

Political ideologies are a prevailing feature of 20th century thought, not least the battle between the left and right, the free market and the centrally controlled socialist utopia. Hans Magnus Enzensberger is perhaps the best example of this, transforming and supposedly adapting the socialist rhetoric into one which he believes can fit the model of the mass media within the society. Unfortunately, the result is one full of glaring ironies and ignorant of the reality, transforming the subjective into an objective fallacy. By viewing this transforming social construct through such a narrow guise, he perhaps did it its greatest disservice, one that also highlights the implicit problems held within Marxism as a doctrine, along with the lack of realism within critical thought. By focusing on the singularity of the enslavement/manipulation model, Enzensberger himself became a victim of ideological dogma. This is especially prevalent when considering his application of hegemony to the mass media and the manipulation of the lower class consciousness and inevitably allows further examination of bias within the area as a whole.

### **Subjectivism and the Dichotomy of the Economic Model**

Although Enzensberger as a Marxist would himself disapprove of the school of thought, existentialism serves as one of the best examples of why objectivity is largely a societal construct, one born perhaps out of the religious significance of one pre-determined list of values of one is expected to subscribe. One of the most noted, Jean-Paul Sartre notes that the communist believes the limitations of such subjectivity lie in man's isolation and "inability to return to a state of solidarity"<sup>1</sup>, a notion anathema to their utopian ideal. Yet due to existentialist's acceptance that man is a sum of his experiences, "a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organisation, the ensemble of the relationships which make up these undertakings"<sup>2</sup>, he embraces the reality that even if such objective bases exist, that individuals decide upon their interpretation. Such is demonstrated in how if a catholic chooses to seek a priest's advice, the type sought already illustrates the type of answer you will get<sup>3</sup>. In addressing this same theory he also provides the retort for such marxist criticisms, as man is "responsible for everything he does"<sup>4</sup>, "for his passion"<sup>5</sup>. Thus the universality and common solidarity comes from being responsible for everyone, creating one through the personal values we impose and hold others too. "The act of lying implies that a universal value is conferred upon the lie"<sup>6</sup> and as such, we must hold everyone to the same standard, to not is to create an uncomfortable moral anomaly within our own beliefs.

Granted, such a theory is based upon Sartre's own subjectivity but the rational basis for assuming everyone does not follow the same beliefs can simply be seen in the mere existence of a political divide between the left and right, fascist and communist, free market and centrally planned. Research has pointed to the idea that we are in fact programmed from birth with some degree of ability to tell right from wrong<sup>7</sup> but even this

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre J.P, "*Existentialism and Human Emotions*" (Citadel Press, New York, 1987) P10

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* P33

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* paraphrased P27

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* P23

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* P19

<sup>7</sup> Reville W, "Babies are born with the capacity to tell right from wrong", Irish Times (03/02/2011) <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/scienceoday/2011/0203/1224288882529.html> - (accessed on 14/03/2011)

cannot explain how we as individuals construe our own personal moral and ideological infrastructures. At best, it would serve to explain the common basis for a lot of societal norms. Overall however, Sartre posits an interesting observation on Enzensberger, that he is merely assuming a universality to his beliefs because that is what man does, he expects them to be reasonable to anyone who reads them.

This in turn explains how economists can come to the exact opposite conclusion as Enzensberger, namely that the free market is the best way in which to serve society. Although not expressly relating to mass media philosophy, three theorists (Lon Fuller, R.H. Coase and Richard Posner) illustrate how easily political or economic convictions can alter one's perception of the world and how much it has in turn affected Enzensberger's view of the mass media. Fuller warned that "it is only under capitalism that the notion of the moral and legal duty can reach its full development"<sup>8</sup>, using the example of the ruler king to explain why centralized and singular decision making cannot be effective within society. Coase is perhaps more simplistic in his assertions, pointing to how the economics of solving legal situations personally can increase efficiency and costs<sup>9</sup>. The grossest violation of such potential free-market rationality comes in the form of Richard Posner who espouses the conceit that such economics can regulate the adoption market<sup>10</sup> and sexual interactions<sup>11</sup>, giving economics almost god-like qualities.

The most damning incitement of such ideologies comes in the form of the post-marxist theorist Gramsci who argues that *"that one can present and explain every political and ideological fluctuation as a direct expression of the structure must be combated on the theoretical level as a primitive infantilism"*<sup>12</sup>. As Marx himself believed economics to be central to the superstructures underlying modern society, Gramsci inevitably acknowledges a central conceit within the work he inevitably attempted to build upon within his own.

In totality, it is easy to see that regardless of which perspective each author takes, there are inherent limitations of their applications as they view each problem through a specific prism, narrowing the potential outcomes by which they arrive at philosophically. Raymond Geuss chastises ideologies as *"a set of beliefs, attitudes, preferences that are distorted as a result of the operation of specific relations of power; the distortion will characteristically take the form of presenting these beliefs, desires, etc., as inherently connected with some universal interest, when in fact they are subservient to particular interest."*<sup>13</sup> Inadvertently he highlights the very same and also returns to Sartre's conclusion that we each impose our ideals as universal values though from a less positive outlook. For Geuss, we must combat such illusions in order to come to realistic conclusions. This is essential to every field, including the mass media.

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<sup>8</sup> Fuller L, *"The Morality of Law"* (Yale University Press, London, 1969) P24

<sup>9</sup> Coase R, "The Problem of Social Cost" Oct (1960) JLE at <http://www.sfu.ca/~allen/CoaseJLE1960.pdf> - (accessed on 14/03/2011)

<sup>10</sup> Landes E.M & Posner R, "The Economics of the Baby Shortage" 7 2 (1978) JLS P323

<sup>11</sup> Posner R, *"Sex and Reason"* (Harvard, Harvard, 1998)

<sup>12</sup> Gramsci in Buttigieg J (ed) *"Prison Notebooks, Vol. III"* (New York, Columbia University Press 2007) P157, 173

<sup>13</sup> Geuss R, *"Philosophy and Real Politics"* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2008) P52

## Hegemony and Manipulation

Enzensberger is quick to point out that “so far there is no Marxist theory of the media”<sup>14</sup> believing he must bring it in line with the pre-existing doctrine as he sees it to be comparable to any other industry. However Marx was evidently more interested in ideas than actual application if one considers that “socialist theorists paid little attention to how a socialist economy would work in practice, most heeding Marx’s admonition to avoid such “utopian” speculation”<sup>15</sup> and that the social base of his economic superstructure included “religion, philosophy, aesthetics and law”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore one must acknowledge the huge gravitas the central economic and historic tenants of his work played, outstripping so many potential factors within the mass media before Enzensberger even put pen to paper. Thinking of hegemony as “the outcome of a process through which the masses consent - for reasons both “economic” and “ethico-political” - to the historic bloc’s assertion of its particular interest as the universal interest”<sup>17</sup>, he argues along the same lines, believing that there is an inherent potential for emancipation within the media; “a potential which capitalism must sabotage just as surely as Soviet Revisionism, because it would endanger the rule of both systems”<sup>18</sup> and that “technical distinction between receivers and transmitters reflects the social division of labour into producers and consumers”<sup>19</sup>. To Enzensberger, there must be an overthrow in order to facilitate such a change within the system. Despite his charges against Soviet communism, there is still an inherent irony within such a belief of hegemony as Marxism implies a central control of industry by the government. As it stands, there may be some potential for manipulation or abuse of powers, capitalism does not provide for a centralized power structure as his political beliefs would. Taking the example of claims that the burka damages women’s rights, if a government bans it, insulting the muslim and without addressing the root causes that may force such women to wear it against their will and thus violate these same rights, it is unlikely to solve the issue. This is equally as applicable to this instance, where replacing one form of media with a potential side effect of manipulation with a centrally controlled government who can exert more force on the same, it is not a satisfactory conclusion.

Habermas agrees somewhat with Enzensberger, believing the birth of large corporations and companies has led to the refeudalization of society. Through this, dissent and valuable social and constructive dialogue is effectively stopped, favouring particular authoritative voices over others<sup>20</sup>, leading to what would undoubtedly call for hegemony and the overthrow of such bourgeois.

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<sup>14</sup> Enzensberger H.M, “*The Consciousness Industry: On Literature, Politics and the Media*” (Seabury Press, New York, 1974) P96

<sup>15</sup> Klein P.G, “*The Capitalist and the Entrepreneur: Essays on Organizations and Markets*” Ludwig von Mises Institute (2010) P6

<sup>16</sup> Harris J.W, “*Legal Philosophies*” 2nd Edition (Oxford University Press, New York, 2004) P267

<sup>17</sup> Mann G, “Should Political Ecology be Marxist? A Case for Gramsci’s historical materialism” Dec (2008) <http://www.sfu.ca/~geoffm/papers/MarxistPE.pdf?pdf?.pdf> (accessed on 13/03/2011)

<sup>18</sup> *Supra* n14

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* P97

<sup>20</sup> Habermas J, “The Public Sphere” (1989) in Seidman S (ed.) “*Jürgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader*” (Beacon Press, Boston) P56-60

Conversely Frederic Lynch believes that the dominant voice within the US at least became that of the liberal, left-leaning, politically-correct circle.<sup>21</sup> Ranney would agree somewhat but only in so far that the media is pro-establishment and against any pro-market alternatives<sup>22</sup>. Again, such similar cries of favouritism from both sides of the political and economic spectrum only serve to highlight how Enzensberger is not looking at the situation from a realist's perspective, merely that of the socialist and Marxist. The more realistic conclusion is borne within Simon Cottle's response who found in particular with the coverage of environmental issues within the media<sup>23</sup>, those reflected in the coverage were too diverse and unrepresentative of any such bourgeois that Enzensberger or Habermas (indirectly) allude to. It is merely "*the organized expressions of vying social, political, economic and cultural interests*"<sup>24</sup>.

Enzensberger again argues that "*there is no such thing as unmanipulated writing, filming or broadcasting*"<sup>25</sup> and that to emancipate we must stop "*defend[ing] against 'depersonalisation' and 'mass culture'*"<sup>26</sup>. However if we look at the above conclusion that there is no real elite, no bourgeois of determinate characteristics, it does not wholly rule out the potential for manipulation of some degree but the degree to which it is prevalent and malice involved is at issue. As the mass media is not centrally controlled and relies on viewers to generate review, a large degree of overt manipulation is perhaps over-reaching. Returning to Sartre's subjectivism, we all create our own moral universe and as such, even the influence such manipulation could have is dependent on the individual watching. Each will assimilate and process the information differently, even if only to slightly varying degrees but over a mass viewing audience, this could significantly dampen any attempt to alter their perceptions of the world. Therefore when he argues we must allow for "mass culture", such a thing already exists and has with the advent of the mass media. Pop music, soap operas and reality television are hugely popular because they appeal to the largest audience and this is what the media tries to do, thereby generating revenue. Incremental changes can be made in the social consciousness but very gradually. Ciaran McCullagh points to the "Cosby Show" and its ability to posture an upper-middle class black family in terms that reconciled earlier negative representations of the African-American community, leading not only to similar formats with the same kind of diversity but a more inclusive attitude over other programming<sup>27</sup>. Horkheimer and Adorno would agree with the idea of mass culture but would also highlight, like Enzensberger, the potential for enlightenment. Unfortunatley for them this kind of general consumption has resulted in such a faculty being lost<sup>28</sup>. To them, a standard homogenous moral landscape is depicted

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<sup>21</sup> Lynch F, "Whose Diversity? Whose Consensus?", July/Aug (1993), *Society* P36-40

<sup>22</sup> Ranney A, "*Channels of Power*" (Basic Books, New York, 1983)

<sup>23</sup> Cottle S, "Mediating the Environment: Modalities of TV news" (1993) in Hansen A, "*The Mass Media and Environmental Issues*" Leicester University Press

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* P120

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* n14 P104

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid* P105

<sup>27</sup> McCullagh C, "*Media Power*" (Palgrave, New York, 2002) P137

<sup>28</sup> Horkheimer M & Adorno T, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1977) in Curran J, Gurevitch M & Woolacott J "*Mass Communication and Society*" (Edward, Arnold, London) P349-83

to assuage any real change<sup>29</sup> but this does not fit in with the change that has come about. To look at the United States, it only ended racial segregation in 1964 and elected an African American president, Barack Obama in 2008. Although perhaps seeming like a long period, it is a significant change socially and brought about by a shift in attitudes. It would be impossible for Horkheimer and Adorno to point out the power of the mass media and yet ignore such a momentous change in less than a few generations. In totality, it wouldn't be possible without a continuously evolving dialogue, something that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas among others do not believe is possible given a supposedly homogenous and pro-establishment mass media.

These are in part recognized by Enzensberger, realizing that the media consumption “*is based not on the dictates of false needs, but... exploitation of quite real and legitimate ones*”<sup>30</sup> and “*deep social needs which come through even in the present depraved form*”<sup>31</sup>, yet the language is still highly antagonistic and marxist in its leanings. This becomes most evident in how he speaks of making everyone “*politically productive*”<sup>32</sup> in the media and through this making all content political. However in raising such an idea, Enzensberger misses that by making everyone politically motivated, he would in fact be removing their choice to not be so inclined. More importantly, given his own political convictions, nature of the media he envisages and how in a marxist utopia it would at least at first be overseen by a government espousing communist rhetoric, the level of discourse it would be prepared to accept from highly altering viewpoints would be of immense concern. If in their eyes the current system holds an elite hoping to consolidate its own power structure, it is difficult to see how they would avoid what might simply be considered by some to be human nature.

## **Conclusion**

Political ideologies or ideologies are inescapable, given that if Sartre is right, we each in a way seek to propagate our own personal morality in such a form. However this cannot be allowed to affect how we view the world, especially if it raises questions of legitimacy in what is being put forward. Such inconsistency are clearly seen when apply personal convictions to the mass media, which is a continually evolving social construct that no one group or individual can control absolutely. In recognizing such biases exist and confronting them, it is possible to move forward and create a philosophy entirely of its own making for a medium that affects almost every aspect of daily life.

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<sup>30</sup> *Supra* n14 P110

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid* P111

<sup>32</sup> *Supra* n30

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