

ABORTION AND IDEOLOGY

Raymond Dennehy

A survey of the justifications advanced by scientists, philosophers, and other members of the elite class, such as judges, to justify the legalization of induced abortion reveals that they have abandoned rational inquiry in favor of ideology. For although their arguments have the trappings of the objectivity of scientific method and other marks of rational inquiry, it is clear that they subvert reason and manipulate evidence to actualize an ideal that they perceive to be above all rational criticism. This enslavement to ideology is but a reenactment of what happened in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to the detriment of science and philosophy, not to mention the degradation of human life.

Sophistical Arguments for Abortion

Two months after the U. S. Supreme Court rendered its decision in *Roe v. Wade*, when the public debate on abortion was white hot, a political cartoon appeared in the editorial section of what is now called *The San Jose Mercury News*, depicting two departed souls standing on a cloud and sporting the obligatory wings. All about them tiny fetuses, also sporting wings, are standing. One of the souls says to the other: "Fetus, Fetus. I never knew so many kids named 'Fetus'."¹ A couple of days later, the paper printed a letter to the editor from a representative of a local feminist group complaining about the cartoon's "insensitivity to women who have had abortions." A plausible interpretation of the cartoonist's motive is that, rather than intending to bruise anyone's feelings, his aim was to caricature what was then the recent entry of "fetus" into everyday language as a replacement for the term unborn baby. Thereby hangs a tale.

The success of the pro-abortion movement depended on diverting the public's attention from the fact that induced abortion is the direct killing of an innocent human being. Replacing "unborn baby" with "fetus" was a good start, for the latter term is sufficiently abstract to deflect public consideration from the homicidal consequences. But

¹ *San Jose News* (San Jose, CA, March 12, 1973).

changing the public's thinking about abortion would require more than making "fetus" the preferred term in everyday discourse. It would also be necessary to spread a fog of confusion over the positions of science on the status of the fetus. Bernard Nathanson writes that, before his conversion from pro-abortion advocate to champion of human life, he and his colleagues worked hard to convince people that it is impossible to determine when human life begins by insisting that it is a moral, theological, or philosophical question, not a scientific one.²

Planned Parenthood, under the leadership of the late Alan Guttmacher, was apparently so devoutly committed to this project of disinformation that neither he nor his organization was embarrassed by contradicting themselves. For example, before he had become a promoter of abortion on demand, Guttmacher wrote the following:

We of today know that man is born of sexual union; that he starts life as an embryo within the body of the female; and that the embryo is formed from the fusion of two single cells, the ovum and the sperm. This all seems so simple and evident to us that it is difficult to picture a time when it was not part of common knowledge.³

He wrote these words in 1933. And as late as 1963, Planned Parenthood proclaimed essentially the same position in its official pamphlet: "Is birth control an abortion? Definitely not. An abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun...." But by 1973, Guttmacher's writings show that he had apparently undergone a conversion:

Scientifically all we know is that a living human sperm unites with a living human egg; if they were not living there could be no union.... Does human life begin before or with the union of the

² Bernard Nathanson, "Confessions of an Ex-Abortinist," <http://www.aboutabortions.com/Confess.htm>; also see his book, *Aborting America* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979).

³ Quoted in Robert Marshall & Charles Donovan, *Blessed Are the Barren: The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), pp. 294-95.

gametes, or with birth, or at a time intermediate? I, for one, confess I do not know.⁴

What could explain this change of thought? New discoveries in embryology since 1963? Hardly! All the evidence since then only confirms the conclusion that from the moment of conception a new individual human life is present.

This gestational agnosticism takes various forms. The practice of decking oneself out in the clothes of science while speaking the language of everyday people seems to exert a powerful attraction on those in the pro-abortion ranks. For example, *Psychology Today* offered a fascinating account of life in the womb. The article's blurb asserted enticingly: "Behaviorally speaking, there's little difference between a newborn baby and a 32-week-old fetus. A new wave of research suggests that the fetus can feel, dream, and even enjoy *The Cat in the Hat*. The abortion debate may never be the same."⁵ However, if the researchers interviewed by the author of those words have anything to say about the debate, it *will* stay the same. Their responses indicate that they would prefer the cozy and secure habitat of politically correct ambiguity. For example, Johns Hopkins psychologist, Janet DiPietro doubts that fetal research sheds any light at all on the abortion debate:

The essence of the abortion debate is: When does life begin? Some people believe it begins at conception; the other extreme believes that it begins after the baby is born, and there's a group in the middle that believes it begins at around 24 or 25 weeks, when a fetus can live outside the womb, though it needs a lot of help to do so.

Up to about 25 weeks, whether or not it's sucking its thumb or has personality or all that, the fetus cannot survive outside of its mother. So is that life or not? That is a moral, ethical, and religious question, not one for science. Things can behave and

⁴ Quoted in *Blessed Are the Barren*, p. 295.

⁵ *Psychology Today*, October, 1998, p. 44.

not be alive. Right-to-lifers may say that this research proves that a fetus is alive, but it does not. It cannot.⁶

Heidelise Als, a Harvard University psychologist, offers another example saying:

Fetal research only changes the abortion debate for people who think that life starts at some magical point. If you believe that life starts at conception, then you don't need the proof of fetal behavior. Your circumstances and personal beliefs have much more impact on the decision....⁷

To be sure, data that suggest or even establish that the fetus responds to its mother's voice with a lowered heart-beat or that it might even dream does not allow the conclusion that it is a human being. One might obtain the same kind of data from the observed responses of animal fetuses *in utero*. But for a scientist to speak as though ignorant of the conclusions of embryology and fetology and, worse yet, to cast doubt on whether the human fetus is even alive by appealing to an alleged disagreement in popular opinion is both preposterous and shameless. If the question of when human life begins is one for ethics and religion but not for science, then what do embryologists think that they have been doing all these years? And notice how Heidelise Als responds to the question by shifting attention from the objective results of scientific observation to the subjective factors that influence peoples' positions.

Not even one with the scientific stature of a David Baltimore, winner of the Nobel Prize for cancer research and president of the prestigious California Institute of Technology, seems embarrassed by basing his argument for embryo stem-cell research on his subjective opinion regarding the status of the embryo: "To me, a tiny mass of cells that has never been in a uterus is hardly a human being - even if it has the potential to become human."⁸

⁶ *Psychology Today*, p. 47.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ David Baltimore, "Don't Impede Medical Progress," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2001; emphasis added.

Another gambit is to offer a philosophical argument tricked out in the clothes of science. Princeton biologist Lee M. Silver exemplifies a group of pro-abortion scientists who do not hesitate to state their position, for he admits that the embryo is alive and that it is human, but he denies that it is human life. Although he speaks as a biologist, it is clear his pronouncements on the status of the embryo are philosophical rather than scientific. The obvious question that one would put to Silver is "How can the embryo be alive, be human, and yet fail to be a human life?" His answer is based on his distinction between "*life in the general sense*" and "*life in the special sense*." Here he draws upon the venerable Scholastic adage, "When faced with a contradiction, make a distinction." By "*life in the general sense*," he means an individual thing "as a product of reproduction and evolution that uses energy to maintain self-defining information and organization. The inanimate becomes animate only upon achieving the ability to evolve." The second meaning of "life" pertains to beings whose cerebral functioning reaches the state of consciousness. That distinction allows Silver to say that the embryo is human, but no more so than "the cells that fall off your skin every day."⁹

What is key in Silver's argument is that it is philosophical rather than biological. Of course, he is perfectly free to philosophize as long as both he and his readers bear in mind that he is no longer speaking as a biologist. But the trouble with Silver's transition is that the status of the human embryo is the kind of question that Mortimer Adler would call "a mixed question." For it cannot be decided either by science alone or by philosophy alone. What human life is and when it begins is a matter for the sciences of embryology and fetology to tell us. The contribution of philosophy depends on an interpretation of the scientific data. But instead of starting with that data, Silver immediately waxes philosophical, conveniently bypassing the position of embryology that from the moment of conception there is individual human life. This raises a crucial question about the dichotomy he claims to exist between "*life in the general sense*" and "*life in the special sense*," a question that he fails to address. Since embryology

⁹ Lee M. Silver, *Remaking Eden* (New York, NY: Avon Books Inc., 1997), pp. 25-26 & 48.

tells us that, from the moment of conception, no constituent part is added to the newly conceived individual life – that is, mammalian reproduction is characterized by continuity in development – how can the embryo be human life in “the special sense” at t2 when, by Silver’s own admission, it is only human life in “the general sense” at t1?

What is implied in this argument is that the two embryonic stages constitute a difference *in kind*, so that the respect given the embryo having “life in the special sense” need not be given to an embryo having “life in the general sense.” It is axiomatic that of two things that differ in kind what applies to one in the relevant sense does not apply to the other in that relevant sense. Thus, if the two stages of embryonic development constitute a difference in kind, it would follow that the kind of respect to which an embryo having “life in the special sense” is entitled cannot be claimed by any embryo having “life in the general sense.” The trouble is that we have no examples in biology of any mammal changing from one species to another *in utero*. This means that “life in the general sense” and “life in the special sense” could constitute a difference only in degree, not in kind. But of two things differing only in degree, what applies to one in the relevant sense, applies necessarily to the other in the relevant sense. For example, a theorem that applies to the triangle as such, applies to all triangles, regardless of whether equilateral, right, scalene, etc.

Silver might, wittingly or not, be taking sides with the functionalist in the *substance vs. function* debate, arguing that because an entity called “substance” is not observable, all that counts in ontological and moral enquiry is a being’s function. If so, he would show once again that he has left the domain of science for that of philosophy to embrace a variation of developmentalist argument of Mary Ann Warren and Michael Tooley.

When it comes to making distinctions in the face of contradiction, no group does it better than philosophers. Mary Ann Warren and Michael Tooley, for example, admit that the fetus is a human being, but they deny that it is a person. The purchase gained by this distinction is that it permits the justification of induced abortion while protecting the right to life of persons, since the latter have rights and fetuses do not. What signals the advent of personhood is when a being starts performing functions such as self-awareness, consciousness of pleasure and pain, desiring to remain in existence, etc. Since the fetus does none

of these things, it is only a potential person; whereas, the mother is an actual person. The rights of an actual person trump the rights of a merely potential person.¹⁰

Here, the principle, *Operatio sequitur esse* (operation follows essence), must be given its due. In the *order of discovery*, function comes before substance because how a thing behaves, its peculiar functions, are the first things we know about it. But in the *order of reality*, its substance is primary because it is only in virtue of what that thing actually is that it has those functions, functions peculiar to its substantial nature. From the knowledge of what a thing does, we infer what it is. Because substance enjoys primacy in the order of reality, it is a reasonable assumption that a person is present from the moment of conception even though self-awareness, thinking, and consciously desiring to remain in existence have yet to appear. To frame matters in a more dialectical way, the instrumentalists have not demonstrated that the fetus is not a person. Even if you buy into their Cartesian assumptions about the nature of the human person, the most their argument can claim is to have produced a merely *probable* conclusion. But to justify abortion when there is no certainty as to whether the fetus is a person implies the willingness to kill an innocent human person.¹¹

Judicial Semantics

On the afternoon of the day that the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its *Roe v. Wade* decision, it rendered its *Doe v. Bolton* decision. What makes the latter decision remarkable is that, in the process of justifying abortion to protect a woman's health, the court saw fit to change the meaning of "health." Henceforth, the word would take into account not only the woman's physical and mental well being but her social and economic circumstances and age as well.¹² This had the effect of rendering every induced abortion therapeutic. It thereby allowed

¹⁰ Mary Ann Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of the Fetus," *The Monist*, Vol. 57, #1 (January, 1973); Michael Tooley, "Abortion and Infanticide," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2/1 (1972).

¹¹ Raymond Dennehy, "Liberal Democracy as a Culture of Death: Why John Paul II Was Right," *Telos*, No. 134 (Spring, 2006), p. 58.

¹² *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179, 188 (1973).

physicians who performed abortions to avoid what would otherwise have been the awkward circumstance of explaining why, if the physician's task was to preserve health and life, they were deliberately taking human life. The court's decision was not the result of a stipulative definition of "health;" it did not decree that "henceforth 'health' shall mean the following...." Instead, it resorted to semantic legerdemain by subsuming the word under the broader term "well being" and then asking what the attributes of that term were. Having rightly determined that well-being takes into account not only physical and mental health but also decent social and economic conditions along with one's age at the time of pregnancy, the justices then reintroduced the word "health," only this time laden with the attributes of the broader term "well being." "Health" was henceforth "well being."

By elevating induced abortion on request to the level of a therapeutic procedure, the court's display of semantic creativity whitewashed the abortionist by conferring on him the title "healer."

Ideology vs. Knowledge

The above examples testify to the power that ideology can exert on the minds and hearts of its adherents, a power so great as to lead them to believe that the righteousness and urgency of their cause licenses them to transcend the injunctions of truth, open-mindedness and the evidence of everyday experience, science and philosophy. Yves R. Simon's masterful critique of the difference between ideology and philosophy illuminates the allure the former exerts, even on those who profess a formal and solemn dedication to seek truth.

According to the familiar use of the word, an ideology is a system of propositions which, though undistinguishable so far as expression goes from statements about facts and essences, actually refer not so much to any real state of affairs as to the aspirations of a society at a certain time in its evolution. These are the three components which, taken together, distinguish ideology from philosophy. The notion of truth which an ideology embodies is utilitarian, sociological, and evolutionistic. When what is actually an expression of aspirations assumes the form of statements about things, when these aspirations are those of a definite group, and when that group expresses its timely

aspirations in the language of everlasting truth – then, without a doubt, it is an ideology that we are dealing with.¹³

To satisfy the criterion of being sociological, it is not necessary that an ideology be embraced by society as a whole. It is sufficient if a group within that society embraces it, for example, the medical profession, scientific community, or academics. Eventually, of course, the ideology will, more often than not, find its way into the larger society, especially when it is initially held by the teaching profession or the media. It was a common tactic of Marxist groups, knowing theirs was but a minority viewpoint, to gain control of the centers of education and the media in order to “educate” the populace.

The utilitarian characteristic only makes sense because ideology aims to achieve a certain result in society by altering or destroying and then rebuilding social, economic, and political institutions. Hence, Marx wrote: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in different ways; the point is to *change* it.”¹⁴ Simon appropriately parallels ideological activity with what the Scholastics call “transitive activity,” activity that has no meaning or value in itself but is undertaken entirely to achieve a specified effect. Once the effect is achieved, the activity loses its rationale. Because, for example, philanthropy seeks to aid the poor, the elimination of all poverty would render philanthropy meaningless.¹⁵ Finally, ideology must be evolutionary, for its credibility depends on the conviction that its goal is progressive, that it signals an improvement and even the fulfillment of the existing state of things.

Most importantly, an ideology must be credible if it is to attract a following. That means that it must claim to be rationally grounded; hence, the materialism propounded by the Marxists was “scientific” materialism. Not to be left behind, the pro-abortionists cloak their

¹³ Yves R. Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), pp. 16-17.

¹⁴ *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, edited by T.B. Bottomore & Maximilien Rubel; tr. by T. B. Bottomore (Harmonsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1963), p. 84.

¹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, translation edited by Mortimer Adler (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1960), pp.163-64.

unscientific and irrational ideology behind facades of scientific and rational integrity. Simon writes:

Indeed, in order to fulfill its utilitarian, social, and historical function, an ideology must have the appearance of a philosophy and express itself in terms of universal truth. Sincerity is a thing which admits of many degrees, and if the adherents to an ideology did not believe with some sort of sincerity that they were adhering to incontrovertible facts and essential necessities, the ideology simply would not work.¹⁶

If it is taken as an incontrovertible universal truth that a woman's right to control her reproduction is primary, then easy access to legal and safe abortion becomes not only a moral imperative but a dictate of reason also. Granted the existence of some advocates of abortion on request who concede that induced abortion is the deliberate killing of a human being,¹⁷ the abortion ideology could never have found social, political, and juridical acceptance if the evidence from the science of embryology had not been flouted in favor of claims that the moment when human life begins is unclear and subject to honest dispute among scientists, theologians, and philosophers, as in *Roe v. Wade*, which claims that human life/personhood comes into being at some designated time after conception. In any case, an ideology has a dynamism, a mad energy generated by commitment to an ideal for humankind, that persuades the ideologue that the highest of moral imperatives is to do whatever is necessary for the realization of that ideal, even if that means transcending the injunctions of truth in science and philosophy while maintaining the needed façade of truthful inquiry. All of which leads Simon to zero in on the heart of ideology and philosophy respectively: the object of an ideology is an object of "desire," while the object of philosophy is a "pure object."

In contrast with ideology, the law of philosophy is altogether one of objectivity. The object of an aspiration is not a pure object;

¹⁶ Simon, *Tradition of Natural Law*, p. 18.

¹⁷ E.g., Naomi Wolf, "Our Bodies, Our Souls," *The New Republic* (October 16, 1995); Sally Markowitz, "A Feminist Defense of Abortion," *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 16, 1 (Spring, 1990).

it is an object and it is something else, viz., an end, just as the object of transitive action is an effect. The object of cognition alone is a pure object; this is one of the best approaches to a definition of cognition. It is by being an end (or a way to an end) that the thing desirable takes on the capacity of object in regard to desire, and it is by being an effect that the thing effected (or to be effected) takes on the capacity of object in regard to transitive action. The object of an ideology is, in spite of appearances without which the ideology would not work, an object of desire. The object of philosophy is a pure object.¹⁸

When referring in this passage to an object of philosophy as a pure object, Simon clearly has in mind speculative knowledge – *knowledge for the sake of knowing* as opposed to practical knowledge – *knowledge for the sake of acting*: the lover of truth submits his act of knowing entirely to the object, projecting no desire to reshape or redefine it. The result is what is called objective knowledge. In contrast, the object of an ideology cannot be a pure object, since, for one thing, its existence is not independent of the ideologue, for it is an idea that he desires to realize in the world. For another thing, just because it is an idea that he desires to see in existence, it is inevitably laden with *his* desires. Although focused differently, Simon's construal of ideology is not that different from Karl Mannheim's: "ideology is a 'quest for reality,'" but one that is relevant only for practice; it is 'an instrument for dealing with life-situations.'"¹⁹ Nor does it differ substantially from Henry D. Aiken, who writes that the nineteenth-century philosophers became involved in a gigantic task of ideological and cultural reconstruction which precluded the very possibility of doing philosophy in the time-honored 'rational' and 'objective' ways which had prevailed in Western philosophy since the time of Plato and Aristotle.

The primary and most obvious harm the pro-abortion ideology has already done is the deliberate killing of close to 49 million innocent human beings in the United States alone since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. This

¹⁸ Simon, *Tradition of Natural Law*, p. 21.

¹⁹ Wm. Oliver Martin, *Metaphysics and Ideology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959), 1.

legally sanctioned practice strikes at the heart of democratic society insofar as it makes the primary constitutional right, the right to life, a negotiable item. Deliberately killing human beings is now allowed, under the authority of a constitutionally protected right to privacy, for morally irrelevant reasons. The grim consequences of this for human life, both inside and outside of the womb, are obvious, for the appeal to morally irrelevant reasons to justify killing means that no one is safe. Yves Simon makes this point with airtight logic:

The prohibition of murder is not relative to any of the aspects in which men are unequal but to features pertaining to the unity of human nature. Murdering an ignorant person is just as much a murder as murdering a well-educated person; education does not matter and degrees of education make no difference. Murdering a colored man is just as much a murder as murdering a white man; the law prohibiting murder is in no way relative to such contingencies as color or other so-called "race" features. Murdering a cancerous patient is just as much a murder as murdering a healthy person; it is not on account of health that murder is prohibited but on account of universally human features, common to healthy and to diseased persons. *Murdering an unborn child is just as much a murder as murdering an adult man; the phase of life in which murder takes place is altogether incidental.*²⁰

As acknowledged above, the first and most serious consequence of pro-abortion ideology is the widespread deliberate killing of innocent human beings. Another harmful consequence is the loss of trust and community. Rom Harré emphasizes the need for trust as a value in the scientific community:

These actual standards of value are closely tied up with the idea of mutual trust. They invoke a certain measure of public reliability. Scientists believe that things personally unknown to them are as another scientist says they are. And this trust is itself based upon shared standards of work and adherence to the common moral order. 'Seek truth and eschew falsehood' is not a

²⁰ Yves R. Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 203; emphasis added.

methodological principle but a moral injunction. It has to do with the conditions under which trust is maintained. Trust is not maintained by telling each other only literal truths. Under that constraint the members of the community would perforce remain forever silent. It is enough that they tell each other what they honestly believe to be the truth.²¹

But the injunction to honesty is not always observed among scientists, particularly when they commit themselves to purposes that collide with the evidence gained from their research. In 1866, Ernest Haeckel formulated his Biogenetic Law, otherwise known as the recapitulation theory: "Ontogeny [the embryological development of an individual] is a brief and rapid recapitulation [review] of the phylogeny [evolutionary history of the organism],"²² which teaches that "the embryo of a complex animal goes through stages resembling its ancestors...."²³ Haeckel's theory attained textbook status and for decades was accepted as the explanation for the supposed fact that the human embryo has primitive gill slits. But Haeckel was guilty of outright fraud. In 1874, biologist Wilhelm His was able to demonstrate that to support his Biogenetic Law, Haeckel had purposely altered previous drawings of human and dog embryos.²⁴ Why did he tamper with the evidence? It seems that Haeckel was a true believer in Darwinian evolution,²⁵ perhaps remaining convinced that since the validity of evolutionary theory was beyond dispute, the distortion of lower truths was justified by the cause of service to that higher truth. But Haeckel was but a single person. What happens when a government throws its support behind deceitful intellectuals?

²¹ Rom Harré, *Varieties of Realism, A Rationale for the Natural Sciences* (Oxford: U.K.: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 12.

²² Percival Davis & Dean H. Kenyon, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins*, 2nd Edition (Dallas, Texas: Haughton Publishing Company, 1993), p. 129.

²³ Quoted in Eric J. Blievernicht, "Gill Slits in Human Fetuses?" <http://rae.org/gillslit.html>, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Nazi ideology is a case in point of what happens when ideology is allowed to trump knowledge. Two German Nobel Prize winning physicists, Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, led a group of "national researchers" in an effort to develop a German or Aryan physics, dismissing Einstein's relativity theory as "Jewish world-bluff." The two did not hesitate to hector and verbally intimidate colleagues who subscribed to relativity theory and quantum mechanics.²⁶ In 1936, the new rector of the University of Berlin instituted no fewer than 25 courses in racial science (*Rassenkunde*), purporting to supply scientific support for the Nazi claims of superiority of the Aryan race and the inferiority of the Jews,²⁷ when, in fact, the courses consisted of systematically distorted scientific claims. The replacement of inquiry and the love of truth with the specious certitudes of Nazi ideology produced a devastating result on the life and mission of the university:

The teaching of the natural sciences, in which Germany had been so preeminent for generations, deteriorated rapidly. Great teachers such as Einstein and Franck in physics, Haber, Willstaetter and Warburg in chemistry, were either fired or retired. Those who remained, many of them, were bitten by the Nazi aberrations and attempted to apply them to pure science. They began to teach what they called German physics, German chemistry, and German mathematics. Indeed, in 1937 there appeared a journal called *Deutsche Mathematik*, and its first editorial solemnly proclaimed that any idea that mathematics could be judged nonracially carried "within itself the germs of destruction of German science."²⁸

Science in the USSR fared no better. It was a Stalinist dogma that the science developed in the capitalist West was "bourgeois science." The communists hoped that Soviet science would eventually rival Western science and, in the end, surpass it. But even after the end of World War

²⁶Leslie Stevenson and Henry Byerly, *The Many Faces of Science: An Introduction to Scientists, Values, and Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), p. 167.

²⁷William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 250.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

II, it was clear that, with the exception of physics, the sciences in the USSR had not made any progress worth talking about. A major figure in the Soviet scientific program was the biologist, Trofim Denisovich Lysenko. In 1940, Stalin appointed him director of the Institute of Genetics of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and by 1948 he had managed to attain absolute control over Soviet biology. Having the might of the Soviet Union at his disposal, Lysenko succeeded in repressing support among Soviet biologists for the Mendelian doctrine of hereditary genetic transmission, despite its worldwide acceptance by the scientific community.²⁹

If obstructing a nation's progress in scientific research is bad enough, the loss of trust among scientists is itself also a terrible price to pay. But the payment does not end there. The lies and distortions that permeate elitist circles is a malignancy that will sooner or later spread to the public sphere, especially when, like the abortion debate, it pertains to the daily lives of ordinary human beings. When mistrust runs rampant in the population, civic virtue slowly withers, for, as a plant needs water, civic virtue cannot live without mutual trust. And without civic virtue, there can be no community of persons. As Hannah Arendt observed, the inability of a people to tell fact from fiction is one of the conditions for the rise of totalitarianism. In an atmosphere of conflicting opinions and skepticism, the authoritarian leader assumes in the eyes of the public an attractiveness that he could never have had otherwise. In the midst of their confusion, the people look to him for guidance. It made no difference to the German people when the facts proved Hitler's wild assertions to be false; they continued to believe and follow him.³⁰

Ideology's Internal Contradiction

The inspiration and energy of an ideology come far more from an object of will than of reason, despite the ideologue's claims to the contrary. August Comte and his followers preceded Karl Marx in the attempt to establish sociology as the dominant field of knowledge. But

²⁹ Stevenson and Byerly, *Many Faces of Science*, pp. 165-67.

³⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), p. 305, n. 1, and pp. 373-74.

the attempt rests on a premise that is incompatible with the premise that philosophy's object is the "pure object." For, if the validation of a statement's truth is preponderant social affirmation, then, of course, a pure object of knowledge must be regarded as a fiction. Consider, for example, Karl Marx's claim that all consciousness is conditioned by the modes of human production³¹ or Thomas S. Kuhn's claim that it is impossible to determine whether science makes progress because the paradigm of what constitutes science is composed of non-rational, non-scientific cultural components that change from era to era.³² There can be no doubt that socio-economic forces shape human consciousness; we are, after all, social beings. But it is quite another thing to say that such forces exert so powerful an influence as to render the human intellect incapable of arriving at objective, ahistorical, transcultural knowledge. And while it is equally beyond doubt that our fundamental scientific outlooks of the universe have changed radically since the Ptolemaic system, it does not necessarily follow that this leaves us bereft of any way of judging whether science makes progress. The fact that we are capable of ever more precise and successful prediction in science is perhaps a reliable standard of progress.³³ At all events, anyone who embraces the view that science is the standard of all knowledge of reality and, at the same time, accepts the claim that the standard of scientific knowledge is not grounded in rational considerations but instead in broad psychological and social elements will find himself in the same camp as the Marxists, holding that all knowledge is socially conditioned.

The problem with sociologism is that it harbors an internal contradiction. This contradiction bedevils the sociology of knowledge in general. Consider the proposition of knowledge so dear to Marxists and sociologists: "All knowledge is socially conditioned." It is one thing to construct a universe of discourse, *D'*, in which all propositions are composed of terms that are assigned meanings on the basis of their

³¹ *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, p. 67.

³² Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), Ch 2.

³³ W.H. Newton-Smith, *The Rationality of Science* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 38ff.

relation to all the other terms in that universe, so that *pd'1* cannot be understood apart from its position in relation to *pd'2*, *pd'3*, *pd'4* ... and they, in turn, cannot be understood apart from *pd'1*, etc. While it would be true to say that every proposition in that universe of discourse is "socially" conditioned and thus cannot be understood apart from the other propositions, the term "all propositions" applies only to universe of discourse *D'*. The latter constitutes an *object language* that depends on a *meta-language*, *D*, for its meanings. The meanings that the meta-language assigns to the propositions that comprise the object language need not pertain to the propositions that comprise the meta-language.

But when the term *all knowledge* is taken as unrestricted in its extension, then the statement, "All knowledge is socially conditioned," is itself socially conditioned. Since the statement is supposed to mean that because all knowledge is socially conditioned, it is, to that extent, not objective, one can infer that the statement itself is socially conditioned and, to that extent, not objective. If the sociologist of knowledge wishes to extricate himself from this muddle, he will have to show why the knowledge claims asserted by the sociology of knowledge are not socially conditioned, and this he cannot do without contradicting himself or admitting that the statement is false. That is the fatal weakness of ideology.

Rejecting the object of philosophy, the pure object, the ideologue is left only with his demiurgic drive to impose an ideal on the world, and for this he must claim that the meanings of institutions, practices, and realities, like human beings, are social constructions that, accordingly, have only the value that society confers on them. These characteristics express themselves today in the pro-abortion and feminist movements, and indeed both have a Marxist ring to them. The principal argument advanced by feminists is based on equality: women can never achieve the equality enjoyed by men until they have the power to control their reproduction. And true liberation requires not only economic equality but gender equality as well. But the latter goal will forever remain out of women's reach as long as social institutions rest upon the belief that gender is a biological imperative rather than a social construct. To show that it is the latter, Marta Llama presents us with a minimum of five genders: (1) men (persons with two testicles); 2) women (persons with two ovaries); 3) hermaphrodites (persons who simultaneously have one testicle and one ovary); 4) masculine hermaphrodites (persons with testicles but who also display other female sexual

characteristics); 5) feminine hermaphrodites (persons with ovaries but who also display male sexual characteristics.)³⁴ Her point in adverting to this panoply is to support the contention of the gender feminists that the traditional division of the sexes exclusively into male and female is a social decree rather than a biological imperative since the other three manifestations of sexuality are equally real. Although the ontology of physical differences between men and women cannot be written off as social constructions, the psychological and intellectual differences can be explained as products of socialization. But this explanation requires buying into the feminist fable of a paradisiacal time long ago when male and female were the same in those parts of their being until the biological imperative of bearing and nursing children confined women to the home while men remained free to build culture.³⁵

Therefore, the claim that all ontology is really ideological reveals itself as more dogmatic than rational. By its own admission, it is not an ontological proposition, since "All knowledge is socially conditioned" can only be a proposition about knowledge, not about things or events. Society's acceptance of propositions as "true" must therefore rest on pragmatism: the particular social construction produces results deemed desirable and is accordingly held to be "true" or "good." So the ideologist finds himself in the position of having to admit that pragmatism is a true philosophical proposition about human knowledge. But this conclusion is incompatible with any claim that pragmatism is not ideology; instead, it must be the philosophical foundation of ideology. An ironic outcome this: an ideological idea of ontological truth as really social truth rests on a non-ideological idea of truth about the nature of knowledge.³⁶

The internal contradiction of the sociologism embedded in ideology thus fails to dissolve ontology, which remains independent of epistemic

³⁴ Babette Francis, "Is Gender a Social Construct or a Biological Imperative?" *Family Futures: Issues in Research and Policy*, 7th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Sydney (July 24-26, 2000), p.2.

³⁵ Sherry Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), Ch 2.

³⁶ Martin, *Metaphysics and Ideology*, p. 79, n.1.

claims. On the contrary, epistemology depends on things; *ontology precedes epistemology*: things are the measure of mind; mind is not the measure of things. That independence refutes, above all, the self-destructive statement, "all knowledge is socially conditioned." Philosophy's task is not to change the world but to discover the truth of things in the world, for example, the truth about unborn humans, as the premise for how they ought to be treated.