The beginning of ideology
THE BEGINNING OF IDEOLOGY

Consciousness and Society in the French Reformation

DONALD R. KELLEY
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Preface

This book represents an experiment in history – intellectual history, I suppose it must be termed, or perhaps social history of ideas, except that this phrase has been pre-empted for rather different approaches to the interpretation of the past. It also represents the results of over twenty years of digging into and reflecting upon the literary remains of sixteenth-century Europe. It builds in some ways on two related products of these investigations, one a history of historical thought and scholarship and the other a biography of one of the more active and controversial protagonists of that age.¹ But while it goes over some of the same ground, it departs both from the narrative and chronological form of the latter and from the analytical (and as historians of science would say, ‘internalist’) approach of the former. The present strategy I think of as synthetic; and since a number of its tactics may seem questionable as well as unfashionable, I may begin by acknowledging and if possible justifying my choices.

My original aim was to try to recapture certain aspects of sixteenth-century experience, thought and behavior which, falling between the history of ideas on the one hand and the history of society and institutions on the other, might yield a more comprehensive and coherent picture of that time than is normally attempted. In keeping with this, and in opposition to current intellectual fashions which value quantitative and objective science and social reality above subjective experience, I have chosen to begin with and to place primary emphasis (though I hope not uncritically) on subjective testimony. ‘Subjectivity is truth’, Kierkegaard has taught; and while the subjectivity in question here must at best be taken at second hand, it should not for that reason be dismissed as inferior to more inert kinds of evidence. Not that I believe that history is moved by minds alone (or stomachs or fists or tools, for that matter); but I do believe that current preoccupations with material factors and subverbal behavior have obscured the force and relevance of individual emotion, thought and dis-

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course in the complex process of history. In any case my strategy has been to move from consciousness to society rather than the reverse.

There is epistemological as well as methodological justification for this view. Owen Barfield has made an important point about natural science which seems even more pertinent to the study of human culture. Physical science has for a long time stressed the enormous difference between what it investigates as the actual structure of the universe, including the earth, and the phenomena or appearances which are presented to normal human consciousness. In tune with this, most philosophy – at all events since Kant – has heavily emphasized the participation of man’s own mind in the creation, or evocation, of these phenomena. Too many historians, it seems to me, are still operating in a pre-Kantian world in search of an ‘actual structure’ discernible apart from human consciousness, their own as well as that of their subjects; to avoid such methodological hubris I have tried to eliminate surreptitious (and pseudo-) objectivity. My explorations into past consciousness and society are indeed the reconstructions of a late-twentieth-century North American interested in social and cultural sciences as well as history. Obviously I cannot see the hearts, minds and behavior of sixteenth-century humanity without distortion, cannot ask significant questions without disturbing the field of inquiry and reorganizing the data.

In the course of the following series of analyses there will be occasion not only to venture into a variety of sub-fields of history (history of religion, education, law, printing and so forth) but also to touch upon more alien areas (such as the psychology and sociology of a similar range of behavior) and often to encounter various controversial problems, including conflicts between the sexes and generations, religious and political conversion, exile and martyrdom, the significance of oral, scribal and print culture, the conceptual value of rhetoric and jurisprudence, the use of literary criticism in intellectual history, the phenomenon of propaganda and its forms, the nature of political parties, and of course the problems of ideology itself, which involve the sociology and anthropology of knowledge. It is tempting to inject various extra-historical and inter-disciplinary concepts on these occasions, but for the most part I have tried to avoid gratuitous (and perhaps meretricious) applications of theories derived from other contexts. For the reconstruction of sixteenth-century mentalities and ideology, it seems to me, Freudian psychoanalysis or Marxian class analysis is no more (and perhaps is less) suitable than Lutheran or Thomist theology. Quite to

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the contrary, I prefer to assume that an exposure to sixteenth-century experience and modes of thought may itself have something to offer to other disciplines, whose evidence and perspectives seldom extend back so far. There is no reason to suppose that religious motivations or political convictions conform to modern conventions, or that psychic or social – oedipal, say, or class – behavior preserves a constant pattern. These are questions to be asked, not categories to be applied.

On such grounds I do not aspire, for example, to apply what currently passes for ‘psychohistory’ to the profound and shattering experiences of sixteenth-century observers and actors (although the work of Erik Erikson, so grounded in such experience, is not without relevance). It is obvious that sixteenth-century materials are rich in subjects for psychohistorical analysis in a general sense – testimonies of generational conflict, conversion, martyrdom, confessional and personal quarrels, autobiographical revelations and even formal theology – but it is difficult enough to find patterns in such evidence without imposing some apparatus of pre-judgment. And as I choose not to rely on Victorian theories of psychology (except inadvertently), so I choose not to place my trust in Victorian views of social structure and process (except again to the extent that a subliminal kind of Marxism is unavoidable); and I might say the same thing about any Christian perspective. If I had a preferred model, it would be that of cultural anthropology: the past is also a foreign country, and we need to approach it as a kind of alien and perhaps unsettling field work, not expecting satisfaction or confirmation from the results. Although I entertain high hopes about the possibilities of exploring sixteenth-century consciousness and the social formations which they reflect, I do not pretend to account for the upheavals of the sixteenth century in a demonstrative fashion. In general my purpose is not to seek causes but rather to reveal patterns, not to reduce but to reconstruct experience, not to ‘explain’ but to interpret.

In this hermeneutical effort I have hoped that reliance on imaginative reconstruction of a wide variety of testimony from several points of view might reveal ties and continuities with our own age which a more positivistic, literal-minded and intra-disciplinary approach would overlook or reject. This presents a difficulty, for these days we are not used to feeling kinship with any century before the seventeenth. Was not that period the ‘age of genius’, when the world began to be transformed jointly by an irreversible ‘revolution’ in natural science and a profound ‘general crisis’ in European society? Well, perhaps; but I do not want to regard the question as
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closed. The scientific revolution has deeper roots than earlier historians suspected; it produced some misshapen progeny which mar the success story usually passed off as the history of science; and in general the legacy of rationalism, naturalism and scientism has been neither so beneficial nor so enlightening as some apologists have argued. As for the seventeenth-century ‘crisis’, this controversial thesis is predicated on a particular conception of demographic transformation, class conflict and ‘modernization’ (our equivalent of the ‘Whig fallacy’ or the idea of Progress?) that seems altogether too indiscriminate, materialistic and unilinear to accommodate an appreciation of historical experience in general and our various predicaments in particular. What this amounts to, I suppose, is another plea – every generation seems to need one – for an historical approach that is relevant without being anachronistic, meaningful without being myopic, illuminating without being apologetic.

A larger difficulty: in pursuit of these objectives – reaching for some of the human meaning of sixteenth-century experience and relating it to our contemporary human condition – I have relied on a conceptual device which many historians avoid or at least conceal (often from themselves). This device is what may be termed a historical generalization; and the form it takes is not a statically defined category but rather a reconstructed, or at least historically inferred, temporal continuum. Certain ideas, institutions, types of behavior, although they may vary widely, or wildly, in time, nevertheless establish traditions or processes which demand coherent historical definition and analysis. Such abstractions as ‘art’, ‘science’, ‘representation’ and ‘property’ have changed radically in content over the centuries; and yet these terms, nominally anachronistic, have a necessary function in giving conceptual coherence to the process of history. Previously, I have advanced similar arguments for two more concretely definable continua – one that scholarly cast of mind which came to be called ‘historicism’, and the other an early illustration of ‘revolutionary’ thought and action. The ‘historicism’ of Budé can hardly be identified with that of Mommsen, still less the ‘revolutionary’ attitude of Hotman with Marx; and yet both cases, it seems to me, suggest historical connections and retrospectively justify the positing of a ‘historical generalization’. Such is also the rationale for the conceptual perspective of this book, namely, the notion of ‘ideology’, which seems to me a promising way of tracing some of the most fundamental ties be-

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tween our world and that of pre-scientific and pre-industrial Europe.

What I understand historically by ‘ideology’ will appear in the
course of the book. Let me conclude these preliminary remarks by
suggesting the reason for subsuming my investigations under this
outlandish (and to many historians, no doubt, distracting) category.
Why, in particular, the beginning of ideology? What is at issue is not
the beginning of ideology in a specific historical sense, of course, but
rather the ‘beginning of ideology’ as a general feature of historical
experience, as a problem of the human condition. Some years ago
there was much talk about the obverse of this epiphenomenon, that
is, the ‘end of ideology’; and despite compounded confusions – cen-
tering less on the emotive term itself than on the question, ‘whose
ideology?’ – the problem is of continuing importance. The phenomen-
on, or non-phenomenon, of the exhaustion of ideals, the collapse
of collective determination and the onset of disillusionment is central
to an understanding of history, which has seen many ideologies rise and fall – and indeed rise again after the societies
which spawned them were long gone. Presupposed by this prob-
lem, however, is another and even more fundamental question
arising at the other end of the ideological process, which is the
generation of values and ideals and of the activity attendant upon
these. This book, focussing upon one of the seminal periods of
European history, takes as its point of departure precisely the posing
of this problem, ‘the beginning of ideology’.

Aspirations and pretensions aside, I have tried to pose some
rather obvious questions about part of what used to be regarded as
‘modern history’. Given the nature and scope of the subject, it
would be a largely irrelevant affection to refer to the sort of
manuscript sources which garnished my two related books; on the
other hand it is necessary to apply to a considerably wider range of
printed materials, which are very far from being exhausted for this
period. Media limitations have unfortunately prevented considera-
tion of visual and iconographic sources; ignorance has made it
unfeasible to explore such more remote expressions of ‘ideology’ as
the play element, various aspects of material culture and less
accessible patterns of behavior which historians, unlike anthropolog-
ists, can seldom hope to observe. As for my point of view, while I do
not want to read the twentieth century back into the sixteenth, at the
same time I cannot pretend not to write from the perspective – and
with some concern for the predicaments – of this age; and to some
extent I do see this as a case study of a larger and more general

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phenomenon that is psychological, sociological and perhaps anthropological. Because my presentation (if not my approach) is deliberately systematic, chronology may be violated; but Clio herself, I hope, will retain some of her charm as well as utility, if not her virtue. Such at least are my good intentions: only God and the Reader – in this secular age perhaps only the Reader – can judge what road they have taken me down.

Research for this book has been carried out, over the past decade and more, in many libraries on two continents. The writing was made possible by extended sojourns at Harvard and at the Institute for Advanced Study; and in this connection I am indebted especially to the late Myron Gilmore, Giles Constable, Felix Gilbert and John Elliott, as well as the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the University of Rochester. Personal obligations are beyond counting, and I will not test friendships by associating my intellectual creditors in this rash undertaking. More generally, however, and in keeping with the topical approach of this work, I may single out my mother’s side of my family for their efforts (largely in vain) to instill a fundamentalist faith (chapter III), certain friends and colleagues at Rochester for intensifying my appreciation of the educational and political dialectic (chapters IV, VI and VII), members of Clifford Geertz and Albert Hirschman’s seminar at the Institute for Advanced Study (especially Quentin Skinner) for encouraging me to think more broadly about this subject than a historian’s training might allow (chapters I and VIII), and above all Bonnie and John Reed Kelley, for helping me on the most fundamental level of socialization (chapter II). This book is for them, in recompense.

D.R.K.
Abbreviations

In general the sources for this book are of three kinds: conceptual aids (especially in the first and last chapters), secondary literature (most important for chapters II–VI) and primary sources (limited in general to printed material and most conspicuous in chapters V–VIII). It is impossible to do justice to any one type: the first I have had to suppress forcibly, except at a few crucial points; the second I have been able to suggest only selectively, since each chapter involves at least one discipline with its own apparatus and historiography; and the third I have had to present even more arbitrarily because the ocean of early modern printed material (here, for the most part, French, Latin and English) has been neither classified nor even charted. Here is a list of the common abbreviations used in the notes:

Ars.  Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal (followed by shelf-mark)
BHR  *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance*
BM  British Museum (British Library) (followed by shelf-mark)
BN  Bibliothèque Nationale (followed by shelf-mark)
Bordier  Henri Bordier (ed.), *Le Chansonnier huguenot du XVIIe siècle*. Paris, 1870
BRN  *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*. The Hague
BSHPF  *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Française*
CHF  *Catalogue de l’histoire de France*, 1 (Bibliothèque Nationale). Paris, 1855
### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>De Thou</td>
<td>J. A. de Thou, Histoire universelle. The Hague, 1740: 11 vols</td>
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<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>R. O. Lindsay and J. Neu, French Political Pamphlets 1547–1648. Madison, 1969 (followed by pamphlet number)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Memoires de l’Estat de France sous Charles neufiesme, ed. S. Goulart. ‘Meidelbourg’ (Geneva), 1578: 6 vols</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raemond</td>
<td>Florimond de Raemond, L’Histoire de la Naissance, Progres et decadence de l’heresie de ce siecle. Rouen, 1648</td>
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Abbreviations

**Table Talk**  

**Tractatus**  
*Tractatus universi juris*. Venice, 1584: 15 vols