Michael Neely

Professor Kammas

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"It is Not Necessary to Accept Everything as True, One Must Only Accept it as Necessary:" A Treatise on the State and Ideology (Topic #1)

In his essay, *Politics as a Vocation,* German economist and sociologist, Max Weber, asserts that the State is the ultimate authority of a society. Unlike other forms of authority, there is a singularity to the State. What makes the State unique, according to Weber, is its monopoly of legitimate violence, how it is the only entity which possesses the power to use violence legitimately against those who use it illegitimately: "The state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e., considered to be legitimate) violence" (1). The reason for the State possessing this monopoly is for it to coerce citizens into obedience, to ensure they obey the laws, dictations, rules, and customs. However, that coercion is not strictly practical or physical. Of course, the people are the victims of violence all the time: They are physically forced to obey the law because they fear the ramifications of breaking it. But that coercion is most effective when augmented by ideology. (Hereafter, violence will be used to denote only coercion rather than physical harm, a denotation more in keeping with Walter Benjamin's later definition. As such, the terms violence and coercion will be used interchangeably).

"I already am eating from the trash can all the time. The name of this trash can is ideology. The material force of ideology makes me not see what I am effectively eating." As psychoanalyst and philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, asserts in the film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*,

ideology is a mask that is veiled upon our sight, upon our ability to view the world objectively. It distorts peoples' ability to view the world other than the way the state has coerced them into viewing it. It confers on us its "proper lens." And it manifests everywhere, in the most subtle nuances of our everyday life. Indeed, ideology works best when it is virtually invisible, when it is so deeply embedded into the fabric of everyday life that identifying it becomes difficult, when "it makes me not see what I am effectively eating."

Because it is so deeply embedded and inextricable from our perception of normativity, ideology produces the effect of verisimilitude; thereby, people no longer view their coercion as the product of ideology. Rather, they believe it to be genuine, the one, objective truth. Accordingly, it is imperative that a state utilizes ideology if it seeks to govern most effectively—which means that its coercion of the people is either blind to them or, if known, trusted and consented to. The state must instill ideology because it encompasses all at once an array of advantages: it promotes a truth that is disguised as *the truth*, upholds a narrative that legitimizes its monopoly of physical violence, establishes *the "proper"* code of ethics, and creates *the "right"* goal for everyone, in concert, to seek.

Part I of this paper unveils the ways in which the State invokes ideology in society to remain invisible in the coercion of its people, whereby the people no longer perceive their actions as coercion. Part II demonstrates how the State also uses ideology to maintain its legitimation even when the flipside occurs: When people become fully cognizant of the distortion and coercion inculcated by it, and now seek to rebel against its authority.

Part I

First, to understand how and why human beings are susceptible to the effects of ideology, one must look no further than psycho-analysis and one of its most renowned practitioners:

Sigmund Freud. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud promulgates various reasons that explain why people, when grouped, act in ways they would not normally act if confined to the individual level. Once paired with others, a decrease in intelligence arises. Rationality slowly dissipates with the adoption of the horde mindset, which is characterized by atavistic impulses that conflict with rationality and morality. Our most primitive inhibitions of sexual desire and other forms of libidinal impulses supersede, and in extreme cases, supplant, what we know to be ethically correct. This supersession does not allow for the ability to distinguish between dubious and non-dubious actions. As a result, a group could commit dubious actions without knowing it.

This lack of cognizance is amplified when a group is particularly susceptible to suggestibility; it becomes easier to influence other members to adhere to a particular mindset when all of them are in unison. With this shared identity engenders a decrease in personal responsibility; when there are more people to share the blame, one feels that he or she may undertake actions without severe punishment if everyone else is doing it as well. If the person were isolated, however, he or she would be less inclined to commit those actions, as they would fear the ramifications that will be set on only him or her.

Once these forces develop within the group is when ideology slowly comes to fruition. When all these forces are in place, a contagion spreads. If one commits a certain action, then the others are quite likely to commit it as well. There is a fear of being an outlier, of being chastised and excommunicated for not following suit with the others. By consequence, every member feels the inclination—and often undertakes to—give in to the pressure and participate with the masses. The more this contagion spreads, the more people are willing to perform whatever action is proposed. Most profound is when those in the group are willing to perform the action because

they are under the influence and rule of a leader. For the purposes of the analysis below, that leader is the state, who spreads the contagion of its ideology through mythic violence on its people, who are no longer rational individuals but members of a horde mindset, and as such, under the influences of all symptoms above.

Sometimes, these symptoms are presupposed by the State, and it has adequately prepared responses—methods to preserve its existence. In *Critique of Violence*, German-Jewish philosopher, Walter Benjamin, posits three kinds of violence, or coercive power, present within the state to preserve its existence: law-making, law-preserving, and mythic. Law-making violence is the invocation and codification of laws and statutes used to govern society and demarcate the difference between what is legal and what is not legal. On the other hand, law-preserving violence is the physical enforcement of those laws; the most overt example is the police, whose job it is to arrest those who break the law as a means of ensuring its adherence. For those who do not obey the laws, they are adequately detained, sentenced to the courts, and punished. The punishment of those who commit illegal actions exists to demonstrate that if the law is not obeyed, consequences follow.

Other times, these symptoms which Freud promulgates may actually be appropriated by the State. This appropriation works most effectively for the State—in that it remains opaque in its coercion—with what Benjamin calls mythic violence. Mythic violence is the force that allows people to bind together and consent to living under the rulership of the State in the first place. To understand the function of mythic violence, we must juxtapose it with the form of violence that the State seeks to avoid: divine violence. The most grandiose form violence is divine violence; it characterizes a revolution that seeks to destroy the State and often establish a new one. However, as the State wishes to avoid divine violence, i.e., to avoid its own destruction, the state instills

into society mythic violence. Mythic violence is basically ideology. It enforces a narrative that becomes the driving force for the binding of libidinal desires (Freud) among citizens to join together and fight for some "cause" chosen by the State, be it morally good or bad.

When the people are conglomerate, they are not only under the influence of the symptoms posited by Freud but also the influence of mythic violence. Both forces, used to the advantage of the State, are equal in effect within mass movements. In *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, American moral and social philosopher Eric Hoffer asserts that for a mass movement to gain traction, it needs to be fueled by a fervor of enthusiasm. The best kind of fervor, according to Hoffer, is nationalism:

> . . . in modern times nationalism is the most copious and durable source of mass enthusiasm, and that nationalist fervor must be tapped if the drastic changes projected and initiated by revolutionary enthusiasm are to be consummated (1).

Nationalism, according to its *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, is bifurcated. First, nationalism is "Identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations." Second, nationalism is "Advocacy of or support for the political independence of a particular nation or people." These two definitions reveal an extreme affinity for one's nation, for one's State, and thereto, supplanting of one's personal desires or reserves. All that matters is what benefits the nation and the State. Hoffer attests to this when he delves into "religiofication:' the art of turning practical purposes into holy causes"' (2). Through "religiofication," the people underpin the importance of the goal they seek as a mass movement. In other words, through the pervasion of the idea of loving one's rulership so unconditionally that it has become likened to a devout religious cause, the State inculcates a

kind of obedience into its people. The people no longer believe they are being coerced into fighting for the cause. They want to fight for it. To them, it is all voluntary.

Indeed, the so-called "religiofication" of the "cause," be it whatever kind, spurs the desire for mass mobility to fight for it. The state knows this all too well; that is why it conflates the function of ideology and another social conditioning tool—religion—in order to make the two seem inseparable. This conflation is salient in the 2006 Documentary *Jesus Camp*, where the part of the State is played by the authorities of the camp, one of them being the notorious Preacher Becky. She, and the other religious leaders of the Christian Camp alike, indoctrinate the youth into their "cause." They teach the susceptible children, who are under the influence and symptoms of group psychology, that they must, as a group, end abortion in the United States because it is a detestable and immoral act in the eyes of the Lord. In so doing, the camp leaders are effectively mixing politics with religion in order to raise the stakes of the "cause." Those who run the camp are fully cognizant that if they want to stress the urgent profundity of the abortion crisis, they cannot treat it the same as one would the politics behind, say, economics. No, this is an issue that warrants the special intervention of Judeo-Christian values: the sacredness of every life, and the sin of stripping the fetus of that right through an abortion.

Because the State of the camp seeks to have its people—the children—react abhorrently to abortion, the State gives rise to such abhorrence through the ideology of Christianity. And it is ideology alone that creates this revulsion on the part of the "citizens of the camp." We must remember that the ideology here is not a physical force manifested in, for instance, the police, who come and intervene. Returning to a previous point: Though the state monopolizes power, it does not use law-preserving violence to force its people to detest abortions on a physical level. If abortion becomes illegal, that is a different story. However, in this case, since abortion is not

illegal, the State enacts violence through religion, through the multitude of ways people are influenced by it. If we stop to observe the overflow of Christianity in this camp, the influence becomes blatant. From the phrase in the Bible, "I knew you before you were born," to the phrase "under God" in the pledge of allegiance, the crucifix hung up on street corners, the commandment "thou shalt not murder," the Christian faith is ubiquitous. Its ubiquity has galvanized these children so much that they are blind to the idea of ever stopping to question this coercion.

The Christian ideology and influence is omnipresent, but it is too deeply embedded into the fabric of their cause that the children cannot view it objectively. The ideology has conferred on their sight a mask they cannot displace. Further, the Christian ideology has led them to accept its authenticity faithfully. None of the children question the legitimacy of the Bible, the existence of God, nor challenge anything told to them by the State of the camp. Indeed, the State's ideology has performed violence on them, and they do not even know it.

In the most extreme of examples, a person could live his entire life without questioning the legitimacy of authority, thereby adhering to it religiously. Such is the case in Franz Kafka's parable "Before the Law." The "man from the country" (145) (hereafter, protagonist), who seeks the Law, cannot access because it is behind a great gate. The gatekeeper will not allow him through. The protagonist, obeying the absolute authority of the gatekeeper, decides to wait by the gate in the hope of being let in eventually. As the years progress, the protagonist repeatedly tries to bribe the gatekeeper with no luck. Still, the protagonist continues to adhere to authority. Eventually, however, the protagonist spends his entire life there with no concession on the part of the gatekeeper. Even on the protagonist's deathbed, he is still not let in. When he is at the brink of death, he asks the gatekeeper why he has not been let in. The gatekeeper replies that the

gate was only intended for the protagonist himself. Now that the protagonist is dying, the gate will close.

The most important thought to consider here is why does the protagonist adhere to the gatekeeper's authority? Why does the protagonist never attempt to bypass the gatekeeper physically? It is because the protagonist believes he is adhering to absolute legitimacy, the law, to which the priest who tells the parable attests:

> Many aver that the story confers no right on anyone to pass judgment on the doorkeeper. Whatever he may seem to us, he is yet a servant of the law; that is, he belongs to the Law and as such is set beyond human judgment . . . It is the Law that has placed him at his post; to doubt his integrity is to doubt the Law itself (151).

To the protagonist, just as one does not doubt the legitimacy of the law, one does not doubt the legitimacy of he who heads it, no matter how moral, ethical, legitimate, it may be. It is to be adhered to unconditionally, without a scintilla of reluctance:

> The moral Law is obscene in so far as it is its form itself which functions as a motivating force driving us to obey its command - that is, in so far as we obey moral Law because it is law and not because of a set of positive reasons: the obscenity of moral Law is the obverse of its formal character (Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 89).

It is important to note that since this is a parable, and all parables contain an in-depth, underlying statement, there is naturally one to be found here. Allegorically-speaking, let us suppose that the gatekeeper is a stand-in for the authority of the State. Let us also suppose that the protagonist is a stand-in for the citizens. Now, let us indulge in a hypothetical: If the gatekeeper were to hinder the protagonist with physical force rather than with words, the gatekeeper would have failed his task. That is, of his subject (the protagonist), the gatekeeper

would not have monopolized legitimate violence, or coercion—which a State monopolizes, in the words of Weber ("Politics as a Vocation"). If the protagonist were to successfully enter the gate and thereby attain the Law, his physical violence would have supplanted that of the gatekeeper—meaning that the gatekeeper did not, indeed, monopolize legitimate violence of the Law. In fighting back against this potentiality, the gatekeeper would have had to resort to law-preserving violence (Benjamin, "Critique of Violence"). But to fight with swords later in lieu of words earlier demonstrates the failure to invoke total obedience in the first place.

That physical violence is necessary for total obedience rather than coercive violence equals two realities. First, it means that any obedience gained through physical coercion is a last resort instead of the first resort. Second, it means that the State is acting inefficiently; it would be quite exhausting, for instance, if the United States were to have to use physically violent measures against its some 327 million population. Ideology is patently the much more efficient tool.

The gatekeeper realizes the benefits of ideology all too well. Instead of civilizing the protagonist through force, he civilizes him through ideas. Returning to a previous point: it is not that the gatekeeper needs the use of physical, law-preserving violence to stop the protagonist if he were to attempt to enter. There is no need. Instead, the protagonist is ruled by what he genuinely considers to be legitimate obedience, but what is really ideas, ideology. Thus, the gatekeeper—the State—has accomplished the ultimate goal: legitimated itself beyond recognition into the social fabric, where it now governs most effectively.

Part II

For those who *are aware* of the State's distortion and coercion of the masses through ideology, however, the State has duly anticipated two therapeutic conditionings, both of which

maintain its legitimation. The first therapeutic conditioning is in the form of ideology. French Philosopher and Social Theorist, Michel Foucault, explores the history of this ideological conditioning—the prison system—in the novel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. When Foucault discusses how the State goes about punishing individuals who challenge its authority, such as breaking laws, he argues that the prison system is, fundamentally, a form of compelling ideology explicitly targeted at those who have yet to commit crimes. It is not enough for the State to lock up those who challenge its establishment as a means of frightening any potential criminals. The State must also walk the extra mile, accomplished through instilling in them a dread of the consequences: "It is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime" (9). To avoid punishment, the citizens must be ready to live normally, to live appropriately, or rather, what the state considers to be normal and appropriate.

The second therapeutic conditioning regards the role of the masses themselves, who, through ideology, consent to this punishment. The punishment is no longer a case in which the sovereign (in a historical anecdote provided by Foucault) is punishing those who have slighted him, he now seeks to gain retribution, and the people are only present to bear witness without necessarily consenting to it. By contrast, the State allows its people to believe they are the ones deciding the normativity. The people in the Democratic State are purportedly at the fore of inculcating normativity, at the fore of judging appropriate behavior and punishing the criminal for acting in opposition, to which Foucault attests:

> The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find

> himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behavior, his aptitudes, his achievements (*Discipline and Punish*, 304).

We—the people—serve as jurists and obey law and order because they hold the belief in the penal system; they have been led to believe it serves them. They have faith in the system because of the State, which has conferred on them this belief through mythic violence. Mythic violence assigns them the legitimate power to punish those who purportedly threaten the tranquility and social fabric of their community. In retrospect, the ideology here does not only punish those who have acted against the state. It gives those "good people" the belief that they hold the power to do that, the power to participate in the State itself, to believe they are legitimately serving the "common good" à la democratic function.

As we have explored thus far, the state governs most effectively when it uses ideology to provide the lens through which citizens view what is "right." And when they do not obey, those rebels are punished by the citizens themselves, who are under the umbrella of group psychology symptoms and the narrative promoted by mythic violence with respect to what ethics are legitimate—all of which is constituted and brought about by the exertion of ideology.

There is a terror to this power. This terror generates when the state uses ideology to persuade its citizens to pursue nefarious actions to which the citizens do not recognize as nefarious. Perhaps the most extreme example that befits this claim is the Holocaust. When that word is spoken, the popular sentiment is usually as follows: All the Germans in Nazi Germany were draconian monsters who relished the genocide of the Jewish population. On the contrary, Christopher Browning provides a much more nuanced view of why certain Germans consented to this atrocity.

In *Ordinary Men*, Browning details the affairs of Reserve Police Battalion 101, a group of middle-aged patriotic men who served as volunteers in Germany's occupation of Poland. They were hardly feverish Nazis. In fact, very few of them favored the party; they thought it was more popular with the youth culture. However, the battalion did feel a traditional sense of respect and duty for their country. So, in lieu of joining the Nazi Party and further laying forth the war effort all over Europe, they choose to stick closer to home and take on what they initially considered to be a less upsetting task.

But as their work progressed, they found themselves under the authority of bureaucratic "higher-ups" who commanded them to liquidate the Jewish ghettos and transport all the prisoners to the forests, where they were to be executed in masses. The first experience of the battalion does not go too well: They find themselves disgusted with the large amount of blood spilled when the bullets penetrate the bodies of the Jews (they could not hit the back of their brain on target, so pieces of their skull were splattered accidentally). So, the battalion was disgusted not ethically but viscerally. They were not disgusted with the abject inhumanity of their crimes but merely disgusted with the spilling of body parts; the only thing upsetting to them was that their work was too messy and stained their clothes.

The battalion, not realizing the abhorrence of their actions, was under the influence of both group psychology and the second therapeutic ideology (as posited earlier), both created by the State of Germany. When interviewed years later as to why they did not choose not to participate in the shootings, given that they were granted that option by Trapp, the men answered that they did not want to be outliers, to be outside the realm of normativity. They wanted to "fit in" with the rest of their brethren, who were governed by the ideology of what it means to be a

true patriot: serving the country you love despite the implications. Such defines the effects of nationalism as described by Hoffer.

What's more, the battalion operated under an ideology of natural law: the means do not have to justify the ends; as long as the ends are attained, anything goes with regard to the means. The men believed the sooner they accomplish the task at hand—despite its abhorrent nature—the sooner the war ends, thereby the sooner they may return home to their families. Indeed, no matter what the costs were, the outcome was all that was needed to assure their compliance. Hitler and other government officials knew this all too well. They capitalized on the Holocaust as a bloody mess that, once concluded, would lead to a Utopian society. This ideology pervaded the nation, and those who did not obey it, were at risk of losing favor with the others in a group, to be a departure from the "normativity' inculcated by the State. The risk thereto was so minuscule in juxtaposition with penalization, but such is the cost of ideology: The blindness it produces, the over-exaggeration of proportion it creates, the way it "makes me not see what I am effectively eating."

For better or for worse, the state *must* use ideology if it wants to govern effectively—if it seeks to legitimize its monopoly of violence and coercion while simultaneously remaining opaque in its coercion at best or recognized but trusted and consented to at least. When compiled together into a group, under the influence of ideology, and then transformed into a mass movement through mythic violence and religionization of whatever "cause" for which it seeks to fight, the people become subjects of the state to participate in whatever bidding it may order.

Ideology is inherently neutral. Ideology's neutrality benefits the State when it appropriates its effects. Ultimately, then, it is up to the people themselves to differentiate between which ideology serves them, and which ideology serves the state—such as committing

genocide in the name of what the State deems ethically and legitimately "correct." In our contemporary society, that is the forthcoming issue: We are cognizant of ideology and how it seeps into our everyday life, but are we truly, consistently cognizant of the effects it has on us and our behavior? We say we do, but our actions prove otherwise. When we are in groups, the answer is far less likely to be "yes."

Hopefully, for the future, our understanding of ideology develops more so as to mitigate the negative effects and buttress the positive effects. We cannot afford another State appropriating ideology without restraint—becoming another Nazi Germany that persuades us not through physical force, but with ideas: "A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas… on the soft fibers of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest of Empires" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 102-103).

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