

Chapter 4: School of Thought or Ideology

Definition and Necessity of Ideology

What is ideology and how is it to be defined? Is it necessary for a man as an individual and as a member of society to adhere to a school and believe in an ideology? Is the existence of an ideology necessary for an individual or a society? Before answering these questions some introductory remarks are necessary.

There are two kinds of human activity: enjoyable and politic.

The enjoyable activities are those simple activities which man undertakes in order to secure some pleasure or to escape from some pain under the direct influence of his instinct, nature or habit, which is also a second nature. For example when man feels thirsty he stretches his hand to a water-container, when he sees a biting animal he takes to his heels, and when he feels an urge to smoking, he lights a cigarette.

Such acts are in keeping with man's own yearnings and have a direct bearing on pleasure and pain. A pleasurable act pulls man towards it and a painful act repels him.

Politic activities consist of the acts which in themselves are neither attractive nor repulsive. Man's instinct or his nature neither pulls him towards them nor pushes him away from them. Man performs these acts or avoids them of his will because he thinks that it is in his interest to do that. In other words, in this case the root cause and the force which drives man to do or not to do something is his interest and not pleasure. Pleasure is determined by nature and interest by reason. Pleasure stimulates desire and interest arouses will.

As for enjoyable acts man takes pleasure in them while performing them. But as for politic acts, he does not take pleasure, though he may feel happy because of the idea that he is doing something that is right and good for him in the long run. There is a difference between a pleasurable and enjoyable act and an act which does not give pleasure and even may cause some pain and hardship, although man may be performing it willingly and happily. Politic acts are not pleasurable because, they do not produce

immediate results. Anyhow they give satisfaction. Pleasure and pain are common to man and animals. But happiness and unhappiness and satisfaction and dissatisfaction are peculiar to man. Similarly to desire something is also peculiar to human beings. Satisfaction, dissatisfaction and desiring are mental functions. They lie within the sphere of human thinking, not within the area of sense perception.

We have said that man performs his politic acts with the help of his intellect and his will–power. On the other hand, the enjoyable acts are performed by him at the command of his feelings and inclinations. That an act is done at the command of intellect means that the calculating intellectual power perceives some remote benefit, pleasure or perfection, discovers the way of attaining of it, which occasionally may be a tedious one, and then plans to attain it. The accomplishment of an act with the help of will–power means that man has a faculty, the role of which is to execute the actions approved by intellect. These acts may sometimes even be opposed to his natural tendencies and inclinations.

The young nature of a student calls him to eat, drink, be merry, and to enjoy sleep and sex, but his calculating mind warns him against the evil consequences of these acts and urges him to keep awake, do hard work and shun indulgence in luxurious living and the lusts of the flesh. At this time man prefers to obey the command of intellect, which is to his advantage and ignores the command of his nature which implies pleasure only. Similarly a patient dislikes to take a bitter medicine of bad taste, but he still takes it at the command of his rightly directing intellect or by the force of his will which can overpower his natural inclination.

The stronger the intellect and the will, the better they can impose their command on nature, despite its tendencies to the opposite.

In the course of his politic activities man at every stage puts into practice some theory or plan. The more a man is developed from the angle of his intellect and will, the more his activities are politic rather than enjoyable, and the more he is close to the horizon of animality, the more his activities are rather enjoyable than politic, for the enjoyable activities are mostly animal activities.

Among animals also we see certain activities directed to achieve a remote object, such as making nests, migration, mating and reproduction. But the animals do not carry out these activities consciously and of their own choice after determining what they want to achieve and how it should be achieved. On the other hand, they carry out these activities as a result of a compulsory and instinctive inspiration from beyond.

It is possible that the scope of man's politic activities gets so expanded that it may include some enjoyable activities also. Therefore all human activities should, as far as possible, be so planned that pleasure–giving activities also become useful and beneficial besides being pleasurable. Every natural activity while responding to the command of nature, should obey the command of intellect also. If politic activity takes the enjoyable activity under its cover, and if the enjoyable activity becomes a part of the general politic plan of life, nature will become compatible with intellect and the desire with will.

As politic activity revolves round a set of remote objects and aims, it naturally requires a plan, a method and the selection of means to secure the object. As this activity has an individualistic aspect, for it is planned by an individual for himself, it is individual intellect which determines its method and means. The choice, of course, depends on one's knowledge, information and power of judgement.

Though politic activity of man is essential for his humanity, it alone, whatever be its quality, is not enough to humanize all his activities. It is true that intellect, knowledge and planning form one half of man's humanity, but yet they are not enough to make human activity human. Human activity can be called human only if it, besides being rational and intentional, is in keeping with the higher tendencies of humanity or at least is not in conflict with them. Otherwise even the worst type of criminal activities are sometimes very cleverly planned and executed. The fiendish imperialist plans bear witness to this fact. In religious terms of Islam any planning or effort made to secure a material and beastly goal not in keeping with human and religious tendencies is called abominable and fiendish. Politic activity is not necessarily human. If it is beastly, it is far more dangerous than a purely pleasurable activity. For example an animal in order to fill its belly tears another animal or a man into pieces. But man who can calculate and plan, to secure a similar object ruins so many cities and puts millions of innocent people under fire.

We leave aside the question whether the goals suggested by intellect are or are not enough to meet individual interests. In other words we leave the question as to what is the limit of the effectiveness of individual intellect or reason in regard to pointing out the individual interests. Yet in any case there is no doubt that thinking power is necessary and useful for making partial and limited arrangements of life. In his life man faces many problems such as the selection of friends, selection of an educational line, selection of a spouse, selection of a profession, travel, behaviour in society, recreation, virtuous activities, fight against immoral and vicious practices and so on. In regard to all these things man is certainly in need of thinking and planning. The more he will think, the more success he is likely to gain. In some cases he even requires the help of others' thinking and experience also (the principle of consultation). In all these particular cases man makes a plan and then carries it out.

Anyhow, the question remains whether on a wider scale also man is capable of making a general plan which may cover all the problems of his personal life and which may be applicable to all situations, or his ability is limited to handling some particular cases on a limited scale only and it is beyond the power of human intellect to cover all situations and to ensure all round success.

We know that certain philosophers believe in the theory of 'self-sufficiency'. They claim that they have discovered the way of being happy and unhappy, and can pass a happy life relying on their own intellectual power and will. But we also know that no two philosophers can be found who have unanimity of opinion as to what is this way.

Happiness itself, which is the ultimate goal, is of the most ambiguous things, although its conception appears to be very clear at first glance. It is still unknown what happiness is and what factors cause it.

Man himself and his capabilities and potentialities are not known yet. So long as man himself is unknown, how is it possible that we may be able to find out what his happiness is and how that is to be obtained?

Furthermore, man is a social being. His social life creates thousands of problems for him which he has to resolve. His duty in every case should be clear. As man is a social being, his happiness, his aspirations, his standards of good and evil, his way of life, his selection of the means of leading his life are inter-linked with the happiness of others, their aspirations, their standards of good and evil, their way of life and their selection of the means. Man cannot select his way independently of others. He should seek his happiness on the road which leads society to happiness and perfection.

If we take into consideration the question of the eternity of soul and the inexperience of reason in regard to the life Hereafter, the problem becomes far more difficult.

Now, here appears the need of a school, an ideology, a general theory or a comprehensive and harmonious system whose fundamental aim is the human perfection and the happiness of all. This system should specify the fundamental principles, methods, do's and don'ts, good actions and bad actions, aims and means, requirements and their solutions, responsibilities and obligations. It should be the source of the inspiration of duties for all individuals.

From the very beginning or at least from the time the developed social life has led to so many dissensions,¹ man has been in need of an ideology or in the Qur'anic terminology, Shari'at. As the time passed and man became more developed, this need also became more intense. In the past, racial, national and tribal tendencies ruled over human societies like a collective spirit. This spirit in its turn brought into existence a series of ambitions (though inhuman) which united each society and gave it a particular orientation. Now scientific and intellectual progress has weakened these bonds. It is a characteristic of science that it tends towards individualism, weakens sentiments and dulls the bonds based on sentiments. It is only a consciously selected rational philosophy of life or in other words, a comprehensive and perfect ideology which may unite the humanity of today or rather of tomorrow, give it an orientation, a common ideal and a common standard to judge what is right and what is wrong.

Today more than ever man requires such a philosophy of life, a philosophy capable of attracting him to the realities beyond the individual and individual interests. There is no longer any doubt about the fact that a school or an ideology is one of the necessities of social life.

Now the question is: who can lay down such an ideology? Undoubtedly the intellect of any single individual cannot do so. Can the collective intellect do that? Can man with the help of his total experience and his past and present information lay down such an ideology? If we admit that man does not know himself, then how can we expect him to know human society and social weal. Then what to do? If we have a right conception of the universe, and believe that the world has a balanced system and there is nothing wrong or absurd in it, we must admit that the great creative machinery has not left this

big question unattended and has already specified the fundamental outlines of an ideology from a horizon above the horizon of human intellect, that is from the horizon of revelation (the principle of Prophethood). The job of intellect and knowledge is to move along these outlines.

How nicely has Avicenna put this question when, while describing the need of mankind to the Divine law (*Shari'at*) revealed through a man, he said in his book, *Najat*: "The need of a Prophet and exponent of the Divine law and human ideology for the continuity of human race and man's attaining perfection of his human existence is far greater than the growth of hair on his eyebrows, the concavity of his soles or other such things, which are at the most useful for the continuity of human race, but not essential".

In other words, how can the great creative machinery which has not left small and superfluous needs unattended, leave the most essential need uncared for?

But if we lack the right conception of the universe and creation, we may accept the idea that man has been condemned to bewilderment and error and any human ideology is no more than an interesting pursuit or pastime.

The above discussion not only makes the need of the existence of a school or an ideology clear, but also shows the necessity of an individual's adhesion to it.

The true adherence to an ideology means to have faith in it, and evidently a true faith cannot be imposed by force nor can it be acquired as a matter of expediency. One can be made to submit to a thing by force, but ideology does not demand submission. It demands faith. It is to be accepted and assimilated.

A useful ideology, on the one hand, must be based on a sort of world conception that may convince reason and feed thinking, and on the other hand, must be able to derive attractive goals from its conception of the universe. Conviction and zeal are the two basic elements of faith which go hand in hand and remould the world.

However there are some questions which we must discuss briefly. Their detailed discussion we leave to a better opportunity,

Kinds of Ideologies

I. There are two kinds of ideologies: human ideology and class ideology.

Human ideology is that which is addressed to all mankind, not to any particular class, race or community. The proclaimed aim of a human ideology is the emancipation of human race, not of any particular group or class. Its plan covers all strata of society and does not remain confined to any particular stratum or group.

Class ideology, in contrast, is addressed to a particular class, group or a stratum of society, and its

proclaimed aim is the emancipation or supremacy of a particular group. The plan that it puts forward is confined to that group only, from which alone it recruits its supporters and defenders.

Each of these two kinds of ideologies is based on a particular conception of man. Every general and human ideology like Islamic ideology has that attitude towards man which may be called natural. From Islamic point of view man has been created to be superior to historical and social factors. He has a special existential dimension, and has been endowed with high qualities which distinguish him from animals. According to this view, man's creative design is such that all human beings have been endowed with a sort of consciousness and intuition, which makes them fit to be addressed and enables them to respond to a call. Human ideologies base their preachings on the natural intuition peculiar to mankind and infuse a spirit of action in man.

Some ideologies have a different view of man. According to them, the human species is not fit that a call be addressed to it, nor can it respond to a call. They maintain that the consciousness and the tendencies of man are determined by the historical factors of his national life and the social factors which fire his class status. Should we overlook historical and social factors, then man in the absolute sense has neither consciousness nor any intuitive power nor is he fit to be called upon to perform a mission. In that case he will not be a concrete man and his existence will be merely conceptual. Marxism and similarly national philosophies are based on such a view of man. These philosophies aim at class benefits or are based on national and racial sentiments or at the most on national culture.

There is no doubt that the ideology of Islam is of the first kind, and is based on true nature of man. That is why Islam addresses its message to the 'common people',² and not to a particular group or class. Islam was able to draw its supporters practically from all groups, even from those to fight against which it had risen, namely the groups which it termed the luxuriously living. It was a great achievement of Islam that it was able to draw recruits from a class to fight against that very class and from a group to fight against the interests of that very group, and even to arouse the individual to fight against himself.

This is a deed which Islam has performed and is still performing. Islam being a religion which relies on the innate nature of man and infiltrates into the inmost traits of his existence, can arouse the individual to fight and bring about a revolution against himself. This revolution is called penitence. The revolutionary power of a class or group ideology is limited to the instigation of an individual against another individual or a class against another class, but it cannot persuade an individual to revolutionize himself, nor can it put the inner sentiments and passions of man under his own control.

Islam, being a religion, and for that matter the final religion, has come, more than any other religion, to set up a system of social justice.³ Naturally it aims at the emancipation of the oppressed and the underprivileged. But it does not direct its message to the oppressed and the underprivileged alone. Islam has not recruited its supporters from this class only. As history bears witness to it, relying on the force of faith and the innate nature of man, Islam has been able to draw its supporters even from among those classes to fight against which it had risen. Islam presents a theory of the triumph of humanity over

animality, of knowledge over ignorance, of justice over tyranny, of equality over discrimination, of virtue over depravity, of piety over sensuality, and of monotheism over polytheism. The success of the oppressed people against the tyrants and the despots is a manifestation of this triumph.

II. In consequence of the foregoing discussion a question arises whether the genuine human culture is of a uniform character or there exists no human and uniform culture; and all that exists and will exist in future is a series of many cultures each of them having national, communal or class characteristics?

This question is linked with another question. Has or has not man a genuine and uniform innate nature, giving uniformity to human culture? If human nature is uniform, it should impart uniformity to human culture also. Otherwise it will be reasonable to believe that culture is a product of historical, national and geographical factors or a product of class financial interests. Islam, because of its particular world conception, believes in the uniformity of human nature. It supports the idea of the uniformity of ideology and culture also.

III. Evidently it is only a human, not class ideology, a uniform ideology, not one based on the division of mankind, and a natural ideology, not one inspired by profiteering interests, that can be established on human values and can have human characteristics.

IV. Does the nature of every ideology depend on its time and place? Is it necessary for man to have a different ideology with every change in times, circumstances and environment? Is ideology subject to the principle of a change with a variation in place, and subject to the principle of cancellation with a variation in time? Is human ideology uniform or multiform?

In other words, is it absolute or relative?

The question, whether an ideology from the viewpoint of time and place is absolute or relative depends on another question: whether its source is human nature and its goal is the prosperity of human race, or its source is group interests and national and class feelings?

From another angle this question depends on what we think about the nature of social changes. When society undergoes a change and enters a new era, does its nature change so essentially that it is no longer governed by the laws by which it was governed previously, as for example, when water with the increase in its temperature, turns into steam, it is governed by the laws of gases and not by those of liquids. Or do we believe that this is not the case with social changes and developments, and that social changes constitute only a stage in the evolution of society and do not affect the fundamental laws or the course of evolution, just as we find in the case of animals that as they develop, their way of life changes, but the laws of their development remain fixed and constant?

From another angle the question whether an ideology is absolute or relative to time and place, is dependent on whether its conception of the world is scientific, philosophical or religious. Scientific conception of the world being transient, an ideology based on it cannot be lasting. On the contrary the

philosophical conception of the world is based on self-evident truths and the religious conception on Divine revelation and Prophethood.

This not being the proper occasion, we skip over the discussion of the pure state of human nature, which is one of the most important topics of Islamic science. Similarly we skip over the discussion of changes in society. Anyhow, we propose to take up the question of social changes and their relation with pure state of human nature when we discuss the topic of history and society later.

V. Now the question is whether an ideology itself is governed by the principle of constancy or the principle of change. In the foregoing we have discussed whether human ideology is different in different periods and places. There the question was that of the abrogation and cancellation of an ideology. Now we take up a different question, namely that of the development of an ideology. Irrespective of the fact whether it is absolute or relative and whether in regard to its content it is general or particular, an ideology is a phenomenon. As all phenomena are subject to changes, development and evolution, naturally a question arises whether the same is true of the ideology also. Is the reality of an ideology at the time of its birth different from that during its growth and during the period of its maturity?

In other words, should an ideology be constantly revised, improved and modernized by its leaders and ideologists, as we find in the case of the materialistic ideologies of our time? If the modern ideologies are not constantly revised, they soon lose their vitality and become obsolete and outdated. Anyhow, the question is whether it is possible to have an ideology, which may be in complete harmony with the course of the development of man and society so that there should be no need of its further revision and improvement. In the case of such an ideology the role of its leaders and the ideologists will be confined to the interpretation of its meaning and content, and the ideological development will be in the field of interpretation, not in the text of the ideology itself.

1. According to the Qur'an, these dissensions rose in Prophet Nuh's time.

2. The term 'common people' is often misunderstood and considered to be synonymous with 'masses' as distinguished from higher classes. As Islam addresses the common people, it is claimed that Islam is the religion of the masses. Incidentally, this is considered to be a merit of Islam. But we must remember that Islam does not address its message to the masses only, nor is its ideology a class ideology. The real merit of Islam lies in the fact that it advanced with the support of the masses, not that it was addressed to them only. What is more meritorious is that Islam has worked up the sentiments of the well-to-do classes among the Muslims for the benefit of the underprivileged classes.

3. "Surely We sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Book and a criterion so that people may observe justice." (Surah al-Hadid, 57:25)

"Say: My Lord has ordered me to be fair." (Surah al-A'raf, 7:29)

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