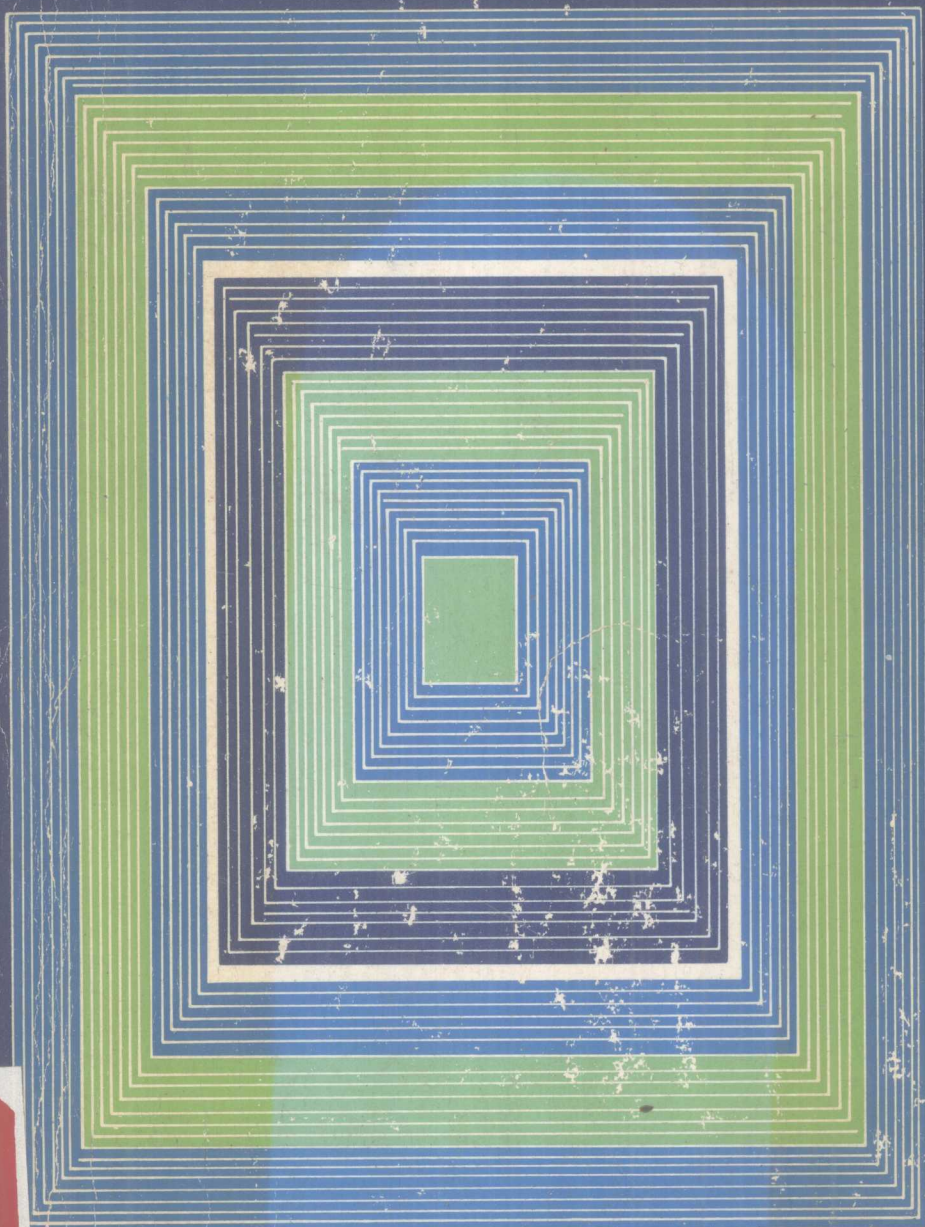


Modern Ideologies

Max Mark



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MODERN IDEOLOGIES

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INTRODUCTION

Man is in an ambiguous position: he is both part of nature and estranged from it, both part of society and estranged from it. Man's consciousness tells him that the laws of nature (to which he is subject) are responsible not only for his existence but also, in the end, for his destruction. His consciousness creates a sense of individuality and a desire for personal happiness, but at the same time it makes him aware that it is only through the group that he can fulfill himself. His awareness of being a distinct self creates the desire to be free, but at the same time he must admit that in the interests of an ordered social life he must submit to some authority. The process of socialization, which has worked on him since birth, creates an attachment to the particular group into which he was born, but his awareness of other groups in the world makes him question the rationality of dividing humanity into distinct groupings. In order to deal with these seeming paradoxes, man needs a more or less organized body of thought for his orientation.

The vital problem that has always faced mankind is finding purpose for existence, and on this subject nature is mute. In fact, by showing complete indifference to the existence of individual man, and even of mankind itself, nature rather suggests that life is meaningless. But as a matter of elementary impulse, man wants to go on living. Under these circumstances, he has to create a world of his own making that will accommodate his need for meaning and purpose. It is, however, in many ways an artificial, threadbare world. Discomfort or disappointment eventually bring most individuals to the existentialist question: What is the purpose of it all? But as long as a person is mentally healthy, he will dismiss such a question as "morbid." He rules out the questioning of purpose because of his internalization of a social taboo. Though every society as a matter of course has notions about human purpose, these notions must be reinforced by a taboo because the problem of human existence is essentially insoluble.

The knowledge that there are other people like oneself and that these people have as much claim to happiness as oneself creates the idea of justice. Thus the basis of justice is regard for our fellow men because they are *like* ourselves. (It is interesting to note that depriving other people of equal rights is always based on the notion

that they are not like ourselves.) In the biblical command "Love your neighbor as yourself," the connotation is that your neighbor is *like* yourself. The command is thus not only prescriptive but explicative: "Love your neighbor as yourself because he is like yourself." The ideas of purpose and justice are so intimately connected that they are usually part of every belief complex. Man apparently cannot conceive of a world that is meaningful and at the same time unjust.

In prehistoric times, mankind lived in small groupings such as tribes in which people accepted each other as fellow men because they had face-to-face contacts. As time went by these groupings grew larger, through either peaceful or forcible mergers. Occasionally a group made itself the carrier of a wider civilization or a religious mission, with the result that those who accepted this civilization or religion became fellow men. Thus, once groupings became too large to be based on face-to-face relationships, it was an *idea* that defined the orbit of human fellowship. And it was the idea of nationalism that established the nation as the modern orbit of human fellowship.

Part of group living, and a precondition for it, is a pattern of social relationships, involving the relationships between parents and children, the relationships between leaders and followers, and the assignments of rights and duties. Essential to any ordered relationship is authority, or the acknowledged right of some to set policies for all. And again, it is an idea that provides the basis for authority.

An amazing facet of the human story is man's ability to formulate ideas that have given purpose to his life, established the orbit of human fellowship, regulated social life, and sanctioned authority. For a very long time these ideas were embedded in folkways and myths that were handed down from generation to generation with little change; hallowed by religion, they found expression in various rituals. But at some point folkways were elevated to the level of consciousness—and more often than not by men who began to question tradition. Such questioning usually remained within the religious framework and led to innovation via changes in religious beliefs. But the questioning of tradition gradually assumed a secular character, paralleling the gradual yielding to secular interpretation of areas hitherto controlled by religion. The only area that religion has continued to dominate is that articulating the purpose of life, but, as we will see, even this area has not been preserved from secular rivals.

Once the questioning of tradition becomes a matter of secular concern, social philosophy is born. From this point on the issues of

human fellowship, the patterns of social relationship, and the legitimacy and ends of government will be dealt with in reference to human experience. Through the ages social philosophy was either contemplative or action oriented. But prior to the nineteenth century, action-oriented social philosophies exerted only an indirect influence through their impact on elites. For the masses, established religion continued to provide direction and emotional satisfaction. With the progressive secularization and democratization of social life, social philosophy became less remote; it entered the arena of social struggle out of which ideology was born.

The turning point in this chain was the French Revolution. Though the term *ideology* has had a checkered career, today we understand it to refer to emotionally charged beliefs about the substance of the "good life," the most desirable orbit of human fellowship, the ideal form of social organization, or the conditions for the legitimacy of government—or all of these together. In the latter case we speak of an ideological *system*, such as Marxism.

Every ideology contains, either explicitly or implicitly, two elements: a particular value and the assertion that social or psychological reality calls for the implementation of this and no other value. For example, the ideology of nationalism holds that all people who have a language and culture in common ought to have a political home of their own that will be independent of foreign dictates. This "ought," in turn, is based on the proposition that only such an arrangement can lead to the happiness and development of the individual.

It therefore follows that an attack upon an ideology must concentrate on its interpretation of social and psychological reality, but the elements of reality are so complex and contradictory that objective proof of what is and what is not becomes rather difficult. While it is possible to prove that racism has no basis in scientific fact, it is not possible to prove that society requires free enterprise rather than socialism for its best development. Even if proof for free enterprise could be adduced, the argument could still be made that human nature is not a closed book, that man can be educated into being a more cooperative being than he is today. Thus, argument about reality must not only deal with what *is* but with what *is possible*. Arguments about ideology are themselves ideological, however much they try to appear in scientific garb. And one of the major problems of the social sciences is that they always contain an ideological element.

Although ideologies rise in response to particular situations and

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needs, it would be an oversimplification to say that there is a linear development between a situation and an ideology; a situation may allow for a whole spectrum of ideologies. However, a situation sets definite limits on the relevance of an ideology. The attempt to export liberal democracy to backward countries, for example, proved to be frustrating and ineffective.

The age of ideology, which began with the French Revolution, has reached its apogee in our times. The role of ideology in the present era reflects the fact that ours is an age of revolution. This revolution, which transcends national boundaries, questions the traditional organization of societies and has pitted different interpretations of the good life against each other. It has often centered on societies that thus far had been overshadowed by the West, societies whose problems are radically different from those experienced by Western man. On the international scene, it has led to a worldwide competition for men's minds in terms of different conceptions of the good society.

PART ONE

THE FUNDAMENTAL IDEOLOGIES

CHAPTER ONE

MAN, THE MEASURE

THE RISE OF THE MODERN WORLD

The modern world is characterized by the placement of man at the center of the universe. With the change in emphasis from what is beyond to what is here, from the religious to the secular, man denied the earlier belief that this world is only the antechamber of a world to come. The new belief stressed the importance of life on this earth and man's capacity for enjoying it. It was the Renaissance that ushered in the new age and created a new model of man: man as the master of his fate.

The change from the medieval to the modern world not only involved the abandonment of earlier beliefs, it also brought an abandonment of old loyalties and the destroying of many traditional institutions. This process was accompanied not only by great physical suffering but also by great mental anguish. Men are basically conservative, and the imposition of new loyalties was experienced as a violation of the very essence of their being. Consequently, new institutions are too often seen as evil. When, with the Renaissance, the modern state arose, the idea of a world composed of artificial units, each claiming to be sovereign and equal, appeared to the traditional mind as a repulsive anarchy or, even worse, a violation of a divine order that could be conceived only in hierarchical terms.

Furthermore, though the new is always the child of the old, in many cases the new, in the role of a usurper, took over through the use of raw power. The veil of legitimacy that had grown around power was torn aside and power as the basis of social life stood in its full nakedness. With the old moorings gone and confusion reigning, man looked in the mirror and saw a rather unattractive figure. Henceforth the challenging question became the role and meaning of power. This is a theme that will recur over and over throughout modern history.

The new discoveries in science and technology played an important role in man's conception of himself as master. As man discovered the laws of nature, his belief in reason grew immeasurably. And the shift from faith to reason released man from his submission

to a hierarchical order and led to his assertion of himself as an individual. From this point on the relationship between the individual and society became a source of unending debate.

Finally, with the new emphasis on what is here rather than what is beyond, the question of the good life in this world received a preeminent place. Increasingly, the good life became identified with the materially abundant life. But since the quest for the abundant life took place under conditions of scarcity, the question of the allocation of resources arose. Who should get what, and why, began to dominate politics, and ultimately became the issue around which ideological struggles revolved. A central concern in these struggles was the place and justification of private property in the means of production.

Though the Renaissance represented a break in tradition, the old was not completely destroyed. In fact, during the centuries following the Renaissance there was an almost continuous struggle between the older Christian tradition and the newer secular ideas. Gradually, however, the old was incorporated into the new—much like old wine into new bottles. In some cases, however, even the wine was new.

A good illustration of such an extreme development is the emergence of the modern state. In the medieval period the common man had two loyalties: a strong spiritual one to the Pope in Rome and a weak secular one to his immediate feudal superior. If the Pope excommunicated a feudal noble, the allegiance of his subjects lapsed. The Protestant Reformation broke the power of Rome—even in the Catholic countries it was substantially weakened—and secular authority became dominant. But tradition still required that authority have religious sanction. Hence a king became king by the grace of God, though this grace more often than not followed success on the battlefield. Later, when the dynastic state was succeeded by the national state, religious sanction disappeared. Thus the modern state is a thoroughly secular institution.

Less drastic than the above development were the cases where religion maintained itself as a force but became permeated by secular values, as in Calvinism. Calvinism accepted the values of the emerging business community but gave them a religious rationalization. Thus success in business was identified with divine grace and failure with divine rejection.

The Role of Power

In the medieval period secular power was not only subordinated to religious power, it was also greatly decentralized. Each feudal lord ruled in his own bailiwick, and the king or prince was a mere figure-head. The rise of commerce brought a new class into being, the middle class or bourgeoisie, which found itself greatly limited by the fragmentation of secular power. How could one conduct business if one was always in danger of running afoul of petty feudal lords? The bourgeoisie needed a centralized authority that would make commerce over wide areas secure.

Another element also contributed to the obsolescence of the feudal distribution of power. To be meaningful, a territorial unit had to be a unit of protection. During the medieval period, when an enemy assaulted a fortified castle with bows and arrows and swords, a feudal lord could protect his people. But when gunpowder was invented, the single bailiwick ceased to be a dependable unit of protection.

Thus, the aspirations of the incipient bourgeoisie and the military obsolescence of the bailiwick provided new opportunities for ambitious kings and princes to become more than mere figureheads, and a great scramble for power set in. When the dust settled, the feudal nobility had been destroyed and supplanted by a court aristocracy. The king had become a king in fact.

Theories of Power

In the struggles that led to the emergence of the centralized monarchy, moral scruples played little part. Evil means did not necessarily lead to evil ends. With the disintegration of medieval values on a wide scale, brute force appeared to be the only ordering principle that could alleviate the chaos.

How respectable it would be in the centuries to follow for a person to be a Frenchman, how happy he would be, in looking at the continued particularism of Germany and Italy, that in his country there had been people on the top who were ruthless enough to forge a great nation. In addition, how pleasant it would be for him to be able to feel morally superior in the face of the struggle of these others, who had to repeat what history in his own case had already covered with its merciful veil.¹

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) became the ideologue of the modern state. Deeply disturbed by the continued fragmentation of Italy in the face of the rise of strong national monarchies in France, Spain, and England, he looked for the prince who would do for Italy what those other monarchs had done for their countries. Here is his prescription:

*You should know, then, that there are two ways of fighting: one by legal means, the other by force. The first way is proper to man, and the second to beasts, but since the first is often not effective, recourse must be made to the second. Thus a prince has to learn well how to make use both of the beast and the man. . . . Since a prince is forced to avail himself deliberately of the beast, he should choose the fox and the lion. For the lion cannot defend himself against snares, nor can the fox against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox in recognizing snares and a lion in terrifying wolves. Those who rely simply on the lion do not know their own interests. Thus a prudent ruler cannot keep his word, nor should he do so, when such a scruple will turn against him and when the reasons that caused him to make the promise have been removed. If all men were good, this precept would not be fitting, but since they are bad and would not keep their word with you, you do not have to keep yours with them. . . .*²

Under conditions of anarchy, Machiavelli thought it better to use power cruelly than not to use it at all.

*Cesare Borgia was considered cruel. Yet his cruelty had reconciled the Romagna, and had united it and restored it to peace and loyalty. If this be carefully considered, then he will be seen to have been more merciful than the Florentines who, in order to avoid the reputation for cruelty, allowed Pistoia to be destroyed. Therefore a prince, in order to keep his subjects united and loyal, should not be concerned about a bad reputation for cruelty. For with but a very few examples he will be more merciful than those who through an excess of mercy allow disorders to break out from which killings and robberies may result. For such civic disorders are wont to harm a whole people, while executions ordered by the prince harm only the individual. . . .*³

A similar emphasis on order over justice was assigned by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who had witnessed the ravages of civil war. Concerned with the justification of an absolute monarchy,

he depicted man's "state of nature" in the gloomiest colors. As he saw it, life in the state of nature is brutish and short, and man needs government in order to make civilized life possible. The government Hobbes had in mind was absolutist—that is, a government to which people have given absolute power and given it irrevocably. According to Hobbes, only such a government can substitute a single will for the many divergent wills that inevitably, sooner or later, must lead to chaos. Once men have become firmly socialized in a new loyalty, and hence the basis of their society has become securely established, their concern can shift to the question of justice.

This was the subject taken up by John Locke (1632–1704). According to him, government must be based on the consent of the governed. But the purpose of the government is not order as such; its purpose is to secure certain inalienable rights. If government does not fulfill this role, or becomes oppressive, citizens have a right to revolt.

*Whensoever, therefore, the legislative shall . . . either by ambition, fear, folly, or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other, an absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people, by this breach of trust they forfeit the power the people had put into their hands for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty. . . . What I have said here concerning the legislative in general holds true also concerning the supreme executor. . . .*⁴

Within the modern nation-states power became civilized and restrained, but in the relationship between states, power—in all its rawness—continued to be the ultimate arbiter. Each state, by claiming sovereignty, became instrumental in creating international anarchy, which made for an almost continuous chain of wars, interrupted only by brief interludes of uneasy peace.

THE MANY FACES OF REASON

The Age of Reason

The Age of Reason began with men doubting the body of inherited wisdom, and thus reason began its reign as *critical* reason. The philosopher who made doubt the permanent companion of reason was René Descartes (1569–1650). The source of the new prestige of reason was the discovery of the laws of nature; as this prestige grew,

reason was held to be a guide for all human efforts, on the assumption that the same reason that had established the laws of nature also governed human behavior. It was recognized that man had emotions, but they were considered subordinate to his reason, and in general man was considered to be endowed with a rather neat and well-ordered character.

The parallelism between nature and society was best expressed in the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–77). According to him, the actions of men were as predetermined as the motions of the heavenly bodies. Man should therefore be investigated in the same way as one studies mathematics. “I will write about human beings as though I were concerned with lines and planes and solids. . . . I have labored carefully not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human action.”⁵

According to this interpretation society was static. The assumption was that once man, by using his fully developed reason, had established the reasonable society, no changes in social institutions would be necessary. There was no assumption of historical change, in the sense that what was considered a reasonable society in one era might be considered unreasonable in the next.

Abstract reason assigns universal and unchanging characteristics to society. It does not connote qualitative change in society but implies only more of the same. Abstract reason provided the intellectual justification for both the age of absolutism and the French Revolution. The French Revolution, which attacked the old regime for its violation of reason, assumed that the new institutions it was fashioning corresponded to the “laws” of reason, and hence had the hallmark of permanency.

Ethics of the Age of Reason

The Age of Reason, having postulated that not only nature but also human behavior were subject to laws, found itself confronted by the issue of moral behavior—that is, how to reconcile objective laws with personal choice, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who addressed himself to this question, argued that a moral law is inborn in man. This law is experienced by man as duty, as a compulsion created by reason. Kant’s expression for this duty was the categorical imperative: “Act in such a way that the maxim of your will could form the basis for general legislation.”

Kant considered an act ethical if it is undertaken with no other