

IDEOLOGIES THE PRISONS OF MODERN PEOPLE

FERİT USLU*

Within the modern age, beginning with the Enlightenment, we have witnessed the rising of ideologies. In the modern era, ideologies take the place of religions and religious beliefs. The Enlightenment was the first popular ideology of the modern people. Then nationalism, communism, socialism, capitalism, positivism, materialism and etc. have followed it. In the Enlightenment period, there was an optimistic climate that everything gradually would get better. Philosophers and intellectuals thought that if they had removed all the things which belong to past, life would have been much worth for living.

The Enlightenment promised freedom and liberty to people. According to the Enlightenment philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire, institutional religion was the obstacle of freedom. From that point of view, most of the Enlightenment thinkers suggested a secular, even more a profane life to society. They thought that if people get rid of institutional religions and their beliefs, they gain their freedom and liberty. But nothing had gone according to their prediction.

Yet not much time have passed through the Enlightenment, the world experienced two global wars. Those were important symptoms which figured out that there is something wrong within in the Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment project took religion from hands of people but it didn't give anything in place of it. However, it is widely known that nature does not accept emptiness. So ideologies filled the gap which had been the place of religion. But ideologies didn't solve problems of societies; also they gave peace and happiness neither to their followers nor to humankind. Instead, because of their exclusivist nature, they have separated people from each other and have made discrimination. We can examine and assess ideologies in different ways: Sociological, physiological and historical ways are among those.

* Hitit University, Faculty of Theology, Çorum, Turkey

ferituslu@hotmail.com

But here, I will analyze and assess ideologies according to their epistemological structure and try to give reasons of why they are prisons of human mind and modern people.

Ideology is defined in various encyclopedias like as “set of ideas, beliefs and attitudes, consciously or unconsciously held, which reflects or shapes understandings or misconceptions of the social and political world.”¹ Ideologies are also described as systemic frameworks about or on the social and physical world.² Bu I think those definitions aren’t sufficient for our purpose here.

Here, we must distinguish worldviews from ideologies. Worldviews are weak and soft frameworks about or on the social and physical world. They are flexible in the sense that they will change or transform according to new facts or developments. But if a worldview is held firmly, systematically and if it resists changing according to recently appearing factual data then it can be called an ideology. If we evaluate religions under the light of my definition, religions aren’t themselves ideologies but they can easily be turned into ideological forms. That is a serious hazard that religious people ought to be careful and avoid from.

In twentieth century religious communities were affected from ideological approaches, -especially from socialism, nationalism and totalitarianism- and their explanatory power. So we witness globally, rising of religious ideologies. Those religious ideologies are same as the secular ideologies. They are dogmatic, unchangeable, firmly and systematically fixed and blind to the individual, social and natural facts. So as the others, religious ideologies don’t give publics peace and happiness either.

According to my definition of ideology above, let me state some distinctive epistemological characteristics of ideologies, and then I will examine them in detail. But first let us cite some characteristics of ideologies:

Ideologies cannot be criticized and questioned by their adherents.

Ideologies have truth claims that are based on exclusivism.

Ideologies are strong and hardly changeable personal views which are lock of factual knowledge.

Ideologies get their power from enthusiasm not from their suitability to facts. For that reason, ideologies make it impossible to grasp the facts in their pureness and simplicity.

Now we can assess ideologies according to their properties above. Ideologies are the

prisons of modern people. As Cemil Meric –a contemporary Turkish thinker- says, “ideologies are the straitjacket of minds”. Indeed this metaphor is fitting the situation exactly. A straitjacket doesn’t have arms, buttons and zipper so once it is dressed to you, you cannot escape and you confined in it. It “surrounds” and “limits” you. Ideologies are also like that. They are like prisons. They almost become a part of personality and eclipse the human reasoning.

An important epistemological problem about the ideologies is that: Because of their very nature, ideologies make their adherents blind to facts. But of course, no adherents will be willing to agree with that. Because getting blind to facts not happens directly and intentionally. Instead, in holding ideologies another process runs deeply which at last make the adherents blind to the facts. Karl Popper called this process, “being closed to falsification”.³

Being closed to falsification occurs in the process as follows: Adherents of the ideologies (either intentionally or unintentionally) collect the facts and data only which verified their ideology. Then think that, by means of those collected facts and data, their ideology is legally confirmed. By this way their faith and trust in their ideologies increase. But the adherents don’t show that sensitivity to the facts or data which do not verify or fit their ideology.

Because of this future of ideologies, you cannot falsify an ideology even in principle. As Popper stated, once you believe an ideology firmly “you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of *verifications* of the ideology. Whatever happened always confirmed it. Thus its truth appeared manifest; and unbelievers [of the ideology] were clearly people who did not want to see the manifest truth; who refused to see it, either because it was against their class interest, or because of their repressions which were still ‘un-analyzed’ and crying aloud for treatment.”⁴

So according to adherents of an ideology, all the facts and data ‘verified’ their theory. There is an incessant stream of confirmations. For example, “a Marxist could not open a newspaper without finding on every page confirming evidence for his interpretation of history; not only in the news, but also in its presentation -which revealed the class bias of the paper- and especially of course in what the paper did *not* say. The Freudian analysts emphasized that their theories were constantly verified by their ‘clinical observations.’”⁵

Ideologies always attract attention by their ‘explanatory power’. “They are appeared to be able to explain practically everything that happened within the fields to which they

3 Karl Popper. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York, London: Basic Books Publishers, 2002), 34, 35.

4 Ibid, 35.

5 Ibid, 34-35.

1 Michael Freeden (1998, 2004). “Ideology” in E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, London: Routledge. Retrieved June 21, 2012, from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/S030>.

2 Ibid.

referred.”⁶⁶ This apparent strength was in fact their weakness, because if an ideology claims to explain everything in the sense that nothing can falsify or refute its utterances, then in fact, that theory includes hardly any factual knowledge. This means that the theory is a fiction. But it is a harmful fiction because its adherent believes its truth with a great enthusiasm and fanaticism.

From the explanations above, it is understood that the future of being falsified is a very important epistemological criteria for propositions and thoughts. Any proposition or thought which claims factuality must provide that criteria. This means that, thoughts or claims that cannot provide falsification criteria have no factual content. They have no interest with the social or natural world; they are pure speculations of mind.

Another problem in ideologies is that ideologies are firmly fixed, frozen and unchangeable doctrines. But nature of world and social life is built on changing. So ideologies cannot have the opportunity to grasp the natural or social facts truly. Ideologies are like prisms which reflect and transform light while it passes through into it. Like prism, ideologies transform the facts and draw a curtain in front of the adherent’s eyes. They are like blinkers that are worn to human mind.

Another problem in ideologies is that they lead their adherents to apply double standards towards the factual data, thoughts or beliefs. This occurs like that: adherents of the ideologies have two deeply different attitudes or approaches towards to their own beliefs and to others beliefs. If the beliefs and thoughts in question belong to their own ideology, they are in a blind trust to the thoughts or beliefs that belong to their own ideology. Because of that, they hardly questioned whether their own ideology have an inner consistency, whether it corresponds to facts and have sufficient evidential ground or not.

Furthermore, when an ideology is questioned in a rational and evidential context and is pointed out its inconsistencies, self-contradictions and the aspects that contradict to facts, the adherents ignore them or interpret their meaning. That is generally done by bending the main concepts of the ideology or emptying their contents. But if the beliefs or thoughts in question belong to other ideologies then the adherents criticize them rationally, logically and evidentially in detail. As if they are not the same people which treat differently to their own ideology.

The noetic structure of the mind of those kinds of people has divided deeply into two compartments. And each compartment is ruled by different principles and standards.

They treat towards their own ideologies as if they are self-evident and no need to satisfy any epistemological or logical requirements. But “other” ideologies must meet a lot of logical or epistemological requirements.

That is the double standards which ideologies lead their adherents. The worse is that it is hardly recognized by the adherents of any ideology. So it is like a virus which enters insidiously into somebody’s mind and spoils its healthy functioning. Ideologies also like viruses in a different manner. Ideologies transform their own structure like viruses by *ad hoc* explanations and rationalizations when they confront to any counter evidence or fact. By that way their cores survive and remain unchanged.

The result of this is ideologies – but every single of them- always turn out to be right. That means adherents of the ideologies are dogmatic and uncompromising people. Dogmatic and uncompromising people have negative emotional states. If their ideology rules their society, those people are despotic, totalitarian and intolerant. Conversely, if their ideology is not in power and is weak in a society, then the adherents of that ideology are usually angry and pessimistic. They are angry, because they think that they know the path of the salvation and liberation of the society, but the society don’t take any notice to them. They think that, society’s apathy to their ideology don’t arise from the irrelevance of their ideology to the social life or human nature but that it is a hand in glove who make conspiracies in order to make society not support that ideology.

In concluding we may finalize our analysis by indicating that ideologies take people away from the facts of world and life. Because of that reasons, adherents of ideologies cannot be happy and get the taste of life. They feel like in a prison.

6 Ibid, 34.