of 'crossover', and the alternative responses to the break-up of religious beliefs in the 18th and 19th centuries, is taken up in my Hobhouse lecture (1977), 'The Return of the Sacred', and reprinted in my book *The Winding Passage*, New York, Basic Books, 1980, ch. 17, pp. 324–54. The English edition (Heinemann Educational Books) is called, simply, *Sociological Essays and Journeys: 1960–1980*.

In this view of ideology, I would demur, too, from the influential formulation of Clifford Geertz. While Mr Geertz is right, I believe, in emphasizing the primary cultural and symbolic nature of ideology, rather than seeing it as a 'reflection' of social structure, he expands the term to encompass any set of world-views that provide orientations and meanings for its adherents, but in doing so neglects the specific *political* dimension that has given ideology its emotional and mobilizing force. See, Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, ch. 8.

NEW DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE COMMUNIST WORLD

In respect to political consequences, the 'End of Ideology', secondly, has some resonance today because we are in a new cycle of disillusionment in the communist world. There were the Moscow Trials and the Nazi-Soviet pact in the late 1930s; the Khrushchev revelations and the Hungarian uprising in 1956; the Prague spring of 1968 and the smashing by the Brezhnev regime of Dubček's effort to propose a 'socialism with a human face'. There is one startling difference in the present situation. The previous disillusionments were moral, intellectual and political. The admitted failures this time are primarily *economic*.

Whatever the previous disenchantments, the overriding argument for the superiority of socialism was that the anarchy of the market is replaced by conscious social organization. As Engels wrote, in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*: 'The laws of society come under man's control, and men, for the first time, can make their own history.' The justification for Stalin's forced industrialization and brutal collectivism in agriculture was that the Soviet Union could make the leap from a backward nation to a modern state only through the mechanisms of central planning and the primacy of heavy industry as the basis for later differentiation of production and the expansion of consumption. After the Second World War, with the emergence of the 'Third World', the Soviet model was touted as the only workable model for 'under-developed countries', whose economic expansion was being held back by 'unequal exchange' and 'dependency' on the capitalist societies.

But what Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev have conceded is that central planning has become cumbersome and inflexible, and that the economies of both countries have begun to stagnate. At the same time, the extraordinary economic successes of Japan, South Korea, the smaller East Asian countries, as well as Brazil, within a shorter period of time than in the Soviet Union, have provided a very different mixed market/state economic model for Third-World countries.

In China and the Soviet Union, the new policies seek to provide material incentives geared to output, the introduction of market mechanisms, a large leeway for enterprise managers to make their own production and pricing decisions, and a degree of competition to weed out the inefficient firms even at the cost of bankruptcies and

unemployment. What, then, is the economic meaning of 'socialism'? In the 1920s, the American journalist Lincoln Steffens returned from the Soviet Union and fashioned a phrase that for decades became the banner for all progressive-minded persons: 'I have seen the future and it works.' As a character in the satirical novel *Mother Russia* by Robert Littell (1978) remarks about Soviet life: 'I have seen the future, and it needs work.'

On the political level, the situation in Eastern Europe presents a mirthless paradox that completes the ideological re-inversion of Marxism. On his road to discovering the materialist foundations of society Marx had sought to show that Hegel's views of political life were 'illusions' derived from a false relation between ideology and reality. In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and *On the Jewish Question*, Marx argued that Hegel had inverted the relation of state to civil society by postulating a false autonomy to the former. And Engels, picking up that theme, in his monograph on *Feuerbach and the Outcome of German Classical Philosophy* (1888) wrote: 'The State presents itself to us as the first ideological power over mankind', for though it was created by 'society' to safeguard the general interest, it 'makes itself independent in regard to society; and indeed, the more so, the more it becomes the organ of a particular class, the more it directly enforces the supremacy of that class'.

This statement could be — it is — an adequate formulation of the relation of state to society in Poland, i.e., of the regime to the working class; and, in the Soviet Union, of the *nomenklatura*, the 'new class' of privilege, to the remainder of the society.⁷

The ideology of Marxism is the belief in the inevitable polarization in advanced Western society between capitalist and worker and the victory of the proletariat as the necessary outcome of the cunning of reason. This is the 'philosophy of history' that replaced the Augustinian *parousia* as the faith system which prophesied the 'leap from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom'.⁸ Does anyone still believe in those illusions?

⁷Perhaps the neatest illustration of the situation in dystopia is the Polish story of General Jaruzelski going to Lenin in his tomb, in the dead of night, to plead for advice. 'Comrade Lenin', he said, 'we are facing a counter-revolution'. 'A counter-revolution?' Lenin replied, 'Our answer is always clear: Arm the working-class!'

⁸The phrase occurs in Engels's *Anti-Dühring* (1877) where Engels, citing the huge advances in wealth in the Western capitalist societies, remarks that the possibilities of socialism are now *here*. (Italics in the original.)

But a different intellectual and theoretical issue is at stake. The fundamental theorem of Marxian sociology is that, *au fond*, all social structure is class structure, and is the relevant unit of politics, even for the analysis of culture. What is striking in almost all societies, particularly in the West, is not only the rapid shrinking of the industrial working class but the break-up of the economic class as the fundamental axis of social division. Every society (with the exception of Japan) is a 'plural society' with large admixtures of minorities. And apart from the multiple identities of gender, age, religion, education and occupation, ethnic identities seem to become more and more salient as group attachment and conflicts between groups on ethnic, linguistic, religious, communal and similar lines seem to be sources today of cultural/political identifications. Yet in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx had written:

National differences and antagonisms between people are already tending to disappear more and more, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, the growth of free trade and a world market, and the increasing uniformity of industrial processes and of the corresponding conditions of life. The rule of the proletariat will efface these differences and antagonisms even more.

Apart from the fact that there is less cooperation and solidarity within the international working class today than at any time in the past hundred years, what is striking is the rise of national tensions in almost every part of the world, as much in the Communist world as anywhere else. How, on Marxist grounds, can one explain the rivalry between the Soviet Union and China; the smouldering war between China and Vietnam; the occupation of Cambodia by Vietnamese puppets; the armed wall between Albania and Yugoslavia; and the threatened break-up of Yugoslavia itself, as ancient antagonisms between Serb and Croat, Serb and Albanian, etc. become visible? What is one to say of the large minority enclaves of Hungarian national groups in Romania, of the Baltic peoples within the Soviet Union, of the Muslim nationalities in Central Asia whose demographic growth rates threaten to overwhelm the balance of nationalities within the Soviet Union?

As one approaches the twenty-first century, the problems of colour, of tribalism, of ethnic differences — in south-east Asia, the Middle East, the fratricidal hatred in the Muslim world — all bespeak an agenda of issues which contemporary sociology, least of all Marxism, is ill-prepared to understand. One sees, particularly in

Marxism, how much our sociological categories were framed within the context of Western society, and how the themes of Enlightenment, rationality, industrialization, consciousness, class, development, the idea of 'historic nations' and social evolution, became our prisms of understanding. And how irrelevant Marx, and even Weber and Durkheim, may be.

TWO IDEOLOGICAL MODES

In our time, we have seen two contrasting ideological modes which have dominated the politics of the past two hundred years. One is the mode which mobilizes what William James once called 'the will to believe', the 'passional and volitional' tendencies that drive men to go beyond logic in order to satisfy emotional needs. The breakdown of religious attachments, the turn to this-worldly concerns, the spur of modernity, all gave impetus to the ascent up the faith-ladders of secular utopias. The desiccation of the old ideologies, however, has now been followed by a 'revolt against modernity', by the return of the repressed, the surging impulses of religious fundamentalisms which invoke both traditional symbols as well as accommodations to the wealth of the world or, as in Islam, a martyrdom in the next one. The fusion of passion and ideology of blood and race, that we saw first in the 'reactionary modernism' of the National Socialist regime, now reappears in the new spasms of rage throughout the world, as in the Iran of the Ayatollah Khomeini, and we see, again, the same blood-chilling slogans and practices that result when such atavisms and technology are fused in the new 'triumphs of the will'.⁹

The second mode is the ideology in power, the totalitarian regimes that compel conformity by emphasizing, through posters and slogans, the 'little red book', or the 'cult of personality', the hammered repetitions of the quotations from the founders or the obligatory visit to the tomb of Lenin ('Lenin lives'), the participatory obedience to the system. This is ideology as ritualized code and

⁹See Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge University Press, 1984. It is an instructive lesson in how technology and modernist aesthetics can be harnessed to reactionary causes. See also my essay 'The Revolt Against Modernity' in *The Public Interest*, Twentieth Anniversary issue, No. 81, Fall 1985.

ritualized communication, the ideological caul which envelops people and makes the rest of the world opaque. As Václav Havel, the Czech playwright and one of the inspirers of the great document of dissent, Charter 77, writes of the deceits of belief: the facade of ideology 'offers human beings the illusion of an identity ... and of morality while making it easier for them to *part* with them', to be stripped of an individual identity within the casing of the system.¹⁰

Yet such ideology, because it is used for an uneasy legitimacy, breaks down as well. One reason is that, at first recourse, the easiest mode of conformity is terror. Yet terror, as in the rampant executions in Stalin's day, or the diffuse hysteria of the Red Guards, has its limits. People seek for a normalization in their lives, even if it is the normalization of the dull conformity of a grey everyday life, and overt terror cannot be resorted to again, once its legitimacy has been destroyed, as in the instance of the 1956 revelations of Stalin's paranoia.

There is also a fact, which ideological discourse (left and right) tends to obscure, that few movements are monolithic or can sustain such uniformity for long. There are, first, the structural rigidities that breed pressure for change: the increasing inability to operate a large, complex modern society from a narrow base of power, either for economic management or political direction, so that widening the arena of decision-making, and providing for some decentralization and individual initiatives, become necessary if a society is not to sag or stagnate. Whether such needs can be translated into institutional change is, of course, the crucial question.

More intangible may be the psychological elements that play a role in the transformation of such societies. It may be the humiliation that a Khrushchev felt at being forced to play the clown at Stalin's whim, as well as the recognition of the structural problems that led to his reform efforts. Or the humiliations of a Deng Xiaoping, forced to be a pig farmer during the Cultural Revolution, may have been a motivating element in his revision of Mao Zedong's thought. Nor should one underestimate the elements of idealism that often linger in the minds and hearts of old communists, even those in power, which led a Nagy and the communist

¹⁰Václav Havel, et al., *The Power of the Powerless*, London, Hutchinson, 1985. I am grateful to the review by Alan Montefiore in *Government and Opposition*, vol. 22, no 2, Spring 1987, pp. 233–41, for bringing the book to our attention.

intellectuals in Hungary or a Dubček in Czechoslovakia a dozen years later to seek for a socialism with a human face.¹¹

Beyond all these may be the most powerful solvent of all — the inescapable and immutable need of men for a moral justification for their acts, moral justifications which in the end encounter the test of rival beliefs and of some transcendental standards. Perhaps the most malevolent and self-defeating theorem in Marxist thought is the moral relativism that undergirds the theory of historical materialism. As Engels wrote in *Anti-Dühring*:

We ... reject every presumptuous attempt to impose upon us any dogmatic morality whatever as eternal, final, immutable ethical laws under the pretext that also the moral world has its permanent principles which stand above history and national differences. We maintain, on the contrary, that all past theories of morality are the product, in the last instance, of the contemporary economic conditions of society. And just as society hitherto has moved in class antagonisms, so has morality always been a class morality....¹²

In the name of a higher morality, the Bolsheviks lied and cheated and executed hundreds of thousands of persons. In denouncing bourgeois democracy as a sham, the Communists worked with the Nazis to destroy the Weimar Republic in the 1930s. Painfully, painfully, socialists learned during the Second World War and after that democracy and legal rights are an inviolable condition for a decent society and that liberty, necessarily, has to be prior even to socialism.

As for culture and religion, it may be that, in their origins, they derive from the material conditions of their times, but once created

¹¹One of the most instructive books, in this respect, is the neglected and fascinating memoir, *Nightfrost in Prague*, by Zdenek Mlynar, New York, Karz Publishers, 1980. Mlynar, a Czech, was trained in law and philosophy in Moscow, and after the Second World War returned to become a high party official and the theoretician in the Central Committee. Over the years, in alliance with Dubček, he began to argue that Communism could not work not only because of its rigidities but because it was betraying its original idealism. Mlynar drafted the plans for the 'democratization' of the party and accompanied Dubček to Moscow when the Czech leaders were summoned there to answer Brezhnev's charges of heresy. Mlynar's book is not only an important account of the unfolding of Czech revisionist thought, but also one of the few first-hand accounts of the way the Russian leaders sought to cajole or bully the Czechs, and finally to send in the tanks to end the Prague Spring.

¹²Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Chicago, C. H. Kerr & Co., 1935; original publication in German, 1877, pp. 93–4.

they take on lives of their own, with the power to continue, if they can reach the well-springs of moral beliefs that are renewed over time. The continuity of culture is the rebuttal to any historicism, and the recurrent impulse to seek truth is the insistent beat that erodes the stones of total power. No political system can exist outside the context of moral justifications. But a moral order, if it is to exist without coercion or deceit, has to transcend the parochialisms of interests and tame the appetites of passions. And that is the defeat of ideology.

But all this now is only one chain of ideological thought, in that larger domain of what Nietzsche called *ketten-denken*, the fetters of the chain-thinkers.¹³ Today in the widening gyre of passional discourse, the links entangle and ideology has come to designate almost any creed held with the will to believe, held with dogmatism or stridency — the ideologies of Black Power, the New Right, Feminism, et al. The historicity of the term has lost its context and only the pejorative and invidious penumbra, but no conceptual clarity, remains. Ideology has become an irretrievably fallen word. And so is sin.

¹³ 'Ketten-Denker-Einem, der viel gedacht hat, erscheint jeder neue Gedanke, den er hört oder liest, so fort in Gestalt einer Kette.' Aphorism no. 376, in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* (*Human, All Too Human*), in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. II, edited by Karl Schlechta, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich/Vienna, 1980, p. 864. 'Chain-Thinker — One who, so full of thoughts, places each new idea that he hears or reads within the form of a chain.' (I owe the initial reference to Melvin J. Lasky.)