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ON THE NATURE OF IDEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

GORDON GRAHAM

Thesis submitted for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Durham

OCTOBER 1975

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A B S T R A C T

The thesis is concerned with the logic of the language of political ideologies and their relation to political and moral conduct. First, the view that ideology is the determination of the ends of political and moral conduct, and the rational consideration of the various 'philosophies' which thinkers have devised, is considered and, after some analysis, rejected. This leads to a consideration of a general scepticism concerning ideology, namely that ideology is an essentially spurious form of reasoning and understanding. The notions of 'rationalisation','false-consciousness' and 'abstraction' are those given particular scrutiny. As a result, the sceptical view of ideology is rejected.

In the second part, a parallel, often suggested, between ideology and religion is explored. It is argued that ideological and religious understanding is essentially subjective, in a carefully specified sense of the term, and that both are views of the world _sub specie aeternitatis_. These two features entail their being understandings categorically distinct from theoretical understanding like history or science. But religions and ideologies are not the same and the distinction between the two is drawn in the context of an examination of the notions of eternity and temporality. The parallel is continued, however, in a comparison of the logic of ideological and theological reflection, where it is argued that a corpus of authoritative literature may allow concrete and reasoned reflection.

Part Three of the thesis is concerned with the place of ideological reflection in conduct. It is claimed that ideological literature may sustain the vocabulary of an ethical tradition and thereby preserve political identity.

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P R E F A C E

This thesis is the philosophical elaboration of a certain conception of ideology, of philosophy and of religion. Ideally, I am inclined to think, a philosophical work should be written either in the form of a dialogue (like those of Plato and Berkeley) or a treatise, consisting in a set of systematically related propositions (like Spinoz's Ethics or Wittgenstein's Tractatus). The former reveals the essentially dialectical character of philosophical reasoning and the latter enshrines something of the complete clarity and coherence that philosophy strives after. But both of these ways of writing philosophically, if they are to be successful, require a great measure of skill and ingenuity. The argument I present here is neither the one nor the other, though it has something of the appearance of the two. My intention has been, however, to think as clearly and as carefully as I can about the nature of ideology, and to do so in the context of a dialectical exchange between a rationalist and a sceptical viewpoint and the point of view I wish to advance.

Though the questions raised are far from new, the problem of ideology is a relatively recent concern in academic inquiry. Nevertheless, I hope that my thinking is centrally and recognisably in the philosophical idiom. As such, it owes everything, in a sense, to its predecessors. Certainly, there is not a single major philosopher whose work I have not read with profit in this connection.

Special mention may be made, perhaps, of the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michael Oakeshott. The degree to which they have stimulated my thought will be obvious in what follows.

At a rather more personal level, I owe a great debt to all those who have taught me and with whom I have been taught. In particular, I should like to thank my supervisor, Dr David Manning and my friend and sometime colleague, Daniel Rashid. My argument owes much to innumerable discussions with them and to their unfailing interest in my concerns. Needless to say, they are not responsible for its weaknesses.

And I must thank my wife Elspeth, not only for the several points in this essay where, in the light of her comments, what is said is expressed with much greater clarity than would otherwise be the case, and for her correction of the typescript, but also for a sympathy which springs, I think, from knowing better than anyone, what philosophy has meant to me.

Lastly I should like to mention my baby son, Murray, who, as my constant companion and source of distraction during the time in which I have prepared this thesis, also the first two years of his life, has contributed, in ways he could not understand, to the happiness of my work.

I am very grateful to Mrs Gillian Gibson for all her co-operation and advice in the typing of the script.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction - The Study of Ideology

Not every subject is a discipline. This, I imagine, is obvious. Politics, for example, is a subject but not a discipline. We may study politics in a philosophical, an historical or even, I suppose, something approaching a scientific manner. And when we do one of these, though our subject is politics, we are engaged in the discipline of philosophy or history or science. My subject is ideology and the question I want to ask in these introductory remarks is, which of these disciplines provides the possibility of a concrete and an on-going inquiry into ideology? It is not, however, that this chapter is intended to provide definitive answers on the problems it raises. Indeed, it will at best touch upon several large issues which it will leave only partially explored. Nor can it be pretended that these introductory considerations are, in some way, an account of the deliberations which have preceded the choice of philosophy as an appropriate idiom, for these considerations are themselves philosophical and require some measure of philosophical sophistication. The arguments of this first chapter are, rather, partly a way of denying the importance of some popular but essentially implausible studies of ideology and partly a way of introducing those problems concerning the nature of ideology which the main body of the thesis seeks to resolve. As a discussion of the topics themselves, then, the conclusions of this chapter must be regarded as tentative.

The question of this chapter is about the possibility and limits of approaching the problem of ideology scientifically, historically and philosophically. I do not claim that these are the only

disciplines, though they are the least contentious, the oldest and the most familiar. The term discipline is itself highly ambiguous and open to misuse. We may be agreed that politics is a subject and not a discipline, but agreement is less likely in the case of sociology, psychology, economics or geography. I do not think, myself, that the last-named are indeed disciplines, but even if we leave aside these modern aspirants, the age-old case of mathematics might still be thought to be problematic. Since, however, this chapter does not claim to be a conclusive resolution of these difficulties, but rather, as its title suggests, the introduction to an actual piece of philosophising about ideology and related matters, it is, I think, reasonable to ignore these peripheral questions. I shall, then, simply ask whether scientific, historical and philosophical studies of ideology are possible and, if so, what the limit and extent of each is.

I

1. The question of the nature of science is very large and very old. It can scarcely receive adequate treatment here. Indeed, I do not intend to say much about the character of science and will restrict my discussion to one important aspect. As I understand it, causation is one of the principle categories of scientific understanding. A scientific explanation, that is to say, will reveal the physically (as opposed to logically, or practically) necessary conditions of the

occurrence of a given phenomenon. And to give the cause of something in general is to give those conditions.

The centrality of causation to science, however, is not crucial to my argument. It matters only in that I take a science of ideology to consist in the revelation of such conditions for ideological belief. Even this I need not establish, for many have claimed that this is what they have revealed and it is with claims such as these that I am concerned.[1] One writer has sketched, so to speak, the metaphysics of such an inquiry in the following way.

> A theory of the origins, acceptance and persistence of 'religious' beliefs - whatever that turns out to include ... will simply set out the several causes psychological and social which jointly account for the origins, acceptance and persistence of those beliefs.[2]

Elsewhere, he tells us:

> This line of argument can of course be extended ... both more broadly into the sociology of knowledge and more deeply into individual psychology. More broadly, the assertion that beliefs are the product of circumstances (or, as Marx himself put it, 'social being determines consciousness') can generate ambitious generalizations about the content of the religious and the political ideologies of different social strata. More deeply, the assertion that a person may be unaware of the influences acting on his attitudes and beliefs can generate elaborate psychoanalytic conjectures about the unconscious. These,

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1 Amongst these we may number Engels, Mannheim and Eysenck

2 W G Runciman: Sociology in its place Cambridge 1970, pp.82-83

> however, lie well beyond the scope of this paper. I have merely been concerned to vindicate the view that there can be a causal connection between interests (as I have defined them) on the one hand and beliefs on the other ... [1]

It is clear from this that at least one version of a 'science' of ideology has centered around the notion of the causes of beliefs, and this would, if my initial, rather bold, assertion is correct, be true of any study of ideology which could reasonably be called scientific. It is pertinent, then, to inquire into the notion of cause.

2. A causal relationship must be between two separable entities. This is not true of all relationships[2] but if we are to claim generally that 'A causes B' and 'B is the effect of A' and are to test that claim, A and B must be separable. That is, we must be able to isolate the two sides if we are to talk of a causal relation between them. Now when we ask about the causes of beliefs it is not clear that there are two sides which are isolatable. Suppose we advance the hypothesis that 'Belonging to the middle class is the cause of holding liberal beliefs'. We should be able to isolate two elements here, one of which brings about the other. These two elements must be 'Belonging to the middle-class' and 'Holding liberal beliefs'.

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1 ibid. pp.218-219. Originally published as 'False consciousness'in *Philosophy* 1969

2 eg. Logical relationships. The convex and concave sides of a curve are distinct but not separable.

It is clear that our use of the term 'liberal beliefs' must not involve any reference to middle-classness, for if someone is regarded as belonging to the middle class on the grounds that he subscribes to liberal beliefs, our 'hypothesis' turns out to be a tautology. But in much of the talk of classes and belief, liberal beliefs and middle-class values are one and the same thing. It is doubtful, on the other hand, whether any definition of the term 'middle-class' which contained no reference to beliefs characteristic of liberal ideology could genuinely capture the reality of that term. This is why I say that it is not clear that the two elements of our hypothesis are indeed separable.

But let us suppose that such separation is possible. It is still not clear that a causal hypothesis is possible. In fact I want to suggest that the link between a state of affairs and the holding of a belief can never be causal.

I said that a causal relationship must pertain between two separable elements. These elements, it will be clear, must be events in space and time. It is nonsense to talk of causal relationships between states of affairs. The dropping, throwing, crumbling, pressing, rolling of a stone, that is, some movement of a stone, may be the cause of an occurrence but never the stone itself. For, by itself, the stone cannot do anything and cannot, therefore, cause anything. And similarly any effect must be on an event. Where, in our formulations, the effect has the appearance of a state of affairs, the effect is actually <u>the change to</u> that state of affairs. For example, an inquiry

into the cause of 'a broken window' (a state of affairs) is really an inquiry into the cause of 'the window's being broken' (an event).

This means that if we are to speak of the causes of beliefs, the beliefs or at least the believing must be occurrences. Of course, the utterance or advocation of a particular belief is an event; it takes place at a particular point in space and time. But the scientific theory of ideology would, we have been told, produce causal explanations of the holding of particular beliefs by different social strata and the content of the beliefs held.[1]

That beliefs and the holding of beliefs are not occurrences should, I hope, require little argument. Something that takes place in time may take a long or a short time. It can be interrupted, prevented, repeated. None of these is true of believing. I cannot be interrupted in my believing. I cannot believe six things before breakfast. And so on. Talk of temporal duration cannot begin when we are concerned with beliefs and the state of believing. And if temporal duration has no place neither has talk of causes. It is true that we may speak of having believed and ceasing to believe, but this refers to a time at which the fact 'X believes Y' was true and a time at which it was not, and not to an event which lasted a certain period

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1 I am aware that there are other sociological theories which employ the notion of historical specificity rather than cause, but my concern here is not with them. Mannheim's, it might be argued, is one of this kind rather than the kind Runciman envisages. As it happens, I think that these are also susceptible to insurmountable logical difficulties.

of time. If I cease to believe something, my believing does not stop. Ceasing to believe is not like the end or even the finishing of a process.

3. The upshot of my argument is that, on the restricted view of a science we have been considering, there can be no science of ideology. And this conclusion is borne out, I think, in the fact that, despite the best intentions and the greatest industry, modern writers who have assumed the contrary have not, even in their eyes, met with any success.

This may seem to be rather a summary dismissal of what has been a prominent and, to some, a persuasive, strand of thinking. But the conclusions advanced here are advanced tentatively. The point of this discussion is not to dismiss these writers but to explain the absence of reference to their work in the body of the thesis. What I have tried to show is that there is a great amount of philosophical clarification necessary before the merits and demerits of the various theories can be considered and further, that it is atleast a possibility that such clarification would lead us to the view that they cannot be said to have either merit or demerit.

II

1. Let us turn, then, to the question of how far, if at all, it is possible to study ideologies historically. It may seem so

obvious that if any study of ideology is possible it must be an historical one, that the question need scarcely be asked. But I hope to show that it is not at all clear <u>what</u> it is that is obvious here. I do not want to deny, of course, that it is possible to recount the history of, say, the Liberal party in Britain, revolutionary Marxist movements in Bolivia, or the nationalist liberation struggle in Algeria. But it does not seem that histories such as these are always all that is aimed at by those who set out to write, for example, the history of Nationalism. And so it seems pertinent to wonder how far the historical studies we may sensibly undertake are necessarily limited in their scope.

2. History, it seems to me, is essentially concerned with the past, and with the present as evidence for the past. The present is, for the historian, the outcome of past activity, hence the importance of temporal sequence. Now while clearly the rise and fall of ideological movements, of groups and parties associated with some particular ideological understanding, do take place in a temporal sequence, I cannot see that ideological beliefs and doctrines can be said to be in time at all. If this is true, then while the activities of those in the past have directly produced the evidence of the present, the beliefs and doctrines of those in the past cannot have done so.

This I hope can be made clearer by a brief examination of the place of evidence in the study of history. When historians give accounts of the past, the truth and falsity of what they say cannot be understood to lie in the correspondence between these accounts and the

facts of the past, as, for example, the truth or falsity of the claim that there is a table in the room rests upon its corresponding or failing to correspond with the state of the room. For the past is not an entity 'out there' of which our statements are descriptions. What saves our claims about the past from the arbitrary direction of whim and fancy, therefore, is not the facts of the past, but the facts of the present. In short, we do not have direct experience of the past because the past is not 'there' to be experienced. But we do have direct experience of the present and this serves as evidence for and against our claims about the past. It is against the facts of the present that claims about the past are to be tested.

To say that the past is not 'there' to be described, however, is not to say that the accounts of the past which historians proffer are 'really' peculiar sorts of descriptions of the present. They are indeed accounts of the past, but they are constructive rather than descriptive. The understanding of the historian lies in his being able, so to speak, to make an account of the past out of his direct experience of what is in the present. He sees Durham Cathedral, for example, as the outcome of the activity of those in the past, the builders, architects, masons and so on, rather than, say, a piece of architecture worthy of aesthetic contemplation. And it is, so to speak, this peculiar eye with which he looks at the present which makes the present _evidence_.

3. If, then, we want to ask whether a history of ideological belief is possible we shall have to ask whether the subject matter of

'ideas' admits of this division between past and present, narrative and evidence. And I think that the answer to this question is that it does not.

Historians of ideas often speak of the origins, growth, spread, or development of ideas like natural law, toleration, civil rights alienation, or, more generally, progress, evolution, science and so on. Now the question is whether an account of something called, for example, 'The development of Marxist thought' can be understood as an historical sequence. If it is to be so understood, it is clear that what we must have in the present is the result, the effect, of that development and not that development itself. And the effect will be our evidence.

Now I think we can see that such a division between past and present, account and evidence, is not involved when people engage in what is called the history of ideas. For, when we try to trace 'The development of Marxist thought' we do not look at present evidence and try to construct an account of the past, we look at the writings of, for example, Marx, Engels and Lenin and try to show how the ideas of one are a development upon the other. But if there is such a development we are not discovering it _indirectly_ by means of evidence but _directly_ by reading the texts.[1] In other words, what Marx and Engels

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1 In a clear sense the student of ideas does not _look_ at evidence at all. This is in part revealed by the fact that, so long as the text is complete, the actual historical edition, the when and where of printing, is not of importance to him.

and Lenin wrote is not evidence for what they thought; it is what they thought. So to trace a development in that thought can only be, if it is anything, to trace a logical and not an historical development.

The same point can be made in another way. Suppose someone says 'When did Machiavelli die?' This is a question about the past. If we were to have or to discover in the present a register recording the date of, say, Machiavelli's burial and we were fairly assured of its authenticity, we would be able to say 'He died on such and such a date'. Now this last statement is not a description of what we have seen (the register); it is not a report of the evidence but a construction upon the evidence. Consider, in contrast, the case where someone says 'What was Machiavelli's theory of politics?' This too, looks like a question about the past. But in fact we could just as easily ask 'What is Machiavelli's theory of politics?' For the way we set about answering this is quite different from that in which we tried to answer the question about his death. We read, let us say, 'The Prince' and 'The Discourses' and now we do not try to construct an account of his theory out of what we read there, but we report what we find there. In short, the answer to the first question will be a construction upon the evidence of the documents we have or find; the answer to the second will be a report and, very frequently, an abstraction from the documents we have.

4. I have suggested that there is no significant difference between the questions as to what Machiavelli's theory was and what it is. Theories, doctrines, ideas, concepts, I want to say, are not in time

at all,[1] are not, therefore, in the past or in the present and are not, therefore, susceptible to historical investigation. The famous question 'Where do ideas come from?'[2] seems misconceived to me. But if theories, doctrines, ideas, concepts are not in time at all, it does not mean that they are inaccessible. Many important features of our life cannot sensibly be spoken of as being in time. One of these is logic and, as I have hinted already, if an historical investigation into ideological belief and argument (as opposed to believers and arguers) is not possible, we should perhaps consider a logical, or more generally, a philosophical approach. Before turning to that, however, it should perhaps be underlined that what I claim to have shown here is not that history is a useless discipline if what interests you is ideology, but that an historical investigation cannot include an inquiry into the ideas and doctrines of particular ideologies but must confine itself to the actions of men and women whose loyalties and purposes were identifiable within an ideological tradition.

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1 This assertion is in direct conflict with what I regard as one of the most popular intellectual dogmas of the time, namely, that ideas can only be understood in their historical context. However, though this often is mere dogma, it receives sophisticated treatment at the hands of, amongst others, Collingwood, but I cannot deal directly with his argument here. Suffice it to say that, though the context of time is irrelevant, the context of language may be crucial.

2 Mao Tse Tung: Four Essays in Philosophy

III

I have been asking whether a scientific study of ideology is possible, and within what limits the historian may engage in an inquiry into ideology, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that the question 'Is a philosophical study of ideology possible?' could genuinely be raised here. For the main body of this thesis purports to be just that. What I propose to do then is to sketch, if I can, the principal features of philosophical inquiry as I understand it, and to say what these imply for a study of ideology.

When we look at the enormous amount of literature, the vast range of speculations which go under the name of ideology, and when we look at the conflicting claims of those who espouse Marxism, or Nationalism, or Humanism,or Existentialism, or whatever, it is natural, if a little naive, to ask which is true and which we are to believe. Now it is at this point that the puzzlement, characteristic of the philosophic mind, begins. For it is not at all clear upon what criteria the truth or falsity of the speculations of ideologists is to be determined. It is not even clear that such determination is possible, that is, that any talk of truth and falsity is appropriate. For there seems to be so much more involved in disputes between ideologies, like that between Burke and Paine, or even controversies within the one ideology, like that between Lenin and the Norodniks, that they are quite unlike the rather quiet disputations of historians or scientists, where we are, perhaps, a little clearer about the appropriateness of talk of true and

false.

The philosopher's questions about ideology, then, are indirect. Philosophy cannot hope to answer the question 'Which doctrines are true and which false?' 'What ought I to believe?'[1] but rather the question of what counts as truth and falsity, rationality and irrationality. But even this latter remark may be misunderstood. It is not as though philosophy can establish the criteria of truth and falsehood. Nor does it discover them. As I understand it, philosophy is neither prescriptive nor descriptive, concerned neither with how things ought to be nor how things are. Philosophy's province is the realm of possibility and not normality (how things ought to be) or actuality (how things are). In other words, the question of what counts as true and false, rational and irrational, is the question "Under what conditions does it make sense to speak of true and false, rational and irrational? What are the logically necessary conditions for the possibility of such judgments?"

Questions of philosophy are, if I am right, questions of logical possibility and necessity, and, since one claims the logically impossible and denies the logically necessary at the cost of sense, what is logically possible and what is logically necessary is determined in the sense and nonsense, coherence and incoherence, of what we

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1 'Philosophy can no more show a man what to attach importance to than geometry can show him where to stand' Peter Winch 'Moral Integrity' in Ethics and Action p.191, London 1971

say and try to say.

> /Philosophy/ must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought.
>
> It will signify what cannot be said by presenting clearly what can be said.[1]

The thesis which follows these cursory, introductory remarks is an attempt to present clearly what can be said about ideology and, where the questions converge, about religion and philosophy, and thereby to indicate what cannot be said. It is neither a descriptive report of facts discovered, such as a geographer might offer, nor is it a construction upon facts discovered such an historian might offer. It is an attempt to construct coherently a piece of logical space.

---

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus Trans Pears and McGuinness. 4.114-4.115 London 1970

P A R T   O N E

PHILOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGY

"One must know when it is right to doubt, to
affirm, to submit. Anyone who does otherwise
does not understand the force of reason.
Some men run counter to these three principles,
either affirming that everything can be proved,
because they know nothing about proof, or
doubting everything, because they do not know
when to submit, or always submitting because
they do not know when judgment is called for."

PASCAL

CHAPTER 2

The Province of Ideology

"A cook is not a man who first has a vision of
a pie and then tries to make it; he is a man
skilled in cookery, and both his projects and
his achievements spring from that skill."

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

1. The word 'philosophy' has two quite separate meanings. In one sense 'philosophy' is the name of an academic discipline, a form of inquiry into the nature or logic of, for example, time, space, mind, being, action, language, meaning, morality, religion, politics, and the modes of intellectual understanding, history, science and philosophy itself. This is philosophy in what we might call the professional's sense, and it is what we could expect to engage in if we chose to pursue a course in philosophy at a University.

In contrast, we can begin to see how very different philosophy, in what I shall call the layman's sense, is by noting a few of the phrases in which the term typically occurs, 'philosophy of life' 'that's my philosophy' 'the philosophy of liberalism'. Roughly, in the layman's sense, philosophy asks questions of general ethical import (at their most general, about the meaning of life and of all things) and to philosophise is to reflect and speculate on the conduct of life, at an abstracted level, in order that one's life may be the better lived.

The concern of this thesis is with layman's philosophy, with how like and unlike it is to religion and to philosophy in the professional's sense. In particular, my concern is with the place that speculation and reflection have in the conduct of moral and political life, or, more properly, with the place that reflection could sensibly be thought to have. I shall call layman's philosophy 'ideology', not with the intention of attaching to that term any of the opprobrium which normally accompanies its use, but because, since the distinction between the two kinds of philosophy is central to my argument, two differ-

ent terms will be useful. Further, it seems to me that, however little agreement there is over the use of the term 'ideology', many of the writings and beliefs referred to by that term are of the kind upon which I wish to focus attention. I do not mean this term, however, to confine our attention to those reflections and speculations which have risen to prominence chiefly in the sphere of politics,[1] though it is true, of course, that amongst the most prominent ideologies are those of Marxism and Liberalism, and that these, more than any other perhaps, have generated a corpus of theoretical writings. Nevertheless, what I have to say about ideology is meant to encompass such different beliefs and doctrines as those of Stoicism, Humanism and Existentialism, no less than the more familiar political persuasions.

2. I have indicated some general differences between ideology and philosophy but I could scarcely claim to have <u>shown</u> them to be distinct. Showing this will in fact occupy me through most of the first part of the thesis and indeed at several other points throughout. One way in which this distinction can be shown to hold good, I think, is by showing that to conflate the two, to think that ideology, though different, is much the same <u>sort</u> of thing as professional philosophy, leads to confusion and incoherence. It is this, so to speak, <u>reductio</u>

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1 In fact very few can be said to have been purely political. Nationalism (especially in Ireland and Italy) found widespread expression in the world of literature and music. Marxism, or so it seems to me, has had far more impact in academic than in political life.

ad absurdum approach, which I shall adopt in the first chapter.

Laymen, and not least those who engage in layman's philosophy, often suppose that ideological questions do fall within the province of professional philosophy and, very often, when they find that professional philosophers are not, by and large, much concerned with questions of the meaning of life, or even with the truth and falsehood of the popular Weltanschauungen of the times, suppose that they ought to be. This in itself is not a very interesting error, if, indeed, it is an error at all. But it is worth investigating, when the suggestion that philosophers should interest themselves in ideological questions springs from the view that, though philosophy and ideology are not the same thing, (for we can clearly see that metaphysics and epistemology are not of ethical import) nevertheless the kind of clear thinking at which the philosopher is supposed to excel is of equal pertinence in philosophy and in ideology. In short, some people have thought and do think that, though there is a difference in content between ideology and philosophy, there is not much difference in kind.

This error, for I shall argue that it is an error, is often compounded by a supplementary account of the place of such reflection in the conduct of ethical life, and in what follows I shall try to expose these mistakes also.

This account of the matter is quite akin, it seems to me, to the Rationalist tradition in philosophy. Perhaps because of the pervasive and popular place of Rationalism in the intellectual climate of the times, the principle virtue of the theory lies in its plausibility.

But in this chapter I shall show, if I can, that, however plausible, the commonplace model is seriously defective.

I

1. The view I am about to consider of the nature of ideology and its relation to conduct can best be introduced by two quotations.

> Those great men, Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle, the most consummate in politics, who founded states or instructed princes, or wrote most accurately on public government, were at the same time most acute at all abstract and sublime speculations, the clearest light being ever necessary to guide the most important actions. And, whatever the world think, he who hath not much meditated upon God, the human mind and the summum bonum may possibly make a thriving earthworm, but will most indubitably make a sorry patriot and a sorry statesman. [1]

> I have known men who, with significant nods and pitying contempt of smiles, have denied all influence to the corruption of moral and political philosophy, and with much solemnity have proceded to solve the riddle of the French Revolution by anecdotes! Yet it would not be hard to show by an unbroken chain of historic facts, to demonstrate that the most important changes in the commercial relations of the world had their origins in the closets or lonely walks of uninterested theorists. [2]

---

1 Bishop Berkeley <u>Siris</u>:350

2 S T Coleridge <u>The Statesman's Manual</u>, ed. R J White Cambridge 1953, p.15

The model which informs both of these quotations goes something like this:-

Activity must be understood to involve two different aspects, the purposive and the instrumental, the pursuit of ends and the employment of means. Both of these are necessary to concrete activity, for it is the desiring of some end in view which moves men to activity, and without some suitable means their activity will come to nothing. Nevertheless, the two are quite different and this difference can be seen in the different ways by which each is determined and in the relations between them. Ends are primary; they are, if you like, the ideals towards which activity strives, and the means we take are secondary, chosen because of their power to realise the desired end.

Now the manner of choosing the ends and the means of our activities, and the kind of knowledge involved in these choices will clearly be different for each. Knowledge of the means appropriate to a given task will be a knowledge culled from practical experience and will be in the nature of a practical skill, a knowledge of how best to set about whatever it is we desire to do and to achieve. Knowledge of ends, on the other hand, will consist in a knowledge of the ultimate or essential nature of things. The proper end of moral conduct will be revealed in a knowledge of the true nature of man. The end to be pursued in politics will be discovered in a knowledge of the nature of government and society. The proper end in education is to be determined by answering the question of what education is. And so on. Each of these inquiries will result in a knowledge of the ultimate nature of

things and from this we may derive certain courses of action and general principles governing that action. Still, all this will not, by itself, ensure concrete and satisfactory activity, for we shall have to combine this knowledge of ends and principles with a hard won practical skill. As the author of the Magna Moralia says:

> We must therefore, as it seems, first say about virture what it is and from what it comes. For it is perhaps no use to know virtue without understanding how or from what it is to arise. We must not limit our inquiries to knowing what it is, but extend it to how it is to be produced. For we wish not only to know but also ourselves to be such. [1]

This twofold scheme of things encompasses and relates, rather neatly, two quite different sides to most of the activities with which we are familiar. In education, for example, we train our teachers in the philosophy of education and this, according to the commonplace model, is in order that they may know the end towards which their teaching is aimed. At the same time we train them in the practical business of conducting a class, in the technique of teaching, so that they may be able to realize that end. Again, in politics and morality, the conduct of a moral life begins with a consideration of the various philosophies (what I am calling ideologies) which the great thinkers and writers of our civilisation have devised and developed, and it is a study something

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1. This work has been attributed to Aristotle, but is now thought to have been written by one of his students. I quote from the Works of Aristotle translated into English, Vol IX. Magna Moralia trans. St G Stock, Oxford 1915, 1182a.

like this that, very often, the layman expects to find in a University philosophy course.

It should not be thought that the formulation of an ideology is a once and for all affair. The consideration of the proper end of man and of society, in short meditation upon 'God, the human mind and the summum bonum', is a life-time's undertaking, and nothing less, it is sometimes said, than the pursuit of wisdom. Nevertheless, the principles and ends of such activities as we engage in must be, in some sense, prior to actual engagement in those activities. And the business of implementing those aims, of putting into practice the ideals which our reflections have led us to pursue, is the business of practical activity. We can clearly distinguish, or so it will be said by those who advance some such view as this, between the practical politician whose task is to bring about, as best he can, the aims of his party and to reject what may be desirable on the grounds that it is impracticable, from the 'uninterested theorist' who determines the ends to be purused and rejects what may be practicable on the grounds that it is not desirable.

The first main feature of the commonplace model then, is that it holds the ends and the means of activity to be distinct, though both are necessary to concrete and satisfactory endeavour. "Peel", Hugh Cecil tells us,

> .. was an example of the mistake of supposing that even the highest practical abilities are sufficient, without philosophic insight, to

save a politician from error.[1]

2. As it is at the level of ends and ideals that the ideologist's role, very often by his own account, is to be understood, it is worth exploring the characteristics of this level a little further. First, since in order to prompt actual activity the end or ideal for that activity must be desired rather than merely thought, the task of reflective thinking is to discern or determine the reasonableness or as some prefer, the rationality, of the various ends that are desired. Ideological reflection, on this view, undertakes a, literally, dispassionate scrutiny of the possible ends and aims which we might and do desire. The outcome of such scrutiny is a knowledge of the true nature of, say, man, government, education, and a set of principles of action by which our conduct may be guided to the realization of that nature. For only in the light of such knowledge can the rationality of our various desires be discovered and demonstrated. These 'theories' of man or the state or justice are the outcome of the exercise of reason, and they are, within limits, verifiable and falsifiable. The principles which we determine in their light stand to activity as a guide, for as contingent circumstances change, the principles in which we believe enable us to steer a consistent path, and, through the miasma of chance and change, to pursue unfailingly those goals which reason has shown to be right. Secondly, it is the general cultural and intellectual milieu in which

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1 Hugh Cecil, Lord Quickswood: Conservatism London 1912, p.68

such reflection must take place and such theories be tested. Just as the point of a technical education is the provenance of technique, so the point of a general education in the humanities lies in that, whether we become 'so called sceptics or agnostics or free-thinkers', we may yet be 'able reverent men, true thinkers sincere lovers of and earnest inquirers after truth'.[1]

Thirdly, since it is obvious that not all men are inclined to reflections of the kind in which we are interested, and since many of those who do not so reflect are nevertheless of one ideology, one persuasion or another, the theorist examines and determines ideals which are taken up by men other than himself. He gives, if you like, a lead in the formulation and examination of doctrines which are not peculiarly his and which will have and are intended to have their primary signifi-

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1 The words quoted are from the will of Lord Gifford by which he set up the subsequently famous Gifford Lectures. Gifford, I fancy, thought very much upon the lines of the commonplace model as, I think the whole intention of the lectures and this passage from his will show.

> "I have for many years been deeply and firmly convinced that true knowledge of God ... and the true and felt knowledge (not mere nominal knowledge) of the relations of man and of the universe to Him, and the true foundation of all ethics and morals, being, I say, convinced that this knowledge when really felt and acted upon, is the measure of man's highest well-being and the security of his upward progress, I have resolved to institute and found ... classes for the study of the said subjects and for the teaching and diffusion of sound views regarding them."

Edinburgh Univ. Calendar 1888-89

cance outside his 'closets or lonely walks'.

It is sometimes suggested that, at the social level, universities and institutions of higher education have this role. They are, it is said, the proper place for theoretical and disinterested debate of this kind, for there, out of the confusion created by passion, minds skilled in reasoned argument can determine the appropriate end of all our public endeavours, and many research projects have been funded with this idea in mind. I am not however going to consider this particular ramification of the commonplace model, but I think that if what I shall say is correct, it calls for some modification of this suggestion no less than of the major theses which I shall examine in more detail.

This, then, completes my elaboration of, as I think, a common and plausible model of ideology and activity, and I shall now show, if I can, that on three different counts this view of the matter is incoherent.

II

1. The first major feature of the picture I have presented lies in its assuming that ideological reflection involves much the same sort of thinking as philosophy, that is, that we can sensibly speak of a relatively uniform kind of rational scrutiny which may dispassionately discuss the wideranging and disparate doctrines presented in the writings and reflections of the large number of authors who can be

described as ideologists.[1] In other words, it is supposed that to learn to engage in philosophy in the layman's sense, is to acquire the ability to think rationally and critically and thereby to assess the merits and demerits of the various ideas of, for example, Conservative, Liberal and Socialist writers. I shall begin my rejection of the model by examining three actual examples of such writing. The books I have in mind were commissioned by the Home University Library around the turn of this century and are Conservatism by Hugh Cecil, Liberalism by L T Hobhouse and The Socialist Movement by Ramsay MacDonald. These works were intended as the self-conscious elaborations of their respective ideologies by three widely recognised exponents, and, as the name of the series suggests, they were designed to enable the reader to consider rationally which, if any, of the three ideological doctrines could withstand critical examination. For my purposes, the fact that they were all written about the same time and with the same intention will enable me to avoid any questions of historical specificity, questions which would in any case, I think, be peripheral.

2. In Liberalism Hobhouse, by drawing distinctions of a sort familiar to political philosophers, attempts to discern, to elaborate and establish the proper end of government and politics. In Socialist Movement Ramsay MacDonald, by the citation of historical fact and

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1 This, of course, was the original notion of 'ideology' advanced by Destutt de Tracy, in his Elémens d'Ideologie (Paris, 1804), namely a science of ideas.

social statistics, tries to determine the historical stage of development of present day (1910) society in order to decide which political goals are dictated by the times. In Conservatism Hugh Cecil articulates certain attitudes and principles and presents a defence of these in terms of an appeal to religious orthodoxy and the English moral and political tradition. For Hobhouse the test of truth is coherence, for MacDonald it is the facts of history, for Cecil it is the Gospels. Hobhouse is establishing ends, MacDonald detecting a process, Cecil defending an attitude and, perhaps, a way of life. Viewed in this, let us say empirical, manner the claim that such writers as these are engaged in the same form of inquiry is nonsense, for neither the aims, nor the methods of argument, nor the kind of evidence deemed appropriate, is shared. For MacDonald, both Hobhouse's logical distinctions and Cecil's appeal to the Gospels are 'unscientific' ways of proceeding, by which I take him to mean that he finds only arguments based on fact and statistics to be cogent arguments. Now I do not mean to wonder whether this is indeed so, but I want to say that where the grounds and manner of argument are open to question and where, in consequence, the kind of argument and evidence advanced changes with each writer (and in fact such a change is characteristic of most disputes between ideologists of different persuasions) then the opposition represented by the writers cannot be the same sort of opposition as that which arises between competing philosophical theses or competing historical narratives. To suggest otherwise would be like suggesting that one historian could reject or correct the accounts of another by introducing, not different

evidence, but evidence of a categorially different kind.

Of course, I do not wish to claim that these writers are not engaged in something of the same sort; that when they believe themselves to be opposed they are mistaken. Indeed it is crucial to my argument that this is a paradigm case of a controversy between ideologists of different persuasions. But because this is so, and because their reasoning is of the kind it is, I want to claim that, whatever arena they are all a part of, it is not the arena of an intellectual discipline. For if we are to speak of their being opposed, the context in which they are opposed cannot be one in which the mode of reasoning is of paramount importance. It is in fact precisely in the character of their modes of reasoning that the differences between them emerge. It is precisely because Cecil appeals to religious truth and political tradition that his identity as a Conservative is clear and because MacDonald demands a 'scientific' reasoning, a reasoning based on hard fact, that he is clearly a Socialist of a certain sort. And where there are differing canons of reasoning, different criteria of what is to count as evidence and what is to count as a cogent argument, we cannot sensibly speak as though the controversy took place within the confines of an intellectual discipline.

The force of this can be brought out by contrasting ideology with philosophy in what I have called the professional sense. When we do philosophy we engage in a distinctive intellectual activity. I mean to say that we reason, argue, object according to certain rules and criteria of reasoning and these rules and criteria determine what is to

count as a valid argument, entailment, objection. The same is true of history and of science. Now the observation of these canons of reasoning is a necessary condition of our thinking and arguing being philosophical at all. A philosopher may, I think, safely disregard matters of empirical or contingent fact; his concern is not with fact but with logic.[1] If he is challenged, therefore, and the objection is that he has disregarded the facts on some matter, the objection will not be a philosophical one. On the other hand, if a man does not agree that a proven contradiction in his argument is a flaw and invalidates the conclusion (at least when based on this argument), then he simply ceases to do philosophy. For in ignoring the canons of reasoning which constitute the activity of philosophising, he ceases to engage in that activity, just as the man who ignores the rules of chess, though he may still move the pieces around, is no longer playing chess.

3. Science and history and philosophy are intellectual activities, so that the rules governing the legitimate and illegitimate exercise of the intelligence are of paramount importance. To do philosophy just is to think in a certain way, and what we may hope to achieve, the establishment, refutation or clarification of some point of view, is a significant achievement in terms of those constitutive rules of reasoning.

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1 This sharp divide between fact and logic may be contentious. Here however, it merely serves as an illustration of a possible piece of philosophical reasoning. As it happens, such a distinction can, I think, be maintained.

Philosophy, if you like, is a sphere of its own, for the rules of philosophy both make it what it is and determine what is to count as problematic and what is to count as a successful resolution of the problematic.

The ideologist, in contrast, when he writes and reflects ideologically wishes to say something significant in a realm which includes more than his thinking and writing, namely the whole realm of the actual conduct of moral and political life. If what he says is to have any impact, he must seek not so much to prove as to convince, his reflections must have cogency rather than the completeness we might expect of a mathematical theorem. For at least part of the measure of their success will lie in these writings having or failing to have some influence on the lives of those who read them. I do not mean that in ideology whatever is acceptable to the majority is right. I mean to say that, if a work of reflection which is supposed to help and to influence the conduct of practical life, has no impact upon that life at all, this must, to some degree, be a measure of its failure. If this were not so, if the ideologist were to confess that what he had to say was only of importance in a theoretical realm, that his reflections do and must leave the world of moral and political relations unaffected, we should rightly lose interest in anything he said.

It is, I am suggesting, in the political and moral (in general the practical) world that ideologists debate and dispute, recognise friends and enemies. And what makes them ideologists is not the kind of proposition, argument, evidence that they present, but the fact

that, whatever political or moral persuasion they may belong to, they choose to articulate that persuasion in the form of treatises and arguments, in general by verbal exposition.

In short, while one man may give expression to his political and moral sentiments in a purely practical manner and another in the attitudes which inform day-to-day conduct, the ideologist chooses reflection as his medium. This means that ideologists are 'doing the same thing' in a different sense to that in which philosophers are 'doing the same thing'. When philosophers argue one with another there is nothing other than philosophy which they can be said to be doing. When political party agents organise on behalf of their respective parties under one description their efforts are in opposition, and under another they are engaged in the same activity. The ideologist's endeavour, I want to say, is in this respect more like the party agent's than it is like the philosopher's.

What I am trying to dispel here is a part of the commonplace view of ideology which would have us believe that ideologists when they dispute and discuss do so in the context of a unifying discipline of intellectual inquiry. I have argued that it is in fact possible for us to talk of ideological disagreement and controversy in an instance where the kinds of argument advanced by the participants are manifestly different. Though such a difference would mean the instant demise of any intellectual discipline, it will, I think, be found to be characteristic of arguments between ideologists of different persuasions. The upshot of all this is that, if ideologists of differing ethical traditions are not all part of a single, unified intellectual inquiry, it cannot be the case that their task or role in practical life is to test and to try political and moral

ideas on what MacDonald calls the 'anvil of reason', for there is no necessarily shared standard of what is to count as a good reason or a bad. The element of dispute and debate arises, then, not from the conflict of theses within a single mode of argument, but out of the competition between the various political and moral persuasions to which the writers belong and of which their writings are one form of expression. It cannot be that their writings are, or could be, a means of settling the differences between them. Taken together they give those differences and that competition an articulate and reflective form. We must abandon, therefore, the rather naïve view that ideological reflections such as these are presented in some vast arena of intellectual scrutiny and are there tested against some unitary Reason.

III

1. Someone might assent to all this but maintain that, though the commonplace model requires minor modification the basic structure remains intact. He might say that whilst it is true that liberal, conservative and socialist writers and theorists do not combine in any significant manner to generate a discipline of political theory which could establish the proper end for politics as a whole, the theorists of particular persuasions do stand in this relation to the practitioners and adherents of those persuasions. Thus, a theorist like John Stuart Mill does not determine the proper end for political activity but for liberals in politics. In other words, the distinction between ends and means, aims and methods, the desirable and the practicable remains an accurate account of the relationship between, for example, liberal philosophy or ideology and liberal

policy and practice. In order to examine this modified version it is necessary now to consider more closely the distinction between means and ends.

2. First, it can be safely said, I think, that the notion of 'end' here cannot be that of formal cause. If anything is the natural end of anything else, as it is sometimes said that the oak-tree is the natural end of the acorn, and if this is understood to be, in some way, an end or function determined by the natural order of things, then the end of things in this sense cannot be of interest to action. The fact that 'X is the natural end of Y' no more invites, prescribes nor is altered by any human action, than does the fact that 'X is a natural property of Y'. The realm of nature is, in its nature, unalterable. No end in this sense can provide scope for human activity, and cannot therefore provide the kind of end which ideologists are said to discuss and consider, for the ends which concern them are ends for activity, moral, political or of some other sort.

The ends in which it is said the ideologist is interested, then, must be ends in some such sense as aim or objective or aspiration. Now it cannot be the case that the theorist's task is to establish objectives as objectives for all the other non-theorists who share his ideological adherence. For any man's objective must be his, if it is to be the motive force of his action and, though ideological argument may persuade him to adopt some particular cause as his objective, it is his adoption and not the argument which makes that cause the aim of his activity. In other words, objectives are the sorts of thing we have and share and we cannot by thought or reason alone establish something as an objective in advance of its being adopted as such.

Reason or reflection, the reflection in which the ideologist engages, if it is to have any role at all in the matter, must, on the strength

of the argument so far, come as a preliminary to the selection of this rather than that as an objective. It is, then, the quality of the various possible objectives which present themselves and not their character as objectives which is the province of the ideologist. It is the question of their desirability, rationality, legitimacy or worth. Now in order to assess the worth of a thing we need accepted standard criteria of worthiness. The burden of my earlier argument was that political and moral theorists *per se* have no shared criteria that would make such judgments possible. If they do pass judgment it cannot be on the basis of their being ideologists but in their capacity as Marxists, liberals or whatever.

3. It is at this point, it will be said, that the proposed modification of the commonplace model is pertinent. The liberal theorist, for example, tests for desirability, rationality and legitimacy the proposed policies of liberal politicans in the light of liberal doctrine and principles. His task is to discern which amongst those proposed policies are indeed liberal. He thinks and he writes, it will be said, within the context and the confines of a tradition of moral notions and political doctrine and his intellectual training gives him greater access to the body of literature which enshrines the informing principles of that tradition.

Now there seems to me to be much[1] in this view of things, and I shall later give reasons of my own for thinking that we can only sensibly speak of reflection *within* one ideology and not *between* ideologies. But as it stands it requires further modification and this modification will show, I think, that in discussing the relation between ideological belief and political or moral activity, talk of ends and mean will not help and

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1 What 'much' there is I try to bring out in Chapters 7 and 8.

may mislead.

The suggestion we have just considered regards the theorist as rather like the conscience of the party, but something more besides. He is the ethical leader of his party as well as being its conscience, for his task is to set out the true ideals to which it is committed. His acquaintanceship with and ability to develop the doctrinal basis of the party is the form of his determination of policy. Now I do not think that we can sensibly speak as though the determination of policy were the province of the ideologist alone, even though we admit that he brings to the question of practical activity, considerations that are peculiar to him. And I think this can be shown in the following way.

Let us suppose that a measure or policy 'X' is advanced by a liberal politician; it is considered by the theorist; it is declared by him to be properly liberal or not so. Suppose that the theorist determines in the light of his knowledge of liberal doctrine, that the proposed measure is not truly liberal. Two things must happen before the measure will actually cease to be among the advertised policies of the liberal party. First, his view that this measure is not truly liberal must stand up to the scrutiny of other liberal theorists in order to become the prevailing view. This is a consequence of the debate between theorists. Secondly, the measure must be rejected by a vote of the annual conference of the party, or whatever the appropriate policy-making body may be. This follows as a consequence of a debate and vote among all (relevant) party members, theorists and non-theorists alike. Now the second debate is <u>ended</u> and the question <u>decided</u> by the procedure of voting. In the first debate the attempt is to <u>conclude</u> the discussion by reaching a reasonable and appropriate opinion on the question in hand. A reason for accepting the proposition that "'X' is not compatible with liberal doctrine' will be a

reason for concluding, therefore, while a reason for rejecting 'X' as a liberal policy will be a reason for voting. Now, the view that 'X' is not compatible with liberal doctrine may be <u>one</u> reason for voting against 'X' but it will not necessarily be the only reason. In other words, a conclusive argument that 'X' is incompatible with traditional liberal doctrine is not a sufficient and necessary condition of 'X's being rejected as liberal policy. The fact that it is incompatible is not the only reason that may (reasonably) operate.

Suppose now that the measure 'X' held by all liberal theorists to be incompatible with liberal doctrine is accepted by the appropriate body as party policy. Suppose, indeed, that several such policies are accepted. Are we to conclude that in so doing the liberal party has ceased to be liberal and its members, other than the theorists, have ceased to be liberals? I think that we are forced to conclude in this way if we accept the commonplace model, even in this modified form. To accept that liberal theorists are sole determiners of the true aims of liberals is to allow the possibility of a divorce between those who determine and those for whom the aims are determined. But such a divorce, as in the example given here, may arise out of a dispute between theorists and party as to which aims and policies should be pursued. The initial account led us to believe that theorists determined the ends for non-theorists. This must be mistaken, for it is possible, as in the example given, for a party positively to reject the aims determined for them by the theorists, and yet remain the same party. The mistake of the model lies in supposing that theoretical considerations can <u>determine</u> or <u>decide</u> an issue. In fact, it is and must be a <u>procedure</u> which determines, some procedure like a vote. When questions of aims and ends are under dispute, ideological considerations

may always be pertinent and are perhaps the most important kind of consideration. We shall have to inquire into these questions in due course. The point I want to make here is just that doctrinal considerations are only <u>one</u> kind of consideration and furthermore are not the sorts of things which can decide or determine the issue, though they may help us on the question of which way to decide (that is, in this case, to vote).

On the modified version of the model it was suggested that only those aims which liberal theorists could endorse could really be called liberal. But this is not so. If there is a division of opinion between the theorists and non-theorists of a party over which policies to adopt and which to reject, it is mere prejudice to suppose that the term liberal truly attaches only to the opinion of the theorists. For liberalism is as much embodied in what practising liberals do and have done as in what liberal theorists say and have said. If this were not so we would have no grounds, indeed no way, of calling someone a liberal who was not a theorist of some sort. One aspect of being a liberal (or a conservative, socialist, nationalist) is the assertion of certain doctrines, but if these doctrines were not related in some way to characteristic attitudes and actions which are not themselves doctrines, it is difficult to know in what sense one could <u>be</u> a liberal, or whatever, as opposed to merely assenting to this and to that proposition. I shall elaborate on this point at a later stage.

In short, the commonplace model of the relation between

ideological reflection and actual conduct, between the ideologist and the adherent of some ideological persuasion ends up by arguing either that there are only ideologists in every tradition, in which case it cannot offer an account of the relationship between them and some other members of the same tradition, or by arguing that ideologists are the determiners of ends for those who, notwithstanding, are able to determine their own aims and objectives.

4. The incoherence in the commonplace account springs, I think, from supposing that ideologies consist in doctrines, so that ideological identity (what someone is ideologically) is essentially a matter of doctrinal purity. It supposes, in this way, that the character and identity of a man's reflections can be determined by the content of those reflections themselves.[1] This is not so. If ideological reflections are to have any weight in a world of practical endeavour they must, so to speak, come with practical significance in them, that is, in a language that is already practically significant, and cannot bestow practical significance upon themselves by the strength of their own reasoning. In other words, the degree to which the existence of some unmistakably liberal actions and attitudes is necessary to the reflections of a liberal having sense and significance is no less great, and may be more so, than the degree to which the existence of some reflec-

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1 I have heard advanced the, to me preposterous, claim that, on the basis of his 'philosophy', Engels was 'really' a conservative.

tive literature is necessary to the continued identifiability of those acts and attitudes. I want to say that liberalism, socialism, conservatism, nationalism, are all traditions of belief and practice and not traditions of belief, continually being put into practice. The reflections of ideologists, if they have any role to play, must be understood to be a part of the general life of an ideological tradition and not the initiator of that life.

IV

1. We have, I hope, now seen some reason to doubt the view first, that ideological reflection is reflection within some unified discipline of rational or intellectual scrutiny, and secondly, that the significance of such reflection lies in its being the necessary initiator or determiner of political and moral conduct. It is true that these two suggestions form the major part of what I have called the commonplace model of ideology and that with their rejection the model must, I think, be seen to fail as a possible understanding of the nature of ideology. Nevertheless, there is a third feature of this model which can be explored to some point and this is its use of the notion of principle.

As I elaborated it, the commonplace model held that not only did ideological reflection result in a true knowledge of the ends of activity, but also in a knowledge of the principles of action con-

ducive to the realisation of those ends. The principles are, I think, thought of as entering into moral and political conduct in the following fashion. I encounter a situation A, which falls under the scope of a general principle or maxim of the form 'Whenever A do B' or 'All A's should B', and I act according to the principle to which I subscribe. In this way moral and political principles guide moral and political conduct. Morality and political belief consists, then, in a stock of such principles, and to act rationally is to act in a manner consistent with the principles one holds and to hold consistent or compatible principles.[1]

2. I have two principle objections to this view of moral and political belief. In the first place, if we understand a man's moral beliefs to consist in a stock of principles and those principles to be related to action in the manner suggested, we cannot at the same time make the claim that an ideology (moral or political) consists in propositions about ends rather than means. For it turns out, upon examination, that if part of the outcome of reflecting on ideological questions is the development of a set of principles, ideological reflection is in part concerned with the discovery of means to the realisation of an end. This point can be brought out in the following way.

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1 It seems to me that this is a view very like that of R M Hare but I do not claim to be offering a critical examination of Hare's moral philosophy here.

If ideological reflection leads us to the belief that, say, government is all about the 'uncovering of civil liberties',[1] and that a worthwhile political life, a life that is not and has not been a waste of time, will have been spent in doing just that, then the general political principle 'All genuine claims to civil rights should be supported' will be a <u>means</u> to securing a worthwhile life of political activity. I shall, later in the thesis, offer an alternative version of the relation between belief and action, but at this point I am concerned only to point out that if we were to accept this notion of principle and this manner of deriving principles as being an adequate representation of moral and political belief and reflection, we could not advance a general model of ideology and action couched in terms of ends and means. For it seems that principles, if they are to be the sort of thing in which moral belief, at least in part, consists, and if they are to be the sorts of thing which guide action must both be derived from thinking about ends and, at the same time, chiefly important as knowledge of the means of realising these ends. In short, the manner of arriving at means to any moral or political ends is part and parcel of, and not distinct from, the manner of determining those ends. In fact this holds good generally.

Both the ends and the aims of our activities only make sense, are only intelligible as ends and as means, in the context of <u>ongoing</u>

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1 The phrase in Hobhouse's.

activity.

> Activity springing from and governed by an independently premeditated purpose is impossible; the power of premeditating purpose, of formulating rules of conduct and standards of behaviour in advance of the conduct and activity itself is not available to us. [1]

One of the mistakes made by those who advance a model like that we have been considering is that they suppose such a division to be possible, that ends are intelligible as ends independently of the context of the activity for which they are supposed to be the ends. But in any event what I have tried to indicate here is that, however that may be, the commonplace model, at least as I have elaborated it, is incoherent on this matter of means and ends.

3. My second objection is this. The way in which principles are said to be related to action presents moral belief as, in some sense, a guide of well tried rules which will help us over the various obstacles which contingent factors present, ignores the possibility of those principles themselves creating obstacles and difficulties. It is supposed that most moral difficulties consist in not knowing what to do next and that a set of moral principles supplies a general rule of the form 'In circumstance A do B'. This may, on occasions,

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1 Michael Oakeshott: 'Rational Conduct' in Rationalism in Politics London, 1962, p. 100

In his book On Human Conduct Oakeshott expresses the same point rather more succintly 'Of course, description in terms of means and ends is not senseless, but its conditionality (means may become ends and ends means) is such as to make it theoretically worthless' Loc cit, p.40.

be so, but it is not always so, as the following example will show.

Imagine that a policeman discovers that one of his friends has broken the law in some respect. Let us suppose further that it is in his power to cover up the crime, or at least to fail to prosecute. What is such a man to do? On the one hand he thinks that his duty both to the public at large and to his fellow policemen in particular demands that he enforce the law, regardless of who the law-broaker may be. On the other hand, he sees that one must have a special loyalty to friends and this entails an obligation to assist them in particularly difficult circumstances. Such a man might conceive of his difficulty as a conflict of principle, for he subscribes both to the view that one must 'Always do one's duty in law' and that one must 'Be loyal to friends in all things'. In short, his difficulty cannot be overcome by appeal to his moral principles, for it is those very principles themselves which are in conflict.

Someone might say: "Oh but it was said that as well as acting consistently with one's principles, one must also hold consistent principles". Consistent in what sense, though? There is no <u>logical</u> inconsistency between the principles 'Always do your duty in law' and 'Be loyal to friends in all things'. It is <u>contingent circumstances</u> which have brought about the conflict between the two. How then are such principles supposed to help us over the contingent circumstances? No rational consideration of the stock of principles to which we subscribe, in advance of particular circumstances, can serve to eliminate the difficulties which circumstances themselves contrive. It must be,

therefore, that if there is to be any resolution of the problem[1], the reasons we may have for holding to one principle and, at least temporarily abandoning the other, spring from the particularity of the circumstances; that it is <u>this</u> friend who is involved rather than another.

It is sometimes suggested that the business of moral reflection just is the business of arranging our principles in order of importance so that we may minimise occasions of the sort envisaged here. But I cannot see that such an ordering could be anything but arbitrary. When such principles as those I have selected for my illustration are not in conflict, as in general they are not, there is nothing to choose between them.[2] And an act of will, a determination to stand for this rather than that, will not do the trick, for when these favoured principles are brought into conflict by particular circumstances the difficulty, if it is affected at all, will be compounded. It is only the facts of some particular situation which could possibly offer any reason for holding to this and abandoning that.[3]

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1 I do not say that there <u>must</u> be some satisfactory solution. Some moral dilemmas are dilemmas just in this, that whatever we do, it will be wrong.

2 Idealist philosophers, for example, Bradley or Green, might argue that in the case I have chosen there was a <u>misapplication</u> of principle, I am not concerned with this objection here, however, since it leaves unaffected the major point that moral principles may create rather than resolve moral difficulties.

3 This is not, however, a version of the currently popular 'situation ethics'.

The general point is that moral beliefs, which we may formulate in principles, far from acting as a helpful guide through externally created and presented circumstances, make those circumstances what they are morally. Moral and political difficulties are constituted rather than resolved by the moral and political beliefs we hold. It cannot be, then, that moral and political beliefs are related to activity in quite the way suggested by the commonplace model.

V

I have rejected the commonplace model on three counts. First, reflection of this sort could not arise in the context of a unified discipline of thought; secondly, the relationship between the ideologists and the adherents of any particular persuasion cannot be thought of as that between the determiners of ends and the implementers of ends determined; thirdly, if the link between ideological reflection and actual conduct is supposed to be made by the formulation of principles, this requires the dichotomy between means and ends to be abandoned and further, that if such principles are to be part of moral and political life and related to the conduct of that life, they must be understood to be part of its fabric and not an external or independent guide.

It might be suggested that I have set my arguments against straw men; that no one has ever advanced views of the sort that I have been rejecting. It is true that no one writer (of my acquaintance) has

explicitly espoused the commonplace model as I have elaborated it. Nevertheless it is, as I think, a plausible one and its plausibility in part derives from the large number of writers who have written as if the model, or something very like it, were an accurate understanding of the matter. My intention has been to dispel a perversive view of ideology which is none the less pervasive because it is implicit rather than explicit in many famous and popular writers.

The errors which I have claimed to detect spring, I think, from a failure, in Pascal's words, 'to understand the force of reason'. Pure reason cannot initiate, nor can it constitute, nor, by itself, can it sustain a moral or political life, any more than, pace Descartes, a world of fact and sensation can be based upon pure and indubitable thoughts. The man who will not enjoy any aspect of his moral or political life which cannot in some sense be tested on the 'anvil of reason' is not a man with a purified ethical life, but a man with no ethical life at all.

In contrast, pure reason is, I think, the sole and moving principle in philosophy, for philosophy is just the business of thinking that which can sensibly be thought. And, in general, we can assign a place to reason and reasoning in theoretical understanding which it cannot hope to have in practical understanding. I shall elaborate the categorial distinction between the worlds of theory and of practice at later points in the thesis. Here I have been concerned simply to arrive at certain negative conclusions, in general the conclusion that, whatever ideological reflection might look like, it cannot look like the the picture which the commonplace model presents.

CHAPTER 3

Ideology and Scepticism

"The same principles which at first view lead to scepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense."

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The gist of my argument against the commonplace account was that it overestimated the place that reason and reflection could play in the conduct of moral and political life, or even in the life of an ideological persuasion. Someone might claim now that in fact I have baulked at the logical extension of my arguments and have stopped short of admitting that there really is no place for reason and reflection in political and moral matters, or more properly, that the reason that is involved has nothing to do with any theoretical or pseudo-theoretical reflection. Such a claim is itself a recognisable philosophical position, that of the sceptic.

In this chapter, I shall be concerned to reveal the mistake of embracing a general scepticism about ideological understanding and reflection, a mistake that is easily made once the over-confident Rationalism of the view we have just been considering has been exposed. Scepticism of course may spring from different sources and take different forms. The sceptical accounts of ideology I want to examine are three in number, but I shall conflate the first two of these since they seem to me substantially of the same sort and open to the same kind of objection. These first two combine to form a view of ideological reflection which derives chiefly from the Marxist and Freudian notions of 'false-consciousness' and 'rationalisation'. Again it seems best to introduce them with two well-known quotations.

I

1. In his famous letter to Mehring, Engels writes:

> The derivation of political, juridical and ideological notions ... is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously indeed, but with a false-consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. [1]

And in a similar vein Freud says that such ideas:

> which are given out as teaching are not the precipitates of experience or the end results of thinking; they are illusions, fulfillment of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. [2]

The first sceptical account of ideology which I wish to examine, then, is the view that ideological reflection is a rationalising form of speculation which is thrown up by the force of motives unknown to the writer. The model or picture which underlies and informs this suggestion goes something like this:

2. In our day-to-day lives we are moved to act as we do by our impulses and desires. We desire X and therefore we pursue X. Much of the conflict in practical life is created not by contradictory or opposed opinion but by incompatible desires. The appearance that such arguments often have of being conflicts over truth is mere appearance,

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1 Engels to Mehring: Marx - Engels Selected Correspondence (ed) D Torr, London 1936

2 Freud: Future of an Illusion, trans. Robson-Scott, London 1962 p.26

for the welter of argument that surrounds political and moral disputes does not precede but follows the determination of courses of action. When, therefore, we are told by a man that he did A because B, where B is the expression of some political or moral theory, that man offers not an explanation of his behaviour but a post festum justification. It is not that he has thought out the view B and therefore acted in the manner A, but that, having done A, he, when questioned or criticised, has recourse to B. The role of ideological beliefs, then, is as a defense of what we actually want and do and not as an instigation of such wants and deeds. The theorist or speculative writer is not an initiator of movements and events, but an apologist for a given group of agents who do in fact act in a certain way and want certain things. Ideological theorising, we could say, on this view, is the business of putting a gloss upon interest and desire that would otherwise be naked.

We should, I think, be very familiar with this view of things for it is almost as common as that which I have called the commonplace model, and perhaps this is due to the extensive influence of Freud and Marx on our general cultural outlook. However, despite its considerable popularity and indeed plausibility, as a theory it need not detain us long. That it is riddled with confusion, or more accurately with ambiguity, since the exposition I have given is scarcely long enough to admit confusion, is, I hope, clear. I shall not therefore examine every difficulty inherent in it. In fact I wish only to examine one radical error which, I think, is of more general interest.

3. The question I have to ask is 'What kind of remarks are the

remarks that ideological belief is false-conscious belief and ideological reflection rationalisation?' I shall try to show that such remarks cannot be about the logic of ideology and that, if on the other hand we take them to be contingent observations on ideology, they are severely limited in scope and, indeed, in interest.

To make a remark about the logic of a proposition is at least to give some of the conditions under which it makes sense. If I say of the proposition "The square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides" that it is non-empirical, I indicate that the sense of the proposition is not to be found in that area of our language where we lay claim to matters of contingent fact, so that any scrutiny, however careful, of actual triangular objects would show that the proposition had not been understood. If, then, the claim that ideological propositions are rationalisations is to be a remark about their logic, a remark about the 'grammar' of such propositions, it must amount to a claim like 'The statements "All history is the history of class struggle" "The proper end of government is the uncovering of civil liberties" are rationalisations and any consideration of them as real or efficacious reasons[1] reveals a

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1 I drop the term 'false-consciousness' here because I do not understand what its contrast 'true-consciousness' would be, and because in general I think the terminology of reason and rationalisation is more familiar and easier to handle. In fact, there is not much difference, if any, between the two ways of talking, so that the omission does not amount to much.

failure to understand them'.

Now this seems very odd to me, for it has the thing, so to speak, the wrong way round. We cannot understand what it is for something to be a rationalisation unless we understand what it is for it to be a non-rationalisation. The idea that something is a rationalisation is dependent on the idea that it could have been the real reason. This requires that the same account must be able, on different occasions, to be 'real' reason and rationalisation. If, therefore, something is a rationalisation it could never be beside the point to inquire what it would be like as an efficacious reason. An example may help to make this clearer.

Consider the case of a man who opposes the policies of a Socialist party on the grounds that they threaten to impinge on the civil liberties of individuals. Suppose that someone doubts this and suggests that, really, he wants to avoid heavier taxation and that all his talk of civil liberties is a mere gloss upon his real motive, material interest. The crucial term here is 'doubts'. What is happening is that the man's sincerity is being doubted. But in order for this to happen there must be something which counts as sincerity and which is absent in this case. In other words, it must be possible for a man to talk of civil liberties in this context sincerely in order for him to do so insincerely. Therefore the reason itself, by its nature, cannot be sincere or insincere; it is the giving of it that can be these. Talk of rationalisation, then, cannot be the characterisation of a type of reason or a type of reasoning. It follows that

remarks about ideology as rationalisation cannot be remarks about the logical character of ideological belief. The reason for this, as I have already implied is that rationalisation, if it is anything,[1] is something we do and something we use statements to do. It has to do with the kind of act and not the kind of proposition involved. In short, though people may rationalise, beliefs cannot.

4. The view that ideology is rationalisation, then, if it is to say anything, must be a contingent claim, the claim that ideologists are rationalisers. Now there is nothing logically wrong with this claim. If there is any substance to the notion of rationalisation, it is the kind of thing that people can do and there is no reason why it could not be the case that those who have been and are well-known ideological writers were all involved in this kind of self-deception.

Nevertheless, though it may be clear that this could be the case, it is not at all obvious that it is in fact the case. In any event, neither Engels nor Freud, nor any of those who have advanced this view with enthusiasm, have actually produced the vast quantity of historical evidence which would be needed to support such a claim. Not only has this not been done, if indeed evidence on this scale is

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1 I have assumed throughout that 'rationalisation' is a coherent concept describing a genuine feature of our experience. I am not convinced that this is so. But my purpose is to draw out what an examination of this very common view can contribute to our final conclusions and the status and coherence of the concept does not affect this purpose.

available, but it should be observed that, since such a claim is a claim about the contingent facts of the past, there is no reason why someone in the future, or someone in the past hitherto undiscovered, should not formulate beliefs which were unmistakably ideological in character, and yet indulge in no rationalisation whatsoever.

No doubt I have pursued this last point beyond what was strictly necessary. Certainly I know of no one who has actually advanced the possible but audacious claim that all ideologists in the past have been rationalisers. Usually any claim such as this is modified and attenuated to the point where it is simply suggested that when people take to the business of articulating and reflecting upon what they believe in morals and politics, what follows, very often, is a piece of rationalisation and self-exoneration, and not least those who go in for moral and political reflection on a grand scale. This attenuated version has, no doubt, some truth in it, but as an historical assertion, an assertion about the contingent facts of the past, it makes no specific claim, and as we saw, it cannot be thought of as a claim about logic at all. If it is true that ideologists very often rationalise, it is no doubt true of many besides them and in saying this we have not said anything about ideologists or their work in particular.

5. This theory is now revealed for what it very often is, merely an attempt to throw doubt on the integrity of a certain sort of writer, and, as such, it scarcely merits the title 'theory'. Nevertheless, its investigation has had some interest, partly because this is, more or

less, the picture which lies behind the use of 'ideology' as a term of abuse, and partly because we are now clearer, perhaps, over what is involved in saying something about the logic of ideology.

II

1. The second sceptical view which I wish to examine, though it bears something of a resemblance to the rationalisation theory, is strictly a theory of the logic of ideology. It is the view elaborated by Professor Michael Oakeshott in his book Rationalism in Politics.[1] In brief, Oakeshott argues that ideologies stand in relation to practical life as abstractions from a concrete manner of conduct, and as a 'crib' to action for the inexperienced. Oakeshott tells us:

> It is supposed that a political ideology is the product of intellectual premeditation and that, because it is itself a body of principles not itself in debt to the activity of attending to the arrangements of a society, it is able to determine and guide the direction of that activity. If, however, we consider the character of a political ideology more closely, we find at once that this supposition is falsified. So far from a political ideology being the quasi-divine parent of political activity, it turns

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1 Some of the points of view advanced in this work are, as it seems to me, modified in Professor Oakeshott's latest book On Human Conduct. However, strictly speaking, I am not concerned with *his* view, but with the coherence of a set of arguments which appear in his earlier book.

out to be its earthly step-child. Instead of an independently premeditated scheme of ends to be pursued, it is a system of ideas abstracted from the manner in which people have been accustomed to go about their business of attending to the arrangements of their society. The pedigree of every political ideology shows it to be the creature, not of premeditation in advance of political activity, but of meditation upon a manner of politics. [1]

Consider Locke's Second Treatise of Civil Government, read in America and France in the eighteenth century as a statement of abstract principles to be put into practice, regarded there as a preface to political activity. But so far from being a preface, it has all the marks of a postscript, and its power to guide derived from its roots in actual political experience. Here, set down in abstract terms, is a brief conspectus of the manner in which Englishmen were accustomed to go about the business of attending to their arrangements - a brilliant abridgement of the political habits of Englishmen. [2]

On this reading then, the systems of abstract ideas we call ideologies are abstracts of some kind of concrete activity. [3]

As this last comment suggests, though Oakeshott has here been concerned with the political realm, this is not the only sphere in which we may find ideologies. The other realm which he discusses at length is that of morality and we shall have to consider some of his remarks in that context shortly. But first I want to draw attention to the place Oakeshott considers these ideologies to have in the conduct of practical affairs. They are, he tells us, cribs for the inexper-

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1 'Political Education' in Rationalism in Politics London 1962 pp.118-19

2 ibid, pp.120-121

3 ibid, p.119

ienced. For the man of little or no political experience, an ideology, which is a successful abridgement of a society's political habits, will give him some indication as to how to react to and act in the political situations with which circumstance confronts him. Compare cooking, where the man ignorant of cookery may have recourse to a book of recipes. Such recipes, however, are merely abstractions from someone else's actual experience in cookery and can never hope to replace the experience itself. Where perhaps the experience is in danger of being lost, such a crib may to a degree sustain it and translate it. But only in an abstract form. Our mastery of the principles of cookery cannot supply the mastery of the interpretation of those principles and only the latter can produce concrete and self-moved activity.

> It might be supposed that an ignorant man, some edible materials and a cookery book together comprise the necessities of a self-moved (or concrete) activity called cooking. But nothing is further from the truth. The cookery book is not an independently premeditated beginning from which cooking can spring; it is nothing more than an abstract of somebody's knowledge of how to cook: it is the step-child, not the parent of the activity. The book, in its turn, may help to set a man unto dressing a dinner, but if it were his sole guide he could never, in fact, begin: the book speaks only to those who know already the kind of thing to expect from it and consequently how to interpret it.[1]

The burden of Oakeshott's argument here seems to be that a political ideology is not an essential part of the activity of politics

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1 Ibid, p.119

being itself an abstraction from concrete activity. But it may play a role in activity. However, when it does so, it plays a subsidiary role to that of actual habitual conduct and not the essential directing part the ideologists often assume. This view does not quite square with what Oakeshott has to say elsewhere. In his essay on possible forms of moral life, he appears to argue that at least in morality ideology is essential. Here he suggests that only the moral life which mixes the forms of habitual behaviour with that of the reflective application of moral rules and the pursuit of moral ideals can be a reality. He goes on to suggest, indeed, that the ideological form, provided it does not dominate, lends to this moral life certain advantages which it would not otherwise enjoy.

> This mixed form of the moral life may be supposed to enjoy the advantages that spring from a reflective morality - the power to criticise, reform, and explain itself, and the power to propagate itself beyond the range of the custom of a society. It will enjoy also the appropriate intellectual confidence in its moral standards and purposes.....
> In short, this form of the morallife will offer to a society advantages similar to those of a religion which has taken to itself a theology (though not necessarily a popular theology) but without losing its character as a way of living. [1]

But this ambiguity as to the essential or inessential nature of ideology need not detain us at this point. For the primary question is whether, essential or not, Oakeshott's understanding of what

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1 'The Tower of Babel' Rationalism in Politics, p.70-71

ideology is will bear protracted scrutiny. To conduct such scrutiny we must, I think, examine the notion of abstraction.

2. Oakeshott describes ideology variously as 'abstracts from some kind of concrete activity', 'an abstract of somebody's knowledge how', 'abstracted from a customary manner', 'an abridgement of habits', 'an abbreviation of some manner of concrete activity', 'a traditional manner of attending to the arrangements of a society abridged into a doctrine of ends to be pursued'. Now all of these expressions are similar but such variety of terminology is almost certain to give rise to ambiguity about what exactly Oakeshott claims an ideology to be and what exactly it is related to. The words he uses are not synonymous. A habit, for example, is something that is done unconsciously, but something done nevertheless. Actions are habitual. In contrast, a manner is not an action at all, or even a series of actions, but a style in which actions are performed. Again, activity is a more general term than either of these and refers to the whole sphere of doing, encompassing conscious and unconscious behaviour and the manner in which that behaviour appears. Over against all of these is the knowledge how to do something, which is not activity at all but stands in an informing relation to and is made manifest in activity. Ideology, Oakeshott has told us, is an abstraction from some or all of these. Indeed, even here there is some ambiguity as to its being an abstraction or an abridgement and these terms are not synonymous. Since, then, all of these are different we might expect abridgements and abstractions from them to look different and we shall be inclined

to ask which, if any, of these is properly ideology on Oakeshott's account. But closer examination will reveal, I think, that we cannot abridge or abstract from them all, for not all of them are the sorts of things which admit of abstraction.

In fact, I think the term 'abridgement' must be abandoned altogether. An abridgement is nothing other than a shortened version of that which is abridged so that it cannot be different in <u>kind</u>. An abridged novel is still a novel, still, indeed, the very self-same novel by the same writer, but with some passages removed. In an abridgement there is no metamorphosis; the abridgement of a poem, say, does not result in a different poem but the same poem shortened. Abridgement, then, cannot characterise the relation between different things of different kinds.

Further, it should be clear from this that, though Oakeshott here and there suggests that such is the case, neither knowledge nor experience arethe sort of thing which could admit of abridgement. An experience is what it is and though one man may have less experience than another, what he has is not an abridged version of the first man's experience, but different experience. Experience is just whatever has been experienced and this cannot be shortened or lengthened. Neither can the knowledge we possess be abridged. If I do not know as much as another man I cannot have an abridgedversion of his knowledge. In order for this to be possible I should have to have known all that he knew and then have had that knowledge shortened, some parts of it removed. But how is this to be accomplished? And even if it were,

that is, even if it made sense to suppose that it could be, what would make my 'shortened' knowledge a shortened version of his? It seems, then, that we must abandon the term abridgement in our talk of ideology and focus our attention on the, perhaps more promising, term 'abstraction'.

3. An abstraction is something which is less complete and less concrete than that from which it is an abstraction. But like an abridgement, it must be the same sort of thing as its original. We may abstract the theme of a symphony and say 'It goes something like this _______' but what follows must be the same sort of thing as that from which it has been abstracted, in this case musical sounds. Again, the abstract of an argument is less complete than the original; there are many details omitted. It is less concrete, or we might say, not concrete at all, for, as it stands, we cannot logically arrive at the conclusion from the premises stated. But the abstract, like the original, consists in such things as premises and conclusion. The abstract of an argument cannot be represented in gestures any more than the abstract of a symphony can be given in pictures.

It follows from this that any abstraction from a concrete activity must itself be a piece of activity. And we can think of examples of this. We can demonstrate how something is done and when we do so we may omit much of the detail which would actually occur in the performance. We reduce a dance, for example, to a few simple steps. The demonstration is not concrete in that if we execute the steps outlined alone, we will not actually be dancing. But the point of such

a demonstration, like that of any abstraction, is to give someone 'an idea of the thing'.

It will be seen from this that, since by Oakeshott's account ideologies are the sorts of thing which may be written down, an ideology cannot actually be an abstraction from concrete activity, or from a manner, or from habits, since it is not itself any of these things. The best, indeed the only, candidate we are left with, then, is an abstraction from somebody's knowledge how to do something. But even this is not quite right. Rather, if we follow Oakeshott's characterisation, an ideology must be an abstraction from someone's account of their knowledge.

This can be seen more clearly if we keep two facts in mind. Though a man may know how to do something he may not be able to articulate that knowledge. A scientist must be able to reason scientifically and a brilliant scientist must be able to do so with excellence, but it would be wrong to expect even the brilliant scientist as such to be able to articulate the logic of science, and of course we know very well that often it is scientists who, when amongst philosophers, are least clear about the character of science. Again, a man may be an astute politician and have an intimate and detailed knowledge about how to set about doing things in the House of Commons and still it does not follow that he will be able to formulate the rules and conventions of the House, still less say anything about the nature of politics.

The knowledge of the scientist and the politician can only be revealed in doing and communicated by injunction. This is not to

say that knowing _is_ doing here. A man may very well know how something is done, but, for other purposes, keep his knowledge to himself. But, at least in this instance, the only vehicle for the expression of his knowledge will be in doing and in demonstration. The knowledge that is formulated in words, on the other hand, has speech as the vehicle of its expression and its articulation will take the form of a descriptive account. But again, the words and sentences do not constitute the knowledge itself, but are an account of that knowledge.

The view of ideology as abstraction, then, must be either the view that all _accounts_ of knowledge (B) are less concrete than any demonstration (A) of the same knowledge, or the view that some accounts (C) are abstracted from complete accounts (B). The first of these alternatives I have suggested does not make sense. B cannot be an abstraction from A since it is not the same sort of thing. That they stand in some relation, of course, I am not doubting, but this relation cannot be one of abstraction since this would involve deeds being abstracted into words, something which I have argued is impossible.

It must, then, be the case that any view of ideology as abstraction amounts to the view that,the set of propositions which comprise an ideology consists in less than a complete account of the rules governing behaviour and therefore lacks the concreteness which is necessary to enable. Thus, for example, the statement of a universal principle ,'Never do X' ,will exclude all the qualifications 'except when Y, Z, etc.', which are necessary if that principle is to

cohere with all the other rules operating in our social life. The formulation 'Never do X', then, will be an abstraction from the actual rules.

No doubt it will be suggested at this point, and perhaps with some justification, that all this detailed argument has left Oakeshott's theory quite unaffected. This is the theory that knowledge of the abstract principle can never satisfactorily replace knowledge of the actual operating rules. It cannot therefore provide the practical guidance which the latter would do and is, therefore, a less than satisfactory source or resource for activity. Now of course I am not arguing against the view that ideological thinking and writing cannot generate self-moved activity. Indeed, earlier my own arguments led me to a similar conclusion. The question therefore is about the place that such thinking and writing does have in activity and my argument is that talk of abstraction cannot help us here.

My objections to Oakeshott's account can, I think, be revealed explicitly be asking What sorts of things would an abstract account of this sort be an account of? Now the answer to this question must, at least in part, be the same as that to a similar question about the (theoretically possible) complete account of which the ideology is an abstraction. What could such an account consist in? It would, I suggest, have to reveal the formative and regulative rules, conventions and procedures which govern our actions in that sphere of practice with which the ideology is concerned. The only feasible[1] description of a way of

1 I do not say that such an account is actually possible. In fact, in Chapter 8 I give reasons for thinking that it is not. Here I merely want to argue that some such account is the only thing that could be abstracted from and that even if we assume the possibility of this, Oakeshott's talk of abstraction cannot be sustained.

life would be that which revealed the cohesive pattern among a multiplicity of various actions. And, since what pattern there is is the result of all these actions being observations of the same rules, the description would have to take the form of the revelation, perhaps detection, of those rules. We could not describe 'chess as such' except in the terms of the formative (constitutive) rules and general regulative rules observed by skilled chess players. An account at a simple observational level would consist in the description of individual movements and would not reveal what made them moves in chess.

An abstract account of such a reality, then, would be either a shortened list of the rules which actually pertain in a given practical context or a shortened formulation of the rules themselves. Oakeshott does seem to have something of this sort in mind when he refers to ideology as an abstract principle or set of related abstract principles, for by principle I understand a rule generalised out of a number of rules. Thus 'Never eat meat on Fridays' is an abstract formulation of the rules, conventions and beliefs which not only give that particular Catholic observation its point, but admit of its change, qualification and exception.

Someone might argue here that by Oakeshott's account we must understand all articulated formulations as abstract in this sense and though we may consider some more or less complete than others they are all, in comparison to the unformulated practical knowledge, abstract and incomplete. This suggestion has, I think, much in sympathy with Oakeshott's account and certainly it is a plausible one. But if my earlier argument is correct, we must reject it because of what it

entails. If all articulated accounts are of this character then all of them must be ideological. But ideologies, we have been told, are abstractions and to conflate all the accounts leaves us with nothing from which they could be abstractions.

The difference between knowledge articulated in words and unarticulated knowledge is not that the one is more or less complete than the other, but that the manner in which the same knowledge is conveyed is different. The question of the satisfactoriness or otherwise of a particular manner of conveyance as opposed to another is not a matter of its completeness. Knowledge of a particular dance may be conveyed by a demonstration of all the movements or just the principal movements, or by a diagram of all the movements or just the principal movements. The diagram is not less complete than the demonstration but simply a different means of teaching and learning the dance. Of course, we may prefer the demonstration as a heuristic method because the diagram requires interpretation and the demonstration does not. But such interpretation is not necessary because of its abstract character but because it is not itself a series of physical movements in space. As a diagram it may be quite complete. If it be said that some knowledge cannot be captured in a formulated phrase, that there are some things which cannot be said but must be shown, this is not to say that articulation can only convey them in an abstract form, but that articulation cannot convey them at all.

Perhaps these objections will be clearer if I put them in the context of an example. Consider the case of cookery again. The

cookery book, we have been told, is an abstraction from somebody's knowledge how to cook. Now I do not want to deny that an ignorant man, some edible materials and a cookery book are not sufficient for a self-moving activity. Indeed they may not be enough for any activity at all, for it is plain that, though we may know what is to be done next, we may not be able to do it; though we may know that here we are to crack two eggs, we may not have the dexterity to do it. But what I do deny is that the cookery book is an abstraction from someone's experience. A man who composes a recipe may write 'Add a pinch of mustard' because experience has taught him that this will bring out the flavour of beef. The injunction is a lesson from his experience and not an attempt, more or less satisfactory, to capture that experience. Experience is something we have had or have not had and though we may learn from the experience of others we do not do so by acquiring some attenuated form of their experience ourselves. And if we have never had someone else's experience we can never do anything that requires our having done it. Experience stands in relation to such injunctions as a test of their appropriateness and not as their content.

4. Let us apply all this to ideologies then. Ideologies, it has been said, are abstractions from a concrete activity. They are distillations of actual experience. This we have seen cannot be so. I do not deny that the appearance of an ideology's being pre-meditated in advance of any activity is mere appearance. But the advice, exhortations and prescriptions we proffer when we write ideologically are the results or lessons of experience and not more or less good accounts of

what that experience has been. They cannot therefore be a crib for the inexperienced, if by this we are to understand a substitute for the experience they have not had. There is, in this sense, no substitute for experience.

The impact of this argument upon Oakeshott's view can be revealed by considering again a passage I quoted earlier.

> So far from a political ideology being the quasi-divine parent of political activity, it turns out to be its earthly step-child. Instead of an independently pre-meditated scheme of ends to be pursued, it is a system of ideas abstracted from the manner in which people have been accustomed to go about the business of attending to the arrangements of their society. [1]

Now, if my argument is correct, we must conclude that ideologies are not systems of ideas abstracted from a customary manner, for there could, I have suggested, be nothing of this sort. Nevertheless this does not prevent us from agreeing with Oakeshott that one who understands ideologies to be the beginning of activity has got things the wrong way round, that his view is, literally, preposterous. We can also agree that talk of independent pre-meditation here is misconceived. Indeed I have argued in favour of both these claims already. But to say that ideologies <u>cannot</u> begin activity is itself a misconceived remark. Ideology is not the sort of thing that could prompt or fail to prompt activity, though, for example, conversion to an ideology could.

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1 Oakeshott, <u>op cit</u>, p.119

Ideological conceptions and reflections do not stand outside practical life in the sense of being a preliminary, coming before. But no more do they stand outside by coming after, as Oakeshott suggests, by being a postscript or a distillation. Along with other features, ideologies are part of the fabric of political and moral life and their relationship to those other features must be an internal one. Oakeshott, in fact, as I noted earlier, is ambiguous on this very point. For on the one hand he suggests that ideological belief and reflection must have an integral place in the form of any viable moral life, and on the other maintains that ideology has little or no place in politics. One part of my argument is that this ambiguity arises out of the ambiguity in his use of the term abstraction.

III

1. What is the value of showing this? First, I think that Oakeshott's is perhaps the only important philosophical conception of ideology to have been elaborated at length and, since the elaboration is complex and subtle, it is worth examining in detail. Secondly, I think that the objections I have made against it can be generalised in such a way as to bring out the two major arguments which this thesis seeks to advance, and which I shall present in greater detail at a later stage.

2. If we are agreed, as I think we must be, that the principal

significance of ideological conceptions and reflections must lie in the realm of conduct, that it is, if anything, a practical understanding that is supplied or enhanced by the ideological conceptions we come to employ and the ideological reflection in which we may from time to time engage, then we shall have to agree that their character is to be understood not so much in terms of the form of the propositions in which those conceptions are found or those reflections expressed[1] as in terms of the place they occupy or could occupy in the conduct of someone's life. This means that there is some room, in the form of ideological beliefs and the shape of ideological reflection, for a discrepancy between the superficial appearance of such propositions and what we might call their logical form, their actual character. One such instance of this is the case where what is said to be believed looks like an abstract aim or end in view, and which need not be anything of the sort. The following example, I think, will help to make this plainer.

If someone tells me that he intends to contest a coming election with the aim of entering Parliament, his aim is a concrete one. This is to say that his aim, being elected to Parliament, is one where what counts as success and what counts as failure is quite clear-

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1 The form of propositions will be crucial in, for example, history or science. The proposition 'Stalin did not die soon enough' is, because of its form, incapable of investigation by historians qua historians.

cut and determinate. If, by way of contrast, someone tells me that his aim is the uncovering of civil liberties, this aim is a highly abstract one. For though we can and do use the term 'civil liberties' in a fairly concrete way, it is not sufficiently clear and distinct[1] for us to be sure what would count as success in this endeavour and to know when the aim had been accomplished. In the first case the practical steps necessary for the attainment (though not the guarantee) of the aim are determinate; they are known and recognised. In the second case, within broad limits, a host of different actions may follow and we cannot be sure whether these are appropriate or not.

Now if it is supposed that this end, 'the uncovering of civil liberties' is to guide activity in the way that a purpose guides our actions, then it must make a very poor job of doing so. For, just because a host of different actions may reasonably follow, the chief function of a purpose, to enable us to select a certain course of action in preference to others, cannot be supplied. The abstractness of the aim prevents it. But we should be mistaken if we thought that all those expressions like 'the uncovering of civil liberties' were abstract aims. It need not be the case that when a man says 'My aim is liberty for all' that the notion of liberty stands in relation to

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1 This is not to suggest that the first thing to be done is to clarify or distinguish it, to define our terms. There is nothing 'wrong' with the term as it is.

his conduct as a rather cloudy and hopeless aim. If someone tells me that he will fight for liberty, I need not expect a specific set of actions to follow at all. For what he has revealed to me by speaking in this way is not the purpose or end of his actions but one of the values or norms by which the worth of his action is to be assessed. Liberty in this case is not the goal above all goals, the aim not of a day's or a month's but of a life-time's actions, but one of the values which informs his actions and in terms of which they are to be made intelligible. If we talk of abstraction here we are mistaken, I think, and our mistake lies in our being misled by what has been called the 'surface grammar' of the expressions he uses. For we must acknowledge that beliefs and conceptions may play a role in conduct not immediately identifiable with that which the surface appearance of their doctrinal formulations suggests.

At this point we may note a curious contradiction in Oakeshott's account. Having acknowledged that the significance of ideological works has been, and was intended to be, in the realm of conduct, Oakeshott argues that they logically cannot influence conduct; that they are the wrong kind of thought for activity. But if they cannot have any impact in practical life, their significance cannot lie in either the beneficial or the destructive influence they have had there.[1]

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1 This is similar to the mistake that Luther makes in 'Secular Authority', where he argues that the secular authority should not interfere in spiritual matters on the grounds that it is logically powerless to do so.

In short, ideological writing, particularly in the nineteenth century, has often been almost inextricably mixed with academic or theoretical inquiry. In consequence the form that that writing assumes is often one which suggests a place in conduct which it logically could not occupy. Both the rationalist and the sceptic, in different ways, are misled by this. The rationalist takes these writings at face value and supposes them to have the place that they appear to have. The sceptic rightly sees that they could not have this place and wrongly supposes them to have virtually no place at all. My argument is that such writings can have a place, but this must be other than their appearance suggests. I shall return to this question later in the thesis.[1]

3. The second general fallacy which I should like to claim my objections to Oakeshott have brought out is what might be called the fallacy of the essentialism of speech. Since the whole of the next chapter is concerned to elaborate the distinction itself and the importance of the distinction which this fallacy fails to draw, I shall only touch upon one aspect of it here.

It seems to me that the accounts of ideology which we have considered in the second chapter and in this both think of speech and writing as being the primary or most appropriate form of communication in ideological matters. Oakeshott speaks of ideology as 'sets of principles' and 'systems of ideas' and appears to share with the protagonist

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1 See chapters 7 and 8

of the commonplace model the view that what the ideologist says and writes, in some sense, makes explicit what is only implicit in his actions.[1] This suggests that words are more readily intelligible than actions, But this need not be so, at least in the realm of conduct. The business of learning how to welcome somebody, for example, is a matter of acquiring, at one and the same time and in the same way, an ability to act and to speak appropriately. We do not learn to identify certain actions as 'welcomes' or 'welcoming' independently of learning how to welcome people, and indeed, could not do so. It follows from this that if someone's actions are unintelligible to me, it is at least possible, and I should say on occasions probable, that any verbal 'explanation' of those actions from him would be equally unintelligible. If I cannot see anything revolutionary in, say, students occupying the administration building of a University, it is unlikely that their 'explanation', that they are 'trying to overthrow the capitalist system' will mean much either.[2]

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1 Of course, what is made explicit is different for each. For the rationalist it is the principles and ends of the actions in question, together with the grounds upon which the goodness or badness of those actions is to be assessed. For Professor Oakeshott what is revealed is a mistaken idea of activity which 'may confuse activity by putting it on the wrong scent'. However, perhaps it is worth emphasising again that I have not been examining Professor Oakeshott's personal view, but rather a certain set of arguments.

2 As this example shows, there are, of course, different levels of identification. Something may be intelligible at one level and not at another, for example 'kneeling' and 'praying'.

The idea that speech can always, by revealing the grounds of an act, make intelligible actions which otherwise are not intelligible seems to me part and parcel of what I am calling the fallacy of the essentialism of speech. Precisely how this fallacy works in the context of thinking about ideology and what the ramifications of its correction are will occupy me in the next chapter.

4. Before turning to that question, I should perhaps say something about my use of the term sceptic. It might be said that I have not in fact presented any genuinely sceptical account of ideology and that, though those I have criticised are no doubt criticisable, I have not shown that scepticism is an implausible and indefensible view of ideological belief and argument. The first thing to be said in reply is that there is indeed reason for calling the theories I have examined sceptical. I should like to argue that the great wealth of ethical writing and reflection which goes by the name ideology consists, for the most part, in a genuine and possible attempt to sustain, and perhaps provide, some element of cohesion and coherence in the realm of human conduct. The talk of rationalisation and false consciousness, it seems to me, denies this and that is why I have called it sceptical. Professor Oakeshott's view I have called sceptical partly because he introduces it as the remarks of a sceptic himself[1] and partly because of its affinity to

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1 See the introduction to 'Political Education' in _Rationalism in Politics_, p.110

some of the opinions of the most reputed of sceptics, Hume.[1]

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that to have shown two particular sceptical accounts to be mistaken is not to show scepticism about ideology to be a mistake. In the remainder of this thesis I shall try to elaborate a positive view of ideology and one which will, I hope, show the sceptical account to be misconceived. In the course of doing this I shall at points address myself to objections from 'the sceptic'. I do not mean to imply by this that those objections have been or ever would be raised by those whose writings I have specifically considered. The sceptic who objects to my argument is, if you like, an idealisation.

We have seen reason I think, both to abandon the attempt to understand ideology on the model of philosophy and to reject the scepticism which this might prompt us to. I shall therefore leave the comparison of philosophy and ideology for the moment and turn to another comparison, which has, if anything, been more popular, namely the identification of ideology as some variety of religion. The exploration of the extent and the limits of this parallel will occupy me throughout Part Two.

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1 See Hume: 'The Sceptic' in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* World Classics Edition, London 1903

P A R T   T W O

IDEOLOGY AND RELIGION

"The realm of faith is not a class for numskulls in the sphere of the intellectual, or an asylum for the feeble-minded. Faith constitutes a sphere all by itself ... "

KIERKEGAARD

CHAPTER 4

The Transcendence of Faith

"What is mirrored in language, I cannot use language to express"

WITTGENSTEIN

1. Both the commonplace and the sceptical accounts of ideology have turned out, upon protracted scrutiny, to mistake the product of an ideology for its essence. That is to say, both accounts understand ideologies to consist in sets of principles or doctrines, the one holding such principles to be necessary to and prior to practical activity, the other considering them superfluous additions, of one sort or another, to concrete practical activity. This identification of ideologies as sets of formulated doctrines cannot be sustained, partly for the reasons I have already given, and partly because it ignores a distinction which I take to be fundamental to any philosophical talk about ideology. This distinction can, I think, best be made clear in the context of a comparison between ideology and religion, a comparison which this part of the thesis will seek to explore.

The distinction I have in mind is this. In one sense the word 'ideology' refers to persuasions (philosophies), political and moral often, like Puritanism, Nationalism, Existentialism, ideologies which lend a common identity to groups of people otherwise engaged in quite different activities, artists, theorists, politicians, pamphleteers, party agents, and so on. In the second sense of the term, 'ideology' refers to a particular kind of intellectual activity, the activity of reflecting upon and formulating the doctrines of an ideology in the first sense. Paine's Rights of Man, Mill's On Liberty, Marx's Capital and Lippman's The Public Philosophy are all pieces of ideology in the second sense of the term. This distinction finds a parallel in that between religion and theology. For similarly, while a religion,

Christianity say, is that which binds together those whose particular activities are different, the priest, the theologian, pastor, evangelist, worshipper, theology is an intellectual enterprise, namely the attempt to formulate and state systematically the doctrines of a religion. But it is not an intellectual enterprise which stands outside the faith to which the theologian adheres; each theologian speaks from within a community of religious believers and it is nonsense to talk as though his task is to rationally assess or secure[1] the tradition of which he is a part, rather than give particular expression to its beliefs and conceptions. Similarly, each ideologist speaks from within a particular persuasion and his task is to articulate that persuasion, not to judge it. If he does offer, as ideologists almost always do, justification of his views, these are not to be understood as proofs, for they are in

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1 I cannot understand those theologians, T F Torrance, for example, who speak of 'establishing modern theology on a sound scientific basis' (Scottish Journal of Theology). I can only suppose them to mean that there is no less certainty about what they have to say than about what scientists have to say. If this is the case the certainty that is available to theologians is of quite a different sort from that of scientists, as I hope to bring out later in Part Two, and talking in this way will only confuse.

It is sometimes supposed that this view springs from Karl Barth's theological writings. But Barth says 'The Church must not withhold from the world, nor must it confuse or conceal, the fact that God is knowable to us in His grace, and because His grace, only in His grace. For this reason it can make no use of natural theology with its doctrine of another kind of knowability of God.' Church Dogmatics Edinburgh 1957, Vol 2:i, p.172

no sense external to the persuasion. To show the Truth of Marxism or Christianity is not like proving its doctrines to be true. Only particular doctrines can be said to be true or false, coherent or incoherent. Ideologies, like religions, are neither true nor false but living or dead.

This distinction between ideologies in the first sense (what I shall call faiths) and ideology in the second sense (what I shall call reflection and doctrine) is easy to blur. When a man tells us that he is, say, a Swedenborgian or a Christadelphian, the most natural and immediate question is about what he believes. And the answer he will supply will almost certainly take the form of a doctrinal expression of his faith. But both he and we are mistaken if we suppose that, by answering in this way, he has given us the essence of his faith, or its foundation, What he says, the doctrine he relates, is not <u>the</u> expression, but <u>one</u> expression of that faith. The faith itself is transcendent. It can only be <u>made manifest</u> in the things he says and does, and cannot be distilled.

2. The full extent of the mistake of supposing that ideologies can be reduced to sets of doctrines, the mistake of identifying ideology in the first sense with ideology in the second, of identifying a religion with a theology it has generated, can be brought out in the following way. Suppose we were to ask the question 'What do Christians believe?' How would we set about answering this? We would most naturally, I suggest, survey all those who have traditionally been regarded as the greatest Christian thinkers and attempt to distill what beliefs they

shared. Amongst these thinkers would undoubtedly be St Paul, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Kierkegaard and Barth. Now in this brief list there is a collection of writers so disparate that the attempt to distill their shared doctrines would, if it resulted in anything, produce a very small number of doctrines indeed. Of these there would almost certainly be none which was not either, not distinctively Christian (for example, God is omnipotent) or, was not disputed by some Christian thinker or group excluded from the list. Even if this were not so, even if there were one or two distinctively Christian doctrines which were denied by no one, this short list could scarcely be considered an answer to the question 'What do Christians believe?' for no actual Christian writer could be said to have believed just these doctrines. Further, it is doubtful whether these brief doctrines by themselves, *in vacuo*, would be believable.

It should be clear by now that there is something wrong with the question 'What do Christians believe?' and something radically wrong with this way of trying to deal with it. And similarly, the questions 'What do Socialists believe?' 'What are the basic doctrines of Marxism?' 'What is Liberalism?' are all subject to the same difficulties. The source of these difficulties lies, I think, in the fact of a faith's being transcendent and, as I hope to show, recognition of this fact can avoid many of the troubles customarily encountered by those who try to write about ideologies.

The first thing wrong with attempts, like that I have outlined, to answer questions like 'What do Christians believe?' is that it is, so

to speak, self-determining. The first move is to draw up a list of widely recognised Christians and to survey their doctrines. But this supposes that we can identify Christians in advance of our determining what Christians believe. Of course we can do this, but my point is that having drawn up the list and given an account of the doctrines of those on the list, we have already answered, in so far as that is possible at all, the question with which we began. To go on to abstract from those doctrines, or to generalise them, is, necessarily, to give an incomplete account of what those writers believed, for that is what we are abstracting and generalising from. And the dangers are greater than this. If, for example, we discover that of the writers we have chosen to consider, all but Aquinas believed in justification by faith alone, the temptation is to say that his is a different variety of Christianity, or even that Aquinas is not 'really' a Christian. But the list we drew up in the first place was a list of well-known Christians![1]

This approach to the study of ideology and religion loses whatever plausibility it had when we see that it cannot even begin to cope with some of the most important theological and ideological disputes of all. I suggested earlier that theologians and ideologists are not theorising _between_ faiths but each within a particular faith. It

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1 Consider a parallel here in all the recent discussions which suggest that Engels was not 'really' a Marxist. Is not this their mistake also?

is a peculiarity of many of the controversies, therefore, that the differences between one theorist and another are differences within the one faith, so that while what each believes is to be characterised by its opposition to the other, these opposed beliefs must, in some sense, both be part of the one faith. Thus both Catholic and Protestant theology must be Christian. The beliefs and doctrines of their respective thinkers, then, are to be understood in terms of opposition to each other. The doctrines of Calvin and Loyola, for example, can only be recounted as incompatible, and yet clearly they are both Christian writers. And this is not as odd as it seems, for we should remember that, though opposed in doctrine, they shared the same faith. If doctrines are contradictory this does not destroy the faith. It is doctrines that are true and false, consistent and inconsistent. Faiths, as I have already suggested, are living or dead. Indeed it may be a mark of the living and burning quality of a faith that it generates doctrinal oppositions.

From this last remark we can see the profound error in asking and trying to answer the question 'What do Christians believe?' for it presupposes that Christianity is primarily believed. But this may not be so. The celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion, though a distinctively Christian practice and undertaken by Christian sects almost without exception in a variety of forms, is not a matter of belief but practice. I do not mean to suggest that belief is not involved but very often it is beliefs about the sacrament which divide or at least distinguish between Christians and the actual practice which unites them.

The point I want to make is that religious practices may serve to provide the identity which Christians share and doctrines may serve to challenge or modify this identity. Practices are not beliefs, but they are as much a part of a man's religious or ethical faith as any doctrine. Again, to take a political example, many adherents of the Labour party are disagreed about the tenets of socialism, about the doctrines to which they can and cannot subscribe. But the common identity which they share as members of the labour party can and does (though not always) transcend this disagreement. Their mutual participation in and loyalty to the maintenance of the structures and life of the party, together with the much less easily specifiable attitudes and common oppositions which they share, combine to inform the political orientation which makes identity one with the other possible.

In short, then, when we identify Christians as Christians, Socialists as Socialists, Liberals as Liberals, we identify those who share a faith. Our question 'What do Christians, or Socialists, or Liberals believe?', being about doctrines, can only be about the theoretical expression of those faiths. But what they share is a common faith, not a common doctrine, so that the only possible answer to the question 'What do they believe?' is 'A variety of things'. If we grasp this distinction between doctrine and faith, however, we need not be troubled by the usual subsequent question 'Well if they all believe different things, what makes them all Christians?'

This, then, is the sense in which faiths are transcendent. The argument for their existence is always that they make certain kinds of

identity possible. But they are not themselves palpable. The theologian, the priest and the communicant, the theorist, the party leader and the agent, each of these has a different form of expression for his faith and in their activities and attitudes what that faith is is made manifest. It is Conservatism which informs the writings of Hugh Cecil, but Cecil's writings do not constitute Conservatism. If they did, how could later writers be justly called Conservative and dissent from his views. It was Conservatism which informed the policy of Tories who would not agree to the 1832 Reform, but it was equally Conservatism which informed Peel's acceptance of the Reform as a fact in 1835. And only if we conceive of opposition to reform in terms of the acceptance of a belief or principle do we find a contradiction here.

3. It will be clear that, if we attempted to give an account of what Conservatism is, the result could only be a set of verbal formulations. It could not be the pursuit of policies for that would not be an account. Yet it is not by studying their doctrines alone that we learn who Conservatives are and what it is to be a Conservative, for, as we saw, that knowledge may be presupposed by questions about their doctrines. It follows from this that any account of Conservatism cannot be a distillation of the faith which informed the great Conservative statesmen of the past, but at best a repetition of the doctrines to be found in the writings of Conservative theorists. And of course we can read these without bothering to repeat them. To repeat what they have said is not to add to our knowledge and most importantly, it is not to add to our knowledge by arriving at a general theory of what Conservatism is.

If this is so, it seems to me to have important implications for the study of ideology, for it follows that no intellectual study of particular ideologies is possible. It is possible, as a Conservative, Liberal or whatever, to give intellectual expression to one's faith. I shall shortly say something about the nature of this enterprise. It is possible to choose, as many have done, the theoretical and doctrinal as a medium in which political (or religious) life is to be conducted. Mill, Marx, Hobhouse and Tawney are all clear instances of this. It is further possible for the academic to recount the history of a political party or movement (or a Church). It is possible to write a biography of some remarkable political figure who was associated with some ideology, a life of, for example, Gladstone or Trotsky. And all of these would serve to acquaint us with the kind of thing Liberalism, or whatever, is; or, more properly, with what 'liberal' means. But none of them, including the writings of a man like Mill, can be said to determine, either from an ideological or from an academic point of view, what Liberalism _is_.

It is, further, possible to give an account to the kind of belief and understanding involved in a political ideology or a religion, to provide, that is to say, a philosophical understanding of ideology. But here _any_ individual ideology will serve as an illustration of general philosophical theses about thought and belief of this kind. This kind of understanding will only be an understanding of a particular ideology _as ideology_. And this is the kind of enterprise in which I am engaged in this thesis.

What is not possible is for the intellectual either as an ideologist or as an academic to answer the question 'What is Liberalism, Socialism or whatever?' with a formulation or summary of doctrine. For faith informs activities of different kinds, whereas the formulation of doctrine is only one kind of activity. It is the case, of course, that many distinguished students of politics and what is sometimes called the history of ideas, have attempted to do something of this sort, to distill the essential doctrines of an ideology. The number of books entitled 'Liberalism' 'Nationalism' 'Marxism', or whatever, is very great. But in the last analysis these books can only consist in a repetition of the doctrines of famous exponents of the ideology in question, or in extensive illustrations of a general philosophical thesis.[1] Such books can and do serve a purpose. They may serve to acquaint us with writers and writings with whom we are unfamiliar and serve thereby to keep such writings alive. But, if my argument is correct, they cannot be said to form part of any concrete and ongoing study of ideology such as historical or philosophical studies may do. Nor can they be a critical or rational examination of the merits of various ideologies either, for the transcendent nature of faith prohibits such endeavour.

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1 Elie Kedourie's stimulating book Nationalism combines something of the two. He uses the case of Nationalism to illustrate a general thesis about ideology not unlike Oakeshott's. Nevertheless, he does make the mistake which I claim to have exposed in this chapter. The very first sentence of his book reads 'Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. (Kedourie: Nationalism)

4. If we keep this major distinction between faith and doctrine in mind, we can see that two different sets of questions can be raised, which the commonplace and sceptical accounts of ideology tended to conflate. First, we may ask 'What does it mean to be a religious believer?' 'What does it mean to accept or adhere to an ideology?' 'What kind of difference does being a Liberal, for example, make to being in the world?' These are questions whose central concern is with understanding. What kind of understanding does faith supply? This is the question to which I turn my attention in Chapter 5.

The second set of questions which may occupy us is about doctrine, theology and ideology in the second sense of the term. 'Is it possible, and if it is, how is it possible, to determine the truth, reasonableness, correctness of religious and ideological doctrine?' The central notion here, I think, is rationality and the central question is 'What kind of rationality is possible in religious and ideological reflection and speculation? It is to this question that I turn my attention in Chapter 6.

All this I shall do in the context of a parallel between religion and ideology. The justification for pursuing this parallel must ultimately lie in the profitability of doing so. I think that, prima facie, to pursue questions of the nature of ideology in company with some of the problems in the philosophy of religion is a plausible undertaking. Nevertheless, in the long run the success of the undertaking must be judged by the degree to which our thinking about religion helps us to get clear about ideology, and our thinking about ideology helps to clarify our thoughts on religion.

CHAPTER 5

Ideological and Religious Understanding

"The question of religion, like that of morality is not one of theory: it is a question of the life a man is going to lead."

H J PATON

Religious faith, indeed any faith, must supply an understanding concerned with being and acting, rather than merely the observation or explanation of phenomena. Faiths are, and must be, in Tolstoy's phrase, 'What men live by'. If we are to discover, then, what kind of understanding faith supplies, we must inquire into the conditions to be satisfied by any understanding which seeks to inform conduct. Faith, as Kierkegaard remarked, is concerned with problems of existence rather than problems of intellect. It was Kierkegaard's complaint against the Hegelian philosophic system that, though it claimed to be the rationalisation of Christianity, it could provide neither guidance nor assistance in the problems of men as human agents. This failure was, in a sense, inevitable, for it sprang from its hybrid character, its being an attempt to rationalise a faith, to place a religion on a firm philosophical foundation. But philosophy, according to Kierkegaard, being an objective inquiry involving proof and demonstration, is never capable of anything but systematic completion. A faith, by contrast, relies for its life and its power upon its ability to inform the lives and deeds of men.

This distinction between the objective, what Kierkegaard calls the 'world-historical', and the subjective, is central to my first thesis about faith. I shall argue that a faith, whether religious or political, is, in a sense which I hope to make clear, essentially a subjective understanding. But I shall further argue, in this chapter and the next, that to acknowledge this is not tantamount to relegating judgments made in the context of faith to the realm of 'doxa' or mere opinion, a realm

in which we cannot discriminate between real and unreal, the mistaken and the correct.

I

1. We can begin to see the reasons for drawing a sharp distinction between the objectivity provided by a scientific[1] understanding and the subjectivity of the understanding of faith by noting their attendant concepts. A science must, if it is to provide objectivity, involve evidence, falsification, demonstration, proof. In contrast, the notion of faith is linked to the concepts of doubt, commitment, devotion, discipleship. A faith may be expressed in beliefs and doctrines, but these do not differ from the propositions and theories of a science in that they are not quite known, or not known for certain, or yet to be proven. If it were possible to know, in the sense of objectively prove, that this or that belief was true, we could in no sense commit ourselves to it. If it were true our commitment would add nothing and if it were not true our commitment could not save it from falsehood. This would be like supposing that a gambler could gamble when he knew the result in advance. But this last image may be misleading. I do not mean to

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1 I use 'scientific' here in the general sense and not in the restricted sense of 'natural' science.

suggest that belief in matters of religion and of ethics is always something of a gamble, but rather that if a demonstration of the truth of some belief were possible and were given, faith would not thereby be established or rationalised but abolished. In other words, belief in the existence of God is not a proposition (guardedly) assumed to be true by those who pray. Rather, the reality God has shows itself in our prayers. Were we, therefore, to treat the question of God's reality as a matter for objective inquiry prior to our praying, we should necessarily remove the possibility of a religious response.[1]

Again: one who believes in the sovereignity of the people does not set about his political campaigning tentatively, lest what he has assumed to be true should, in the light of new evidence or fresh thinking, be shown to be false. His affirmation of the sovereignity of the people, and the counter affirmations it provokes, are part and parcel of the political activity in which he is engaged, and not the assumption on which it is based.

> No man will commit his life to the care and guidance of an hypothesis recognised as such ... for the scientific man to convert his hypothesis into a faith were to betray the very spirit of science. A hypothesis must not turn into a dogma, and the scientific man is the servitor of no creed. Hypotheses, consequently, cannot transform character. They have no practical vim. ...

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1 The effect of this is well illustrated in the famous 'prayer': 'O God, if there is one, save my soul, if I have one'.

> The difference between a scientific hypothesis and religious faith seems to be fundamental. The science may conjecture, religion must "know"; that is to say, it must be a matter experienced.[1]

The ideas of proof and demonstration, verification and falsification are applicable to propositions and hypotheses. But it is not in propositions that the man of faith believes but in such things as the love of God, the power of salvation, the equality of men, the inevitability of communism, man's moral goodness, or the historic destiny of a nation.

In other words, the 'world-historical' requires an objectivity, which, when it is supplied,removes all power to inform conduct. Conduct, on the other hand, can only be subjectively informed. This subjectivity and its necessity can be made plainer in the context of an examination of the notion of change.

Faith, like all practical understanding, is concerned with how things ought to be. It occupies that part of our life in which we try to change things, rather than explain them or contemplate them, to change both ourselves and the world in which we are. Now it is clear that all notions of changing must be absent from any objective inquiry. Our studies, and the disciplines of which they are the exercise, cannot be concerned to alter the world, for the whole point is to discover and explain the world as it is. Scientific hypotheses are advanced, as has often been noted, on the assumption that nature is uniform and inanimate.

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1 Sir Henry Jones: The Faith that Enquires London 1923, p.83

But they must also be advanced on the assumption that the advancing of the hypothesis will not itself alter the phenomena which the hypothesis seeks to describe and explain. If it did do that it would be self-defeating. The past must, for the historian, be dead. If it were changeable then his mere activity could, regardless of proof and evidence, render his historical narrative fallacious. If philosophising changes the grounds upon what makes sense makes sense, then it cannot be said to have given the sense of a proposition. If its distinction between, for example, what is moral and what is non-moral (as opposed to immoral) changes that order of things, it cannot be said to have done any distinguishing.

The conclusion must be, then, that objective study cannot be concerned with living and changing, while faith, religious and ideological, must be. Faith is concerned not to describe who we are but to determine it and thereby to determine how we will act. Someone may convince us that we are sinners but it is the acceptance of this fact which makes _us_ sinners, for now we understand things in such a way that we act in relation to God as penitents. Someone may convince us that we are, for example, first and foremost Irishmen, and it is the acceptance of this description which leads us to conduct ourselves in a certain manner, to value certain things, to have certain aspirations, in short those manners, values and aspirations which make us Irish patriots. And I do not mean that all such talk is circular, if that would be a criticism. An ideology or a religion _must_ provide an understanding which encompasses the understander and his relationship to other persons and things. If

this were not so it could not be the sort of thing a man might live by. And if it is so, it cannot hope to be objective in the manner of science, history or philosophy, where the person of the individual historian, scientist or philosopher cannot play a part without the destruction of the activity. This is how, then, ideology in the first sense in which we distinguished that term, is subjective; it is the kind of understanding in which the understander must have a place. Therefore faith only supplies an understanding of the world when we accept the part that faith determines for us. In this sense, a faith supplies an understanding of the world and of our place in the world only when it is accepted.

2. I shall try to elaborate on the nature of this acceptance and this subjectivity a little later, but first I want to note that, to grasp the essential subjectivity of faith is to see the error in what many well-known authors have said about religion and ideology. The, generally Marxist, suggestion that ideology is a false-consciousness to be replaced by some form of science fails to see that the one, if it were genuinely scientific, could not replace the other without destroying its power to inform and guide our practical life. If, when he said 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in variousways; the point, however, is to change it',[1] Marx had in mind philosophers whose task was explanatory, he suggested what it was impossible for them to do. For if they had tried to change the world

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1 Karl Marx: _Theses on Feuerbach_ XI

they must, logically must, have ceased to do philosophy. If on the other hand he said it of those whose task was ideological, he presented a false dichotomy, for to engage in religious or ideological speculation is to try to change the order of things. The so-called union of theory and practice, then, was not an accomplishment, but a logical necessity.

Conversely, Popper was equally mistaken in condemning Marxist theory because it was not scientific,[1] for, given the concerns of its authors and supporters, it could not have been. Further of course, it was nonsense for him to claim that one and the same kind of belief or theory could be unscientific and dangerous, for any theory which qualifies for the terms scientific or unscientific (as opposed to non-scientific) is necessarily impotent and cannot, therefore, be dangerous or anything else. And I think that the theories of Feuerbach and Mannheim concerning religion and ideology respectively are similarly founded or ill-founded upon this category mistake.

3. I said earlier that one of the necessary prerequisites of faith, as a form of understanding, was the acceptance of the faith in question, and I hope now to make this clearer with the aid of two examples, the one religious and the other ideological.

Suppose someone tells us that 'God sees the truth, but waits'. It may be that our notion of the justice of God cannot allow any

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1 In, for example, 'Philosophy of Science: a Personal Report' in British Philosophy in Mid-Century ed C A Mace, First Edition London 1957

occasion for him to act unjustly and 'seeing the truth, but waiting' would constitute just such an occasion. We may, in short, reject the suggestion as unworthy of God. On the other hand, this whole way of talking may be quite senseless to us. We may have no idea at all what has been claimed when it is claimed that 'God sees the truth, but waits' and our response will be,then, not an attempt to agree or disagree, but some acknowledgement of the fact that we cannot, and perhaps have no desire to, do so. We may, of course, go on to suggest that the whole jargon is meaningless, that is, that it could not make sense for anyone, but this would still be to treat the proposition as meaningless rather than false.

Again: suppose someone says 'The present economic crisis is yet another instance of the ruling class's attempt to crush the proletariat in the advanced stages of the collapse of capitalism'. We might argue with someone who said this, thinking the proposition false on the grounds that capitalism is not in an advanced stage of collapse. Or we might agree with what he said, after having discovered that the extent and bitterness of industrial disputes has steadily increased over the last twenty years. But if we were to adopt either of these responses our reply would be couched within the terms of the original claim and within the whole framework of understanding in which such a claim is made.

Now a framework of understanding is that whole system of concepts and rules of reasoning which makes the assertion, correction and rejection of judgments about the world possible. It is only if we

are familiar with the rules of scientific reasoning, for example, and can employ the concepts of science that we can make scientific claims about and offer scientific explanations of the various phenomena in the world. And it is their concord with these rules and their deployment of these concepts which make statements scientific, independently or regardless of whether they are true or false. Indeed the rules and concepts of science make assessment of truth and falsity possible. In the examples just given I have been trying to show that in a similar fashion ideological and religious descriptions of the world must deploy certain concepts, and my point is that the acceptance, in the sense of the use, of these concepts is prior to any talk of truth and falsity, soundness and unsoundness. The ideological framework in terms of which these judgments are made cannot itself be open to question, any more than a scientist can question the framework of science; can in other words wonder whether science is a 'correct' understanding of the world.

> I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No, it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. [1]

In other words, we may sensibly wonder whether this or that Marxist claim is true; but it does not make sense to wonder if Marxism is true.

'Still', it might be said, 'now you are drawing a parallel between science and ideology which you earlier said could not be drawn.'

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1 Wittgenstein: On Certainty Oxford 1973, para 94

But there are two important differences between science and faith which the earlier argument sought to emphasise and which the parallel just drawn did not deny. In the first place, the significance of an ideological or a religious understanding, an understanding of faith, must lie, at least for the major part, in the world of conduct. And this world, unlike the worlds of ideas constituted by a theoretical understanding, is one which we cannot avoid belonging to. The kind of rationality involved in the construction of an explanatory intellectual order, a scientific theory or an historical narrative for example, will _necessarily_ lead to the same conclusion, for anyone who chooses to follow the reasoning. (Provided, of course, the reasoning is sound.) If a man does not or will not follow the chain of reasoning or accept the evidence appropriately presented, he simply ceases to be a scientist or an historian. But in practical life it is different. Clearly a man cannot cease to be engaged in the practical world because he does not think in one set of concepts and rules of reasoning. The understandings which can inform practical activity are therefore, to some degree, exclusive. To think in one way, as a Marxist for example, is necessarily not to think in another, say as a liberal.

This is the same point as I made earlier. There is no general sphere of understanding called ideology or religion. There are only particular ideological and religious understandings. There is no such thing as that which the commonplace model required, a unitary background of Reason, against which all ideologies and religions can be tested. This is not to say that such understandings are partial; they

are indeed universal in that they enable us to describe and to lend significance to, pretty well, any phenomena of our experience. But they are incommensurable, at least to some degree, precisely because they make competing demands not simply upon what we must think, but upon what we must do. And to take one of two possible courses of action is necessarily to fail to take the other.

In the second place, as ideologies and religions are practical understandings they are made manifest not only in what we say but in how we behave, so that to understand the world in the terms of one ideological or religious picture is a matter of actually conducting one's life after a certain fashion, in a certain pattern, of acting and reacting in one way rather than another. The Marxist approves and commends one set of actions and events and the liberal another, and sometimes it just does not make sense to look for the grounds upon which such commendation is based. For some reactions and attitudes just are those characteristic of liberals and Marxists. The question then of whether one understands after the manner of a liberal or a Marxist is a question of how similar one's attitudes and reactions are to each, a matter, in short, of which attitudes and reactions come naturally. The liberal's attitudes are what they are and no question of truth can arise here. What could such a question mean? The possession of understanding, the kind of understanding which enables a man to identify, to cope with and to react to the various events and situations with which he is confronted, is a matter of belonging to this rather than that manner of life. And the incommensurability between one ideology and

another, between one religion and another need not appear in the form of alternative beliefs so much as different ways of life.[1]

4. 'But you are saying that in ideology and religion there is no scope for rational criticism, that we must either simply accept or reject'. The man who raises this objection fails to see, I think, that rationality or reasoned thinking will only take us so far. I do not say that there is no scope for rational criticism here, but rather that I do not know what criticism of Marxism, or Christianity, or Liberalism or Buddhism as a whole would be. Any exercise of reason in a critical or positive fashion pressupposes and can neither establish nor abolish such traditions of belief and practice as these. It is, as the examples given above were intended to show, only when we think in that way and in those terms that the question of whether our thoughts are reasonable or unreasonable and our judgments sound or unsound can be raised.

The objection, however, may spring from a feeling that I have, so to speak, hermetically sealed each ideology and each religion in a world of its own, in which case the doubts of the objector will not be so easily allayed. Now this might mean one of two things. It might mean first that my argument entails that the ideological adherent and the

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1 "There are, for instance, these entirely different ways of thinking first of all - which needn't be expressed by one person saying one thing, another another thing.

What we call believing in a Judgment Day or not believing in a Judgment Day - the expression of belief may play an absolutely minor role."

Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations Oxford 1966, p.55

religious believer can say whatever he likes without any questions being raised as to its reasonableness; that in religious and ideological matters there is a sort of general anarchy. In which case, it will be asked, can we talk of understanding at all here? But this suggestion is no part of my argument, which is rather that the criteria of what is reasonable and what unreasonable, what it is appropriate to say and to think are internal rather than external. This is not the same as claiming that there are no criteria at all and in the next chapter I shall try to outline what kind of criteria may operate here.

On the other hand the objection may be that the picture I give is one of each ideology and each religion being discrete and distinct from every other. But again this is not so. My argument is that ideologies may best be understood as ethical traditions, by which I mean traditions within a general moral and political life. Roughly, then, we may characterise the difference between one ideology and the next as a difference in vocabularies.[1] Now the point is that the degree to which these vocabularies overlap is a contingent matter. For example the way liberals and conservatives talk about things and the vocabulary they employ are often, and particularly in this century, quite similar. But the conservative and Marxist pictures of the world have almost no common features. Further, one particular person may combine a familiarity

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1 By 'vocabulary' I do not simply mean the words used. The word 'Prejudice', for example, in Burke signifies quite a different notion to that signified by the same word in Mill.

with the vocabularies of two ideological traditions which are normally thought of as being different. He may thereby be able to see something in, say, both liberal and nationalist versions of some matter and have loyalties to their respective organisations (Mazzini for example). Or one man may be a liberal who can see the force of a conservative view (Maine) or perhaps a liberal who finds a good deal to sympathise with in a socialist outlook (Hobhouse). In short, the discreteness between faiths is not to be overemphasised for it is a contingent and not a logical discreteness. Nor should it be underemphasised. The discreteness that _is_ possible is well described by Alasdair MacIntyre.

> Aristotelianism, primitive Christian simplicity, the puritan ethic, the aristocratic ethic of consumption, and the tradition of democracy have all left their mark upon our moral vocabulary. Within each of these moralities there is a proposed end or set of ends, a list of virtues, a set of rules. But the ends, the rules, the virtues differ. For Aristotelianism to sell all that you have and give to the poor would be absurd and mean spirited; for primitive Christianity the great-souled man is unlikely to pass through the eye of the needle which is the gateway to heaven. A conservative Catholicism would treat obedience to the established authority as a virtue; a democratic socialism such as Marx's would label the same attitude servility and see it as the worst of vices. For puritanism thrift is a major virtue, laziness a vice; for the traditional aristocrat thrift is a vice; and so on.[1]

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1. Alasdair MacIntyre: _A Short History of Ethics_ London 1967, p.266 I do not intend by quoting this to endorse the general philosophical thesis MacIntyre advances in this book. Indeed, as I hope my later arguments will show, some qualification is needed even in his way of expressing the matter here.

5. The subjectivity of both religious and ideological understanding lies in this; whether one set of concepts and one vocabulary can allow a man to describe the world intelligibly and in a manner which can satisfactorily supplement the conduct of his moral and political life, is a question of, depends upon, the inherited ethical and religious background with which he begins. 'The truth which edifies is truth for you'[1], which is not to say that in ethics and religion anything goes, but that some reflections and ways of talking logically cannot edify and some beliefs logically cannot make much sense if, contingently, one has a quite different mode of life from that in which the reflections and the beliefs are at home. This is not to say that one cannot come to believe and to talk in that way, though I do not think that the gaps thus traversed are ever very wide. Between the man who contents himself with thinking that 'The world is the best of all possible worlds and everything in it is a necessary evil'[2] and the man who heralds 'A new manifestation of human powers and a new assessment of the human being'[3] the ethical distance is too great to allow mutual understanding. Only the most naive Rationalism could suppose the difference between the two to be a matter of alternative

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1 Soren Kierkegaard: Concluding Unscientific Postscript, translated by D F Swenson & W Lowrie, Princeton 1964, p.226

2 Michael Oakeshott 'Political Education' op cit p.133

3 Marx: 'Private Property and Communism' Marx's Early Writings ed. T B Bottomore, London 1963, p.163

doctrines or contradictory propositions. Perhaps an observer might, from some middle point, be able to see something in both these utterances but this would not be enough to bridge the gap between the two. For he could not occupy and move in the different worlds of moral and political activity in the context of which this kind of talk makes sense. The subjectivity of faith determines that we cannot begin our moral, political and religious life from scratch. We must begin, if that makes sense at all, from where we are.

II

My second thesis about faith is that it is an understanding of the world 'sub specie aeternitatis'[1] and the elaboration of this will occupy me in this section and the next.

1. To say of a certain understanding that it views the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is, roughly, to say that it is concerned with the essence or significance of things, rather than the fact or phenomenon of things.

> Imagine that we come into a theatre after a play has started and are obliged to leave before it

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1 The phrase, as is well known, appears in Spinoza's *Ethics* V:XXXI. But I am not using it here in quite the same sense as that in which Spinoza uses it.

> ends. We may then be puzzled by the part of the play we are able to see. We may ask 'What does it mean?' In this case we want to know what went before and what came after. But sometimes even when we have seen or heard a play from beginning to end, we are still puzzled as to what the whole thing means. In this case we are not asking about what came before or what came after, we are not asking about anything outside the play itself. We are, if you like, asking a very different sort of question from that we usually put with the words 'What does it mean?' But we are still asking a real question which has sense and is not absurd. For our words express a wish to grasp the character, the significance of the whole play. They are a confession that we have not yet done this and they are a request for help in doing it. Is the play a tragedy, a comedy or a tale told by an idiot? The pattern of it is so complex, so bewildering, our grasp of it still so inadequate, that we don't know what to say, still less whether to call it good or bad. But the question is not senseless.[1]

The question is not senseless, but my interest lies in what form a possible answer must take. First, it must be noted that we have at our disposal nothing other than the words and events of the play. However we are to answer the question our answer must be couched in terms of the facts of the play, that is, what is said and done in the play. In other words, there are no supersensible entities or external facts available to us nor, indeed, are any such things called for. The meaning of the play must be brought out, in and through the play itself and cannot be brought out by relating it to something outside

1 John Wisdom: 'The meaning of the questions of life' in <u>Paradox and Discovery</u>, Oxford 1964, p.41

itself. There is no external reference here.

This means that to questions of the form 'What is the meaning of X?' we cannot give an answer of the simple form 'Y' where 'Y' is a claim about some matter of fact outside or beyond 'X'. Nor, however, can our answer take the form of a simple re-statement (for example another performance) of the facts of the play. These facts will not in themselves answer the question, for we have already witnessed the play and it is our possession of the knowledge of what is in the play that has prompted our puzzlement.

Since, then, we cannot look for any facts other than those of the play, and since knowledge of those facts will not by itself answer the question, the answer must take the form of a significant ordering of the facts we already know. Our question 'What does it mean?' is, therefore, an expression of lack of understanding and not of ignorance. The facts of the play, what happened, what was said, can only be the subject matter of knowledge. But we know the facts of the play already. The meaning of the play is a question forthe understanding, a question of how we are to understand that which we already know. To be in possession of an understanding, then, will be to have the ability to order the facts which we all know in a satisfactory way.

Wisdom, of course, wants, as I want, the illustration of the play to throw light on the nature of much more general and ambitious questions, about the meaning of life and of all things. He continues the passage I quoted by saying:

> In the same way when we ask 'What is the meaning of all things?' we are not asking a senseless question. In this case, of course, we have not witnessed the whole play, we have only an idea of an outline of what went before and what will come after the small part of history which we witness. But with the words 'What is the meaning of it all?' we are trying to find the order in the Drama of Time.[1]

This last sentence, if my argument is correct, is not quite right. We do not and could not find the order in the Drama of Time, if by that we mean that our puzzlement is to be dispelled by discovering further facts, even facts about some supersensible realm, and thereby adding to our knowledge. For what we seek is understanding and not knowledge. Our concern is not so much with the facts, most of which we already know, as with the significance of the facts. This is why I say that faith is concerned with the world *sub specie aeternitatis.*

> The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: in it no value exists - and if it did exist it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case.
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> For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie within the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world.[2]

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1 Wisdom: *op cit*, p.41

2 Wittgenstein: *Tractatus* 6.41

Even this way of putting the matter might be misleading. 'Outside the world' here cannot be understood to refer to a realm beyond the world, a world beyond this one. A faith is a transcendent understanding not in the sense that it supplies knowledge of a transcendent realm but in that it brings to the facts of this world an order in which they are intelligible. The mark of our possessing an understanding of this kind is our ability to order and thus to fathom the contingent facts of everything that happens and is the case. The understanding is transcendent because it can only be made manifest in our ordering of the facts and further because it is not determined by those facts. If you like, it presupposes the fact of the facts in its ordering of the facts. 'The love of God' for example 'is not based upon the facts but is itself the measure by which the Christian assesses the facts'.[1]

2. It might be said, of course, that this is true of all understanding, the understanding supplied by the theoretical disciplines of history and science no less than that supplied by faith. But the difference between the two kinds of understanding is this. Religions and ideologies are evaluatory understandings whereas history and science are understandings of one kind of fact designed to establish another kind of fact. In other words, the understanding of faith must enable us to relate the whole sphere of fact to the sphere of conduct, while the understanding which the historian or the scientist seeks never

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1 D Z Phillips: Faith and Philosophical Enquiry, London 1970, p.213

moves beyond the sphere of fact. A closer examination of the case of history will, I think, show this to be so.[1]

The difference I am pointing to is similar to the distinction St Augustine draws between sacred and secular history. According to Augustine, the task of the writer of sacred history is to reveal the hand of God in the events of the past. Secular, or pagan history, on the other hand, is the recounting of what actually happened in the past, in other words, history fit for pagans to do. The distinction is not quite that which I wish to draw. But I want to concur in Augustine's opinion that the disagreement between Christian and pagan is not over the facts of secular history.

The point can be made like this. If an historian claims for example, that Richard III was responsible for the deaths of the Princes in the Tower[2], what he says is open to correction by another historian and its being open to correction is what makes history an on-going study. Such correction, if it is forthcoming, must be made not in the light of what actually happened in the past (for that is what is under

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1 History is particularly apposite here, not only because in the study of history the factual character of our judgments is evident, but because it is to 'history', in the sense of 'the past', that many ideological and religious writers have turned their attention.

2 This example springs to mind because it is widely recognised as a contentious claim. History can, so to speak, be seen at work on this subject, in Josephine Tey's splendid pseudo-detective story, <u>The Daughter of Time</u>.

dispute) but in the light of the facts of present evidence. And if the evidence is as the second historian claims and if his reasoning is sound, the first historian must acknowledge that his account of what happened in the past is mistaken. Part of what is involved in this acknowledgement is the acknowledgement of the facts of the evidence. The historian qua historian cannot doubt this,[1] since if he did, the criteria common to both and which enable not only the second historian to correct the first, but the first to reject the proposed corrections of the second, would be removed and the possibility of mutual inquiry gone. On my argument, an understanding must take some facts as given, that is, the facts to be understood cannot be questioned in terms of the understanding, which consists in an ordering of those facts. Alternative understandings (though not kinds of understanding), if they are to be in competition, then, must be in agreement over some set of facts. For the historian these are the facts of present evidence. In these he does and must agree with other historians, for this agreement is what enables him to agree and disagree with their proferred narratives of the past.

In the case of ideological and religious understanding things are very different. To begin with the ideological and religious writer

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1 I do not say that it cannot be doubted, though it seems that the only plausible doubt could be that of the philosophical sceptic, whose interest is more in matters of possibility and necessity than in matters of fact and non-fact.

tries to provide an understanding of the past itself, or more properly, of the whole Drama of Time in which past and present and future are conjoined. The past and the present are not distinct categories in religious and ideological discourse and understanding in the same way as they are for the historian. The past, if it is the meaning of history which concerns us, is our past and not, so to speak, the dead past of the historian. This means that when the past is referred to in ideological and religious writing, the facts of what happened in the past must be taken as given and are not themselves dubitable. Augustine was right in thinking that the task of the sacred historian is to detect the hand of God in the past, whatever actually happened in the past. The facts of the past must be taken as given before sacred history can be written.[1]

For example, Mazzini, the great expositor of Italian nationalism, exhorts the Italians[2] to realize their historic destiny by building what he calls the 'Rome of the People'. This Rome is the third Rome because it has been preceded by the Rome of the Caesars and the Rome of the Popes. Now clearly, this presents us with some order of the drama of time. And it is the facts of the past that are so ordered, for there were indeed such people as the Caesars and such

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1 The sacred history of which Augustine speaks has a counterpart in Hegel's philosophy of history, where Hegel tries to detect the movement of Absolute Spirit in the facts of the past.

2 In the essay 'To the Italians' See Duties of Man and other essays, London 1907

people as the Popes and their deeds and qualities were much as Mazzini suggests. But it is not part of Mazzini's task or intention, nor, unlike many writers, does he make any pretence of trying, to establish these facts as facts. What he does is to describe the facts of the past, which he is prepared to take in outline and on trust from historians, in such a way as to relate those facts to present concerns in the world of conduct. He speaks to the Italians of their forefathers, and in so doing he does not fly in the face of fact but makes, or at least tries to make, the facts of the past significant to the people of the present and in terms of their present difficulties. Similarly, the ages into which Augustine's sacred history was divided were divisions which enabled him and others to see a special significance in the present age. This is what the enterprise of sacred history is about.

> The meaning of history lies always in the present ... do not look around yourself into universal history, you must look into your own personal history. Always in your present lies the meaning of history, and you cannot see it as a spectator, but only in your responsible actions. [1]

An ideological or a religious understanding of the past, then, is quite different from the understanding we may hope to gain in the academic study of history. It is an evaluatory ordering. It selects out of the facts of the past those which can be related to us as agents

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1 Rudoph Bultmann: History and Eschatology Edinburgh 1958, p.155

in the present. It is about who we are, what our existence adds up to, and very often where we are to go from here. In this way, it provides us with the kind of understanding of facts which may inform conduct. The understanding supplied by the academic study of history, by contrast, enables us only to assert more facts of a different order.

3. One objection which springs to mind is this: "The distinction between the fact of an event or a state of affairs and the significance of an event or state of affairs cannot be sustained. The distinction seeks to release ideological and religious accounts of the past from the critical scrutiny of historians, but this cannot be done. Consider the following statements:

> The Estates General met on 5th May, 1789.
>
> The French Revolution began in 1789.
>
> The 5th May, 1789 marked the end of feudal monarchy in France.
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> The French revolution was a bourgeois revolution which overthrew the old feudal order in France.
>
> The French revolution marked the beginning of Rationalistic politics in Europe.

The objection is that all of these statements about the past are of the same form and that their truth or falsity will depend upon historical evidence. To say, that the French Revolution began in 1789 and to say that it was a bourgeois revolution, is just the same as saying that a bourgeois revolution began in 1789. And all of these are simple statements of fact. To say that a bourgeois revolution began in 1789 or that rationalistic politics began with the French Revolution is not to give the significance of what happened, it is just to relate what

happened."

I find this objection very plausible but a slightly more detailed consideration of the examples given will reveal as crucial those differences which this objection seeks to ignore. Consider the first statement again. 'The Estates General met on 5th May, 1789'. This, I suggest, is the only claim among the examples given, that is treatable as a judgment made in the context of the study of history. We could come across diaries, documents, letters, state papers, reminiscences which gave the date of the opening of the States General and we could therefore be pretty certain as to what the actual date was. And if we had formerly thought that the opening had taken place on, let us say, 2nd May, such evidence would serve to refute the received account. My point is that historical reasoning provides us with a very clear idea of what would count as evidence here, and what proof and disproof would be. And though the <u>actual</u> state of evidence may force us to reserve judgment, should the appropriate evidence become available we cannot seriously doubt the historical judgment that 'The Estates General met on 5th May, 1789'.

Now consider the second example. 'The French Revolution began in May 1789'. The term 'The French Revolution' refers to a cluster of events and not to any particular event. Indeed the term 'revolution' is vague since revolutions are not like rugby matches, they do not begin and end with a whistle. To say that the terms are vague is not to say that they need to be made more precise; it is to say that they can never be <u>determinate</u>. Their usefulness lies in

their vagueness and we are not awaiting greater precision in their use. If they can never be determinate, any judgments which involve their use can never be determinate. It follows that the judgment 'The French Revolution began in May 1789' is not a determinate fact the truth of which could be assessed by the examination of evidence alone. It follows then that the canons of historical reasoning alone cannot provide us with the possibility of accepting or rejecting this judgment, for they enable us to assert and deny specific facts about the past, and this statement is not a specific fact. The date of the beginning of the French Revolution depends upon which events we include by that term. Not that we could decide which ought to be included. The reference of the term results simply from what we do include. A book on the French Revolution may well begin with the opening of the States General in May 1789. But equally well it could begin with the perilous state of the French economy in 1780 or with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in August 1789. And none of these would be wrong. Of course we could not include any events we might fancy in the term. The expression 'French Revolution' gives us a rough indication of the period under discussion. It is vague, but not hopelessly vague. My point, however, is that the statement 'The French revolution began in May 1789' may well be useful in the writing of a history book but, unlike the statement 'The States General met on 5th May, 1789', it cannot be treated as a possible judgment of historical fact which it makes sense to try and prove or disprove by the examination of evidence. It is, in short, a specimen of the 'history

in outline' referred to earlier and which, though it is obviously related to historical fact, can make a fully intelligible appearance in contexts other than historical research. The point, however, is that here is a statement about the past that is not the statement of a specific fact of the past, and which the evidence available to historians will not be sufficient to confirm or deny. It cannot be the case, then, as the objection we are considering would suggest, that all statements about the past are susceptible to the investigations of historians.

Let us now consider a third, and final, example from the list with which we began. 'The French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution which overthrew the old feudal order in France'. The term 'bourgeois', like any other term, must be applied according to some criteria, for example, the presence of features X, Y, and Z. The identification or description 'bourgeois' is, therefore, an ordered understanding of the elements X, Y and Z. Of course, nothing much follows from this since this is true of vast numbers of terms in our language. However, if we were to dispute that the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, we would have to claim that in the cluster of events which can sensibly be called the French Revolution some of the necessary elements X, Y or Z, are not to be found. But the elements X, Y, Z, must be facts about the past, facts about what happened at that time, like the date of the opening of the States General. Talk of 'bourgeois', then, is a matter of ordering the elements, the facts, of the past. But if we are to order the elements and if it is possible

to offer alternative orderings, the orderings must themselves be indifferent to the fact of the elements. If we are to understand the facts we cannot be in doubt as to what those facts are. This means that the term 'bourgeois' occurs in an understanding of the facts of the past, for the elements it orders are facts about the past. But this shows that the concern here is quite different from that of the historian whose primary task is to establish what the facts of the past are. History, in this sense, does not provide an understanding of the past at all, but of the present. History is the present conceived as evidence for the past. The proposition 'The Estates General met on 5th May, 1789' explains the present condition of the evidence upon which that claim is based. It explains why certain documents in our possession are as they are. But ideological understandings, of which the statement I am now considering is a part, are understandings of the past. And we cannot understand the elements a, b, c, that is order them according to a manner of understanding, if we are in doubt as to what those elements are. If the conclusion that historians offer us no understanding of the past seems paradoxical, the paradox can perhaps be dispelled by noting simply that the product of historical research is a narrative of the events of the past. But a narrative narrates events, it does not explain them. It tells us what happened, not why it happened.

In conclusion, then, detailed investigation of particular cases has shown, I think, that although all the statements listed are statements about the past, and indeed statements about what happened

in the past, they are not all equally susceptible to investigation by the methods of critical reasoning historians employ. The statements an historian may make about the past are different from those an ideologist may make about the past because they occur in the context of different activities and different kinds of understanding. And the last case is clearly an instance of the sort of thing about which I spoke earlier, namely, the portrayal of the pattern of things, the drama of Time, for the concept 'bourgeois' is not to be understood outside the general sequence of feudal, bourgeois, socialist or communist.

> Here we have a belief in historic facts different from a belief in ordinary historic facts. Even, they are not treated as historical empirical propositions.[1]

4. The objector may here go on to say[2] 'What you are arguing here in effect releases religion and ideology from criticism by reference to hard fact. But though such a release may relieve the ideological or religious apologist from the embarrassment of certain criticisms, it does so only at the cost of rendering his claims empirically vaccuous. For if no evidence will count for or against the claims an ideologist may make, they cannot be said to be <u>claims</u> at all'.

But there is some confusion here. Ideologies and religions are understandings of the world and not sets of propositions about the

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1 Wittgenstein: <u>Lectures and Conversations</u> p.57

2 As Alasdair MacIntyre does in 'Is understanding religion compatible with believing?' see John Hick ed. <u>Faith and the Philosophers</u>, London 1964

world. As understandings, they allow claims about the world to be made and to be examined and rejected. The claims that are made by the ideologist, therefore, do not constitute but reveal the understanding in terms of which they are made. And if the judgments we make in ideology or religion prove unsound, they do so against criteria internal to the ideology and not against some general, external criteria of 'the facts'.

My argument has been that ideologies and religions are understandings of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* and I have tried to elaborate what I mean by the phrase. They cannot, therefore, be rendered empirically vaccuous by anything I have said since they were never, so to speak, empirically substantial. Nor could they be. To understand things in a religious or an ideological manner does not, as it does in history or science, enable us to assert yet further facts about the world, or even to explain the facts we already know, but rather enables us to arrange the facts of our experience in an evaluatory order, so that they become significant in terms of conduct, who we are, what we must do and refrain from doing.

III

Are ideologies and religions, then, as has often been suggested, much the same sort of thing? Are ideologies a secularised form

and the historical successors of religions?[1] Even though we have so far encountered no reason to distinguish between the two and even though what I have said has referred to both under the general term 'faith', this familiar and, as I think, plausible suggestion cannot be sustained. For the secularisation of religion is supposed to consist in a transformation from an 'other-worldly' to a 'this-worldly' understanding[2] and such a transformation, if it were possible, would destroy what is distinctive in a religious understanding. Or so I shall argue.

I have not distinguished between ideologies and religions so far because I have been concerned to bring out how very different these modes of understanding, whose significance lies in the realm of conduct, are from those which are theoretical in nature. And in the portrayal of such a contrast ideology and religion must look alike. Their differences, then, what distinguishes the one from the other, will be found not so much in the form of reflections in ideology and theology, as in the kinds of activity which each seeks to inform. And it is indeed in this that we may locate the distinction between ideology and religion. The concern of religious belief and practice is primarily with eternal life, while ideologies are essentially temporal in conception. It is in terms of this distinction between the eternal and

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1 "Christianity was the grandmother of Bolshevism" - Spengler

2 Feuerbach attempts just such a transformation in Essence of Christianity

the temporal that I should like to show how religion is a different kind of understanding from ideology.

2. The way I have spoken, indeed have had to speak, about ideology and religion has already given an indication of the differences I now want to bring out. The ideologies of Marxism, Liberalism and Nationalism, for example, I have described as ethical traditions, that is, manners of understanding within the general realm of moral, political and educational activity. But Christianity, Buddhism, Islam are religious traditions, that is, understandings which seek to inform activities and practices peculiarly their own.[1] Religion, we might say, is self-contained in a way that ideology is not. In other words, religious beliefs and practices inform religious life, which is made up of acts of a certain distinctive kind. But there are no such things as ideological practices, unless perhaps we use the expression to refer to the particular kind of thinking and writing which I shall discuss in the next chapter. Ideologies inform activity in the realm of politics or morality or education, all of which are, so to speak, constituted independently of them.

This can be seen most easily in the 'transforming' power of religious belief and ritual. Here, 'ordinary' acts are, by description in religious terms and when performed in the context of religious

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1 I leave aside here the complex question of the relation between ethics and religion. This omission does not, it seems to me, impair what I have to say about religious faith. It does, however, entail disagreement with those (some Christians and Buddhists, for example) who claim that the chief import of religious belief is in ethics.

rituals, changed into acts of a different order. For example, the everyday actions of eating bread and drinking wine, in the context of Christian belief and ritual, become the wholly different kind of act that is the celebration of the Eucharist. Again, kneeling and singing become acts of praying and worship. And so on.

Religious activity, then, is activity of a different kind from all other and I shall try to say shortly wherein the difference lies. Here it is worth noting that the transforming character of religious belief and ritual lends to the religious man an independence in activity which is not possible for the ideological adherent.

To become a religious believer must, in part, result in our engaging in new kinds of activity. We pray, we meditate, we worship where we did not before. To become convinced of a religious faith is to adopt a different persona, that of the religious man. But to become, say, a Liberal, is to perform not different _kinds_ of act but different acts from those which we would otherwise have performed. They are acts in the same realm, in this case the political, and are _shared_ by the adherents of competing ideologies.[1]

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1 In Trollope's _Phineas Redux_, Mr Daubeny, the Conservative leader, throws both his own party and the Liberal opposition into great confusion by proposing legislation to disestablish the Church. The confusion arises from this action being hitherto recognised as a typically Liberal policy and as anathema to Conservatives by its seeming quite out of keeping with Conservative philosophy. But the possibility of his acting in this way shows the political character of the act to be independent of party and ideology.

The dependence of ideological understandings upon a general realm of conduct which they do not and could not themselves constitute is perhaps even more evident in the case of moral ideologies. The competition between one moral tradition and another, Aristotelianism and Puritanism, say, cannot revolve around what is to count as being moral activity, but rather what is to count as morally good activity. The former debate is about what is moral and non-moral and this is appropriately conducted in moral philosophy. The latter is a debate about what is moral and what immoral, or more frequently which virtues are of paramount importance and which not.[1] In this way moral ideologies presuppose a shared form of moral life and do not constitute it. The difference between, for example, the Stoic and the Epicurean are differences within the realm of moral conduct.

'But isn't this also the case in religion? Aren't the differences between, say, Christianity and Islam within one realm?' Perhaps they are, but the important point is that no shared criteria of religious acts are necessary to the life of a religious tradition. The religious believer has always the non-religious to compete with. But I cannot understand how liberalism and conservatism could be competitors without a shared context of political activity.

The effect, we might say the social manifestation, of this distinction between ideologies and religions is that the one, religion,

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1 This point is elaborated further in Chapter 7.

takes the form of institutions, while the other takes the form of organisations. The life of a religious institution, the Church for example, revolves around the maintenance of a constitutive framework of activity, that is in the maintenance and performance of rites and practices which cannot, logically cannot, be performed outside that framework, for example, the ordination of priests, the celebration of the sacraments, the consecration of places of worship. By contrast, the ideologies of liberalism, or socialism, or nationalism, give rise to organisations, political parties, whose purposes are to win and retain the power to exercise the authority of certain offices which logically could be occupied by others. Further, the understanding supplied by an ideology is regulative of our conduct in a sphere in which the adherents of ideologies other than ours may and do compete.

In short, then, to come to possess a religious understanding is, amongst other things, to come to participate not merely in different activities or even a different range of activities but in activities of a different kind altogether. To come to possess an ideological understanding is to participate in the same kind of activity in a different way.

3. But there is more to be said than this. There is something to be said about the 'essence' of the matter. And what more there is may best be brought out, as I earlier mentioned, in the notions of eternity and temporality.

Religious belief, and in general the concerns of the religious believer, are characteristically thought of as being 'other-

worldly'. This other-worldliness lies, I think, in the religious believer's hope of and attempt to live 'eternal life'. Now it is clear that to talk about eternity is not to talk about an infinite duration of time. Any period of time in the past, the present or the future, however long, is necessarily temporal and the point about eternity is that it is necessarily time<u>less</u>. Nor will it do to think of eternity as 'the whole of time', for this suggests limits and it does not make sense to speak of time's having an end or a beginning. This means that eternal life cannot be thought of, as very many thinkers have suggested, as a life of infinite duration which begins when our present, temporal life ends. For a life beyond the grave, being a life in time, would not differ <u>in nature</u> from that which preceded it. If the notion of eternal life is intended to provide a release from the temporality of existence, a life of immortality beyond the grave cannot do so. For such a life, far from being timeless would be infinitely temporal. Even if we suppose the world beyond the grave to be occupied by some different kind of entity, the soul[1], a view which seems to me open to insurmountable logical objections, we cannot justifiably suppose that the life lived by such entities would be any the less a life of chance and change than that with which we are familiar.

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1 There are, of course, other accounts of soul-talk than that I have in mind here.

> When the Fourth Evangelist represents Jesus as saying 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent' he plainly does not refer to an immortality that is attained after death, but to a relationship here and now which does not change or pass away. He is, in fact, uttering what poets and mystics have always said, that in and through the transient is realized the permanent. If this be true - and there is a mass of testimony to it - then the antithesis between nature and supernature becomes absurd, and the total corruption of the natural must be abandoned: nature and grace become sacramentally related as outward to inward, and the incarnation of the divine is in keeping with the whole character of the physical world, since 'God so loved it'.[1]

My argument in section two of this chapter has been that, just as religious experience is not to be understood as something like sense experience, only more mysterious and much rarer, still less experience of a supersensible realm of being, but rather as the phenomena of our experience conceived and thereby understood in a certain manner[2], so the possession of an ideological understanding does not enable us to explain the phenomena of our experience by relating them to something external to them nor does it reveal the foundations of

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1 C E Raven, Natural Religion and Christian Theology, Cambridge 1953, Vol I, p.38

2 When we are told that someone has heard 'The voice of God in the wind' this does not refer to something extra that he has heard and we have not, but to the impact upon and significance for him of what we have all heard. '"You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed" That is a gramatical remark' Wittgenstein, Zettel Oxford 1967, para 717.

the values we express, but is itself a conception, an understanding, of those phenomena which bestows value upon them. But while the religious understanding provides the possibility of our living new life, ideological understanding involves the fashioning, and on occasions refashioning, of the pattern of moral and political life which we already lead.

The 'newness' of life lies in its being eternal life, that is the realisation of the permanent in and through the transient. In what does this realisation consist? It consists, I think, as the term other-worldly suggests, in, so to speak, dying to this world, that is ceasing to find the significance of the present in what the future brings. To conduct one's life within an eternal view of the present is necessarily to be indifferent to how things are in the future, or rather, since being indifferent is the achievement rather than the condition of religious life, it is necessarily to see the future course of events as cause for indifference. From the point of view of eternity, the future is not distinct from the present or the past; it is merely more time. To conduct one's life within a temporal view of the present is necessarily to be concerned with how things go in the future since, in a temporal view, the future is the test of the wisdom of the present.

Perhaps I can make this slightly obscure talk a little more clear by some concrete examples. If we are concerned to act in time, then plainly the time at which we act is important, if we are to act successfully. The rational economic investor, for example, will care-

fully assess the present state of the market in order to maximise his future gains. The student will prepare for these present examinations in order that his future employment prospects may be improved. In both these cases the hope of realising a future state of affairs informs our actions, and what the future turns out to be determines whether we have done well or badly, acted wisely or foolishly. In short, to act in time in the present involves the idea that our present actions are assessable in terms of the future. Such action is future orientated. But temporal activity is also past orientated, for we learn from our experience of how things have turned out in the past how best we may manage the present so that we may order the future. If having done X we find that Y does not materialise, we will be inclined to question the efficacy of X as a means to Y and perhaps eliminate it from our stock of tactics. Thus, our present activity is constantly and continuously modified in thelight of the past in order the better to secure the future. But some of the relationships and features of our experience necessarily involve a rejection of considerations of this sort. Chief among these are those involving love.

If a mother loves her son, she loves him regardless of what he may do in the future. He may leave her without a word, he may use her cruelly, but it would still be perfectly intelligible for her to love him _in spite of everything_. Indeed the exquisite pain of such disaffection lies in its being such love that is spurned. The mother loves her son regardless of what may happen, even what he may do, and she loves him, therefore, not because he is lovable but because he is her son. Of course, his disaffection _may_ result in her ceasing to love him, but this is not the kind of modification in behaviour which is

the result of experience. If she did cease to love him as a consequence of such treatment, far from declaring that she had grown wiser by the experience, that she had learnt better than to love him, she might well think of her ceasing to love him as the sign of her failure as a mother. In a sense the mother's love is necessary not contingent. It is not a matter of choice for her whether to love him or not. Certainly her love is not the outcome of experience, it is not as though she found him lovable and so loved him; and, as I have tried to indicate, her love is neither modified by experience nor regulated by anticipation of the future.

Now it seems to me that this account is not only also true of the relationship of loving and worshipping God, but is necessary to that relationship. Love of God must, in a sense, be absolute, that is, it must override all other considerations. If our love of God is intended to secure the future, if we worship Him because of what we hope He will do for us, then our love is dependent upon and in proportion to the contingencies of experience. In this case it cannot embody an eternal relationship because it is dependent upon what time will bring. When the worship of God is designed to ensure or secure future bliss, even bliss beyond the grave, supposing that idea to make sense, it is not a relationship of love at all. Our love for God must, logically must, be independent of future contingencies, else it cannot constitute a relationship of a different order.

D Z Phillips, discussing Kierkegaard, says:

He sees, rightly, that thanking God is a nec-

> essity and not an option for the believer. How is it possible? It is possible precisely because the thanking is not an appropriate conclusion inferred from the way things go, but is itself a reaction to, and an assessment of, the way things go. The Christian thanks God whatever happens in the sense that nothing can render loving God pointless. The way things go is contingent, but the possibility of thanking God in all things, a possibility St Paul speaks of, is, Kierkegaard says, part of the eternity which God has put in men's hearts.[1]

This distinction between the eternal and the temporal is incorporated in a religious understanding and thereby made manifest in the activities of the religious believer. It allows and requires activity of a different order[2] because it seeks to challenge the kind of life which we ordinarily lead. It allows and requires the transformation of ordinary acts of which I spoke earlier, a transformation which takes our actions out of time altogether.

5. Is such transformation with its notion of the timeless also involved in the actions taken and the lives led which an ideological understanding informs? I have already given some reasons for thinking that this is not so. There is no comparable transformation of human conduct in the language and understanding which an ideology may supply. This claim is borne out, I think, in the examination of particular cases. The concern of those who think and write ideologically and those

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1 D Z Phillips, op cit, p.209

2 I do not say 'higher' because I am not sure how the two could be assessed. I am inclined to say that the religious quest springs from a certain sort of dissatisfaction rather than a more profound dissatisfaction.

who act in the light of an ideological picture of the world seems almost invariably to be concerned with the securing of a desirable future. For example, Marxism, in most of its varieties, seeks a 'correct analysis' of each political system and economic situation in order that revolutionary change may be engineered most successfully. The debate about whether a bourgeois revolution is a necessary precondition of a socialist revolution illustrates this concern with efficacy and instrumentality in contingent circumstances. Conservative theorists, to take another example, have often tried to detect the point in the past where things went 'wrong' in order that we may put them 'right'. Conceivably, Nationalist ideologies are least concerned with efficacy, for the kind of devotion a Nationalist will give to his country often constitutes the kind of relationship which is independent of time, of how things go. But even here, notions of instrumentality and success have played an important part. Mazzini, for example, though he saw it as the <u>duty</u> of every Italian to struggle for the liberation of Italy, nevertheless also claimed that this was the only way in which the economic and social ills of the country could be eliminated. Further, much of the political plausibility of Nationalism, particularly immediately after the First World War, lay in its claim that the self-determination of peoples was the best way to secure international peace. A liberal's devotion to liberty might also be thought of as having something of a timeless dimension, but here again it is often an important and influential argument in its propagation that reasonableness in all things is the only way to

avoid the dangers inherent in doctrinaire extremism.

This temporality in ideological understanding is not, I think, surprising. For as I earlier argued, ideologies inform kinds of activity which they do not themselves constitute. We shall expect, therefore, the understanding supplied by an ideology to be as temporal as the activity it seems to inform. In the case of politics,[1] this is a complete temporality. Politics just is the activity of creating, maintaining and developing the institutions and procedures of a state, in and over time, to meet the requirements of the changing circumstances time brings. The concern of the politician, qua politician, is almost exclusively with how things are and how they will go.

Further, most of the noteworthy political ideologists have thought and written almost entirely in terms of relating the past to the present to the future. They have proferred accounts of the past which determine the appropriateness of actions in the present with a view to a future which they hope to secure. This is true of Marx, Mill, Maine, Mazzini, Lenin and countless others.

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1 Someone might suggest that an eternal dimension is possible in moral ideologies, understandings which seek to inform moral conduct. For, he might argue, moral conduct also concerns relationships out of time. This question is too large to discuss fully here without detracting from the main thread of my argument. Suffice it to say that since moral relations are between <u>human</u> beings, they must be temporally confined by the mortality of human beings. It is the otherness of God Himself which allows love of Him to constitute a purely or completely eternal relationship.

Still, it may be that the temporality of ideological understandings is a contingent matter. I mean that it is perhaps conceivable that an ideology could provide the possibility of eternal relationships. As I indicated a moment ago, in the expositions of nationalist ideology the Nation sometimes takes on something of the character of a transcendent reality, even perhaps a transcendent agency.[1] But by and large in ideologies there is no agency other than human agency, which means that the hopes of the ideologist must rest upon human endeavour and achievement. Religion, on the other hand, and I know of no religion which does not enshrine this doctrine explicitly, acknowledges the ultimate vanity of human achievement. The hope of the religious man is for a 'Kingdom not of this world'; it is eschatological; it resides in God.

> It is very easy to slip from eschatological hope directed to the coming Kingdom to revolutionary strategy directed at the establishment of a socialist society, without being conscious of the divine act which alone establishes the one, and the human work which builds the other. Augustine's repudiation of the classical 'politics of perfection' was, in effect, a repudiation of any hope of resolving the tensions inherent in fallen society through human means. In contrast to the revolutionary with his programme and his strategies for realizing it, the man whose hope is eschatological has no programme, no ideology and no strategy. His hope is set upon a resolution of conflicts far beyond any ideology. In so far as an ideology commits a man

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1 This is revealed sometimes in what it means to the nationalist to live and die for his country. In a sense, all that is important to him is quite unaffected by his own death.

to a vision of an ultimately desirable social order, eschatalogical hope is the negation of ideology. It asserts that the Gospel is in radical conflict with the world, and must be so until the end, whatever shape 'the world' may assume - even if the 'world' were one shaped by the Gospel itself, even if the society were permeated by Christian inspiration and formed under Christian impulse. The Christian hope is radically revolutionary in that it must question at its roots all forms of social order. But it is also anti-ideological and anti-Utopian in that it cannot hold out any positive ideal or Utopia as an alternative.[1]

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1 R A Markus: Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine Cambridge 1969, p.170-171.

CHAPTER 6

Ideology, theology and theory

"It is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs."

ARISTOTLE

1. In the last chapter I have tried both to show that ideologies and religions are understandings of the world and to show what kinds of understanding they are. To say that they are understandings is to deny that they consist in sets of propositions or principles and to assert that they are themselves frameworks of understanding which allow claims to be made and to be refuted. And it has been part of my argument that the criteria, by which the soundness and unsoundness of these claims is to be judged, are internal to the ideology in question. In this chapter I hope to show just what the form of such criteria might be and what kind of reflection they allow. Thereby I hope to refute the sceptic's suggestion that in matters of ideological belief there is no scope for talk of a genuine exercise of reasoning.

To do this is to investigate the nature of ideology in the second of the two senses I distinguished in Chapter 4, namely, ideological argument and reflection, which I earlier called the theoretical expression of faith. But it might be suggested that what I have said so far prohibits the possibility of any such expression, that, far from refuting the sceptic, I am forced by my own argument to concur in his opinion. Before turning to the main burden of this chapter, then, it will be necessary to consider this objection.

2. It could, I think, be put like this. 'In the course of the argument you have advanced two claims which, taken together, prohibit the assertion of a third. The first two of these are as follows.

(A) It is in the nature of theoretical inquiry that it is incapable of providing any orientation towards or knowledge of the

future. Everything in philosophy or history or science is, from the point of view of the practical man, valueless and useless. Philosophy, for example, can offer an account of morality but it cannot make us moral. History can tell the story of political parties but it cannot tell us which to join. Science can reveal the properties of the Universe but it cannot advise us on which to exploit. Academic or theoretical inquiry is by its very nature concerned with fact and non-fact. But the factual by itself is dead. Theory, then, as you have argued throughout this thesis, cannot determine or guide the will. In short, academic inquiry has no import for practical life. (B) On the other hand, those beliefs and doctrines and traditions of thought and practice, which we often call "philosophies", which you have called ideologies or more generally faiths, are concerned with just those questions of how we are to live, both with relation to particular circumstances and in general. But these, since they are the sorts of thing we live by, must, if the world is to be understood in their light, <u>be</u> lived by. In this way, where faiths are concerned we cannot separate understanding a view of the world and understanding the world according to that view. Thus, <u>objective</u> examination in this context does not make sense. That is, it is not possible to subject a belief or set of beliefs of this kind to rational scrutiny and <u>then</u> accept or reject it. Ideological understanding is, in this sense, a subjective understanding.

Given this view of theory and this view of faith, it follows that (C) it is impossible for a man to theorise about his faith. Yet

you have claimed that what is distinctive about the kinds of writing and thinking which we have been considering is that they are the theoretical expression of faith.'

It is clear that either there is some error in this elaboration of the argument or I am indeed forced to accept the sceptic's conclusion. And, of course, it is my contention that there is some confusion in the first argument, which I will now try to show. The showing of this is really the concern of the entire chapter. Here, therefore, I shall merely make a few disclaimers.

First, I am not arguing that some form of theoretical elaboration of an ideology or a religion is necessary to the life of an ideological or religious persuasion. Indeed, the contingency of such articulation is an important part of my distinction between ideology in the first and ideology in the second sense, and between religion and theology. All Christians, for example, as religious men, are in possession of a peculiar or particular understanding of the world and this understanding is manifested not primarily in assertions about how the world is, but in a whole way of behaving, a set of attitudes and responses to things in the world. Again, most Liberals are primarily liberal in their attitudes and in the values they share. What makes them ideological adherents is the fact that these attitudes and values make sense and can be articulated in the context of, in relation to, a picture of the world. But it would simply be false to suggest that all liberals could give an exposition of their political and moral belief, just as it would be false to

claim that all Christians have a theological account of their belief at their fingertips. It follows that the articulate exposition of the understanding faith supplies is only one possible form of expression, that there are many other ways in which ideological belief and understanding manifest themselves. Of course, this articulate, theoretical elaboration is usually more communicable and approachable than the more concrete, practical expressions. But this is because it takes the form of propositions and arguments, not because it is in some sense the 'core' of the faith. Indeed, theology and ideology are parasitic to some extent upon the other kinds of expression which the faiths they seek to express enjoy and I can readily conceive of a faith which does not give rise to any theoretical account of itself.[1] To argue, then, as I wish to do, that reflection in matters of faith can have a genuine place in the conduct of life is not to argue that such reasoning is central to or even a necessary condition of a faith's

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1 Compare Wittgenstein's remark to Friedrich Waismann:

> "Is speech essential for religion? I can quite well imagine a religion in which there are no doctrines and hence nothing is said. Obviously, the essence of religion can have nothing to do with the fact that speech occurs, or rather: if speech does occur this itself is a component of religious behaviour and not a theory. Therefore nothing turns on whether the words are true, false or nonsensical."
>
> Phil. Review, Vol 75, 1965, p.16

This seems to me not quite right. At least, all I want to claim is that a religion without doctrine is possible. But not all religious language is or even arises out of doctrine.

existence.

Still less is it to argue that the beliefs by which men live can be founded on an objective basis, that they can be shown or demonstrated, independently of the context of the faith itself, to be sound or unsound, rational or irrational. For I have argued all along that this is _the_ difference between scientific or 'world-historical' propositions and the beliefs of a faith, that the latter cannot be given any objective _foundation_, while that is just what the former must have.

3. Here it might be said that such disclaimers as these show that the term 'theory' used in the context of ideology or religion, is, at the very least, grossly misleading. For the argument in Chapter 5 so centred around the contrast between theoretical and practical understanding that the use of 'theory' here can only serve to obfuscate.

This may be so, and in the light of this objection I shall use the terms 'reflection' and 'reflective' in preference to 'theory' and 'theoretical'. But since the terms 'theory' and 'theoretical' are commonly used to refer to just those works of literature whose character I wish to investigate, I can, I think, safely claim, without denying the earlier distinction between the theoretical and the practical, that what I have to say about ideological reflection is a matter of revealing what 'theory' is like, or more properly, what it must be like, in ideology. It is to this that I shall now turn.

I

1. We sometimes contrast theory with practice when we are not, and could not be, in any doubt that both are centrally within the world of practice. These are cases where, for example, we contrast the theoretical perfection of a design with the likely practical difficulty of its execution. But I do not think that our speaking in this way arises out of total confusion. Clearly, however, the use of 'theory' here is quite different from that in which we describe science or philosophy as theory. In the case I have just cited practice is the acid test of theory, but a scientific theory could not be tested in practice since it is incapable of advocating anything which might or might not work in practice. For example, the hypothesis that 'All gases expand when heated' can be tested by heating gases. But it is not the act of heating which refutes or confirms it, but the fact which the act is designed to reveal. On the other hand, the 'theory' that 'The top of the bottle will come off it you heat it under the tap' is 'falsified' if it fails to get the top off. In other words, the act of heating gases has a significance in the context of developing and testing a scientific theory. The theory about the bottle top has significance in the context of a practical act.

This different use of the term 'theory' is not quite that upon which I wish to focus attention. I cite it only to show that in ordinary language the word can be used to draw a contrast between

practical reasoning and practical activity. This is partly the contrast which I wish to make,but I want to point to a difference between two possible responses to practical life which both involve reasoning. I shall call these the reflective and the active responses to the conduct of life. The reflective response, as I shall elaborate it, is the response which is not content merely to live out a life, but which seeks to 'philosophise', in the layman's sense, that is to articulate that life and the significance it attributes to events and phenomena.

2. The contrast between the active and the reflective can be brought out, I think, by considering again the example of the bottle top. The practical difficulty, in this case, is that of removing the top of the bottle. It is suggested that one way of doing this is to loosen the top by warming it under the hot tap. This is suggested, let us suppose, on the very good grounds that metal expands more than glass. This is, as I say, a very good reason for trying this method of solving the problem, but from the point of view of the practical task in hand, though these grounds may be good and may be persuasive, they do not stand or fall with the success or failure of the recommended method. It is the method that is important and not the explanation of why it is successful. In other words, if we do warm the top of the bottle and it does not come off, it does not follow that metal does not expand more than glass. But equally, it is irrelevant, if the method has failed, to set about proving that metal does expand more than glass, for however that may be, the

method of removing the bottle top has still been a failure. In brief, from a practical point of view what works is right and what fails to work is useless and of no further interest, regardless of the soundness of the grounds upon which such a method is advanced.

It is easy to be misled by the simplicity of this example. In fact, I think that a similar analysis of, for example, the relations between economic theory and advice to politicians on steering the economy, will hold good. Be that as it may, the contrast I want to draw is between this variety of practical reasoning, which is, we might say, geared to results, where what is sensible is what works and what has been found to work, and that species of practical reason where, regardless of what works, what matters is what is right. Consider the following example,

Suppose that a political leader, faced with the possible expulsion of his party from power, together, let us suppose, with all that he and his party have fought for, is advised to imprison some of his political opponents even though they have committed no impeachable offences. The arguments for and against this policy might be considerable. For example, it could be argued that, such was the present organisational state of the political opposition that, if a few key men were imprisoned and thereby removed from their executive positions within the organisation, the opposition, despite considerable resources, would collapse. The expertise and experience necessary for the successful deployment of those resources would have been destroyed. Against the idea of imprisonment without

trial it might be argued that such a policy had always proved the surest method of stiffening the resolve of those committed to the opposition by making martyrs of their leaders; that it would provide an additional factor which would push many uncommitted people into supporting the opposition; that it would create the considerable problem of providing top security prisons for those interned. Or more generally it might be argued that the reputation of the government would be irreparably damaged both at home and abroad.

All of these considerations are designed to show that this measure will or will not accomplish a certain effect. In other words, they are concerned with what will and what will not work. Such arguments, of course, cannot demonstrate that such and such _will_ be the outcome. The actual effect of any measure is a contingent matter. Rather these considerations have a bearing upon the advisability of a certain action. But there is another set of considerations which might be brought to bear in an argument of this kind and these are considerations of rightness.

Suppose that the politician in question refused to adopt the measure of imprisonment without trial for the reason that, when the law has not been broken, freedom from coercion is a fundamental human right. He might claim that, whatever the likely consequences and however desirable these might be, imprisonment without trial is fundamentally _wrong_. Or again, from a different viewpoint, someone might argue that in a particular state, imprisonment without trial was so alien to the country's political traditions that nothing

could justify it. The point about both these arguments and in general the kind of consideration of which they are instances, is that it is useless now to estimate the outcome or efficacy of the measure, for the judgments are about right and wrong, about what can and cannot be done regardless of these particular circumstances. I do not mean that judgments such as these and the factors involved in arriving at them have nothing to do with the success and failure of a particular policy. They may. If a particular act is sufficiently alien to a given political climate the degree of opposition it provokes may be quite unlike normal political unease. What I do want to argue is that considerations of immediate success and failure can rightly be regarded as irrelevant to judgments of this sort, for they are judgments of a different order. A man cannot advocate a measure on pragmatic grounds, if he has good reason to think that this will lead to undesirable consequences. But if he is concerned to do what is right it need not matter to him whether the right action will also be successful.

3. To say this is not to revoke my earlier distinction between the eternal and the temporal. An eternal view of the present understands human effort in the world of change to be ultimately vain. It is, if you like, a refusal to acknowledge any value in the world of pragmatic endeavour. But such a refusal is not involved here. The considerations of rightness such as in the example I have just given, do not involve a denial of the importance of political activity but are rather considerations of the limits to such activity. They trans-

cend the particular circumstances in the sense that their concern is, so to speak, with an overall view of the political life a man is going to lead, rather than with the political wisdom of this particular act in these present circumstances.

This, however, is not a rejection of the whole idea of a political life. Its concern is with political <u>identity</u>.[1] I mean to say that what I have called purely pragmatic considerations are pertinent to the politician qua politican, while considerations of rightness arise when the question is asked 'What must I do and what must I refrain from doing if my integrity and identity as a liberal (or whatever) is to be preserved?'.

4. The distinction I am drawing is hardly new. I think that this kind of distinction between the morally right and the practically efficacious is that which Socrates defends in both <u>The Republic</u> and <u>Gorgias</u>. I think, too, that recognition of this distinction is what led Kant to locate moral goodness, not in the consequences of an action, but in a good will. What I am trying to do here is employ this age-old distinction in the context of a certain problem, the problem of the place of ethical and religious reflection in the conduct of practical life. And I think I can do this in the following manner.

It is clear that, in the example I have been using, the first, the pragmatic, set of considerations about what will work and

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1 This point is expanded in Chapter 8

what will not work are the outcome of experience, experience that is to say of what has and has not worked in the past. The best advisors, then, will be men of practical experience. But of course it is not enough that we have experience of the past. Skill in the business of advising and deciding lies in our ability to relate the lessons of the past to the concrete, altered circumstances of the present.[1] This is the sense in which the practical past is quite different from the historic past. For, while the historian's past is studied for its own sake, the practical man can readily discard those events in the past which throw no light upon the present. The criteria of what is important in the past are quite different for the historian and the practical man.

In purely practical, pragmatic reasoning, then, the present circumstances are crucial in determining the wisdom or folly of any particular action. But in considerations of the second kind, the attempt is to transcend those very circumstances, to detect the enduring feature of the act, its good and its evil. Present circumstances, when they do play a part in such judgments are always _mitigating_ circumstances. Considerations of the second kind are not directly concerned with what is to be done but rather what can and cannot be done in the light of who we are and what we value, independently of

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1 I think that Machiavelli's _The Prince_ exemplifies the error of thinking that knowledge of the past is sufficient in itself.

this particular time and circumstance. Of course, circumstances may force us to abandon one value in favour of another for, notoriously, ethical choices most usually present themselves not in blacks and whites but in varying shades of grey.

In pragmatic or purely practical reasoning, the wisdom or soundness of any judgment as to what is to be done is assessed in the light of past experience, present circumstance and reasonable prognostication as to the future. By what criteria, if any, is the soundness, wisdom or folly of any ethical judgment to be assessed? The essence of the sceptic's case is that it makes no sense to talk of wisdom here, for no reflection can show one ethical judgment to be better than another.

5. Now in Chapter 5, I argued that only in the context of a tradition of moral life can a judgment be an ethical judgment and have sense, be intelligible. This is to say that before any ideological, religious or ethical proposition can be assented to, it must be understood (this, of course, is true of all propositions) and what is involved in understanding a moral judgment, the logically necessary preconditions of the possibility of its being understood, is a form of moral life shared between the maker and the understander of the judgment, however limited the extent of the shared elements of that life may be. I should like now to argue, that, given the intelligibility of ethical judgment, the existence of a shared, authoritative tradition of ideological or theological reflection allows the possibility of a mutual and genuine reflective examination

of such judgments.

Let us return for a moment to the example we have been considering. In the second set of considerations, it was said that to introduce imprisonment without trial would be to violate a fundamental human right. The burden of Chapter 5 is that it makes no sense to wonder whether it is wrong to violate a fundamental human right. It just is the case, for anyone to whom talk of fundamental rights makes sense, that they are the sorts of things which must not be violated and which set limits to what can and cannot be done. If, then, any dispute is to arise at this point, it cannot be an argument about whether the violation of human rights is right or wrong. Such a dispute would not be peculiarly ethical, as some philosophers have suggested; it would be vacuous. The ethical question, if there is one, then, must rather be over whether this is or is not a case of the violation of a human right. What marks it off as a question of a different kind is that it is couched in the language of a recognisable ethical tradition. In this particular case, however, there is not much scope for debate, since for most liberal writers and liberal people, imprisonment without trial is the paradigm case of the violation of a fundamental right. But since the life of ideological and religious traditions must be carried on in a world of chance and change, questions of this order do arise and are introduced.

Few people who find talk of human rights intelligible would doubt that imprisonment without trial is indeed the violation of such a right. It is not over cases like this that disputes arise. But

suppose that a politician is urged to intervene in the closure of a factory on the grounds that those who are about to lose their jobs have a fundamental right to work. Here we might well wonder whether work can be considered a fundamental right, like the rights to life and liberty, and a dispute may arise between those who take differing views of the matter. My question is whether there is any possibility of reaching a conclusion on an issue such as this, in a process of reflection, as opposed to the mere assertion of an opinion one way or the other.

I should like this point to be quite clear, however. I am not trying to re-introduce a notion 'Truth' like that in the common-place model which I earlier rejected. Rather, I am trying to reveal the kind of rationality, if any, that is possible in ideological and theological reflection. And I think that we may sensibly speak of a judgment's being rational without thereby implying any idea of demonstrable certainty or without wishing, even, to engage in any talk of truth or falsity.

II

1. To arrive at an answer to the question of whether the ethical writing which we call works of ideology can involve any notion of rational reflection, I shall explore the parallel suggested by the title of this chapter, that between ideology and theology. For

I think that the kind of reasoning involved is similar in both.

The particular example I should like to consider, in some detail, is the controversy between Pelagius and the doctors of the Church, Jerome and Augustine. This dispute was about the relationship between nature and grace, original sin and guilt, a question which has often occupied theologians. Pelagius claimed that it was possible for a man to be perfect without knowledge of Christ. Augustine claimed that all men were corrupt by nature so that perfection was only possible by the saving power of the cross. What interests me in this dispute is the form of the arguments that were advanced on either side and with a view to commenting on them, I should like to summarise them briefly.[1]

Pelagius argued that, if men were imperfect by nature, if that is to say, 'a man were of such a character that he could not possibly be <u>without</u> sin, he would be free of blame'.[2] In other words, if sin is in our nature, it cannot be affected by and cannot, therefore, involve a responsible or an irresponsible exercise of the will. 'How can one be subjected to God for the guilt of that sin, which he knows is not his own. Or, if it is his own it is voluntary, it can

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1 What follows is a greatly attenuated and simplified account of this fascinating debate.

2 Augustine: On Nature and Grace Trans. P Holmes in W J Oates (ed) Basic Writings of St Augustine, New York, 1948, Vol I. Apart from a few fragments, the only record of Pelagius' original work is in Augustine's criticism of it. All my quotations, therefore, come from this work.

be avoided'.[1] If, then, it can be avoided, it is possible that in some men sin is not committed at all and that, therefore, there is no imperfection in their souls.

Now in order to avoid the charge that he has left no place for God's supremacy and man's inferiority, Pelagius adds that, of course he is discussing a matter of possibility and not actuality and that all men are, as it happens, sinful. Further, he agrees that if the possibility ever is an actuality it is so only by the grace of God.

There are two quite different kinds of argument at work here. The first of these is what we could call logical argument. Pelagius thinks that he has detected an incoherence in the doctrine of original sin and he thinks that if this incoherence is remedied the resulting position admits the possibility of sinfulness without salvation. The second kind of argument, his defense of this view as orthodox, involves an appeal to general notions of orthodoxy and to the specific orthodoxy laid down in the writings of the theologians. (Pelagius refers to Origen, for example.) It further involves an appeal to and interpretation of Scripture.

Augustine's objections to Pelagius are of these same two kinds. He takes up the logical question of nature and voluntary action and argues that necessity and freewill are not incompatible. (I do

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1 ibid. XXXIV

not say that this is a sound argument, only that it is recognisably an argument.) Secondly, he argues that, even though Pelagius admits the necessity of the grace of God to the perfection of any man, his claim that human perfection is possible without redemption entails the heretical proposition that Christ's death and resurrection were in vain.

> I take the instance of a young man, or an old man, who has died in a region where he could not hear the name of Christ. Well, could such a man have become righteous by nature and freewill; or could he not? If they contend that he could, then see what it is to render the Cross of Christ of none effect, to contend that anyman, without it, can be justified by the law of nature and the power of his will.[1]

In short, Pelagius' doctrine involves a denial of the place of Christ in the salvation of man and can scarcely, then, stand as a Christian doctrine.

Further, Augustine claims that Pelagius' teaching is directly contrary to the Scriptures and he quotes Paul's letter to the Galatians 'If righteousness come by the Law then Christ is dead in vain'.

2. Now my interest is not in the content or the substance of these arguments but rather in what kind of arguments they are. We have seen that two different sorts of objection and defence are involved here. Pelagius appeals first to logic and then to orthodoxy. He claims that the doctrine of original sin cannot be right because it is

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1 ibid XXXIV

incoherent, and that the rejection of that doctrine is not in conflict with orthodox teaching as enshrined in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers. Augustine claims that the doctrine of original sin is not incoherent and that its rejection is in conflict with orthodox belief as enshrined in Scripture and in the teachings of the Fathers.

It is clear that arguments of the first sort are indeed possible objections, as indeed they are in almost all kinds of discourse. For since, though what is logically incoherent can be said, it cannot be asserted, (eg. I have squared the circle) and what is logically necessary cannot be denied and further, since all argument consists in part of assertion and denial, it follows that the question of the logical coherence or incoherence of our assertions and denials in argument will always be pertinent. However, the degree to which this kind of argument is capable of generating clearcut objections outside of those contexts where it is the only form of argument (philosophy proper, for example) should not be overestimated. Often it is not at all clear whether two notions are incompatible or not (for example transcendence and immanence) and further, as I shall try to bring out in the next chapter, there may yet be point in affirming the seemingly nonsensical or tautological. Arguments of the second kind are of more interest in the context of the present thesis. They involve a notion of religious scruple. Augustine's claim is that to argue in the manner of Pelagius is to give way to heretical opinion. Its heretical nature can be brought out by showing that it conflicts with the teachings of earlier and respected Christian thinkers, or

that it is contrary to Scripture, or both.

Now what I want to claim is that, where there is an acknowledged traditional corpus of literature identified peculiarly with the life of a particular organisation or institution and where there is an authoritative text, there is the possibility of agreement and disagreement as to the significance and nature of conduct and events in the world and that since, within limits, these disagreements are settleable, it makes sense to speak of a reflective employment of reason in matters of faith. But this kind of reason does not and could not supply the demonstrable certainty or conclusiveness of the exercise of reason involved in a theoretical discipline like mathematics or history. The sceptic concludes that because there is no certainty, no conclusiveness, there is no reason. I should now like to show that this is not so.

3. I spoke of this argument between Augustine and Pelagius as involving a question of what could and could not be affirmed by the believer. In a theoretical discipline, the question is what can and cannot be asserted. If a man insists that Napoleon did not die in 1821 despite evidence to the contrary, then he violates the canons of historical reasoning and thus ceases to be an historian, to be doing history, at all. Similarly, if a man affirms that observance of the Law can be sufficient for human perfection, then, at least on Augustine's account, he denies the universal and necessary saving power of Christ and thus violates orthodox Christian doctrine. In short, to believe what Pelagius asserts is to cease to be a Christian.

Of course, the sceptic will reply, 'This is a matter of opinion; it cannot be shown'. But it can be shown, and, as it happens, I think Augustine does show Pelagius to be mistaken here. It can be shown because there exist authorities to which appeals may be made, namely the Bible and the teaching of the Church Fathers, and because the application of the terms grace, nature and original sin are not totally arbitrary.

Someone will say here: 'All this depends on whether or not you accept the Scriptures as authoritative. What if a man says "I don't care what it says inthe Scriptures?" then no conclusion is binding upon him.' But could this be said? If Pelagius refused to be corrected by what was said in the Scriptures then I cannot see the sense in which he could have been engaged in this controversy at all. If he denied that what he said had its significance in the context of being a reflection upon the Scriptures,[1] I cannot see that he could have claimed any significance for it at all. Besides, Pelagius tries to avoid conflict with orthodoxy, not because he is afraid of what will happen to him, but because he recognises such conflict as error as much as Augustine does.

Of course, if appeal to the Scriptures means nothing to a man, then he cannot engage in any controversy involving such an appeal. But then he cannot express opinions within that controversy either.

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1 In fact the arguments of On Nature appeared first in a Commentary on the Epistles of Paul.

I want to say here that something either is or is not, has or has not authority. It cannot intentionally be made an authority nor can it intentionally be rejected. If this is right, it follows that it does not make sense to suppose that I am not bound by a conclusion in theology if I do not accept the Bible as an authority. If the Bible has no authority for me, then questions which depend for their resolution on its deployment as an authority cannot arise.

4. I am not saying, however, that the conclusions of theological reflection are demonstrably certain, though some may be. Rather I am suggesting that if we are perplexed in matters of religion it is possible to reach conclusions after a process of reasoning; in short, that genuine reason is possible in matters of faith. The degree to which such reason will result in conclusions agreed upon by all is a contingent matter. It depends upon the extent to which the Scriptures and the writings of theologians are open to interpretation and whether there are any supplementary authorities like, for example, Papal bulls. What can be said *a priori* is that where there is a tradition of reflection upon an authoritative text there are the necessary conditions for reasoned, reasonable and unreasonable concluding and affirming.

III

1. The question now arises as to whether what I have been arguing in the case of theology also holds good for ideological reflection. What I have sketched are the conditions which, when realised, allow the possibility of considering rationally what it is appropriate and what it is inappropriate to do and to believe in the context of a particular religious tradition. Now it is probably fairly clear that these conditions are not often realised in the ethical traditions which we call ideologies.

To begin with, almost none, with the possible exception of Marxism, has anything which could even be thought of as an authoritative text, still less an authoritative tradition of commentary and reflection upon that text.[1] Even if we were to consider Marx's own writings as authoritative for Marxists, they could not be so in the same way that, for example, the Bible is for Christians, for its authority derives from its being divinely inspired.

Secondly, most ideologists of modern times have been so imbued with the spirit of Rationalism that they have been unable to treat the writings of the forebears of their tradition as authoritative. For Pelagius, the fact of being in conflict with earlier

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1 Consider here the kind of authority enjoyed by Peter Lombard's _Sentences_.

theologians is itself sufficient indication of error. For most modern writers some ground outside the tradition itself, which will provide a rational criterion by which the forebears may themselves be criticised is sought after, and, of course, sought after in vain.[1]

Thirdly, some institutional authority[2] often helps to reinforce the authoritative literature. In the history of Catholicism the stamp of Papal approval has often provided crucial clarity on the demarcation between the orthodoxy and the heretical. But I know of no ideological tradition where a parallel institutional authority has had a recognised and continued existence in the life of that tradition.[3]

It seems, then, that an actual perusal of ideologies reveals nothing of quite the same character as a text with the authority of Holy Writ. Perhaps it is indeed inconceivable that such a text could be found, for Holy Writ stems from and is concerned with a particular kind of reality, the reality of God, which, as I have noted already,

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1 This of course also applies to religious writers. Paley's Evidences of Christianity is one example.

2 It need not always, I suppose, be instituted. It was Augustine's personal authority which, in many ways, swung the opinion of orthodoxy against the Donatists. As Bishop of Hippo he had no particular authority in the matter.

3 In Marxism, the Second International was a possible contender for the role of just such an authority. But its failure lay precisely in that it did not become the accepted body which would decide upon orthodoxy.

has no parallel in ideology.

Nevertheless, ideologies often do have a corpus of 'classics' and it is such a corpus, or so I shall argue, which, if it does not allow reasoning of quite the kind to be found in theology, does allow that ethical judgments need not wholly be at the mercy of whim and the arguments summoned in their defence need not be wholly random.

The reasoning in which theologians engage involves a notion of orthodoxy in doctrine, the doctrine of God and of His relationship to men. The orthodoxy which a corpus of literature that has no such transcendent reality may enshrine is not so much an orthodoxy of doctrine as of language. And, as I hope to show, orthodox agreement in language can, at least on occasions, allow the possibility of rational agreement in opinion.

2. I have noted already more than once in the course of this thesis that the differences between one ideology and another reveal themselves not in a simple opposition of principle or proposition but in the vocabulary, the concepts, each employs. Of course the concepts peculiarly identified with one tradition may be mixed, often quite happily, with those of another. In Mazzini's writing, for example, liberalism and nationalism are almost inextricably combined. In Beveridge socialism and liberalism are inseparable. Still, we can sensibly make distinctions between liberal and nationalist, socialist and conservative and to show that there are borderline cases is not to deny but to affirm that some such distinctions are

possible.[1] But if such differences are to be brought out this must be done by reference to the contrasting ways in which each understands and describes the world. The differences do not consist in opposing assertions about the world.

For example, a perusal of liberal literature, however comprehensive, will not discover a 'core' of doctrine which liberals have, by and large, accepted. What it will discover is a continuous revision and modification of, and disagreement over doctrine, in which all parties express their disagreements in similar terms. In brief, they all use the concepts of liberalism. And prominent among these concepts are the notions of liberty, civility, law, rights, toleration. It is the presence of this shared language and not agreement over doctrine which unites them in the same tradition.

I do not mean to say that by drawing up a list of such concepts for each ideology we will have a criterion by which to determine who is truly liberal (or whatever). A language must be shared but it is not thereby bounded and, as I have suggested already, the borderline cases must remain borderline. What can be said, at least what I now hope to show, is that though, in general, a language cannot determine what will be said in it, at least on

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1 'Many words in this sense then don't have a strict meaning. But this is not a defect. To think it is would be like saying that the light of my reading lamp is no real light at all because it has no sharp boundary'
Wittgenstein: The Blue Book

some occasions the meaning of words does determine what can and cannot be affirmed, and further, that terms may derive their meaning chiefly from their systematic use in works of ideological reflection.

Let us return to the case concerning human rights. I said there that any ethical dispute could not possibly be about whether it was right or wrong to violate a human right but whether this or that set of actions did or did not amount to the violation of a human right. It is clear, then, that the dispute is over the application of the term 'human right', about whether it is or is not applicable in a given set of circumstances. Now the proper application of a term is to be decided in the light of its meaning, and the meaning of a term is to be discovered in and derives from its use. The use of a term, of course, must be reasonably systematic and extensive if it is to give a fairly clear meaning. Therefore, if a particular work employs a term fairly systematically, reference to that work (or works) may, on occasion, satisfactorily resolve questions about the appropriateness of further application of the term.

This is the way in which a corpus of literature may sustain an ethical language and may provide that orthodoxy in language which enables a reflective determination of the reasonableness or soundness of ethical judgments. This point can, I think, be best elaborated and defended in the context of another parallel, that between ideological reflection and legal reasoning.

3. It has been noted that legal questions are often questions

about words,[1] or, more properly, about the application of words. But we should not conclude from this that these matters are merely matters of words, whatever might be meant by that. For upon the decision whether to call this an act of manslaughter or of murder a very great deal may depend. I think that the way in which words are important, become important,and issues over words may call for resolution in questions of ideological reflection finds an instructive parallel in the legal concern over words. More importantly for our purposes here, the parallel also extends to the way in which these issues may reasonably be resolved.

The particular example of legal reasoning I should like to explore is the issue in Anthony Trollope's novel The Eustace Diamonds.

It will be recalled that the title of this story refers to a diamond necklace, the ownership of which is in dispute. It is claimed by the executors of the estate that the necklace could not have been bestowed upon his wife by the late Sir Florian Eustace, since this particular necklace is a family heirloom. It is not in doubt that an heirloom cannot be given away. What is in doubt is whether the necklace is in fact an heirloom. The learned Mr Dove, reputed for the excellence of his opinions, is invited to offer one in this case. He determines that the necklace cannot be an heirloom

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1 See Glanville Williams: 'Language and the Law' in Law Quarterly Review January and April 1945

and that, since its specific inclusion in the will is in doubt, it could be claimed by the widow to be 'paraphernalia'. Now the manner in which Mr Dove arrives at this opinion is the same as that by which most legal questions are resolved, namely by an investigation of previous cases. Mr Dove determines that, given the way the terms 'heirloom' and 'paraphernalia' have been used in the past, the necklace cannot properly be called an heirloom, and, despite its great value, could plausibly be called 'paraphernalia'. Of course, should the disputing parties be dissatisfied with this reasoning, the reasoning cannot itself settle the matter. This requires a judgment in court. But the judge's decision will be taken[1] in the light of reasoning similar to Mr Dove's. Mr Dove's reasoning is, if you like, preliminary reasoning,but only in the sense that it indicates in advance of an actual court ruling how that ruling will go.

Mr Dove arrives at his opinion by considering how the terms 'heirloom' and 'paraphernalia' have been used in previous judgments. By doing this, he tries to determine the proper meaning of the terms and his conclusion is correct in so far as it coheres with the meaning already established in law. This is the sense in which legal opinions are coherent or incoherent. Now, depending on how systematically and extensively the terms have previously been used, Mr Dove's task will be more or less difficult and the truth

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1 And will be criticizable, that is open to appeal.

of his conclusion more or less ascertainable. It is unlikely and perhaps inconceivable[1] that the past employment should be so systematic as to allow complete certainty over the correctness of the present opinion. But the point is that such legal opinions may be arrived at by reflection and that the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the opinion can be shown while, at the same time, no suggestion of indubitably demonstrable proof or certainty arises. We may, in short, sensibly speak of the coherence or incoherence of a legal opinion without pre-supposing the kind of complete coherence for which a theoretical discipline strives.

4. If we now turn our attention to ideological reflection we shall find, I think, that in many instances this is not dissimilar. One striking dissimilarity, of course, is the absence of what would in this case appear to be vital, namely a corpus of past legal decisions. But this absence is, at least on occasions, remedied by a corpus of literature. And I should like to show, if I can, that this is indeed the case by examining the instance of Marxism.

When we read Marx's writings, especially *Capital*, we come away, if we are persuaded by what we read there, with some sort of understanding of the world in which we move and have our being. In what is this understanding revealed? It is not revealed, and

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1 This is not peculiar to legal talk. It is what has been called the 'open texture' of language.

could not be if my argument so far is correct, in our now being able to assert a number of propositions about the world to be true. For, the understanding we are now in possession of could not consist in some additional facts about the world which we did not formerly know to be true. This would be knowledge rather than understanding that we had won. It consists rather in the ability to make a new range of judgments about the world. We may, of course, now affirm certain beliefs which we did not formerly affirm, but these are not simple propositions[1] about the world which we did not formerly know to be the case. Such affirmations cannot be given any meaning, any sense, outside the understanding we have newly acquired. Nor does the understanding consist in a stock of principles for action; ideologies cannot be understood to be a stock of principles (abstract or otherwise)[2]. The understanding we now possess reveals itself in an ability to describe and explain the various phenomena of will and sensation in which the world consists, in terms of a particular and distinctive set of concepts, concepts like, for example, alienation, science, ideology, labour, capital, surplus-value, exploitation, revolution, feudalism, socialism and so on. The

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1 'I believe in God' is not like, does not do the same sort of job as 'I believe there is a tiger outside the door'. Similarly, affirming 'Capitalistic relations are exploitative' is not like asserting 'Granny Smith apples are green'. The peculiarity of beliefs such as these is examined at length in the next chapter.

2 As I argued in Chapters 3 and 4

extent to which these concepts combine together to make, so to speak, a workable understanding, is determined by the extent to which the rules for their employment, that is their meanings, are determinate enough to prevent their whimsical use. And the rules, very often, are just as determinate as the works from which they spring are systematic.

Marxism is a good illustration here because the language of Marxists is so very nearly the language of Marx, even where the Marxists in question have not read Marx. And precisely as the terms of Marx's writings are used extensively and systematically to that degree disputes over their application are settleable. For example, the term 'surplus-value' can be used to describe and relate phenomena with a reasonable lack of ambiguity. The term 'ideology', on the other hand, is one which Marx scarcely employs so that the numerous Marxist accounts of ideology, though they bear something of a family resemblance, are at considerable variance. Marx's use of the term is so limited in extent, that recourse to that will not suffice to settle any disagreements.[1]

It is my suggestion, then, that more or less similar notions of rightness and wrongness can apply here as did in the

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1 Perhaps this is true ofmany Marxist concepts. Certainly a perusal of Marxist literature does not, as a matter of fact, reveal much agreement and suggests that often the use of terms <u>is</u> whimsical. I am, however, only concerned with logical possibilities.

case of Augustine and Pelagius and of Mr Dove and the heirloom. I am claiming that, in some disputes between Marxists there is, in principle, some scope for a reflective consideration of the correctness or incorrectness of a judgment. The reflection consists in a comparison of any particular judgment with the correct usage of the terms it employs, as revealed by the writings of Marx. The degree to which reasoned reflection is possible is a function of the degree to which those same terms are used extensively and systematically by Marx.

Someone will say here: 'All this depends upon our acceptance of Marx's writings as authoritative'. I cannot see that anything could depend on that. We cannot 'accept' something as authoritative. What would such acceptance be like? To be a Marxist is not to have accepted Marx's writings as authoritative. It is to be someone for whom those writings have authority and this is revealed, not in something we believe about them, but by the part they play in our lives. For many Marxists, of course, Engels is also involved. Further, many disagree over which of Marx's writings (The Young or The Mature) are the embodiment of the 'true' theory. The matter is even further complicated by the later theorists Lenin, Trotsky, less often Stalin, and recently Mao. It is in part an illustration of my thesis that the most profound disagreements tend to revolve around these canonical differences.

The objection may be raised: 'What about Marx? He must have used Marxist vocabulary and yet he cannot have belonged to the

tradition which he founded. How did his words have sense? If he talked nonsense, being without a canon of literature, everything based upon what he said must also be nonsense. But if he talked sense, the sense of what he said must have derived from something other than the Marxist tradition. Therefore, if Marxist talk makes any sense, it must do so on some basis or criterion external to itself.'

But such an objector has failed to understand the idea of a tradition. Marx did not found a tradition; this could not be done. A tradition has grown up around what Marx wrote and the growth of that tradition has lent to those writings a certain authority. They did not come with that authority built in. Nor could any basis in science or history lend them authority of that kind. What Marx said was, as is well known, couched in the language of German philosophy, French socialism and English economic theory. No doubt the synthesis achieved between these three disparate elements was, in its way, a considerable intellectual feat. No doubt, too, it is this intellectual strength which in part caused a tradition to grow up around these rather than some other writings. But the intellectual effort neither founded nor did it provide a foundation for the ideological tradition which grew up around its

product.[1]

5. What I have been sketching are the logically necessary conditions for the possibility of some degree of reflection, agreement and disagreement in the making and considering of ethical judgments, given that these can only have sense in the context of an ideological or religious tradition. In short, I have claimed, against the sceptical account of ideology, that reason and unreason are possible here, given certain conditions.

Of course, talk of possibilities may suggest a simplicity which the reality, the actualised possibility, is unlikely to have. To begin with, even when reason is possible, men are not always reasonable. Secondly, different parts of the literature of a tradition may conflict, or worse, it may be uncertain whether they do conflict or not. Thirdly, the authority of the literature may not be recognised by all the parties. Fourthly, passions in these matters tend to run high. And so on. Very few, if any, ideological debates are as clear-cut as the matter of 'heirloom' vs. 'paraphernalia', or even as clear-cut as the Pelagian controversy. In consequence, the life of an ideological tradition is always turbulent

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1. I do not understand those who speak of Marxism's 'standing or falling' with, say, Marx's theory of history. I suppose this means something like 'If Marx's theory of history is true, then Marxism can be believed, will be believed'. But we know that it can be believed, without going into Marx's theory of history. An ideology cannot depend for its life upon the intellectual coherence of one of its doctrines.

and rarely approaches anything like the sustained stability of a legal system or even a church. But in form, the three are not so very different.[1] In any event, they are more like than is the form of ideological reflection to the logic of an intellectual discipline, and this is the error I have sought to correct.

IV

1. The question with which we have been concerned is how, if at all, those ethical judgments which we make in the course of our conduct of life and which set limits to what is appropriate and permissible, to what can and cannot be done and thought in the context of a moral or political tradition, can be reflective, considered judgments, not capable of proof or demonstration, but nevertheless free from the arbitrary dictation of whim and fancy. I have argued that a corpus of literature sufficiently systematic and with sufficient authority can supply the criterion by which the reason and unreason of our various judgments can be determined, especially in those ethical questions, and perhaps all ethical

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1. There are differences, of course. One is that to which I have alluded already, the presence, often crucial, of an institutional authority in law, and sometimes in the church. This is connected, I think, with the point I made earlier (Chapter 5: III:2) that the social manifestation of a religion, and the law, is an institution, that of an ideology an organisation.

questions are of this sort, where it serves no useful purpose to distinguish between matters of fact or substance and matters of language or words.

All this, it will be recalled, has been advanced against the sceptic who claims that ideological reflection is a spurious form of reasoning, in short, no exercise of reason at all,and further, that my account of ideological understanding entails my concurrence in just such a view. I hope that the argument has shown that neither of these suggestions can be substantiated. Before concluding this section, however, I should like to consider one final argument against my rebuttal of the sceptic, an argument which has much in sympathy with and could be said to be derived from Aristotle's account of ethical life in the Nichomachean Ethics.

2. 'The scope you allow', it will be said by this objector, 'to ideological reflection depends upon a fundamental distinction drawn between two kinds of question and consideration which may arise in the course of our lives, roughly,purely practical or technical questions and considerations and questions of rightness. But such a distinction cannot be drawn. A man cannot be wise and be evil. The wise man knows what is good for the life of the individual and of the state and such goodness cannot be separated into material and ethical goodness. The 'phronemos', the practically skilful and wise politician, will not do that which offends the ethos of the state both because it offends and because it is injurious. Political education,the education necessary to the successful government of

society cannot consist, then, merely in the acquisition of skill in the business of manipulating and maintaining political procedures. It involves learning the appropriate use of those procedures as well as a training in their mechanics. We do not know how to act politically if we know only how to initiate procedures. Complete political knowledge, the knowledge which will allow a concrete, self-moved activity of politics, is knowledge of the how and the when and the what of political activity.'[1]

I do not disagree with any of this. It is not, however, an objection to what I have been saying. The argument is that, in concrete political activity pragmatic considerations and considerations of rightness are inseparable. But it does not follow from this that they are indistinguishable. We cannot separate out the mind and the body of a man but we can, do and must distinguish between the two. To establish that there is a distinction we do not have to isolate minds from bodies (this was part of Descartes' mistake, I think). We have to show that judgments about a man's mind cannot be reduced to judgments about his body. Similarly, in order to show that pragmatic considerations are distinct from considerations of rightness we do not have to show that the one, in reality, can stand on its own, without the other, but that the one is not reducible to the other. And this I think I have shown. For I

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1 I hope it is clear how this objection may be said to be Aristotelian.

argued that while circumstance is central to judgments made in the light of pragmatic considerations, circumstances are a matter of indifference to judgments of rightness. The man who does what duty requires of him for fear of the consequences of not doing so has not acted out of duty.[1]

3. The Aristotelian view, then, is either mistaken, or it is the view that both ethical and practical considerations and judgments are necessary to and inseparable in any concrete moral or political life. This, of course, I do not question, and nothing I have said implies anything to the contrary. No doubt this sort of objection goes part of the way to correct the Rationalist error in thinking that the concrete activity of sustaining a life together can find its source and resource in thought alone. This error is one I also sought to correct earlier in the thesis. It is perhaps worth underlining the fact that the ideological reflection, the possibility of which I have tried to allow, is and can only be sensible or meaningful reflection within some ideological tradition.

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1 This reveals, in part, the singularity of the question philosophers have often asked themselves 'Why should I be moral?' If it could be shown that, in some way, morality pays, this would either be irrelevant to the man who does what he thinks is right because it is right; or it would suggest that moral judgments are 'veiled' judgments as to which course of action is most likely to afford benefit. But surely the most difficult human problems involve conflict between the natural desire to benefit and the obligation to do right?

PART THREE

THOUGHT AND CONDUCT

"deliberating is not to be understood as a regrettable frustration of a demonstrative manner of thinking. It is the only kind of argument in which an agent can recommend an action to himself and its reasons are the only kinds of reasons which may legitimately be adduced for having made *this* rather than *that* choice."

MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

CHAPTER 7

Ethics and Generality

"Not everything that is expressed in the language of information belongs to the language-game of giving information."

WITTGENSTEIN

1. Someone will say: 'What you have now shown is that when we make particular statements in ethics what we say is indeed subject to reason and unreason. And no doubt it is the case that the reasonableness or otherwise of particular statements can only be determined in the context of a corpus of authoritative literature. But to show this is not to show, as was earlier claimed, that a theoretical or reflective expression of one's ethical persuasion is possible. To be able to make reasonable and unreasonable particular judgments about the world may show that we are in possession of an <u>understanding</u> of the world, as opposed to a mere account of it. But a theoretical expression of one's understanding of the world would be couched in general or universal, not particular, statements. It would reveal the <u>ground</u> of the particular judgments. The reason which the theorist must claim to exercise cannot be one which, in the light of previous reflections, gives rise to particular descriptions of the world; that is what any adherent of the ideology in question may do. Rather, the theorist seeks to add to that corpus of literature itself, by revealing, in general, how such particular judgments are to be made. What has yet to be shown', it will be said, 'is not how it is possible to employ such literature as a standard of rationality in the making and considering of particular judgments, but how such literature is possible.'

I think that the man who objects in this way is mistaken about the character of ethical judgments, for, in a sense, such judgments do not admit of generality. Further, when we do try to

speak generally in the language of an ethical tradition what we have to say, if understood as being in an explanatory mode or revealing the founding principles of our talk, must turn out, upon analysis, to be either tautological or nonsensical.

If then, we are to identify satisfactorily the place and importance of ideological reflection in the conduct of life, we shall have to locate it in a peculiar or distinctive response to the particular and not in a general explanatory account of the particular. In this chapter, I shall try to show that ideological reflection does not play a part in our lives by adding to the stock of our knowledge or by providing theoretical explanations of that which we already know. The reflections which may enable us to understand the world ethically do not take the form of helpful information or general theories.

2. According to the argument of Chapter 5, an ethical judgment is a judgment of fact conceived within a world of value, which is to say, a description of the world in the language of an ethical vocabulary. The possibility of a fact's being ethically significant depends upon our being able to impose some order of value upon the world of contingent fact. This is to be done by describing, and hence understanding, contingent facts in the vocabulary of an ethical tradition and thereby encompassing the contingent facts of experience, which in themselves are without value, in the ethical world in which we move.

It follows from this that any proposition[1] conceived within a world of value will, to those who move in that world, be understood as a simple factual proposition, and to those who do not, it will be unintelligible. To say 'That is blasphemy' is, if one is a religious believer, however devout, a simple assertion about the fact. If one is totally out of sympathy with religious belief, it is to utter a meaningless sentence.[2]

The difference between a proposition which has import in ethics and one which does not, does not lie in their being different sorts of proposition (eg. descriptive/evaluative)[3]. The difference lies, rather, in the conditions necessary for understanding and

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1 I speak only of propositions here, because I am interested in the nature of an ethical understanding of the facts and events of experience (what happens and is the case). Moral and political vocabularies, however, may be, and perhaps most frequently are, used in utterances which are not propositions about the world. Commands and entreaties, for example, may be couched in an ethical vocabulary. Such utterances are themselves ethical actions and form part of an active rather than a reflective response to ethical life. At a later stage, I shall discuss the relations between ethical propositions about the world and those ethical statements involving 'ought'.

2 Sentences can, of course, be understood in degrees. I may perfectly well understand that the word 'blasphemy' is being used to condemn.

3 Julius Kovesi's stimulating discussion of this problem reaches a conclusion of the same form as that which he wishes to reject. For on his account judgments in ethics turn out to be different sorts of proposition. See Kovesi: Moral Notions London 1967

agreeing that the propositions are indeed fact. For example, to agree that 'This man is guilty' it is necessary to follow all those conventional procedures by which the fact that it was this man and not another who committed the felony in question is to be established. But in order to do this it is necessary first to understand the utterance and this involves or rather requires that we share that form of life where legality and illegality make sense, where talk of guilt and felony can begin. And this is a matter of belonging and participating. If we do not, to some degree, move in that world of value, we will not understand what it is to be guilty, so that the judgment 'He is guilty' will not convey anything to us. If, on the other hand, we do understand what it means to be guilty, the question of whether this man is guilty or not is simply[1] a matter of fact. The point is that there are no such things as 'value-judgments', if we mean by that term a judgment of value <u>as opposed to</u> a judgment of fact.

To take another example. Given the Marxist scheme of things, the dispute about whether the Russian revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois revolution is simply a dispute about a matter of fact, namely, whether the characteristics necessary for something's being a bourgeois revolution were or were not present in Russia at that time. But to be able to make and dispute this judgment it is not

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1 When I say 'simply' I do not mean to deny that these are often complex questions.

only necessary to know some facts about Russia in 1905, it is necessary to understand, that is to share in, the Marxist scheme of things. Without this latter understanding, the judgment 'It was a bourgeois revolution' is not a value judgment, still less a factually erroneous judgment; it simply makes no sense. The man who does not think and move within the world of Marxism does not himself understand the facts of history in these terms and cannot, therefore, assess whether judgments couched in these terms are correct or incorrect.

In contrast to both these cases stand propositions like 'This pen is red'. Here, the necessary conditions for understanding (as opposed to verifying or falsifying) the proposition do not include a shared world of value, for, by themselves, the terms 'pen' and 'red' do not convey any positive significance in the world of practice. And the difference between the first two and the third does not lie in their being propositions of a different kind or form, but in the necessary conditions for their being understood.

I take this to be the point of the remark that: 'It is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics',[1] for what we have called factual judgments conceived within a world of value, however discreet that world may be from any other, are always particular or relative judgments and never general or absolute

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1 Wittgenstein: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 6.42

judgments.[1] A general proposition of ethics is, if my argument is correct, impossible, since this would have to be, not a factual judgment conceived within a world of value, but a statement, a proposition about those concepts in themselves. In other words, while the task of ethical thinking and belief is to confer significance upon an indifferent world, to look for general or absolute propositions of ethics would be to require statements about the value of value itself. The attempt to do this must always, I think, result in incoherence (eg. Justice is evil) or vacuity (eg. Lying is wrong).

In short, if, as has been argued, the difference between one ideology and another lies in differences over the significance of the facts and not the facts themselves, then, though these differences can be made manifest in different attitudes, ways of behaving and descriptions of the world, they cannot be captured in anything _said_. No proposition can contain, so to speak, a judgment of pure value.

If this sounds odd, it can be made more plausible by a couple of examples. 'This is murder'. 'He has committed murder'. 'She was murdered'. 'You have been found guilty of murder'. These

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1 I am aware that the terms 'absolute' and 'relative' are used by Wittgenstein in his 'Lecture on Ethics'. However, I do not think the distinction advanced here precisely coincides with his.

are all particular statements referring to people and events in the world and all employing the term 'murder'. Depending on how things actually are in the world, each will be true or false. They are all statements of particular fact, and sometimes it is supposed that the ethical element in the proposition 'He is a murderer' can be brought out by showing that the making of such judgments presupposes or assumes a general ethical principle about murder. But what would such a general ethical proposition look like? Of course, we can think of a plausible candidate here, namely 'Murder is wrong'. Now it is suggested that the acceptance and assertion of this fundamental proposition of ethics is what turns the factual judgment 'He has committed murder' into an ethical judgment, a judgment of value, and that such a general proposition or principle is a necessary part of any legitimate argument which seeks to move from fact to value.

But upon closer examination, we must conclude that such an utterance could not be the assertion of a substantive general proposition of ethics,[1] or indeed a substantive assertion of anything else. It is vacuous. For one familiar with the notion 'murder' it just is the case that one cannot murder with impunity. There is

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1 I am not, of course, denying the possibility of general empirical propositions about murder. For example, the proposition that 'All murders are committed in the morning' is neither tautological nor senseless. It is simply false.

no logical possibility of ethical disagreement or ethical difference (and hence agreement and unity) in terms of general principles or propositions like this. Ethical differences are not between those who think that murder is right and those who think it is wrong, but between those who think, say, that killing by drunken driving is murder, and those who think it is not. It simply does not make sense to claim that murder is right, though it makes perfectly good sense to claim that some particular murder, (the assassination of Hitler, for example) is justifiable. But even here, though we may disagree about what to think, this disagreement is not about the rightness or wrongness of murder in general, but, given the wrongness of any murder, whether this one can be justified.

Again, it is clearly meaningful to say 'That was very generous of you' 'He is a generous man'. These are particular judgments. They convey information about the world. But if I say 'Generosity is good', this is vacuous, it tells us nothing. We cannot sensibly argue about the matter for it would be nonsense to suggest that generosity is a bad thing. Those for whom generosity is a principle virtue do not differ from those for whom it is not in that the former think it good while the latter think it bad. The former may, in some particular instance, call a man generous where the latter would be inclined to think him a spendthrift. It is in this sort of difference that ethical boundaries are

revealed.[1]

These two cases are illustrations of the thesis that there can be no general ethical propositions. The man, then, who required of ideological reflection that it allow general propositions was asking the impossible. No general propositions can be forthcoming. If, then, ideological reflection is anything at all, it is reflection concerned in the making and considering of particular judgments.

2. Once the impossibility of general propositions in ethics is admitted, those sympathetic to the objection with which this chapter began may conclude that all talk of theory in ideology is misconceived. But to conclude in this way would be a mistake, if we mean by denying the pertinence of the word 'theory' that there is no difference between the active and the reflective response within practical life. And if this denial is on the grounds that talk which genuinely has its significance in practical life, in the practical ordering of the world, is nothing like the talk involved in an intellectual manner of ordering the world, like science or history, the conclusion is doubly mistaken. For it has been the constant theme of this thesis that these two kinds of ordering are logically distinct. We should not then expect ideological reflection

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1 This, I hope, makes plain the qualifications I spoke of earlier, when I quoted from Alasdair MacIntyre's Short History of Ethics. See page 100.

to look anything like the construction of an intellectual understanding. And I think that failure to grasp this lies at the heart of both the commonplace and the sceptical accounts of ideology. Both think that the question at stake is whether the reflection that is possible in the realm of practice can be a science. The one assumes that this is so and explains the place of ideological reflection accordingly. The other sees that no science is possible here and concludes therefore that no reflection is possible. But this is an inappropriate dichotomy with which to approach the matter and I should like now, if I can, to destroy those last vestiges of the way of thinking which inclines us to suppose ideological reflection to be something akin to the exercise of an intellectual discipline.

3. I spoke of active and reflective responses to practical life. The difference can be brought out in the following way. A practical understanding of the world must consist in an ability to bestow upon the events that contingently occur in time, a significance for us as agents. The movement of a hand in space is, in a practical understanding, neither contemplated in its aesthetic quality (as in the appreciation of a ballet) nor does it stimulate explanation in terms of its physically necessary antecedents (as in the science of physiology) but is recognised, say, as a bid at an auction. Understood as such, it provokes a response, a reaction on the part of the other agents involved in the situation. The mark of our being in possession of this sort of understanding lies in our ability to respond appropriately (in this case by accepting or

raising the bid) and a lack of understanding is signalled in an inappropriate response (by, for example, treating it as a threatening gesture).

The child who learns to live and to accomplish his purposes, learns, even, which purposes it is sensible to entertain, learns how to behave, which actions and responses are appropriate and when. The point about this sort of understanding is that, unlike the intellectual understandings that history and science supply, its practical character allows it, often, not to take an articulate form, but rather to find its immediate expression in actual conduct. A practical understanding of the world allows us to feel and to be at home in the midst of a world of chance and change. And being at home reveals itself in the ease and confidence with which we act.

The primary expression of practical understanding, then, will take the form of being able to act, rather than being able to assert.[1] The knowledge it supplies will be in the nature of a skill, an ability to do. Of course, I speak here of the logic of the matter, for only in logic can the doing be separated from our articulation of what we do. Once the power to articulate and assess our activity in words becomes an actuality we cannot in _fact_ separate our thought and our speech from our behaviour.

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1 Some utterances, as I noted earlier, are themselves actions.

Nevertheless, though it is easy to think of our behaviour as, in some sense, resulting from at least our verbal identification of phenomena in the world, this is not so. The child does not learn to identify certain people as 'mother' or 'father' first and then act accordingly. Part of learning how to act appropriately to 'this' (and the 'this' must remain unspecifiable) is to call this 'mother' or 'father'. Our learning of language does not precede but comes amidst, is coeval with,our learning how to act in the world.

Now, it follows from this that a practical understanding could, at least in principle, be revealed almost wholly in inarticulate activity; that the significance bestowed upon the phenomena of our experience could make itself manifest only in our reactions to them. If, then, we sometimes articulate that significance,the words we utter should not be understood as describing or formulating the principles of our unarticulated activity, but rather as replacing that activity, replacing the reaction in physical behaviour by a reaction in linguistic behaviour.[1] Practical and ethical talk does not reveal an ethical understanding of the world in the same way that a newspaper report reveals what went on at Wembley last night. Its role is not that of supplying, either to onlookers or the agent himself, information about a certain ethical order in terms of which

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1. Something similar can be argued about 'pain' language and 'the language of love', I think.

the world is arranged. Still less does the particularity of ethical talk lie in its giving peculiar information or reports of a peculiar sort.[1] The sentences 'He was murdered at 3.00am' and 'The knife entered the heart and life was terminated at 3.00am' do not differ in that the former conveys an ethical meaning on top of, or as well as, describing the facts, while the latter merely describes the facts. Rather the former describes the facts in such a way, in a language which enables the facts to have import in ethical life. What makes ethical talk distinctive is not that it is additionally informative, whether about some super-sensible qualities which the world is thought to possess or about our feelings, but <u>enabling</u>. It enables us to go on in the world.

We can see from this, I hope, that what I have called the reflective response to ethical life shows itself as an inclination to <u>articulate</u> the ethical significance of particular phenomena in the world. It attempts to formulate in words the significance of things. Such formulation, however, must replace or accompany simple behaviour, and does not describe it or reveal its foundations. The words we utter must do, in some way, what the action does. The words must be of <u>service</u>, and their power is to enable, not to assert. To understand such words is to be able to accept the judgment which such words express. It is to be enabled to come to

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1 As the school of moral philosophy known as 'intuitionism' supposed that it did.

terms with the phenomena to which they refer. Any further reflection, reflection upon the correctness of such judgments is, if it is productive of understanding, also enabling and not descriptive or explanatory. The test of whether, having reflected in this way, our ethical understanding of the world is enhanced is not merely whether we can go on, but whether we can go on with greater confidence and ease in our conduct of life.

The reflective response to ethical life, then, consists in an inclination to react to the world by thinking and talking rather than in action, to affirm in words one's ethical relation to the phenomena of the world. For example, when the events we call the French Revolution took place, the reactions of Englishmen were many and varied. Most, I imagine, knew little and cared less about what had happened and was happening in France. Some went to France to join revolutionary movements there and generally to take part in the turbulent events. Others stayed in England and, sharing the same sentiment as those who went, raised what support they could for the revolutionaries and tried to emulate their actions in England. Still others sought to prevent any such support being given, to foster the emigré French nobility and to suppress any similar revolt in England. All these are practical reactions and they spring from, they indicate and they make sense in the context of, an understanding of the world in which the events in France are encompassable. They are all active responses. They consist in the performance of actual actions, of a more or less unusual nature. And all of them may be contrasted

with, for example, the sermons of Dr Price, and, above all, Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France and Paine's Rights of Man. These last two are ideological works par excellence, for they are responses to particular events in the world which take the form of a description of those events in the terms of an ethical vocabulary, a vocabulary, that is to say, which enables us to grasp the significance of the events, to see their good and their evil.

'Seeing' the good and evil, however, is a metaphorical way of speaking, for it is not like seeing the colour or the shape of an object. To be aware of the evil of something is to be able to encompass that phenomena into one's practical life in such a way that the integrity of that life will not be destroyed by it. And to understand the good is to encompass phenomena in such a way that practical life is enhanced, that one is edified.

When we speak of reflection in practical life, therefore, and wonder about the place it has, we must not suppose ourselves to be thinking of a reflection upon or about that activity but within that activity; nor should we think that the illuminating character of such reflection, if illuminating it be, lies in its providing further or necessary information. The operations of thought which the exercise of an intellectual discipline must involve, the activities of making observations, explaining, reporting, verifying, falsifying, are, by and large, alien to any reflection whose significance lies in practical activity. Such talk is not of the accounting, verifying, explaining variety, but rather enabling, edifying, instructive.

Works of ideological reflection are profoundly misunderstood as reflective if we, or indeed the authors themselves, imagine them

to be scientific, informative, explanatory. They can, if they are to bear any sort of relation to human conduct, be nothing of the sort. Their reflectiveness lies in their being descriptions of, judgments about the world, rather than actions in it. What inclines us to call them theoretical, I think, is their systematic character. But, since such reflections cannot, logically cannot, result in general ethical propositions of pure value, anything systematic must reveal itself in particular judgments about the world. Ideological treatises are not systematic in the same way that philosophical treatises are.

I have already mentioned Burke and the French Revolution. Men of Burke's persuasion, no doubt, did express their opposition to the Revolution in words and speeches. What marks Burke off is not that he had some additional explanation of the events in France, whereas the average Whig had only an account of them. Rather, Burke tries to give a complete account of the Revolution in the vocabulary of a certain ethical tradition. This vocabulary is also that in which the isolated judgments of the Whigs are made. Further, its ethical character lies in its serving to mark distinctions between people and events which are also made manifest in actual conduct characteristic of Whigs. Burke and the average Whig,[1] if they have

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1 'Average Whig' is perhaps an unfortunate term since it is arguable that there was, at the time, no one set of people to whom such a term could refer. But I use it to indicate what might be called a logical fiction. I am concerned with a logically possible rather than an historically actual relationship.

an ethical understanding, will be able to encompass the cataclysmic events of the French Revolution with some degree of equanimity. They will not be nonplussed, completely confused, and thrown off balance by those events. In short, they will know, in a sense, what is going on and what it all adds up to. But such knowledge and such understanding does not supply an explanation of the occurrence of those events, but reveals itself in an ability to react intelligibly to them. The difference between the one and the other lies in the fact that the one consists in deeds (harbouring emigrés, fighting a war) while the other consists in reflections (a treatise).

The treatise, however, is not explanatory of the events of the Revolution, nor is it, for reasons advanced in Chapter 2, to be understood as the basis or the foundation of the actions of the members of the ethical tradition to which it itself belongs. It does neither of these since both of them would be 'scientific' in character (the first historical, the second philosophical) and could not, therefore, have any import in practical life. Burke's 'Reflections' is itself one kind of response within an ethical tradition. It is the passing and making public of judgments couched in the language of that tradition.

These judgments are about the significance of the events of the French Revolution. Judgments about the significance of things will consist in descriptions of those things,but their ability to convey and bestow significance does not lie in their being descriptions of some peculiar aspect of the phenomena in question. The

description in ethical terms is one way of <u>bestowing</u> significance on those phenomena, of bringing them within the compass of our practical and ethical life.

The business of writing and reflecting ideologically, then, is the business of making the world ethically intelligible by describing the contingent phenomena of the world in the vocabulary of an ethical tradition. And the point of such significance is not like that in, say, empirical science. Its object is not to inform or to explain, to supply us with fresh knowledge of the world, but to enable us to conduct our lives in the world with confidence and ease. Further, as I argued in the last chapter, such descriptions can be free from whim, and the correctness or incorrectness of such descriptions is ascertainable where there is some authoritative appeal, as, for example, a corpus of literature identified peculiarly with that tradition.

It follows from what I have been saying that most ideological writing will be concerned with making particular judgments about some specific set of phenomena in the world, however large or small that set may be. And I think that this is borne out by a perusal of those works usually described as ideological or philosophical in the layman's sense of that term. Just as Burke conveys and propagates his ethical world via an account of the events of the French Revolution, so Paine offers an alternative ethical world through a competing description of the same events. Again, Marx reveals the significance of things through descriptions of, variously, the 1848 Revolutions,

working class life in 19th century England, the civil war in France. Mazzini's liberal nationalism is conveyed by a systematic description of the actions of Austrians in Italy. Maine and Mill both concern themselves with popular movements in England. And so on. The examples are endless, for there is no other way than by the description of the particular that an ethical understanding can be conveyed in words. There can be no propositions of ethics.

Such works as those I have cited are often held to be explanatory, and, in a sense, they are, though I have rejected that term. But since their significance lies in the practical world, the world of activity and evaluation, they are 'explanatory' not in their ability to abate <u>mystery</u>, the mystery of ignorance, but to abate <u>unease</u>, the unease that arises when we have no confidence in our ability to go on. What we stand to gain in faith, or the strengthening of faith, is neither knowledge nor information, but confidence and edification. Ideological treatises do not 'explain' phenomena in the way that scientific hypotheses explain. They are not general, nor do they stand <u>outside</u> the phenomena to which they relate. Liberal treatises, for example, do not show that liberalism is true (whatever that might mean) but show the Truth of Liberalism. '"Faith cometh by hearing". But this faith is in our hearts and makes us say, not "I know" but "I believe".'[1]

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1 Pascal: <u>Pensées</u> Braunschvg 248. The quotation is from Paul's <u>Letter to the Romans</u> 1.17

4: Someone will say: "But these works do involve proof, demonstration and explanation. Marx is not merely content to elaborate an account of 19th century industry. He defends his account and argues in favour of it as the true account. Maine tries to show, with historical evidence, that popular government is destructive. Locke tries to prove logically that property is necessary to society. And in all these arguments there is recourse to general theories and assertions. Paine, for example, does not merely say 'That is a right' and 'That is a right'. He says things like 'Every civil right grows out of a natural right'[1]. Now this is general and it is argued for."

The first thing to be said about this objection is that ideological writers, especially those in the 19th century, have often thought themselves to be engaged in academic inquiry, to be proving from the facts of history, demonstrating by scientific reasoning, drawing philosophical distinctions. But it does not follow from the fact that they thought that this is what they were doing, that this is what they were doing. I may claim, and perhaps even intend, to show that 2 plus 2 equals 5, but if 2 plus 2 does not equal 5, whatever my intention and whatever my opinion of the achievement of my work, my claim is mistaken. Similarly, Marx thought he had, in his writings, unified theory and practice. But if this is logically

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1 Thomas Paine: Rights of Man Pelican Classics edition London 1969, p.91

impossible, then his claim is mistaken. And, of course, his mistake cannot lie in his having done the logically impossible. His work cannot itself be a logical confusion. When it is said, therefore, that Marx was not content to elaborate an ethical description of 19th century industry, but sought to develop a revolutionary theory of that society, we must understand this to mean that Marx would not have taken favourably to the suggestions that his work _is_ the elaboration of such a description; that he does not and could not prove what he says scientifically; that no unification of theory and practice does or could result. But Marx's feelings on this matter are clearly irrelevant. The substantial question here is 'What actually is the nature of his writing and reflection?' and though Marx, like anyone else, is entitled to advance an opinion on the nature of his work, it is not a privileged opinion because that work is his. We need not trouble, then, if an account of what kind of reflection is possible in ideology is greatly at variance with the views of those who are famous for that reflection. It is notorious that even the most brilliant scientist may make a poor showing at giving an account of the logic of his discipline.

The second point to be made against the objection we are considering is that I have not denied the possibility of reflective argument in ideology and, since the whole of the last chapter was concerned to reveal what kind of reason and argument is possible, I hope I can take this to have been shown. But the form of such argument is not the defense or rejection of general judgments by refer-

ence to evidence of the particular (as in the case of science) but the defense of particular descriptions by an appeal to orthodoxy in language and doctrine enshrined in a corpus of authoritative literature.

The third point will require rather more extensive elaboration than these first two. It has been said that ideologists do make general statements and the example quoted is Paine's remark that 'Every civil right grows out of a natural right'. Here, it will be said, is clearly a general theory of right. General propositions of ethics, then, cannot be impossible for this is one. My reply to this is really a further elucidation of the view that when ethical language takes on the appearance of a general statement about the world, it must be understood to be enabling rather than explanatory or informative. I shall try to show that if Paine's remark is taken to be explanatory it must, upon analysis, turn out to be nonsense. But I shall then go on to show, if I can, that when we understand utterances of this sort to be enabling, we may see that where information is not and could not be conveyed by the statement there may yet be point in making it.

5. Let us begin with Paine's statement. 'Every civil right grows out of a natural right'. The question is, briefly, whether general talk of natural rights can do the same sort of job as talk of civil rights. If we are arguing about whether a man has a right to a certain piece of land our argument can fairly readily be settled by recourse to the law relating to land ownership and the

facts of the case. If there still remains something of a dispute, we may try to determine what his rights in general are, as the law now stands. But the whole of our argument is dependent for its sense and for its concrete character upon a legal framework, the legal system within which such questions can sensibly be raised and answered. It is not as though, were there no legal system he would have different rights or that his rights would be abolished, still less that he would have those rights, only they would now be unenforceable. It is rather that, without a legal system, no talk of rights and no arguments concerning them can begin. The business of claiming or denying a right presupposes a system of law. The existence of law allows the possibility of rights, and the content of law determines what those rights are. The non-existence of law, therefore, does not alter the substance of rights but prohibits their possibility. The possibility of talk of rights depends upon the existence of a specifiable legal system. This is part of the grammar of 'right'.

This being the case, what are we to make of talk of natural, or for that matter human, rights.[1] The superficial appearance of Paine's remark suggests that he can supply the ground or foundation of the rightness of a right outside any legal framework. But this is absurd. It is absurd because, as we have seen, rights presuppose

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1 Or, conversely, the 'Duties of Man' (Mazzini)

some system of law or civility,[1] while natural rights transcend any social system. I say 'transcend' here because, as Paine's tract makes clear, the role of natural right is to enable us to deny the rightness of some rights presently (1792) recognised in law (eg. The right of patronage) and to assert the rightness of some things not presently enshrined in law (The universal right to vote). Now this means that if we say that the origin of every civil right is a natural right, we cannot be giving an explanation of every right that is, however the appearance of our utterance may incline us to think that that is what we are doing. For natural rights are supposed to enable us to discriminate between one existing right and another, whereas an explanation would have to be an explanation of whatever rights existed. On the other hand, an explanation of the rightness of rights could not enable us to point to what was right and wrong in present rights. Rights, logically, cannot be wrong. Whatever service Paine's talk performs, then, it cannot be that of providing a general theory or explanation of right.

Rights cannot, logically, be wrong, but they can, of course, be objectionable and objected to. One way of expressing one's opposition to some right in law is in the vocabulary of natural

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1 I do not consider here the additional difficulties raised by positing a system of natural law. I do not do so because this would involve a distracting digression. But I think that talk of natural law can also be seen to be enabling. I hope the rest of this chapter will, indirectly, show this to be the case.

rights. The vocabulary of natural rights may enable us to articulate our opposition to some right in law and this vocabulary may be kept alive by tracts like Paine's.

Another example may help to make this plainer. Suppose that under a given legal system citizens have, amongst others, the right of habeas corpus and, say, the right of way along any footpath of more than fifty years recognition. A man may, without feeling very much one way or another, witness and indeed tolerate the violation of the second of these rights. He may, though he recognises the existence of this right, be very little bothered to find that such a right of way is fenced off where it goes through someone's garden. Though he recognises that he does have a right in law, it may not trouble him much that he cannot exercise it. It may on the other hand be the case that for him, as for many people, the right of habeas corpus is quite a different matter. Here it is perhaps quite inconceivable to him that he could stand by and witness a violation of his or indeed someone else's right in this matter. Yet, if we were to point out to him that, in law, the two are equally rights and the violation of either equally an offence, what we have said, though true, is likely to be considered shallow or beside the point. For the man may claim that the right of habeas corpus is a much more fundamental right than that of a right of way.

Now when someone says this, I think that most of us would claim to know what he meant. But whatever he means, what he says, if taken to be the description of some feature of the right to trial,

must turn out to be nonsense. A legal system is not the sort of thing which has depths or foundations. Such talk as this cannot, I think, increase our knowledge about the world. But what it can do is to mark a difference in the world, namely between the importance of some rights rather than others in our ethical ordering of the world. It does not, however, mark in the sense of describe what the differences are. Nor does it describe the ethical order. It may provide a vocabulary in which the discriminations demanded by that order may be made, and through which that order may make itself manifest. When we describe something as a natural or a human right we do not offer an explanation of or an observation upon the fact of the thing, but we bestow upon the contingent facts of the world an importance which such a thing must have if it is to be satisfactorily encompassed in our ethical understanding.

The consequence of seeing that this kind of talk is enabling is, I think, to grasp that if we are to understand the place that ethical judgment and ethical reflection can have in the conduct of life we must ask what service it performs there and not how well or badly it describes or explains that conduct. Any completely objective explanation and description must, I have argued throughout the course of this thesis, stand outside conduct and cannot, therefore, assist us in it.

6. No doubt the sceptic will give voice to some impatience here. 'Look' he will say 'When Paine says "Every civil right grows out of a natural right" he has offered me a theory of right;

if what he says turns out, upon analysis, to be incoherent non-sense, no amount of philosophising will turn that nonsense into sense. If its nonsensical character results from its being a spurious mixture, a confusion of theory and practice, then that is what it remains. It cannot subsequently be shown, by some elaborate reconstruction, to have been part of a genuine form of reflection after all.'

No amount of philosophising will turn nonsense into sense and nothing in my argument suggests that it will. My concern is with logical possibility and necessity. I have tried to show the impossibility of practical activity's being informed by objectively demonstrable theory and the necessary form reflection must take if it is to inform conduct. My argument about Paine and indeed many theorists like him is that we can be misled by the appearance of what Paine has to say. For one thing is certain, the significance of Paine's writings has been in the practical and not in the theoretical arena. His 'theories' have life as the inheritance of the Radical tradition in politics[1] and not in the world of philosophy. If we are to understand how this is possible, we must understand how such statements as Paine's may play a role, perform a service which their appearance suggests that they could not. I do not deny

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1 Many Fabian Society pamphlets are clearly in this tradition. The kind of 'life' that Paine may have is shown in the Henry Collins' introduction to the Pelican Classics edition of Rights of Man

that a confusion between theory and practice may result in works of a spurious nature which do not come to occupy any place in practical life. (I think of Comte's Positivism, for example). But neither do I suggest that ethical reflection must have this misleading appearance. It is the case that many, if not most, ideological reflections ape the appearance of the theoretical sciences. It is sometimes said that if this were not so, they would lose much of their plausibility. Be this as it may, there are some works of ideological reflection which do not have this appearance (for example, Marcus Aurelius's Meditations, Halifax's The Character of a Trimmer) and some which, though they have the appearance, have never gained practical currency (for example, Huxley's Evolution and Ethics, Bolingbroke's The Use of History).

Certainly, part of the difficulty in meeting the rather hard-headed objections of the sceptic[1] arises because of this misleading appearance. The case we have been considering is one in which, when our support for opposition to some right in law is in question, we have recourse to talk of natural or human rights. Often this talk, by its appearance, leads us to suppose that the debate has moved to a deeper or a more general level, that we are now concerned with the truth and falsity of 'theories' about a transcendent realm

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1 Perhaps it would be wise to repeat here my earlier caution that this 'sceptic' is an idealisation. I do not refer in particular to those whose views I considered in detail in Chapter 3.

of general principle. We are inclined to think that this is so because the appearance of our utterances is that of general statements. On my argument, this logically cannot be so. Yet, against the sceptic, I want to claim that there may still be point in making such statements.

What point there is, or may be, can be brought out by considering a case where we are less likely to be misled by the appearance, where, in fact, what we say does not have the appearance of a substantive assertion at all.

If someone says to me, 'I did promise to go to the match with him tonight, but I don't think I should leave her in this mood', I may say, 'Well, you did promise and a promise is a promise'. Now, what have I said? I have stated a fact 'You did promise'. Not only did he already know this fact, but its recognition lay at the heart of his difficulty. I said, 'A promise is a promise' - a tautological statement of the most obvious kind, which, on anyone's reckoning, could scarcely be thought to increase his knowledge of the situation. But that it could not have increased his knowledge is only interesting if it was ever thought that it might. In saying 'A promise is a promise' I never did and never could intend, nor would I be thought to, tell him something he did not know. If the utterance is to be significant, then, it cannot be significant in the way that information is. My point is that even when a proposition may be thought to give information, even when it has the appearance of an assertion about the world, its role may actually be like, and more importantly,

sometimes could only be like, 'A promise is a promise'. It is tempting to try and bring this role out by saying that 'It reminds us of what it is to promise'. But even this way of putting it may be misleading, for to be reminded is to be reminded of something we once knew. But knowledge, if I am right, is not involved here. I should prefer to say that if the man says 'You're right, a promise _is_ a promise' what we have said has enabled him to _affirm_ his ethical understanding of promising. And I should like to claim that the same is true of 'All men (however unequal) are equal', 'The world is the best of all possible worlds and everything in it is a necessary evil' 'All history (that matters) is the history of class struggle'. All these, analysed as informative or explanatory, turn out to be vacuous or contradictory. But there may yet be point in uttering them.

7. 'A promise is a promise'. The important question here is not, Is it true? (could it be false?) but Is it helpful? To ask Is it helpful? is not very different from asking, after the event, did it help? that is, asking a contingent question. Not that whatever helps is right. The kind of reflection of which I spoke in the last chapter will, within limits, determine what it is appropriate[1]

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1. Consider this example of appropriateness. A Conservative politician said of late 'We support workers not shirkers.' This, no doubt, is true. It is also, taken at face value, uncontentious. Who would advocate the support of shirkers? Nevertheless, there is something about the utterance which makes it appropriate for Conservatives (it might almost be a rallying call) and which makes its assertion inappropriate for those of a different political persuasion.

to say and to try to say. Nor, if it is helpful, can it be helpful in the same way that those pragmatic or purely practical considerations which I distinguished earlier could be helpful. Ethical considerations are concerned with setting the limits to what can be done with integrity in the context of a moral or political tradition.

The reflection whose possibility I have sketched will, at best, provide us with a vocabulary and a keen sense of how it is to be used. In an attempt to improve his ability in the deployment of such a vocabulary, and his ability to council and exhort others in matters of ethics, a man may systematically reflect in ethical terms upon a large number of situations and events. He may try, too, to make his judgments about each situation cohere with all the rest. Further, in so doing, he will, perhaps, elaborate his view in seemingly general statements and these may, in their turn, come to be adopted as orthodox doctrinal formulations. But if we imagine that in so doing the man is theorising <u>about</u> rather than <u>within</u> his faith, that his reflections are, so to speak, out of or beyond the conduct of life, whether as a rational precursor of actual activity, or as a distillation of the principles of the tradition to which he belongs, we shall fail to understand how it is that what he says has any significance at all. For understood on either of these models, his talk must turn out to be vacuous or nonsense.

Such a man is a theorist and I have tried to show the conditions under which such theorising can be a genuine exercise of reflective reason. But the precise nature of its involvement in

actual conduct has yet to be explored. It is to this that I should like to turn in a concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 8

Reflection in Conduct

"Writing is an admirable activity for arousing the sense of system that lies dormant in every man, and anyone who has ever done any will have found that it always awakens something which we did not clearly recognise before, even though it was lying within us."

LICHTENBERG

> In a long and elaborate proclamation in which he asserted, with all the elegance of Oriental rhetoric, both the sanctity of his mission and the invincibility of his troops, he /The Mahdi/ called upon the inhabitants /of Khartoum/ to surrender. Gordon read aloud the summons to the assembled townspeople. With one voice they declared that they were ready to resist. This was a false Mahdi, they said. God would defend the right; they put their trust in the Governor-General. The most learned sheik in the town drew up a theological reply, pointing out that the Mahdi did not fulfill the requirements of the ancient prophets. At his appearance, had the Euphrates dried up and revealed a hill of gold? Had contradition and difference ceased upon the earth? And, moreover, did not the faithful know that the true Mahdi was born in the year of the Prophet 255, from which it surely followed that he must now be 1,046 years old? And was it not clear to all men that his pretender was not a tenth of this age? These arguments were certainly forcible; but the Mahdi's army was more forcible still. [1]

In this last sentence, Strachey neatly summarises for us what has been called the problem of ideology. The Mahdi did indeed win Khartoum, and, apparently, regardless of the theoretical coherence or otherwise of his claim to be the Mahdi. The problem arises when we think, as it is tempting to do, in the manner of the commonplace model of ideology, that there is a clear and close connection between the 'truth' of our 'theory of politics or morality' (or of Life, perhaps) and the success which attends our endeavours in the world, and when, moreover, we suppose this kind of reflection to be supplementary

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1 Lytton Strachey: 'The End of General Gordon' in Eminent Victorians Penguin Modern Classics edition, London 1969 p. 243

or preliminary reasoning which, if sound, will guide us through the contingencies of existence. When we see that this is not so, when it is apparent that these reflections are neither the way to avoid 'sorry statesmanship' nor the 'origins of the most important changes in the commercial relations of the world', it is equally tempting to embrace (as I think Strachey does) a scepticism which holds such reflection to be, in some sense, a superfluous addition to the concrete or realistic conduct of life. The problematic character of ideology is not, however, averted thereby. For we must now ask why men engage in such reflections and in the propagation of their conclusions at all.

At a conservative estimate, 200,000[1] copies of Paine's Rights of Man were published and distributed, often by men who in doing so risked a very great deal. And men of considerable political experience vigorously sought to prevent its publication and to destroy its popularity. Were all these men mistaken? Did their activities spring simply from a confusion over what is and what is not logically possible, or from an ignorance of the ways of the world? We must agree with the sceptic, I think, that many of these men, and their counterparts in numberless other situations, both misunderstood the true character and overestimated the real significance of their activity. Nevertheless, we cannot sensibly agree,

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1 The example is drawn from E P Thompson's fascinating study A History of the English Working Class, London 1963

as I hope I have shown, that these activities of arguing, writing and propagating,and the doctrines around which the activities focussed, were not a genuine part of the fabric of morals and politics. We cannot agree, if for no other reason than this, that for many,on these and similar occasions, such activities formed the major part of their ethical conduct and presented to them difficulties, doubts, dilemmas and achievements characteristic of moral life.

In consequence, neither can we agree, even when we have rejected a monistic or unitary view of the rationality involved in ideology, that such reflections are subject to no canons of reasoning at all. It is true that we have seen good reason to replace a monistic account with an appreciation of the pluralism inherent in ethical and religious life. But the acknowledgement of pluralism does not entail, and indeed denies, the non-existence of rationality altogether.

Still, though we may with confidence abandon both the commonplace and the sceptical account, we may yet be unclear as to the precise character of the involvement of ideological reflection in human conduct. It is the purpose of this chapter to clarify just this question. Since it takes the form of a conclusion to the argument presented in the preceding chapters it is, necessarily, repetitive to a degree. What I hope to do here is to resolve a few of the remaining ambiguities and to draw together some of the strands of my argument insuch a way as to answer the question with which this chapter is peculiarly concerned.

I

1. To do this, it may be best to return for a moment to Strachey's example, It is natural that the inhabitants of Khartoum, faced with the immanence of the Mahdi's forces, should have asked themselves 'What ought we to do?' By itself, the question is ambiguous. Despite what some philosophers have said, 'ought' is not a solely moral term. In the sense in which it is not, the question 'What ought we to do?' is the question 'What needs to be done?'. This is a technical question and as such it is purposive in form, 'What ought we to do if we are to achieve ...?' An answer need not, however, presuppose some one purpose, but may be hypothetical, 'If you want to achieve X, do Y'. In this sense, the question calls for that kind of consideration which I earlier called purely practical. Since I have already spoken at some length on the nature of these considerations, I shall not do so again now.

In the second sense, the sense which is of particular interest to this thesis, the question 'What ought we to do?' is the question 'What is it right to do?' And at this point our attention must focus upon the other kind of consideration which I have called considerations of rightness. In the example we have before us, the considerations advanced by the learned sheik may strike us (and perhaps Strachey intends that they should) as a little fanciful, but they are not, I think, different in kind to those we might find more cogent. The question here is whether the inhabitants' resistance

would or would not amount to opposition to the true Mahdi. It is clear that such opposition would be quite abhorrent, whatever its success, to the devout, so that the question of crucial importance is whether the contender is a true or a false Mahdi. The sheik in the example brings forward reasons for thinking that this is a false Mahdi.

These are reasons with regard to his entitlement to be called The Mahdi. In other words, the question resolves itself into the application of a term or title (the Mahdi) and such application must be made according to the rules operating over the use of the term. These rules are discovered and mastered in the use of the terms handed down to us, hence the sheik's reference to the writings of the prophets.

To resolve such questions as these into matters of the application of a term may seem a little dry, given the intensity of feeling which normally accompanies situations of this sort. I put it like this, however, in order to reveal the character of the question both as being one of a certain sort of understanding of the contingent facts with which we are confronted and as a question allowing some possibility of reasoned reflection. The moves in such reasoning would be both a consideration of those cases where we are not in doubt about the use of the term and of the use of the term in those texts which have authority for us.

It is unlikely that we will arrive at any very certain conclusions in such matters, and even if we did, their certainty would

be of quite a different kind from that in, say, mathematics or physics. This, however, does not in any way show that reason is impotent here. It is a philosophical prejudice to suppose that if two parties do not agree upon some issue, one or both of them must be unreasonable. To begin with, there is a certain open texture to all language and to ethical language more than most. Secondly, in matters of ethics and religion there is an uneliminable personal element. Some feature of a situation may strike one person as important or crucial while to another it may not seem to have any very great weight at all. And since in the making of ethical judgments it is the agent himself who must decide, if they are to be of any moment in his life, this personal elément is very often of the utmost importance.

Those who refuse to be satisfied with anything less than a single set of principles verified in the light of a unitary, universal and indubitable Reason, fly in the face of both logic and experience. They fly in the face of logic because there is every philosophical reason to think that such a universal Reason is impossible, and in the face of experience because it presents an appearance of great diversity and not uniformity in the business of religious and ethical allegiance and sentiment.

2. The second conclusion to be drawn from the case we have been examining is that ideological reflection is indeed practical in character, that is, wholly involved in the world of conduct. The question, 'What ought we to do?' is about what is to be <u>done</u>. But

it is not concerned with what is to be done in the same way that questions of a purely practical or technical variety are. The people of Khartoum concluded with the learned sheik that this was a false Mahdi. Plainly, this determines what is to be done, for there can be no doubt among the faithful that a false Mahdi is to be resisted. He is to be resisted because of what compliance with his demands would amount to. But the considerations which bear upon the determination to resist have nothing to say about its likely success or failure. Even if that resistance fails, even if the likelihood of its failure is widely recognised in advance, it does not show the determination to resist to have been ill-considered. For the important point is that compliance with the demands of a false Mahdi would itself be a kind of betrayal, defeat and failure.

> For many believers it is not the outcome, the course of events which determines whether God is victorious, but faith in God which determines what is to be regarded as victory.[1]

From the other point of view, the Mahdi, assuming he genuinely believed himself to be the true Mahdi, had a confidence in his right which may have lent him a certain confidence in his might. But it would be a mistake to think, and he would be foolish to suppose, that the confidence in right assured him of success in might. Conversely, even though the chances of military success might be small, he may well think himself obliged to make the attempt. For a failure

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1 D Z Phillips: Faith and Philosophical Enquiry p.83

to do so would be a failure on his part to preserve the integrity of his identity as the Mahdi.

The point is that, from either side, success and failure are different in character here from in the purely practical context. They are independent of the actual course of events. It is his awareness of this independence that often makes the man of faith appear, to the more purely practically oriented man, to be ruthless and incapable of compromise.[1] But whether he be this or no, the man of faith may rightly disregard the likelihood of material success or failure in arriving at moral decisions.

The case we are considering here is one where a religious understanding is involved, and nonetheless religious because it may be unfamiliar to us. As I argued earlier, the religious significance of an act must be totally independent of the practical lessons of contingent experience. Ideological or ethical understandings, on the other hand, cannot have this total independence. Though they are not affected by contingencies as the understanding of practical wisdom is, they are affected by what happens <u>in a different way</u>. For example, the political events of the English Revolution of 1688, though they did not and could not show the

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1. There are, of course, ideological traditions in which toleration and reasonableness are cardinal virtues. But these necessarily involve a certain uncompromising attitude to 'extremists'.

arguments of Filmer's _Patriarcha_ to be invalid or his judgments mistaken, and did not prove the correctness of Locke's view of the world in the _Two Treatises_, did nevertheless incline Englishmen, who concerned themselves with such matters,to talk in the manner of Locke and to cease to talk in the manner of Filmer.[1]

This was not because Filmer's thesis had been refuted by the subsequent course of events, but because his view of the authority of the crown residing in the person of the monarch did not 'fit' very well with the conditions under which William and Mary succeeded to the throne. It is not that any man, if he were reasonable, would be compelled upon reflection to reject Filmer's account of the matter, but that circumstances and the way things turned out inclined men to cease talking in the language of _Patriarcha_, and, perhaps, made it easier to talk in the terms of Locke's _Treatises_.

In this way, though particular contingent circumstances cannot bear directly upon our ethical judgments, they may prompt or provoke some change in the terms of some men's ethical understanding. As Paine says at one point:

> a long and violent abuse of power is generally the Means of calling the right of it into question (and in Matters, too, which might never have been thought of had not the Sufferers

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1 I am indebted to Dr David Manning for this example. See his (forthcoming) _Liberalism_.

been aggravated into the inquiry).[1]

The indirectness of the connection between our ethical understanding and the contingent facts of experience may be contrasted with these purely practical considerations where the result or outcome of our actions is the test of the wisdom of our judgments and decisions. Filmer's way of understanding the world was, so to speak, left behind, but it was left behind just because men ceased to talk and thus to understand in that way. And men ceased to talk in that way partly because of the turn events had taken. It is futile to wonder, as many have done, whether ideas cause events or events ideas. The question is based on a false dichotomy. The world is, in part, a world of ideas.

3. Someone might ask: 'Surely, religious language and belief may be contingently affected in this manner also?' Perhaps it may, but the important difference is that the changes in men's understanding are, in cases like Filmer's, inevitable. For the language of Filmer and Locke are languages in which political sentiments are expressed, that is, sentiments which inform but which do not constitute the sphere of politics. Because this is so, because, in the main, religious understanding also constitutes the activities it informs, ideological understanding may be influenced by contingent events in a way that religious belief is not. We may mark the difference,

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1 Thomas Paine: Common Sense in Leonard Kriegel (ed) Essential Works of the Founding Fathers New York 1964

perhaps, by saying that ideologies are independent of particular circumstances but do not, and could not, enjoy a general independence. Unlike religions they are not totally at war with the world of contingency.

In summary, then,I hope I have satisfactorily shown that ideologies, ethical traditions, are understandings which have a genuine place in human conduct, which is, nevertheless, a distinctive place.

II.

1. In the examples we have considered so far, reflections of the kind in which we are interested have been occasioned by particular and critical circumstances. Is it not possible, we might wonder, to reflect in a similar manner _in general_, that is to try to set an ethical pattern of rightness for actions, rather than merely to determine the ethical character of this or that action? Someone in sympathy with the commonplace model discussed at the outset of the thesis might feel that there was some cause here to reconsider that account. Certainly, we can think of cases which are clearly of a general character and which show up the commonplace model in the best light.

For example, Christian theologians of time past were often occupied with the question of whether rebellion against the

sovereign is or is not contrary to the will of God. Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and, to a lesser degree, Augustine, all turned their attention to this problem. And the problem is not about this or that particular rebellion but about rebellion in general. 'Nothing could be plainer' it might be said, 'than that in order to determine whether some particular rebellion is an act of impiety, it is pertinent to ask whether rebellions as such are acts of impiety'.

It is true that there is a measure of generality here which has to be accounted for. It must be said, however, that if my argument in this thesis has been sound, there are two forms which this generality cannot take. First, for reasons advanced in Chapter 2, the generality in reflection cannot take the form of general principles or aims determined in advance of an activity, which consists in putting them into practice. Nor, for reasons advanced in the last chapter, can it take the form of general propositions of ethics. This point has already been fairly thoroughly explored but it requires careful elucidation if it is to be fully appreciated. At the risk of tedium, therefore, I shall retrace some of the facets of the argument.

2. I should like to do so by returning, briefly, to the example of Mr Dove and the Eustace Diamonds. It will be remembered that Mr Dove concluded, after some reflection, that a diamond necklace may not be considered an heirloom. Now his conclusion could be expressed in either of two ways. He could say: 'Necklaces cannot be heirlooms' or he could say 'This (referring to the particular neck-

lace) cannot be called an heirloom'. The point I want to make here is that both these amount to the same conclusion. The first way of putting the conclusion makes it look like a general rule or principle from which we derive the particular. We could say 'Necklaces are not heirlooms, therefore Lady Eustace's necklace is not an heirloom'. But if we were to think that this was a move from a general understanding to a particular judgment we should be mistaken. For in the context of the case, to conclude in either way is to give a ruling. And in whichever form the ruling is expressed, it will have been arrived at by the same process of reasoning, namely, an investigation into past applications of the term 'heirloom'. Further, the two statements do not stand in any particular relation to each other. The general 'Necklaces are not heirlooms' does not explain or inform the particular; it is simply another way of saying the same thing.

We can see this more clearly by contrasting it with another familiar sort of general statement, a scientific hypothesis. The particular statement 'This object falls at 32 feet per second per second' is to be determined as true or false by empirical observation. But the general statement 'Objects fall at 32 feet per second per second' cannot be either confirmed or refuted by empirical observation, since we cannot _observe_ the world in general. True, as Popper has shown, I think, the general statement is refuted if we observe a particular instance of an object falling at some other speed, but this is not because we observe the general

statement to be false but because our observation of the particular is logically incompatible with an assertion of the general. It is the argument involving the fact of the particular, however, and not the observation itself which refutes the hypothesis. Moreover the two statements stand in a particular relation to each other. The particular observation may lead us to wonder why the object falls in the way it does and the answer is 'Because of the law of gravity'. In other words, the general hypothesis 'All objects fall at 32 feet per second per second' serves to explain the particular phenomenon we observe.

It will be clear that the general and the particular expressions of the legal judgment are not related in this manner. They are, notwithstanding, certainly different in some way. But the difference does not lie in what they assert or in the manner in which they are arrived at, but in the ways that each may be used. The particular judgment is a specific affirmation of the rule governing the application of the term 'heirloom'. The general judgment is an affirmation of this rule in general, that is, in any given case. In short, the general expression is an affirmation which is itself a formulation of the rule.

3. It is tempting to think that when we formulate a rule we are describing or reporting upon the rule that actually operates in conduct. If we do think this it is a small step to conceding the suggestion that I have consistently and continuously argued against, that ethical reflection leads to a discovery or determination of

the basic rules or aims or principles which govern an activity. But this is not so. When Mr Dove concludes that 'Necklaces cannot be heirlooms', he does not describe the rule for the application of the term, which he has discovered in the previous cases he investigates. He investigates previous cases in order that he may go on in the same way. His general statement, then, is not only a formulation of the rule but is itself one way of following the rule. And in following it he affirms it. That is what makes his statement a ruling, a statement capable of legal import.

The formulation of a rule is not a description of the rule, for rules are in no sense 'there' to be described. They are transcendent in precisely the fashion in which I argued earlier that faiths are transcendent. Rules govern what we do, and because of this knowledge of rules can only be manifested in action. They inform our activity. For any rule, then, it is the case that we can conform with it or break it, but we cannot describe or explain it.[1] For example, to speak a language is to engage in a rule-following activity. I mean to say that only if we follow the rules which govern the use of a language can we make intelligible utterances. To know the rules of a language, therefore, will consist in being able to speak it. But this knowledge is quite different

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1 This obviously conflicts with the perfectly ordinary sense in which we say 'Explain the rules to me'. But this means 'Teach me the rules' (I go on to elaborate on this). When I say that explanation is not possible here, I mean explanation after the fashion of the historian or scientist.

from that involved in knowing the formulations of rules. It does not follow from the fact that we can speak a language that we can give some formulation of the rules which govern our speaking it. Conversely, knowledge of the formulations of those rules does not consist in being able to follow the rule, but in being able to repeat the formula.

It may seem so obvious that we can state the rules of an activity (like tennis or chess) that what I say appears to be highly implausible. There is no reason why we should not use the expression 'Stating the rules' so long as we are clear about what is involved in this. To formulate a rule is not to reveal the basis or informing principle of some activity which involves the following of a rule. It is itself one way of affirming the rule. Even when we determine what rules shall apply, even that is to say, where our formulations are specifically intended as constitutive and regulative for some sphere of activity (as in the promulgation of laws, for example) our formulations cannot be determinate, since, in order to inform activity, there must be interpretation, application and modification in the light of contingently changing circumstances.[1]

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1 It is worth remembering at this point that Mr Dove's 'Necklaces cannot be heirlooms' is occasioned by the need to apply the law in a hitherto unconsidered instance.

The rule-following activity of speaking a language is again a good example here. The rules of language may be formulated but the way language may be used and may come to be used is not determined thereby. Rather it is we who, in those formulations, determine to use it this way or that. For example, it might be said to be a rule of language that 'Disinterested does not mean uninterested'.[1] But can we be said, in saying this, to have stated a fact? The statement does not involve any claim about how people actually do use the words uninterested and disinterested. And if, by and large, they do regard them as being synonymous, must we not say that very often they do mean the same? I do not intend to say that the statement 'Disinterested does not mean uninterested' is false, not a fact, but that it is a mistake to suppose that it could state a fact. Statements of this sort are generalisations within an on-going linguistic practice.[2] They are themselves instances of following the rule and as such cannot be the independent revelation of the rule that is followed.

What these formulations do do is enable us to affirm certain norms in the context of the conduct of a practice. Suppose

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1 An example suggested to me by Mr Geoffrey Hunter in a discussion of this point.

2 Here we touch again on the main burden of Professor Oakeshott's account, and at this point we can, I think, appreciate its great plausibility. Nevertheless, as I tried to show, talk of abstraction will not capture the character of the relationship.

someone uses 'uninterested' to mean without passion or partiality. We might say: 'You mean disinterested, don't you?' If he replied 'Uninterested, disinterested, they're much the same, aren't they?' we should say 'No, Uninterested does not mean disinterested'. In doing this, we would be affirming a norm in the use of language, perhaps with a view to preserving the possibility of making just those discriminations which a conflation of the two terms prohibits.[1] But our statement would not be made in the realm of possibility, (it is quite conceivable that uninterested and disinterested should come to mean the same) or in the realm of actuality, (on many occasions the words are so used as to have the same meaning) but in the realm of normality (we ought to use the words like this).

4. I hope I have shown that certain utterances of a general form are one way in which a norm may be affirmed in the context of some on-going sphere of conduct. When we put it like this, it is pretty obvious where all the argument has brought us. For it is clear that the statements we call beliefs and doctrines are just of this kind. For example, the claim that 'All history is the history of class struggle' is not, as is almost always supposed, a rather grand explanatory theory of the past. Logically, it could

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1 Consider the statement 'Fabulous does not mean fantastic'. Undoubtedly, there was a time when the two words were generally used in such a way that they meant quite different things. But nowadays they are used synonymously. This prohibits us, very often, frommaking those discriminations which such a difference in meaning would allow.

not be that. In fact, it is a general affirmation that what is of most importance in the past are the class-struggles we find there. This importance can be shown, but it cannot be proven. Importance is not a quality which inheres in the events of the past and lies waiting to be discovered, but something we attach or attribute to the facts of the past. And the statement 'All history is the history of class struggle' is one way of bestowing or affirming this importance.

In short, then, ideological doctrines are general affirmations of the rules and norms which may govern the application of the concepts of the ethical vocabularies[1] by which we bestow value upon the contingent facts of experience.

III

1. I have argued that there is no difference in the kind of conclusion that particular and seemingly general judgments are. The manner in which we arrive at them and the reflective considerations

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1 Someone will no doubt say that I have reduced all ethical questions to mere matters of words. I do not know what is meant by <u>mere</u> here. The intelligibility of all experience is dependent upon language. This is not to say that language <u>is</u> experience. But without language the experience remains 'private' and therefore unintelligible. Words, and the rules for their use, are, then, crucial in all human intercourse and fundamental to the elaboration of the nature of that intercourse.

upon which we may base them are one and the same. And I have already elaborated at some length upon the nature and manner of this reflection. Nevertheless, plainly there are differences between general and particular affirmations of rules and norms. The differences, however, do not lie in the logically necessary conditions for each, but in the advantages which accompany the use of each. First, and obviously, among these is that the general or doctrinal formulation, unlike the particular, is not restricted to the specific case which may have prompted it. It can, so to speak, be used again and more readily lends guidance to further application than does the particular. It is not in any sense universal[1], but it is not confined to a specific set of circumstances in the same way that particular judgments may be. It is, of course, both possible and necessary, as I have already argued, to apply the rules for the application of a term in the light of previous particular applications, but this does not prevent the deployment of general formulations making the

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1 I do not mean to enter the debate about the universalisability of moral judgments directly. My argument, however, is that the generalisations of which I speak do not add anything to the particular. This can be seen in the fact that when a particular judgment is completely universalised, it turns out to be 'When in any situation exactly like this (and this must amount to a virtually unique specification) act exactly as you would in this one'. General formulations may assist us in some measure in the application of a rule, but they cannot determine the appropriate interpretation in advance of particular circumstances.

task easier.[1]

This relative independence of the specific occasion, or more properly, the fact that general doctrinal formulations are not affected as immediately as particular judgments are by the specificity of circumstances, allows them, on occasion, to sustain an ethical vocabulary over space and time. More especially, they hold this advantage over any purely active expression of ideological adherence. For the purely active expression, consisting as it does in deeds, is confined in its affirmation of ethical faith to the occasion upon which it is performed. If, then, we ask, as this thesis is concerned to do, whether ideological doctrines have any peculiar or distinctive part to play in the conduct of ethical life, we shall find the answer here.

2. To students of ideology, fascism presents some difficulties peculiar to itself. Despite the ubiquitous use, or abuse, of the label 'fascist', the ideology of fascism had a relatively brief life, confined in both time and space. During this life, it generated very little theoretical literature and what works were written tend to be unsystematic and inconsistent. This has led some people to

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1 It is, for example, often easier to give a legal ruling in the light of the law itself, than in the light of precedent. Hence the advantages of codification. It goes without saying almost, that on nearly every occasion both are involved.

conclude that perhaps fascism is not an ideology at all. Since, however, as I have argued, theoretical literature is not a necessary part of an ideological tradition, we need not concur in this conclusion. Part of the reason for this comparative paucity of reflective literature was undoubtedly the fact that the Fascists prided themselves on being men of action, not of theory. Furthermore, much of the support for the movement sprang from a general feeling that Italy's political and economic problems arose out of a certain national disunity, rather than from any very positive or definite idea of corporate unity. The ideology, therefore, found its chief expression in a very active response to a specific set of circumstances. In consequence, when those circumstances changed and the action was no longer possible (The Marches on Rome were over), the possibility of adherence to the ideology went with it. For the Italians of the time the choice was really whether to join the movement or not. And this was not a choice that could be reflected upon very much, except in the terms of some competing ideology. If a man has doubts about whether to join, those doubts had to be expressed in the language of Marxism or Liberalism, since the Fascists had no very extensive vocabulary in which to present or resolve the question, so that in their eyes, simply by having doubts, he had already declared himself not to be a Fascist.

But when the times had changed, as times inevitably will change, when there was no longer a great and active movement to join, the Fascists were left with no doctrinal positions and no distinctive

ethical vocabulary in which to affirm their identity over against those of other persuasions and in which to perpetuate their understanding of the world.

The point may be emphasised by comparing this case with the case of an ideology which has and always has had a wealth of reflective literature, namely Marxism. After their failure to accomplish any significant political achievements in the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Marxists, chief among them Lenin, were forced to abandon their active involvement in the political struggles in Russia. But this did not signal the demise of the ideology, for its adherents were able (and saw themselves as being compelled) to turn their attention to doctrinal questions, Lenin taking up some of the most abstruse of all.[1] the existence of a corpus of literature peculiarly their own provided them with an ethical vocabulary in which both the significance of the defeat they had sustained was to be grasped and the plans and hopes for the future were to be expressed. In this way, the ideological literature supplied the possibility of sustaining, affirming and indeed developing their distinctive political identity, despite their enforced exclusion from active engagement in Russian politics. And the preservation and development of this identity took the form of an elaboration of and argument over various doctrinal

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1 His two most 'philosophical' works: Materialism and Empirio-Criticism and Philosophical Notebooks were written during the years 1905-1914.

formulations by which the rules for the application of the terms of their vocabulary were affirmed. In short, the ideological literature which they inherited sustained the background of understanding in which they conceived the facts and events of the world. It was in this way that the writings of Marx and Engels were of service in the life of the ideology of Marxism.

The second advantage which may attend ideologies and religions with a corpus of literature providing some doctrinal formulations lies in their power of communicability. There is nothing more natural, when we are told that a man is, say, a Marxist or a Christian than that we should ask him what he believes. If his ideological or religious understanding is made manifest solely or chiefly in an active response to the world, that is, purely in a characteristic manner of behaving and acting, it is pretty well inarticulate. Though we may, by following his example, learn to understand the world as he does, this way of learning will be dependent on his fairly constant presence. The process may, so to speak, be short-circuited, by an articulation of his understanding. If this takes the form primarily of particular ethical judgments ('I believe that this situation is X and therefore we must do Y'), though we may, and in part must, learn to employ his vocabulary by such utterances, they often appear to be confined to the specific.

If, on the other hand, he tells us that, for example, 'The sinfulness of men can be atoned in the saving power of Christ', while without some particular applications of the terms 'sinner' and

'salvation' we shall be unable to come to understand the world in the same way, yet what he says may more rapidly and more easily introduce the vocabulary in terms of which he makes his experience significant.

We should be mistaken, however, if we thought that in what he said he had revealed to us the foundations of his understanding, or, worse, that he had simply made another general claim about the world which could be assessed alongside all those of his competitors, in some general framework of human understanding. To come to share his understanding of the world is not to have been satisfied of the correctness of his picture of the world, but to come to picture the world in that way oneself. For the man himself too, there may be some advantage in expressing himself in this manner. We are all, I am inclined to think, the adherents of some ethical or religious tradition, but we are not all capable of the formulation of belief or of the sophisticated process of reflection which such formulation may involve. Ideologists and theologians are, generally, men and women of impressive ability and erudition. To those who are not so capable, the formulations of the theorists may supply a way of affirming our position in the world of morality, politics and religion which, without those thinkers, we would lack. Further, they may introduce in the mind of the believer or adherent, especially if he demands a certain intellectual strength in this faith, a confidence which is the accompaniment of that sense of system of which Lichtenberg speaks in the passage quoted at the head of this chapter. This, surely, is

the place which theologians have played in the lives and conduct of ordinary believers? It is easy both to overestimate and to belittle this place. Perhaps I may, to some degree, have set the matter right.

We have arrived, then, at a conclusion to the question which this thesis set out to ask and to answer, 'What is the role of ideological reflection in human conduct?' In so doing we have, I hope, resolved those difficulties which were encountered by the other, plausible answers which I have rejected. What must not be lost sight of, however, is the dependence of this reflection upon what might be called the general stream of human activity. This last chapter has been especially concerned with the place of reflection in that activity. Reflection, by itself, can neither create nor indefinitely sustain an ethical understanding. Such an understanding must always, at least in some measure, be manifested in activity, for it is, after all, an understanding which informs conduct. Moreover, where, as in the case of anarchist literature, the reflection itself prohibits any concrete activity, it must be vacuous and impotent, fit only to be a subject of some interest to the detached inquiry of academics. Anarchist literature may, from time to time, have prompted someone to throw an occasional bomb but since, upon examination, it cannot enable us to attach to the throwing a greater significance than to any other political act, it must remain,and has

remained, an empty absurdity.

The burden of my thesis has been the inextricability of thought and conduct in any understanding which is to be of practical import. If it has done nothing other than this, it will have served to point out some of the errors in the way we commonly think about the questions it has raised. And, perhaps it has lent some plausibility to the view which I have tried to substitute.

P O S T S C R I P T

Throughout the thesis, I have tried to answer the most obvious criticisms that may be made against what I have been saying, but doubtless there are many points in my argument which are open to serious, though unforeseen, objections. Partly, this is because I have had cause to touch upon, and sometimes merely touch upon, so many of the traditional problems of philosophy. It is improbable, too, that I have contributed anything very original to the analysis of these problems. What originality there is in the thesis lies in its synthesis rather than its analysis.

The twentieth century has been heralded as the time of a great revolution in philosophy. I do not myself think this to be the case. Nothing can be very revolutionary which does not involve a profound and unmistakable break with the past, and Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume and Kant are of as much interest to and studied by philosophers now as at any time. Nevertheless, there has been an obvious division in philosophy. Since Moore's famous 'Refutation of Idealism', Moore, Russell, Ayer, Ryle, Austin and Wittgenstein (though I am not sure that he would have been happy with the inclusion of his name) have formed a tradition quite separate from the self-confessed inheritors of the continental Idealist tradition, among whom we may number Bradley, Bosanquet, MacTaggert, Collingwood and Oakeshott.

The subject of my inquiry has led me to ignore this division and to read the philosophers of both traditions. In consequence, since a philosophical education consists in nothing other than reading and following the minds of previous philosophers, the outcome of that education is in sympathy with and shares something of the appearance of both.

I should like to think that such a synthesis is to a degree both original and timely.

> "Even though my philosophy is not equal to
> the discovery of anything new, yet it may
> have courage enough to regard venerable
> beliefs as unfounded."
>
> LICHTENBERG

SOURCES OF EPIGRAMS

TO:-

PART ONE	PASCAL	: Pensées
CHAPTER 1	MICHAEL OAKESHOTT	: Rationalism in Politics
CHAPTER 2	BISHOP BERKELEY	: Three Dialogues
PART TWO	KIERKEGAARD	: Concluding Unscientific Postscript
CHAPTER 4	WITTGENSTEIN	: Notebooks 1914-16
CHAPTER 5	H J PATON	: The Modern Predicament
CHAPTER 6	ARISTOTLE	: Nichomachean Ethics
PART THREE		
	MICHAEL OAKESHOTT	: On Human Conduct
CHAPTER 7	WITTGENSTEIN	: Quoted in Cioffi - 'Information, Contemplation and Social Life"
CHAPTER 8) POSTSCRIPT)	LICHTENBERG	: in J P Stern Lichtenberg: A Doctrine of Scattered Occasions

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

The first list in this bibliography (A) contains all those books and articles quoted from or referred to in the text, together with those which have had a considerable bearing upon my development of the argument in the thesis. The second list (B) is a subsidiary and select bibliography of books and articles related to the topic of ideology.

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