



GRESHAM COLLEGE

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**Building Jerusalem in England
Transcript**

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Building Jerusalem in
England's green and pleasant
land, or just stopping its roof
from leaking?

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GRESHAM COLLEGE

BUILDING JERUSALEM IN ENGLAND'S GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND OR JUST STOPPING ITS ROOF FROM LEAKING?

Professor Rodney Barker

*1 PICTURE

I'd better start by explaining the title of this evening's lecture:

Ideologies range from the radical and the revolutionary - building Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land ? to the entirely cautious, customary, and conserving - 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' but of course if you have a leak, do something about it.

But ideologists, even if they know what they want, have to persuade us.

How do ideologists try to persuade us, and themselves, that what they are proposing is right, or sensible, or a good thing?

Faced with the problem of justifying what they want to achieve, or preserve, ideologists have appealed to the past and the future, to home and to abroad. The different ways of solving this problem amongst conservatives, socialists, liberals, feminists, and anarchists.

Ideologies as incoherent clusters of aspirations and aversions

An ideology is always a cluster of arguments, aspirations, and aversions, whose coherence is not necessarily logical, and probably never will be. Ideologies are held together by the fact that they are expressed by some person or people at some particular time.

Herbert Morrison got it spot on when he said that socialism was whatever Labour governments did. In other words ideologies are not the application of some timeless, place-less universal principles which humans merely discover and apply - they are the various thoughts, aspirations and aversions which people actually have and are particular to a time, a place, and the people who have those ideas.

There are no monopolies, and the kind of things that are demanded, or resisted, the aspirations and the aversions, will not be the exclusive property of one ideology or another. Conservatives, liberals, feminists, socialists, all believe in freedom, and all believe in order, but in different ways and in different combinations. Ideologies are not neat packages either in terms of what people want or in terms of how they justify it.

Ideologies in this sense will never be fixed or finished. That is so because the attempt to make all the various things you want, fit together, and to justify them, is never complete.

If, for instance, a conservative who believes in the importance of the conventional family, develops an argument for the law to favour conventional households, she immediately comes into conflict with another conservative who believes that the state should wherever possible leave people alone. She may even believe that herself, so in solving one problem or resolving one inconsistency, she has created another. Ideologies are always on the move, because they are always trying to resolve these kinds of problems, and in solving one, creating a further one.

Thinking is an activity, aspiring to something, reacting against something, so that ideologies are always on the move, always trying to achieve coherence and never quite doing so, always containing incompatibilities, never complete, neat, coherent or finished.

This is a very different use of the word from its employment to mean something artificially neat. Some ideologies do get close to that, since people will always try to achieve coherence, and one way is to oversimplify, and then hope reality will match, or can be made to match.

Ideologies, or ideologists, may sometimes be like the giant Procrustes.

*2 PICTURE

But they never achieve it

Justifying ideologies

If you go into politics it's because you are not happy. Either you don't like the way things are, or you do but are afraid someone is trying to change them, or you want to recover something you think has been lost, or you want to get to somewhere or to some condition, which you do not yet enjoy, but believe you would enjoy or would be good for you if you could get there.

So the question that anyone putting forward a political argument or promoting a political ideology has got to answer, even if they don't think they are answering a question, is 'why'.

Why should we agree with you, what's your justification for saying we should do things differently, or carry on doing them in the same way, by what authority do you speak? What principles or arguments can you present which will convince me that your way of doing things is one I should follow?

An ideologist is never content simply to convince himself or herself. They need the support of others because what they want is not a particular kind of personal life, but a particular kind of society, state, or social world.

This was Shaw's explanation of reformers and philanthropists of all kinds

So they need to justify what they want to those on whom they depend to fit in with their own aspirations and aversions:

There are broadly four ways in which they can do so:

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IEKA: Political goals or practices out there (foreigners do it better, so let's learn from them), Catholics in the 16th and 17th centuries, Bonapartists in the 19th, communists, fascists, and USophiles in the 20th

Building Jerusalem: up there (universal principles demand it, it is the just thing to do, or the moral thing to do, or the divinely required thing to do). This can of course be the most rigid or apparently unassailable reason that can be advanced: 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, so help me God'.

*4 PICTURE

In other words, it's not me who wants this, it's some greater person or greater principle, and that overrides anything I may want or you may argue

Stopping the leaks: down there (that's what things are actually like here, this is a realistic proposal which draws on reality, or at least our reality, the sort of people we are, the way we do things), . This is usually a conservative argument with a small 'c', but it's not only conservatives who use it

Putting back the thatch: or back there (this is how traditionally we've always done it even if that's not how we're doing it now; it's a matter of roots, and heritage, which are what make us what we are, or at least what we ought to be): This, and the 'down' there argument are related, but distinct

What the answers to the question, 'how do the various political ideologies justify their recommendations?' show is that terms such as 'left' or 'right', 'socialist' or 'conservative' are very large rag bags, which contain a great variety of answers. The only people who try to reduce an ideology in the sense that I am using the word to a single principle, a complete description and prescription, a final and finished truth with no gaps, no ragged edges, no unanswered questions, are of course the practitioners themselves, and they all do it, we, probably, all do it: 'you are not a real socialist!' 'you call yourself a conservative, but what you fail to realise is the true conservatism is...' 'I am a true believer, you are a heretic'.

But the rag bags, albeit more or less coherent rag bags, are what we have and what we have had. Each of the main ideologies, or it might even be more accurate to call them ideological clusters, uses several of these justifications, several of these answers to 'why?'

What characterises socialism, or feminism, or conservatism is not therefore some kind of ideological purity, some argument which they alone have and which no one else uses, but the overall, total mix of arguments, and an incoherent and changing mix as well

Conservatism

Out there: not many of those, since conservatives, of whatever kind, tend to share the view of Mr Podsnap in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*: 'And OTHER countries,' said the foreign gentleman. 'They do how?'

'They do, Sir,' returned Mr Podsnap, gravely shaking his head;
'they do--I am sorry to be obliged to say it--AS they do.'

If 'conservative' means a liking for the familiar and the established, then this kind of skeptical patriotism is an obvious part of the ideology

Up there:

Eternal verities of human nature: patriarchy and hierarchy

Always a favoured minority and a flawed mass of everyone else

Eliot and Clerisy,

D. H. Lawrence and authority,

Wyndham Lewis and the 'separation between creative man and his backward fellow' and a distinction too based on gender

Eternal divine verities:

Robert Filmer, patriarchy from God, who also made them high and lowly

And there's a relation between the two: the argument that humanity is flawed, or that most people are 'backward' so need leading, controlling, guarding by a cultivated, or skilled, or moral elite is the secular version of the idea of the fall

Down there:

F. J. C Hearnshaw, in his 1933 book *Conservatism in England*, argued that conservatives often seem to distrust thinking and writing, and conservatism 'tends to be silent, lethargic, confused, incoherent, inarticulate, unimpressive.' conservatism as common sense and the way we do things here: 'I suppose the best textbook of British conservatism is the constitutional history of England'.

Oakeshott, writing in the 1950s in his essay *The Political Economy of Freedom*, the liberties of the English as opposed to the rights of man.

Back there

Roger Scruton in *The Meaning of Conservatism* in 1979:

'a conservative is also a restorationist'

However finely divided and defined the categories are, in the real world there is less neatness

So that there is a whiff of 'down there' as well in his 2004 book, *News from Somewhere*.

Socialism

Out there: abroad

Beginning with 1917 and the Soviet Revolution, which was initially seen as a revolt of the people against Tzarist autocracy and a triumph for progress. So there were plenty of people to look to the Soviet Union as the way forward.

The Fabian Socialists and founders of the LSE Beatrice and Sidney Webb in their 1935 *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation?* Saw what was going on, or what they thought was going on, in the Soviet Union as the fulfilment of their ideal of a rational, scientific socialist society.

John Strachey and living for ever in the Soviet Union in his 1932 *The Coming Struggle for Power*.

And long after disillusion with the USSR had set in, there was Yugoslavia to admire for its various forms of worker's co-operatives, or Cuba under Castro after the revolution of 1959 seen as, amongst other things, a popular rejection not just of corrupt dictatorship but of corrupt United States imperialism.

Later, as disillusionment with the Soviet Union set in, models of social democratic equality were found in Sweden by Anthony Crosland in his 1956 *The Future of Socialism*, where both the policies of the government in economic management and the provision of welfare, and the role of co-operative societies and trade unions in engaging with a market economy, provided lessons for the UK.

Up there 1. imagination and utopia

Socialism in Eden

Morris, 1890 *News from Nowhere* collaboration and fellowship, useful work, even some move beyond gender divisions

Edward Carpenter, 1889 *Civilization, its cause and cure* : a rural small scale utopia as an alternative to industrial, commercial society

Up there 2Socialism on principle

Hardie and fairness in the religion of socialism

Tawney and equality, since all are children of God

Down there Socialism in Wigan

Robert Blatchford: 1902 *Britain for the British*

Orwell: the decent ordinary people of England, 1937 *The Road to Wigan Pier*,

the alternative to England as like 'a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kow-towed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts.'

Socialism in Whitehall and town hall: Sidney Webb & the Fabians: This is how we are doing things already: the liberal town councillor

Back there Traditions of equality, diggers, levellers, and peasant uprisings, and Morris's *A Dream of John Ball*

Liberalism

Out there Lands of liberty and markets, USphilia, and Hayek's 'unknown civilisation which is growing in America' to which he dedicated his 1960 *The Constitution of Liberty*

Up there Hayek again, the principle of liberty as opposed to the unprincipled nature of conservatism

Liberalism up there as a commitment to a fair start and equal liberty (Hobhouse)

Down there Spencer again, and the historical nature of rights to person and property

Back there The radical tradition, through Mill to Paine and back to the seventeenth century

Feminism

Out there? Alas, no

Up there as the realistic application of existing principles: Liberalism and socialism brought to their senses

Down there Feminism as down there: look who does the work: Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge, and how to end it*

Woolf and *Three Guineas* in 1937, women as the practical alternative to male irresponsibility, vanity, and incompetence

Hilary Wainwright, Lynn Segal and Sheila Rowbotham in 1979 on the same theme in *Beyond the Fragments*, women as co-operative, men as addicted to competition and being in charge

Back there

Sheila Rowbotham, 1973, *Hidden from History*.

Mary Wollstonecraft, 1793 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Anarchism

Out there Communes across the world

Up there: utopia, the imaginative alternative

Down there Local government, the international postal union, communes, mutual aid.

Kropotkin, *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*

Back there Diggers, levellers

The unstable dynamism of ideology

What is striking is that any particular ideology, in the sense of aspirations and aversions, things wished for and things disliked, opposed, or hated, is very likely to be justified in a number of ways. Ideologies are alliances:

Ideologies are clusters, not distinct isolated sets of theories each totally distinct from the rest. There are overlaps, but of items only, so that an apparently similar idea or similar justification may appear in two different ideologies, and so in different company and with different significance:

Orwell and ordinary people, Oakeshott on the practice of liberty in England

Hayek on liberty as a principle, Hardie on justice as a principle

Tawney on Christianity meaning we are all children of God, Elliot on Christianity as involving truths which only an elite could properly grasp

A#, B&

Some people might say 'if only it were simple, if only it were clear what we should do and what we should not do, and clear to everyone so that there would be no more disagreement'

Well, that went with the Garden of Eden and fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But it wasn't a tree, it was an orchard, with quite a few different fruits. You had to choose, and if you ate the apple first, you had to eat the pear second. There is often the choice between two things, both good, and there is no universal answer.

And a world where there were no decisions, moral, political, or of any other kind to make would be like that described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, and dismissed by the character played by Jane Fonda in the 1978 film *California Suite* who, looking at all the smiling, drifting people on the sunny west coast of the USA said it was 'paradise, with a lobotomy'.

Ideologies are constantly changing, and offer as many choices as they do answers. And just as there is a range of aspirations and aversions, so there is a range of justifications and persuasions. The identity of a particular ideology lies not in some unique characteristic which it shares with no other ideology, but in the mix, in the total pattern, the whole rag bag.

And now into the new century? Interesting times where the rag bags may be a bit unfamiliar, but at least we should be reassured that there are still no final agreements or answers.