

DANIEL BELL

*the end of*

# IDEOLOGY

ON THE EXHAUSTION  

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OF POLITICAL IDEAS  

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IN THE FIFTIES

with a new essay by the author,  
“The Resumption of History in the New Century”

Named by the *Times Literary Supplement* as One of the 100 Most  
Influential Books since the End of World War II

DANIEL BELL

*THE END OF  
IDEOLOGY*

On the Exhaustion  
of Political Ideas  
in the Fifties

with “The Resumption of History in the New Century”

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## The Resumption of History in the New Century

*The End of Ideology* was first published in 1960. The essays, a number written in the decade before, dealt with the vicissitudes of the concept of ideology as derived from Marx and elaborated by Karl Mannheim; the exhaustion of Marxism as a political—but not intellectual—doctrine; and the diminishing utility of the use of class in explaining many conflicts, particularly in American life.<sup>1</sup>

Ideology, as I used the term, was not simply a *weltanschauung*, a cultural worldview, or a mask for interests, but an historically located belief system that fused ideas with passion, sought to convert ideas into social levers, and in transforming ideas transformed people as well. When it becomes a striking force, ideology looks at the world with eyes wide shut, a closed system which prefabricates answers to any questions that might be asked.

This is true of many creeds that mobilize individuals—which is why I said, specifically, that ideologies of color and nationalism would appear in the last half of the century. My discussion was focused on Marxism as a creed that, because of its moral failures, had lost its appeal for intellectuals and the masses of people, and why the Marxist political systems, having lost their legitimacy, would fail. (See in particular Chapter 14, on theories of Soviet behavior, especially the section on totalitarianism.)

The immediate context of this argument was the political debates that arose after the war. To that extent this book followed the argument of Albert Camus, who was the first person to use the phrase “the end of ideology”; the volume edited by R. H. Crossman, *The God That Failed*, especially the essays of Arthur Koestler and Ignazio Silone; and the devastating book by Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*. (That context is elaborated in the Afterword to this volume, added to the Harvard University Press 1988 edition.)

This essay is an effort to present the underlying historical per-

1. An alternative conception of “status politics,” presented in Chapter 6, was amplified by Richard Hofstadter, Seymour Martin Lipset, and myself in the volume *The Radical Right* (republished by Transaction Books, 2001).



spective, which had been obscured by the political debates over the title and the theme, and to see where we stand today in the post-Cold War world, a situation that I call “the resumption of history.”

The end of the twentieth century has been marked ironically by the declaration of two ends, *the end of ideology* and *the end of history*. Though the two would seem to be similar, they are, in fact, far apart. The end of ideology, as an historical review, is not the end of history, and the end of history, to complete the paralogism, is not the end of ideology.

This book had a fundamental thesis, its underlying framework, namely, that from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, there was a great historical crossover in the nature of political discourse and social identifications, a crossover from religion to ideology in the language and rhetoric of the warring belief systems, the great meta-narratives, so to speak, of revolutionary movements and creeds.

An age of revolution had begun in the seventeenth century, a revolution not of an endless rotation of the past, but the overthrow of the existing social order, to turn the world upside-down and bring forth a new heaven on earth, and redeem sin in the souls of men.

The source was the re-introduction of the idea of faith in the conscience of men during the Protestant Reformation. That Reformation, however, divided Christians also by the political allegiances within the various German principalities. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were dominated by wars of religion. This came to a surcease, for a time, in the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, with the doctrine of *Cuius regio, eius religio*; the territorial princes determined the religion of their lands, and those who held a different belief would have to migrate (which few could do), convert (which many feared), or corrupt their consciences. It was not until a century later, with the Peace of Westphalia, at the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648, that a policy of toleration was possible for rulers who wanted it.

The millenarian tensions created by the Reformation encouraged the belief in the dissolution of all things secular. Nowhere was this more evident than in the English Revolution of the 1650s, the first sustained effort to realize the kingdom of God on Earth, in the vision given its purest form by the Fifth Monarchy Men. Their source was the Bible: the prophecies in the book of Daniel had long given rise to millennial hopes and expectations. The apocalyptic augury was the image of the four beasts—originally four kings, but after the Reformation, the depiction of four



world empires: Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, Greece, and Rome. The last beast had ten horns (or kings) and a little horn, which destroyed the last of them. After that destruction would come the Fifth Monarchy, the kingdom of the saints forever. History, thus, had a divinely ordained conclusion.

The Fifth Monarchy Men was a sect organized to bring about the kingdom of God on Earth. They believed that existing society was the creation of the anti-Christian Fourth Monarchy, and demanded that "all the unGodly be killed and that the wicked have no propriety in their estates." Society was to be remodeled along the pattern laid down in the book of Daniel—a set of precepts, however, so loose that no common program ever emerged.

The conviction that God's saints were engaged in a millenarian struggle in England gave rise to the theory of the elect nation. John Milton, in 1641, wrote of the "*Precedencie* which GOD gave this *Iland*, to be the first *Restorer* of *buried Truth*."

And the rhetoric of the Fifth Monarchy Men left a deep imprint on the English Revolution. Oliver Cromwell in his early years was a sympathizer, if not a member of a Fifth Monarchy congregation. But their loose resort to arms brought them into disrepute. What followed was Puritanism, the idea of "new men," the saints; new organizations, congregations, and covenants; and the idea of a new society, the holy commonwealth. The rulers, until the return of Christ, would be a small minority, the elect, who would rule as the godly over the unregenerate. The New Model Army that Cromwell created was unique in the history of the military, living under a rigorous self-discipline, avoiding the plunder and pillage typical of almost all armies, because they were in the service of the Lord.

The political struggle was of country against court, parliament against the monarchy. Economic interests were surely at stake, but the language and rhetoric in which the justifications were clothed were in the only terms they knew, the religious terms. What they hoped to do, as Blake wrote later in his *Milton*, was to build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. Yet John Milton himself, who in his *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* had justified the death of an unworthy king, and had become Latin Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Cromwell's government, was also one of the first to express his disillusionment with one-man rule in his pamphlet *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. He was among the first, but not the last.<sup>2</sup>

The great crossover came with the French Revolution. The lan-

2. For this period, see B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), and Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).



guage was political, deriving from the Enlightenment, the fulfillment of Reason, but the underlying sentiments were religious. This was expressed in the festivals, the great and continuing outpouring of peoples in happy celebration of every event that would denote any aspect of the Revolution.

Celebrations had been a traditional feature of French life. Royal festivals and religious celebrations often, in their theatrical performance, were almost saturnalias. The Revolution had overturned the old hierarchies, but left men alone, equal but solitary. "It was now the task of the legislator to connect them," wrote Mona Ozouf, "a task that all utopias of the century took up with meticulous relish."

Through the festival, the new social bond was to be made manifest. Though the legislator made the laws for the people, the festivals made the people for the laws. The festivals celebrated Youth, Victories, Old Age, Agriculture, Spouses, the Republic, the Sovereignty of the People, with flags and drums, with painted banners and songs, without end. What was celebrated, as Michelet pointed out, was the communion of the people. The Festival of the Federation, on July 14, 1790, was the apotheosis of these celebrations, when 50,000 persons thronged the Champ de Mars in spontaneous improvisation, a site which became a sacred place of the Revolution, its amphitheatre, as Camille Desmoulins called it, a religious monument.

For Robespierre, the supreme leader of the Revolution, the Festival of the Supreme Being became his own project of glorification. The "Being of Beings" was borrowed from both the Christians and the *philosophes*, the meeting point, as Ozouf puts it, of "the traditions of Berulle, Rousseau, and Voltaire." The Tree of Liberty, however, had to be watered, and the water was the blood of opponents of the People. "Revolutionary creation," as Ozouf writes, "obeyed only a single law, that of the purge, which dominated both revolutionary thought and Revolutionary action." In the most concentrated stage of The Terror, as it was named, in the course of nine months from the end of 1793 to 1794, about 16,000 people perished under the blade of the guillotine. Writes William Doyle: "The cold mechanical efficiency of the method had all Europe watching with fascinated horror." The mob cheered wildly as the heads tumbled into the baskets. To criticize the Terror was to risk sympathizing with the victims, and thereby becoming one of them.

The effort of the French Revolution was to de-Christianize society, but in its place, the communal became the religious. This transfer of sacrality onto political and social values became a new



legitimacy, the cult of mankind, and it was this cult that heralded a new era, a new secular religion.<sup>3</sup>

The French Revolution was the totem for all subsequent revolutionaries, from Babeuf to Buonarotti, to Blanqui, and Marx and Lenin. History, said Engels, would be the leap from the Kingdom of Necessity to the Kingdom of Freedom. The Bolshevik Revolution, totally unexpected, was the leap of ideology.

Lenin introduced one new significant instrument in the play of politics—the Party. The masses, said Lenin, “left to themselves” in their efforts to gain a better life, would only achieve a “trade union” consciousness. Socialist consciousness would have to be “instilled” into the masses by the Party. The Party was a group of dedicated, iron-willed men, under centralized direction, who would always strike in ruthless fashion. Politics, said Lenin, was *kto-kvo*, who/whom, one or the other, with no compromise between. Similarly, ideology was either communist or capitalist, and there was no middle way. In all this, what Lenin did was to introduce, along with the Church and the Army, a new organizational weapon.

When he died, Lenin was canonized, his mummified body an icon in a tomb near the Kremlin, where the faithful made their dutiful pilgrimage to genuflect and express their devotion. In banners across the land was written the slogan (with its echoes of Christ), Lenin has lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live.

Marxism had posited that social change emerged from the specific economic relations of a society. But history, now, was a revolution from above. “There can be no justification for references to so-called objective conditions,” Stalin wrote in 1934. “The part played by so-called objective conditions has been reduced to a minimum; whereas the part played by our organizations and their leaders has become decisive, exceptional. What does this mean? It means that from now on, nine-tenths of the responsibility for the failures and defeats in our work rests not on ‘objective’ conditions, but on ourselves alone.”<sup>4</sup>

Historical materialism had been torn to shreds. But so were tens of millions of persons, as the regnant ideology sought to transform history and peoples. It was the God that failed.

3. I have followed here the work of Mona Ozouf in her *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). See too William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 253 on the figures of the Terror.

4. Quoted in Robert V. Daniels, *The Nature of Communism* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 34.



The crossover had ended. That was the thesis of "the end of ideology."

The "end of history," as fashioned by Hegel, was a metaphysical doctrine. The philosophy of history was a parallel (if not replacement) for the theological direction of history. In Christian doctrine, man was separated from God by the Fall. As Augustine formulated the Church's view, the end of time would come with the *parousia*, the Second Coming, when man would be reunited with God. That would be the end of history, of man's time on earth.

In the Hegelian view, there was an original cosmic consciousness that was dirempted by the emergence of self-consciousness. Man was divided into subject and object, the I and the Me, and the distinction between appearance and reality. Through time, this division proceeds through the inner levels of consciousness by the *begriff*, the cunning of reason, while on the manifest level, the divisions of history are realized by world-historical figures such as Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, who are the instruments of the sweep to universalism. The end of history, in the Hegelian scheme, becomes the realm of the transcendental.

Marx had taken the Hegelian drama and given it a social location. The original unity of species-being (*wesen*) and primitive communal living became divided by mental and physical labor, town and country living, and, most important of all, the propertied and the propertyless (the proletariat). The end of history on the social level was the end of these divisions under full communism. And on the level of consciousness, as Engels said, there would be an "end of ideology," for ideology, the deceptive images of "false consciousness," would be fused with the material world, the structural source of reality.<sup>5</sup> In both doctrines, the fusion of appearance and reality meant that men would no longer be ruled by ghosts, spirits, fetishes—i.e., religion—but, in the words of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, would become "equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless, / Exempt from awe . . . the king / Over himself . . ."

The end of history, as the term was used by Francis Fukuyama, despite its resounding echo, is a far different, even prosaic use of the Hegelian phrase. For Mr. Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War was the victory of democracy and the market, and of a universalist creed that had no other rivals. Islam and Catholicism make

5. I have explored the textual sources of these arguments in my essay "The Misreading of Ideology: The Social Determination of Ideas in Marx's Thought," in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 1990.



universalist religious claims, and while Islam once tried to conquer the world by the sword, and Catholicism, up until the modern period, through the arms of the secular monarchs, they are incapable of becoming universal today—Islam in particular, since its theocratic view joins economics, politics, and religion into one doctrine (as did communism). To assume, however, that democracy will command the allegiance of the world's peoples is to assume that "ideas" drive history. But, more, it is to stand in the lineage of a single-minded view that "History" has a direction, if not a *telos*, and to obscure the very complexities of history with which we live. What, then, of the post-Cold War, after the "end of ideology"?

We are all embedded in history. The present is not the past, in the obvious sense that while there may be continuities over time—for example, the great historical religions, perhaps the most enduring of human institutions—even these continuities take different form and differentiation over time. In the past four hundred years, science and technology have created not only new modes of thinking, but new instruments to remake nature, if not ourselves.

But how do we characterize history or, since history is not a *thing* but a set of changing relationships, how do we delineate historical inquiry, the ways of identifying the significant patterns of change? Conventionally, we speak of ancient, medieval, and modern history, though, on reflection, this is largely a sequence of Western history. Adam Smith and colleagues of the Scottish Enlightenment had described a four-stages theory through which society passed, based on the modes of subsistence: hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial. Marx, bypassing this, had made the modes of production the fulcrum of social evolution, that of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism.

Apart from the difficulties of establishing a universal frame of reference, there are good sociological reasons why it is difficult to posit *unified periodizations* as a set of frames to understand history. Society is composed, I would argue, of three different realms, each of which follows different "logics" of organization: the techno-economic, the polity, and the culture.

The techno-economic realm is a system in that it consists of loosely interrelated units in which changes in the magnitudes of one set of variables have a more or less determinate outcome among the others in the decisions of the relevant economic actors. Change is "linear" in that if a new product or service is cheaper or more productive than the previous one, then, subject to cost, it



is used. It is a process of substitution. The system moves, more or less, through markets, to equilibrium.

The polity is *not* a system, but a social order, a set of rules, by coercion or consent, that regulates the competition of disparate actors, the “ins” and the “outs” for political place and privilege in the society. The polity is also a set of rules for the administration of justice (as defined at the time), the protection of individuals and the punishment of malefactors. The state, as Max Weber famously observed, is the only social unit with a legitimate monopoly in the use of force. There is no “linear” movement, but more often alternations in the constellation of actors—most usually, various elites.

Culture has two dimensions: the styles of the expressive arts, and the modes of meaning, historically the religious. At times the two have fused, as in the liturgy, litany, music, and architecture of the Catholic Church. More often, as in “modern” times, they have been separate. In the expressive arts, there is no principle of substitution. Boulez does not “replace” Bach. The newer tonalities or use of perspective for the picture widen the aesthetic repertoire of mankind. Among the great historic religions, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, despite all the changes in form, the *core* doctrines of karma and transmigration, of monotheism and the covenant, of the Koran and the prophet, are still recognizable today.

Tradition guards the portals of change, and syncretism (as in Augustan Rome or modern times) provides a permeability for culture to pass through national or historical boundaries. Yet though economic systems have crumbled and political empires have disappeared, the great historical religions and the great expressive forms of culture, from Egyptian reliefs and Chinese scrolls through all the myriad works that fill our museums to overflowing, retain their power for appreciation and renewal.

How, then, can one think of unified periods of historical time, which jumble economics, politics, and culture into a single configuration,<sup>6</sup> as being consistent?

How, then, should we look at history? For Clausewitz, history

6. Marx was once asked how it was that, if each mode of production has a qualitatively different form from previous ones, we could still appreciate the artistic and dramatic works of the Greeks. He never responded publicly, but in his *nachlasse*, some posthumous notes, he replied that the Greeks represented “the childhood of the human race, and that we respond to it as we do to all the charming works of children.” But Antigone, defying Creon in order to demand the bodies of her brothers to give them a decent burial, is not a child; nor was Nadezhda Mandelstam, seeking the body of her husband Osip, murdered by Stalin, to give him a decent burial. Burial, with monuments, is one of the transcendental markers of a civilized society.



was driven by the interplay of Reason, Passion, and Chance, made manifest by the state, people, and war. For historians of a grand sweep, there are the meta-narratives, *Enlightenment*, *Progress*, now *Globalization*, that encompass the modalities of philosophical or economic currents. Each of these has its attraction, but for a sociologist they fly too far above the empirical terrain and lack any lenses to identify significant changes in the patterns of social relationships, and to understand the impact on everyday life—what Husserl called the *lebenswelt*, or lived experience.

I would propose three prisms, which are not necessarily congruent, for sociological inquiry:

*Contingent turning points:* Events, technological or political, that re-orient the course of history in totally unexpected directions.

*Institutional structures,* which establish set relationships over time for individuals in the positions and roles, of status and class, in the stratification systems of society.

*The primordial identities of peoples:* The communal entities sharing language or religion, united by what the sociologist Franklin Henry Giddings called “the consciousness of kind,” and expressing that unity in a common life both in the polity and in the culture.

Contingent events, by their nature, are unpredictable, for they are not determined, and emerge from the vicissitudes of chance. The February Revolution in Russia was the outcome of a long chain of circumstances that resulted from the breakdown of existing structures, but the October seizure of power by the Bolsheviks was a gamble that paid off. Equally, the choice of Hitler for chancellor by Hindenberg, at a time when the Nazi Party had begun to lose votes, may have been prompted by the belief that Hitler could be controlled by von Papen and General Schleicher. He destroyed both.

Yet the events, though prompted by chance, also produce what Michael Oakeshott, in a stunning phrase, called “interlocking contingencies.” The turn itself is uncertain, but what follows is a train of events whose consequences reconfigure history.

Institutional structures have been the major frameworks of history since the beginning of civilization. Technologically, there have been pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial societies. Feudalism, capitalism, and socialism have been regnant social systems. But politically, the most enduring institutions have been empires, those vast territorial conglomerates held together most often by armed force. What has been the most fateful fact of the



twentieth century, a fact overshadowed by communism and fascism, has been the breakup of empire.

World War I saw the shattering of the Habsburg and Romanov dynasties, of Wilhelminian Germany and the Ottoman Empire, lineages which, in the case of the Habsburgs, had lasted for more than a thousand years, beginning as the Holy Roman Empire. No such large-scale political earthquake had been seen since the breakup of the Roman empire and the existence of Byzantium for a thousand years.

After World War I, the map of Europe was redrawn, with countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states becoming national states. In the Middle East, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia emerged, with Syria alone having an historic identity. The others, created by the British, sought uneasily to find out who they were.

World War II saw the end of the English, French, Dutch, Belgian, and Portuguese empires, and more than a hundred new states arising from the ruins, but, in almost all cases, the old natural boundaries of tribes and peoples were crossed by the new entities.

In 1989, the Soviet empire dissolved and Yugoslavia disintegrated, with dozens of peoples coming out of the shadows and seeking to assert a new singularity. The Soviet experiment had been a "revolution from above." Now these peoples were turning to the past, trying to become, in Herder's sense, a *volk*. It is that effort, once more, to become a *people*, which characterizes the end of the twentieth century. That is the resumption of history that stamps itself on our time.

The idea of a "people" is an amorphous concept, yet other than tribe or clan, it is one of the oldest and most powerful feelings in history. History most often has been the subjection of "peoples" by marauding armies. While whole peoples have disappeared, through extermination or assimilation, what is so extraordinary has been the persistence of peoples, and their efforts to achieve self-determination on some territorial ground.

In the nineteenth century, the phrase most commonly used for peoples was race, a term that denoted a common ancestry. One of those who had first used this term was an extraordinary man, now almost forgotten, who was the third man with Marx and Engels (after all, the dialectic is a triad)—Moses Hess. Hess was an early Hegelian who introduced Marx to social and economic problems (when Marx was still wound up in philosophy) and converted Engels to communism. Hess collaborated with Marx on sections of *The German Ideology*, and even participated in the early discussions of *The Communist Manifesto*. The break with Marx



came over Judaism. The generation of German Jews who had been emancipated by Napoleon was threatened by the reversion to the ghetto with the return of the German princes. Many Jews, such as Marx's father, converted. Hess's father did not. Nor did Hess. Marx, like Fichte before him, considered the Jews to be a "huckster people" and retrograde. Hess considered the Jews to be "a world-historic civilized people," who, moreover, could never live peacefully in a Europe where Jew-hatred was endemic and would not be eradicated. The only solution for Jews, wrote Hess in 1862, would be to achieve a nationality and a state of their own.

Hess came to his views in sharp disagreement with Marx. "Social institutions," he wrote, "like spiritual outlooks, are racial creations." All of past history was concerned with the struggle of races and classes. "Race struggle is primary; class struggle is secondary. When racial antagonism ceases, class struggle also ceases. Equality of all social classes follows on the heels of equality of all races and finally remains merely a question of sociology."<sup>7</sup>

For those who think of history as irony, Marx's name remains in defeat, though Hess's has not. As a proto-Zionist, he had voiced the need of a people, maintained by history and a vision, to realize an aspiration. The creation of Israel as a Jewish national state, after a diaspora of almost two millennia, is one of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of peoples.

Hess was a nineteenth-century thinker. Yet, as Lionel Trilling observed in his study of Matthew Arnold (who had used race as a way of explaining how "people's habits . . . determine its modes of life, institutions and government") racial theory "was almost undisputed in the nineteenth century." And, he continued, "Stendhal, Meredith, Mme. de Stael, Carlyle, J. A. Froude, Kingsley, J. R. Green, Taine, Renan [from whom Arnold got much of his interest in the Celts], Sainte-Beuve—all built the racial hypothesis into their work. Indeed the list could be made to include nearly every writer of the time who generalized about human affairs."<sup>8</sup>

7. Moses Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958). At the conclusion of the Foreword, no pagination. About his views of the fate of Jews in Europe, Hess notes that in 1840, after the Damascus Affair, a savage attack on Jews, ". . . the Germans, after their war of Liberation, not only repudiated the Jews who fought with them against France but moreover even persecuted them with the cry of 'Hep-Hep.' . . . What the German patrioteer loves in his fatherland is not the State but racial domination." Ibid., p. 33.

Needless to say, Marx, who could never brook any opposition, damned Hess in vituperative and scatological terms ("someone excreted from a dung factory"), and as a Jew.

8. Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, Meridian Books, 1955), pp. 214–215. The study was originally published in 1939.