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Ideologies That Kill: One Way In, No Way Out

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Abstract. This article describes the phenomenon of ideology as an ineluctable trap from which there is no detour and no escape.

Ideology can denote a belief system that provides answers to the nature of political power and how it is distributed, obtained, and maintained. Conceptions of what is right and wrong and how to arrive at what is right and wrong stem from these answers about political power. One can make a strong case that ideology ultimately serves the function of providing meaning and order in the world. Perhaps this function undergirds internecine conflict among people with different ideologies in situations wherein these ideologies are seriously threatened. Even people who deny ideology in themselves or others maintain an ideology of denial and may experience conflict with different interpreters of the same or differing ideologies.

These abstractions, unfortunately, can bring noxious, concrete consequences. For example, ideologies bearing on appropriate sexual behavior can serve as impediments to preventive and secondary intervention measures towards acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Ideologies bearing on matters of the spirit can engender holy war. War also can be engendered through ideologies bearing on the values of nationalism and on comparative valuation of values.

Ideology also can bring consequences that kill the body, not through war or disease, but through homicide and suicide. Here--as with war--the psychological intermediaries appear to be exacerbated depression, anxiety, anger, and arrogance that may or may not be fueled by unconscious conflict. In addition, ideology's noxious consequences may have these psychological intermediaries as endpoints. For example, Quinn and Crocker (1999) have found a significant positive correlation between belief in the Protestant ethic and lower psychological well-being for women who perceive themselves to be overweight. And the very possession ideology may be construed as harboring a belief system facilitating or maintaining one's exploitation at the hands of those with more political power (cf. Dobles, 1999; Osterkamp, 1999.)

Of course, ideology may engender positive consequences (besides bestowing meaning and order) including cooperation, selfless sacrifice, scientific and cultural contributions, and even conceptions of death that help transcend less than humane social control mechanisms (cf. Hart, Sainsbury, & Short, 1998). The question then becomes how to maximize the positive and minimize the negative with similar and differing ideologies. Unfortunately, this itself is an ideological question. We are left with a conclusion that political psychologists--as with the rest of humanity--cannot remove themselves from what has to be understood and changed. Here the scientific method falls woefully short and that which is to be understood and changed remains neither understood nor changed. (See Dobles, I. (1999). Marxism, ideology, and psychology. *Theory and Psychology*, 9, 407-410; Gordimer, N. (December 1, 2000). Refusing to 'live with AIDS.' *The New York Times*, p. A31; Hart, B., & Sainsbury, P., & Short, S. (1998). Whose dying? A sociological critique of the "good death." *Mortality*, 3, 65-77; Osterkamp, U. (1999). On psychology, ideology and individuals' societal nature. *Theory and Psychology*, 9, 379-392; Quinn, D.M., & Crocker, J. (1999). When ideology hurts: Effects of belief in the Protestant ethic and

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feeling overweight on the psychological well-being of women. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 402-414.) (Keywords: Ideology, Science.)