

Ideology and international relations

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A distinctive feature of the evolution of the modern international system has been the emergence of ideologies so universalist in their assumptions that they have ignored, or worse, denied the cultural and political diversities of mankind—diversities which constitute the ineluctable framework of international politics and which make the conduct of foreign affairs such a complex and difficult craft. One major obstacle, however, to understanding the problems which this development poses for the theory and practice of international relations is the fact that the correct usage of the term 'ideology' is very much broader than that which is generally accepted today.

The word is commonly used to describe a particularly rigorous, comprehensive and dogmatic set of interrelated values, based on a systematic philosophy which claims to provide coherent and unchallengeable answers to all the problems of mankind, whether individual or social: a philosophy codified, preserved and expounded as a doctrine above question or challenge. Such a philosophy was that of Thomist Christianity. It is in that sense that we speak today of 'Marxist–Leninist ideology'. It was a term also applied, if in less rigorous form, to the racist values which inspired the Nazi party in Germany and their imitators elsewhere. And it can be applied to one continuing strain of thought in the complex culture of the United States, that of dogmatic Jeffersonian democracy, which has received considerable emphasis over the past decade. When we speak of an *idéologie*, in short, we know what we mean: a priest of a secular religion.

But the true meaning of the word is that given by John Plamenatz in his book *Ideology*: 'a set of closely-related beliefs or ideas, or even attitudes, characteristic of a group or community'.¹ This implies something much broader, looser, and less codifiable: a value system, a 'mind-set' as the Americans might call it, a *Weltanschauung* as the Germans *do* call it, or, in the French expression before which my colleagues in the historical profession prostrate themselves in such awe, a *mentalité*. It suggests that richly confused mixture of partly inherited, partly acquired assumptions, very little if at all subjected to deliberate introspection, which most of us accept quite unconsciously as the framework of our lives and which most of us would find it difficult, perhaps impossible, and certainly very embarrassing to codify and defend.

In fact the correct usage of the term 'ideology' bears as much relation to that normally employed as does the *mentalité* of a professing member of the Church of England to the Thirty-nine Articles, or the Athanasian Creed, or any of the other documents where the fundamentals of Christian belief are set out with embarrassing clarity. But to those standing outside our culture, this confused accumulation of inherited or acquired beliefs, attitudes and values, which lose all their essence if we

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try to codify and define them, may appear more systematic, more logically interconnected, more finite and definable, than we ourselves realize. We are all *idéologues* in spite of ourselves.

Evolution of ideologies

The earlier thinkers to whom the term *idéologue* was applied were indeed ideologists in the sense that we understand the term today. These were the French rationalists of the eighteenth century, especially the group who in 1750 launched the *Encyclopédie* as a kind of manifesto: men such as Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvetius, d'Holbach, and their later disciple Condorcet. These people had a clear and systematic philosophy, based on their perception of Man as a rational and reasoning being, capable through his reason of understanding the laws governing both nature and human society and with an inherent right both to exercise that reason and to create an environment enabling him to do so.

Thinkers equipped with such clear and irrefutable insights could thus cut through and reject the muddle of superstition, injustice and prescriptive privilege on which society had hitherto been based—the ideology, in fact, of the *ancien régime*—and substitute a new, coherent, systematic ideology of their own; one which would define the nature of justice and so make possible the creation of the just society. Truth, Order, and Justice would reign hand in hand. As in *The Magic Flute*, the forces of the Queen of the Night would be put to flight and Sarastro, the High Priest of Reason, would rule supreme. Sarastro, it may be noted, had a very summary way of dealing with his adversaries, but then they were by definition reactionary and disruptive. When a regime embodies justice, freedom and human rights, anyone opposed to it is automatically opposed to justice, freedom and human rights. These new insights made possible a New Order. But a New Order presupposed New Men, whose minds had been cleansed from all the prejudices and falsehoods of the past. The old messy incoherent ideology had to be removed and a new one fitted in its place before the brave new world could be brought into being.

When fifty years later Karl Marx attacked 'bourgeois ideology', it was not these systematic ideologists he had in mind. He was certainly able to demonstrate that their particular interpretation of the Rights of Man, with its emphasis on the individual and his property, served the class interests of the bourgeoisie. But for Marx, 'ideology' did mean *mentalité*; and the *mentalité* of the possessing classes in the early nineteenth century, while it comprised some of the ideas of the revolutionary *idéologues*, included a great deal else besides. It would have had to accommodate the attitudes of unlettered people who had never heard of the Enlightenment and would probably have disapproved of it if they had. It comprehended the whole cast of mind, the *Weltanschauung*, with which or into which everyone in society, particularly everyone in the huge amorphous social group known as 'the bourgeoisie' had been born. It comprised everything that grew from the soil created by the particular set of economic relationships which characterized 'bourgeois society'. For Marx, ideology was not so much *what* people thought as *how* they thought and inescapably thought. There was only a small group of intellectuals who like Marx himself were able, through some Houdini-like trick which has never been explained, to escape from the dark prison of the mind to which history had confined their contemporaries and view the development of mankind in its entirety with minds (like those of the Encyclopaedists) scoured clean from the detritus of the past. Only they, equipped with this knowledge could open the prison gates and allow the rest of mankind to escape in their turn.

These emancipated minds could now develop a totally fresh ideology, one which would be as deeply rooted in the class interests of the proletariat as that of the Encyclopaedists had been in the class interests of the bourgeoisie. The difference was that, whereas the doctrines of the Encyclopaedists really had developed, naturally and unconsciously, out of the interests and perceptions of the middle and professional classes, those of the Marxists had to be deliberately planted in the mind of a proletariat which was as yet unconscious of them, being still blinded by a 'false consciousness' derived from their bourgeois environment, which it was (and still is) the task of the enlightened to strip away.

So this proletarian, or Marxist, ideology had to be *created*. A new and coherent value-system had to be built up to replace the jumble of ideas and prejudices which clogged the perceptions of mankind in general and the working classes in particular. And this new system of ideas, this new morality, had, once it had been established, to be constantly purged of all divergent views, heretical interpretations and doctrinal disagreements that might sully the purity of the new world-vision and make the new order unworkable. Thus 'ideology' was not seen as something that was *there* already, whether consciously or (more likely) unconsciously. It had to be defined, imposed, and then kept free from taint. Ideology as *mentalité* became ideology as dogma.

Relevance to international relations

What had all this to do with international relations?

The original *idéologues* were not so much international as pre-national. Reason, in their eyes, was uniform and universal; they could therefore speak for all rational men. It is true that almost simultaneously with the appearance of the *Encyclopédie*, Montesquieu had published *L'Esprit des Lois*, in which he described how historical and geographical circumstances created diversity in human cultures. But even Montesquieu had defined laws as being 'necessary relations arising out of the nature of things';² and that 'necessity' had surely by definition to be universal. For the Encyclopaedists, Reason operated as uniformly throughout the world as did the laws of natural science, and all that stood in the way of its universal recognition was ignorance, superstition, and the surviving vested interests of the old feudal order. These puddles of obscurantism would quickly evaporate once the healing rays of education (within one's own society) and civilization (applied to other barbarous societies which one had a duty to conquer and rule) could be brought to play on them. But to make that process possible at all, it might be necessary to have revolution at home and wars for liberation abroad. Liberty for oneself was not enough; the duty remained to liberate one's fellows. The world could not survive half slave to superstition and half free from it.

There is something gruesomely familiar about this rhetoric of the Girondins, those early idealists who preached world revolution only to be devoured at home by their own. Here 'the modern age' begins. For it was this rationalist universalism which was, in the twentieth century, to become so characteristic of both liberal democracies and Marxist regimes. In the United States it survived in a particularly untainted form until the era of Woodrow Wilson, and still reverberates strongly, if intermittently, through American presidential rhetoric. All peoples, according to this ideology, are naturally 'good'. If we could only get at them over the heads of their oppressors, we would find them to have the same perception of their needs and values, the same capacity to settle their disputes according to rational principles, and so to live together in peace. All that is needed, therefore, is the universal institution of democracy. Conflicts arise only because of misperceptions, or of the vested, anti-

social interests of ruling groups. In 1919 Woodrow Wilson believed that he could achieve a peaceful settlement of European disputes by appealing to peoples over the heads of governments. In the Second World War the belief persisted in liberal circles—and indeed still persists in some quarters today—that if only Hitler and the Nazi ‘clique’ could have been removed from power by a coup mounted by ‘good’ Germans, the Second World War might have been avoided or at least brought to an early end. There is a strong school of strategic thought in the United States today which advocates the discriminating use of nuclear weapons to ‘decapitate’ the Soviet regime; presumably on the assumption that the liberated Soviet peoples would then elect a government truly representative of their values and interests. The question of *why* such naturally good and rational people so often end up with such bad governments is less often addressed.

The liberal *idéologues* thus had, and still have, a ‘theory’ of international relations. It is based on the assumption that there already exists a natural global community, whether international or supranational, whose interests are harmonious and whose value-system would be generally perceived as universal if only all its members could be reached, liberated and where necessary educated.

In nineteenth-century Europe it was believed that this liberation would take the form of the assertion or fulfilment of a ‘national’ identity. Once nations had achieved full independence, it was assumed by Mazzini and his disciples, they would co-exist in harmony, each adding the timbre of its particular instrument to the universal concert of mankind whose tones had been blended by a master hand. Nations would accept their role as provinces in a single global society. International relations would then be simply the administration of an essentially homogeneous world community.

Marxism and liberalism compared

This essentially Benthamite view of international relations was inherited by Marx, who substituted the ‘proletariat’ for the liberal concept of ‘peoples’. Like the liberals, the Marxists believed that international conflict existed only because of the vested interests of the ruling classes. But they carried their analysis a stage further. The whole concept of nationality they saw as a bourgeois myth which the proletariat did not share:

The proletariat [wrote Marx] are in the great mass by nature without national prejudice, and their whole upbringing and movement are essentially humanitarian, anti-national. Only the proletariat can destroy nationality.³

So whereas Mazzini saw the problem of international conflict as one which would be resolved in a natural harmony of nations, for Marx the problem itself would cease to exist. With the triumph of the proletariat the whole illusion of nationality would vanish. Ultimately of course the state itself would vanish with the advent of the classless society and the consequent disappearance of the ruling classes, which Marx claimed used the state as a mechanism for oppression of the proletariat. There would then be no need for international relations at all. Issue a few manifestos, as Trotsky said when he took over the Russian Foreign Ministry, and then shut up shop. But meanwhile, there must be war for the liberation of those peoples who were still unjustly oppressed, whether by their own ruling classes or by colonialist occupiers. Tomorrow, as Auden wrote during his Marxist phase.

Tomorrow, for the young, the poets exploding like bombs . . .
Tomorrow the bicycle races.

Through the suburbs on summer evenings: but today the struggle.⁴

So for both kinds of *idéologie*, liberal as well as Marxist, international relations were no more than a temporary and disagreeable necessity, a transitory phase which would, inevitably and properly, be one of conflict ranging from competitive co-existence to full-scale wars of liberation. At the end of this phase there would be peace, which would come about not through the establishment of world empire or even world government, but through the removal of obstacles to the emergence of a world community which was *there* already, and which would begin to function once the operation of Reason, or the forces of History, were given unchecked rein.

The rise of nationalism

This optimism has unfortunately not been borne out by events. Exactly two centuries have passed since the outbreak of the French Revolution—two hundred years of conflict which might lead us to suppose that in the affairs of mankind there is no such thing as progress but that, as in Newtonian physics, action and reaction are equal and opposite. Internationalism, so far from dissolving nationalism, has provoked it. In the eighteenth century within the commonwealth of learning on both sides of the Atlantic the Encyclopaedists were indeed seen as expressing the ideas of all civilized and rational men. The fact that they gave expression to those ideas largely in French was no more an obstacle to their acceptance than had been Aquinas's Latin or Aristotle's Greek to the universal acceptance of their ideas. But the commonwealth of learning was small. Once these ideas became more widely known, and, more important, once they had become associated with the activities and ambitions of revolutionary France, it was a very different matter. The dawn of the reign of Reason and the establishment of the Rights of Man became widely associated firstly with ferociously oppressive Jacobinism and then with militarist and expansionist Bonapartism. A few sages like Goethe remained loyal to their ideals, accepting the French *imperium* as an acceptable price to pay for the implementation of the values of the Enlightenment, but they were in a minority. The forces of populist chauvinism proved stronger than those of Reason and Reform.

Arguably, the French Revolution set back the cause of political reform in Britain and Germany by half a century by strengthening not only the fears but also the popularity of the *ancien régime*. Certainly that Revolution led, not to a new age of peace for mankind, but to an era of escalating nationalism which was to reach a bloody climax in Europe in 1914–18 and whose global reverberations show no signs of dying away. For the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of another kind of ideology: that of the Nation. It was Rousseau, the progenitor of so many of the ideas which were to come together in the totalitarianism of the twentieth century, who first pointed to the possibility, indeed the necessity, of creating 'nations' by a process of ideological indoctrination.

It is the task of education [he wrote] to give to each human being a national form, and so direct his opinions and tastes that he should be a patriot by inclination, by passion, by necessity. On first opening his eyes a child must see his country, and until he dies, must see nothing else.⁵

The same use of education for the process of nation-building was to be urged by Fichte in the aftermath of Prussia's catastrophic defeat at Jena in 1806:

I propose a total change in the existing scheme of education as the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation . . . By means of this new

education we want to mould the Germans into a corporate body, which shall be stimulated and animated in all its individual members by the same interest.⁶

Germany would exist, in short, if Germans were brought up to *will* its existence. The same would apply to Italy, Poland, Greece and all other communities aspiring to a national identity; not least to the United States.

As the nineteenth century wore on, these aspirations became reality. New states were created, and old ones consolidated their internal authority. That authority made possible universal, state-directed education, and the requirements of the modern state made it necessary. Education was everywhere used to create national self-consciousness as an essential element in social mobilization. Nationalism was not ideology as dogma; that is, it was not, like Marxism, based on a coherent philosophy. It was rather ideology as *mentalité*; but it was a *mentalité* as artificial and as deliberately created as the 'proletarian' ideology of Marx. National attitudes, myths, beliefs and perceptions had to be inculcated in the minds of the young, and during the nineteenth century schoolteachers throughout Europe and the United States saw it as their function to do precisely that: to plant in the minds of their pupils ideas, myths and attitudes which were specifically English, German, French, or American.

The Mazzinian assumption that all this would ultimately result in universal harmony was not generally shared. The perception of Fichte, itself derived from Kant, was a great deal more acute:

Every nation wishes to spread its own ideas and ways of life as far as it can, and as far as it is in its power, to incorporate the whole of mankind; and this is due to a compulsion which God has implanted into men and on which the society of nations, their mutual friction and development rests.⁷

The result, as most of Fichte's countrymen came to agree, was likely to be not universal harmony but universal struggle, as each nation strove for self-determination at the expense of its neighbours—a struggle willed by God, as Fichte's generation saw it, or by nature, as it was seen once the process of natural selection and evolution had been expounded by Charles Darwin. In the conceptual framework provided by the ideology of nationalism, therefore, international relations was the art of surviving in a jungle of predators in order to preserve one's own superior culture and ultimately to impose it upon inferior adversaries.

Contemporary fortunes of nationalism

Looking back on European nationalism as it developed before 1914 from the perspective given by the experience of two world wars, we are naturally inclined to regard the whole phenomenon as a pathological condition, a sickness which it needed a terrible blood-letting to cure. But we historians know, or should know, that our judgements are themselves culture-bound, an aspect of the *mentalité* of our own times. A Social Darwinian from the 1900s might very plausibly argue that those conflicts were indeed necessary, that the blood-letting was inevitable, so as to determine which of the various competing European ideologies should set the pattern for the future development of mankind. Those who are not willing to fight in order to protect and if possible extend the political and social structures which were created by and which preserve their cultural values, will see those values wither and die, like molluscs deprived of their shells. If the two world wars were terrible, it was because both sides so profoundly believed in their ideals. The severity of the ordeal was due not so much to the weapons with which the belligerents fought as to the social

cohesion which enabled them to endure for so long. Ultimately, so the Darwinian would argue, only the strongest did survive, as nature had intended; and it has been the ideology, the *mentalité* of those victors which has shaped the world in which we now live. It is understandable that after 1918 such Social Darwinian views became unpopular and after 1945 virtually untenable. The wars destroyed, at least among European nations, the frenetic nationalism that had caused them. But although we may regard their destruction with understandable relief, we must take account of two points. The first is that the nineteenth century process of 'nationalization' which was pioneered in Europe is still working itself out in the rest of the world. New states, in order to create and preserve social cohesion, still inculcate in their citizens some measure of national ideology. Unsatisfied aspirants to statehood, be they Basques, Palestinians, Kurds, Sikhs or Tamils, continue to wage their own holy wars for self-determination and bring up their children in the true faith, as did Czechs, Italians, Germans, Poles, Irish, Serbs and Croats in Europe a century and a half ago. These aspirations are unfortunately often satisfiable only at the expense of one another. Europeans may feel blasé about nationalism, but there are many dedicated and violent people in the world who do not.

The second point is that once the genie of national self-consciousness is out of the bottle it is not easy to put it back. There are broadly three ways in which this has been attempted in the post-war era. The first way is represented by the efforts of the victorious powers after the Second World War to extinguish the nationalist ideologies of their defeated adversaries as part of the process of removing their war-making capabilities. But the Japanese have remained firmly Japanese, and the Germans have remained obstinately and consciously German; aware of a common past and a common culture embodied in their language which creates among them a truly special relationship cutting across political divisions and differences in ideological dogma. Were the two Germans to remain separate for generations, then the diversity of their historical experience might indeed create cultural diversity, as geographical separation is gradually creating cultural diversity between the British and the Australians; but then we would see the emergence of two separate nations, each with its own ideological *mentalité*, not of a single 'non-nation'.

A second route to 'denationalization' might appear to lie in the use of the very process by which nationalism was inculcated; education. To a certain extent that is happening in this country. The kind of 'national' history out of which the 'myth' of the British nation was created by nineteenth-century historians—the history of princes and dynasties, of wars and conquest, even of constitutional and parliamentary evolution—is given decreasing attention in our schools and universities. The evolution of British society in all its diversity is emphasized rather than that of the British State. Further, the cultural values of other societies, primarily those to whose immigrants we are hosts, are often given as much attention as those of our own. The idea that British culture is not only distinctive but *properly* distinctive, something with its own value and legitimacy, is unfashionable, to put it no more strongly, while the whole concept of 'patriotism' elicits suspicion and mockery.

To pronounce judgement on this development is to reveal one's own *mentalité*, or more likely that of one's generation. But it is an open question whether abandonment of traditional methods of maintaining social cohesion, without putting anything in their place, will really produce a higher culture whose diverse elements will successfully blend in a richer synthesis; or whether it is not likely to create a depressed and dispirited society, unsure of its identity, increasingly beset by conflicts of class and race, and less and less significant on the international scene. For unless the enormous power wielded by the modern State is legitimized and made acceptable by the

mobilization of some kind of numinous national feeling, unless its guardians can credibly claim to be acting on behalf of a community whose diversities are reconciled in the higher and deeper interest implicit in the term 'the nation', that power will be seen as oppressive and is likely to become oppressive. Politics then degenerate into a dismal cycle of disruption and oppression, which we see in so many Third World countries and which sometimes appear to threaten our own.

The third escape-route from the ideology of nationalism is of course to replace it with the ideology of internationalism. But the record here has not been good either. We must never forget that the primary and instinctive loyalties of human beings are to the small local communities they know best and of which they and their families have always formed part. Parochialism came before nationalism. The creation of national self-consciousness was, for the mass of mankind, a widening of horizons, not a narrowing of them. Progress towards a yet higher ideology, a system of cultural values transcending national boundaries, is possible for a highly-educated minority, but in making such progress that minority is in danger of distancing itself from the mass of its fellow-countrymen, if not of losing touch with them altogether.

Since ideology as *mentalité* is shaped by experience, progress of this kind certainly becomes possible for larger groups in society as communication and travel become easier and as English becomes a lingua franca for international intercourse. Within western Europe a genuine community may indeed be gradually shaping, as such a community was gradually shaped among the different nations in the United Kingdom. But western Europe is not the world, and even such limited internationalism is not cost-free. It is often seen, at least initially, as an attempt to inculcate alien values, and the liberation it offers is suspected as a new and unwelcome kind of slavery.

The ideology of the Enlightenment may have been that of all civilized men, but there were a lot of uncivilized people, particularly in Germany, England and Spain, who saw it as an attempt to legitimize a specifically French hegemony. The whole essence of German nationalism, indeed, derived from a sense of outrage at the invasion and pollution of indigenous values by what was widely seen as a specious and debilitating alien creed. A generation later the Slavophile movement in Russia was born of a no less violent reaction against invasion by these alien Western values, and developed its own specific, indigenous ideology in defiant contrast—an ideology which has probably been a great deal more influential in determining the *mentalité* of the Soviet Union today than the formal dogmas of Marxism–Leninism.

Conversely the proletarian internationalism preached by the Soviet Union after 1917 was widely seen, not least among the working classes in Western Europe, as alien, subversive of indigenous cultural and social values, and a flimsy cover for Soviet imperialism. In many influential quarters in the West today the doctrines of Marxism–Leninism are still seen as no more than a programme for Soviet 'world conquest'. In Europe between the wars, Fascism everywhere derived much of its appeal from its hostility to international capitalism on the one hand and to international communism on the other. Both were depicted by Fascists as alien and sinister influences which threatened the capacity of nations to preserve their own values and control their own destinies.

This negative reaction to internationalism is still evident today. If the West fears Soviet-sponsored internationalism as subversive of its values, the Soviets are equally fearful of the disintegrating effect of Western values on their own society and those of their satellites. For many Third World states, 'western values' derived from the universalism of the Enlightenment are either irrelevant or deeply disruptive, an instrument for ensuring a continuing Western hegemony. It is perhaps only the depth

of their impoverishment that keeps them from reacting still more strongly against the ideology of the rich White world; and once that poverty is alleviated we may see yet more violent nationalist reactions. And even within the West, the growth of an internationally-minded 'overclass' with their credit cards, overseas business contacts and holidays abroad, the growing internationalization of their cities, and increased provision for servicing tourism, all combine to leave behind a semi-educated and resentful underclass which defiantly takes as its symbols the national flags abandoned by the élites—the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes, perhaps even the swastika—and displays them on new and less glorious battlefields. These debased relics of national identity are often all they have left of their self respect.

Conclusion

So a truly global community still lies a very long way in the future. We are stuck with the reality of international relations: not *interstate* relations but *international* relations. And international relations is about *dealing with foreigners*. This is a point that I have made many times before, but it cannot be made too often. In all too many textbooks on international relations, states are treated simply as entities to be assessed in such quantifiable or behavioural terms as economic potential, military power, technological development, internal political structure or geopolitical imperatives. Such treatment is itself the product of a particular culture—a particular ideology in fact: Anglo-Saxon political thought. It is a culture from which we may not ourselves be able to escape, but which we cannot expect other peoples necessarily to share.

The first duty both of the theorist and of the practitioner of international relations, therefore, is *empathy*: the capacity to enter into other minds and understand ideologies which have been formed by environment, history and education in a very different mould from our own. The most direct way of doing this is of course to study the languages which both express and create these differences between nations. For many this will be a counsel of perfection, but at least we should be conscious of our imperfections. To study international relations without understanding linguistic diversities is like studying painting with the handicap of being colour-blind. The fact that an increasing amount of the business of the world is conducted in English is undeniably a functional convenience, but it can be deceptive. English is not the native language of those with whom we are dealing, and is not a natural or effective vehicle for their ideas. It enables them to understand us a little better than we can understand them, but it can give an illusion of mutual understanding where none in fact exists.

Whether or not we possess the key which languages provide to the understanding of other peoples and their ideologies, there is another which lies within the grasp of all of us: the study of their history. If without languages we are colour-blind, without history we are groping in total darkness. History enables us to understand ourselves as well as other cultures. It teaches us what we may and may not expect in our mutual relations. It teaches us our own limitations, and thus a certain humility. In dealing with a multicultural, multi-ideological world, that in itself is not a bad beginning.

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