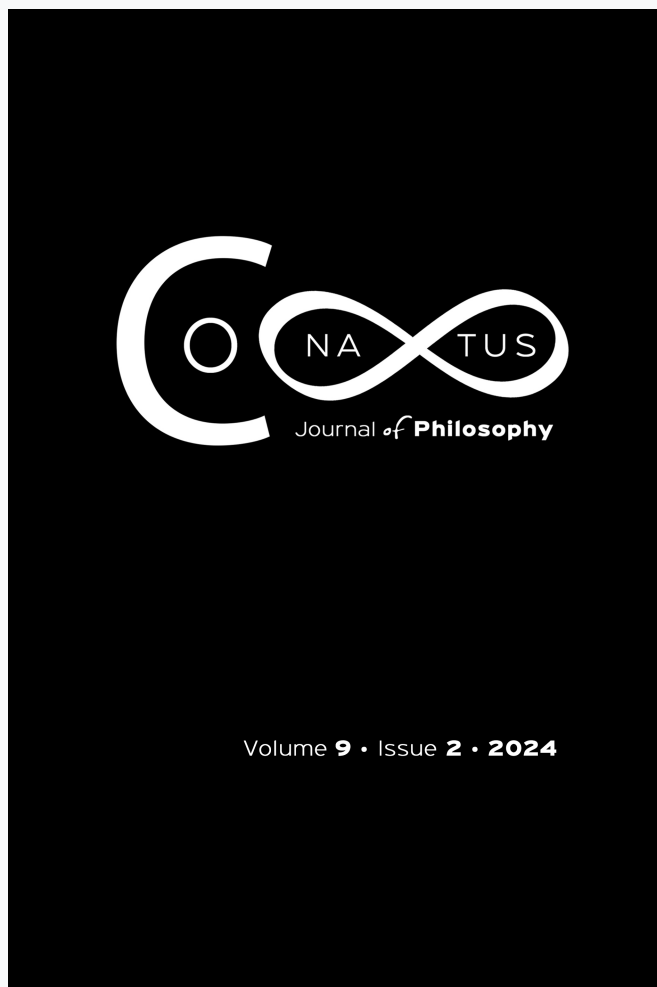


## Conatus - Journal of Philosophy

Vol 9, No 2 (2024)

Conatus - Journal of Philosophy



### Fixed Ideas and Ideologies: Developing a New Epistemology Rooted in Apathy

Zachary Isrow

doi: [10.12681/cjp.34435](https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34435)

Copyright © 2024, Zachary Isrow



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

Isrow, Z. (2024). Fixed Ideas and Ideologies: Developing a New Epistemology Rooted in Apathy. *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9(2), 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.34435>

# Fixed Ideas and Ideologies: Developing a New Epistemology Rooted in Apathy

**Zachary Isrow**

*Beacon College, United States*

*E-mail address: [zisrow@beaconcollege.edu](mailto:zisrow@beaconcollege.edu)*

*ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7898-9216>*

## **Abstract**

*Epistemologies are overwhelmingly riddled with biases, influenced by ideologies and fixed ideas. Max Stirner and Louis Althusser argue at length regarding the negative impact of these on our way of thinking. This paper argues that the only escape from Stirner's fixed ideas or Althusser's ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses) is through an apathetic disposition to the truth – something very unphilosophical in nature. In order to create parallaxic shifts in thought, we must also develop a new epistemology, one rooted in apathy. Through this, we can become true philosophers and thinkers moving towards a truth not solely determined by our pre-held assumptions.*

**Keywords:** *Stirner; marxism; ideology; skepticism; apathetic skepticism; political philosophy*

## I. Introduction

In the early 1930s, Louis Althusser developed a theory in reaction to the Marxist tradition. Rejecting the prominence of the repressive state apparatus, Althusser suggested an alternative. Instead of the state acting as a repressive agent, he posited that various institutions exert power, or influence, over individuals through the spread and centrality of a given ideology. This ideological state apparatus is far from strictly Althusser's attempt to refocus Marxist

thought. Instead, this stems from a tradition Marx himself turned against.

In 1880, a young Hegelian named Max Stirner, published his only full-length philosophical work, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*. In it he takes up a position, now called individualist egoism, as well as a dialectical materialism.<sup>1</sup> Initially, Marx was heavily influenced by Stirner's ideas. Once Engels and Marx began their philosophic relationship, however, Marx took a different approach, even going so far as to criticize Stirner in a chapter entirely devoted to doing so in his *German Ideology*. However, Althusser returns to the single most important concept in Stirner, an *idée fixe*. Previously, I have argued that any idea that can be called supreme, any *idée fixe* can take the form of a spiritual placeholder.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will argue that ideology, understood in a general sense, and Stirner's fixed idea, are nearly identical concepts, with the sole distinction that the ideological state apparatus is itself, as a concept, a fixed idea.

## II. Althusser's ideological state apparatus

Althusser begins his essay *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, by supporting Marx's claims regarding labor and the necessity to continuously reproduce the very conditions of production. However, he is quick to note that Marx's view of the state is not quite representative of what actually takes place. For Marx, the state was a repressive structure which allowed for the ruling class to dominate the working class in order to obtain the most surplus value that could be generated through the exploitation of labor power.<sup>3</sup> This is what has since been labeled as the repressive state apparatus and contains everything that is public and belongs to the 'state,' such as government, military, the court system, etc. Althusser considers this to be a *descriptive theory*, which means that it "really is, without a shadow of a doubt, the irreversible beginning of the theory" and secondly, "that the 'descriptive' form in which the theory is presented requires, precisely as an effect of this 'contradiction', a development of the theory which goes beyond the form of 'description.'"<sup>4</sup> In other words, though Marx identified a

<sup>1</sup> Though he scoffs at Hegel's dialectic.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Isrow, "Political Theology Without Religion," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 24-31.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 137.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

crucial starting point for understanding the state and the way that it functions, there is something left out of this theory which is not accounted for.

While the Marxist tradition distinguishes the state apparatus from state power, there is another aspect that must be evaluated as it too makes up a part of the repressive state apparatus. This extra element is what Althusser terms, the *Ideological State Apparatus*. While the repressive state apparatus remains in the public sphere, the ideological state apparatus is entirely private. Religion, culture, and family are all examples of the ideological state apparatus. It is private insofar as it affects, it belongs solely to the individual. The influence each (ideology and Stirner's fixed idea) holds over the individual is strictly dependent on that individual, and thus it can be contrasted with the repressive state apparatus.

Additionally, Althusser notes a distinction between the functioning of these different apparatuses. In the former, the repressive state apparatus, it functions "predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology" while the "Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*," though they "also function secondarily by repression."<sup>5</sup> Thus, while the state uses violence and punishment, though not strictly in terms of physical violence or punishment, the church or the school ideological state apparatus holds power over the individual not in this same way, but instead first and foremost through the ideology that it ingrains within the individual.

Each of the many ideological state apparatuses has its role in securing state power *vis a vis* the ideology it spreads. Althusser writes the following:

The political apparatus [spreads and exploits] by subjecting individuals to the political State ideology, the 'indirect' (parliamentary) or 'direct' (plebiscitary or fascist) 'democratic' ideology. The communications apparatus by cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc, by means of the press, the radio and television. The same goes for the cultural apparatus (the role of sport in chauvinism is of the first importance), etc. The religious apparatus by recalling in sermons and the other great ceremonies of Birth, Marriage and Death, that

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 145.

man is only ashes, unless he loves his neighbour to the extent of turning the other cheek to whoever strikes first.<sup>6</sup>

Still, if each has its own task in order to establish the unity that will secure state power, there must then be a central ideological state apparatus, one which takes on the most important role. Although, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write in *Multitudes*, the current condition of labor and immaterial production creates a scenario “when our ideas and affects, or emotions, are put to work, for instance, and when they thus become subject in a way to the command of the boss” resulting in

new and intense forms of violation or alienation...for example, in various forms of immaterial labor to blur the distinction between work time and nonwork time, extending the working day indefinitely to fill all of life.<sup>7</sup>

Althusser seems to indicate that the most primary ideological state apparatus is the school. Certainly, it is in fact the case that “no other Ideological State Apparatus has the obligatory (and not least, free) audience of the totality of the children in the capitalist social formation.”<sup>8</sup> In what way does education form the most primary, that is, the most powerful ideological state apparatus? No other apparatus has as direct of an influence on our ideological development than the education system. Given the amount of time spent in the education systems, the ideological agenda from schooling is clear. Although education is marketed as a time to learn skills and knowledge needed, it is ultimately geared towards developing only that which is deemed necessary to be an active and engaged citizen. Indeed, there has been a major push for citizenship education in the last couple decades globally, which raises the question of education as such versus education as a form of indoctrination.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning quite early in life, youth are sent to learn the many necessary habits and customs of the current ruling ideology. Civics, ethics, and general behavioral customs are passed down to them, only shortly before they learn the background of the development of this ideology

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Althusser, 156.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Sears and Andrew Hughes, “Citizenship: Education or Indoctrination,” *Citizenship and Teacher Education* 2, no. 1 (2006): 3-17.

through history, literature, science, and the like. Eventually, they are thrown out into the world with the goal of continuing to reproduce the conditions of production such that the capitalist paradigm and the surrounding ideologies remain intact.

A longer discussion of the school as an ideological state apparatus is required if indeed it has the greatest influence. To suggest that the school is such arguably alters the role that the system sets for itself. If it is the case that its end is the furthering of the ideological status quo, then its end is not one of education, but *indoctrination*. Education seeks to enlighten an individual to think for themselves, to gain knowledge that will prove useful *to them*. Indoctrination has, instead, as its primary goal, “promoting loyalty to the group” – the spreading of ideology ensures this end.<sup>10</sup>

If we reconsider the child at school, who is being ‘taught’ in order to eventually become another cog in the ideological machine of the state, all that is being done is indeed promoting this ‘loyalty.’ If we all can agree that “efforts to instill beliefs that simultaneously lead a person to ignore the force of reasons for or against the belief, or to believe counter to the weight of evidence and reason, are clear-cut instances of indoctrination.”<sup>11</sup> Kant stated in his lectures on education, that a child submits (to education) in either a positive or negative way.

Positive in that he is obliged to do what he is told, because he cannot judge for himself, and the faculty of imitation is still strong in him; or negative, in that he is obliged to do what others wish him to do, if he wishes others to do him a good turn.<sup>12</sup>

Birgit Schaffer best explains this as “Either the child stands in the way of the freedom of others, or someone else forces an obligation upon the child.”<sup>13</sup>

It would be better, however, to add the evaluation that the child becomes dependent upon his obligations that come with instruction. Kant writes “In the former case, the consequence of not obeying is pun-

---

<sup>10</sup> Max Hocutt, “Indoctrination V. Education,” *Academic Questions* 18, no. 3 (2005): 37.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Hanks, “Indoctrination and the Space of Reasons,” *Educational Theory* 58, no. 2 (2008): 195.

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Education (Über Pädagogik)*, trans. Annette Churton (Boston, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1906), 27; IX: 453, 20-24.

<sup>13</sup> Birgit Schaffer, “Changing the Definition of Education. On Kant’s Educational Paradox Between Freedom and Restraint,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33, no. 1 (2014): 13.

ishment; in the latter, the fact that people do not comply with his wishes” and so thus the child must obey if he is to realize his own pleasures (which arise out of others’ compliance with his will).<sup>14</sup> When obligation comes with education, can we still call it as such? As has been pointed out above, such is better referred to as indoctrination. As Max Hocutt writes, “indoctrination obviously serves the group, it does not so obviously help the pupil, who may, in fact, be called on to sacrifice himself for the group’s benefit,” and this ‘obligation’ which Kant notes in education, is this sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> The individual no longer gains knowledge for its own sake, nor even for the sake of his own, but instead, does so in order to fulfill an obligation towards the ‘other,’ for the ‘state,’ and for the current ideology.

It was for this very reason that Mandeville so vehemently opposed the formation of charity schools in 18<sup>th</sup> century England. These schools were not formed out of a virtue of being good-hearted and charitable, but instead out of the self-indulgent empathetic need to eliminate the suffering of others that arises out of the passion of pity.

No Habit or Quality is more easily acquir’d than Hypocrisy, nor any thing sooner learn’d than to deny the Sentiments of our Hearts and the Principle we act from: But the Seeds of every Passion are innate to us, and no body comes into the World without them.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, these charity schools were established out of a hypocrisy, or more so, a failure of men to “know their own hearts,” and recognize that “Pride and Vanity have built more Hospitals than all the Virtues together.”<sup>17</sup> The teachers used these schools in order to simply impart and to subject students to ideologies that they wanted or which would continue the reproduction of the productive conditions.

It is clear exactly how the institution of education serves as the primary ideological state apparatus, through what can be labeled as an *indoctrination* insofar as it has as its objective, to instill in children the ideology of the state. This very idea, however, of an ideological state apparatus, bears startling resemblance to the conception of a ‘fixed idea’ as remarked by Max Stirner. Stirner poses to us “what is it, then,

<sup>14</sup> Kant, 27; IX: 453, 24-26.

<sup>15</sup> Hocutt, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees Or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. Frederick Benjamin Kaye (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), 319.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

that is called a ‘fixed idea?’” to which he proposes, “An idea that has subjected the man to itself. When you recognize, with regard to such a fixed idea, that it is a folly, you shut its slave up in an asylum.”<sup>18</sup> A fixed idea is one that takes hold of an individual, and in quite a literal sense for Stirner, and is one from which he cannot escape – he has become fixated of it, subjected to it.

Initially, this may appear to be similar to the concept of ideology, in that an ideology can be seen as a fixed idea. While this is certainly the case, it is false to assume that the two are equivalent, for ideology is only one example of a fixed idea. Instead, Stirner’s fixed idea is more like the ideological state apparatus itself than strict ideology. Although there is still a major distinction between the ideological state apparatus and a fixed idea in Stirner’s conception of it, viewing it this way allows for a better understanding of the relation between the two concepts. We must first articulate the distinction between ideology and a fixed idea more clearly before moving on to evaluate the relationship between the ideological state apparatus and Stirner’s fixed idea.

### III. Ideology and the fixed idea

As Althusser uses the term, though he takes this from Marx, “ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group.”<sup>19</sup> If we then take ideology in this use of the term, we note the similarity with a ‘fixed idea.’ Both possess and dominate the individual, taking control and fixing them on itself above all other ideas. As we break down ideology further, Althusser states two theses regarding the term. First, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” and second, that “Ideology has a material existence.”<sup>20</sup> While I will not comment on the latter of these theses, as it is too unclear as to whether Stirner would grant this same mode of ‘existence’ to fixed ideas, this is not necessary to show the distinction between a fixed idea and ideology, as will be articulated below.

In response to the first of these theses, the fixed idea not only subjects the individual to it, but as John F. Welsh notes, “it ‘fixes’ reality as a realm which elevates essences, specters, and ghosts, to the subject or

---

<sup>18</sup> Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. David Leopold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43.

<sup>19</sup> Althusser, 158.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-165.

absolute idea, and reduces persons to the predicate.”<sup>21</sup> The fixed idea then, does everything to subject the individual but reflect the *real* conditions of his existence. It hides everything *real* from the individual and keeps them in a “haunted” modernity of ghosts, spooks, spirits, and more. This ‘haunting’ or ‘ghostliness’ of the fixed idea is quite different than the ‘ghostliness’ of my conception of a spectricity, which ‘haunts’ objects in its own way, but which is nevertheless entirely real.<sup>22</sup> There is nothing real about the fixed idea one holds nor is there a hidden truth underneath the fixed idea – other than the hidden truth that the fixed idea is false! However, there is more to ideology than simply that it obscures real relations to conditions of experience. In fact, Althusser continues to suggest a similar sentiment with the following regarding ideology:

all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the similarities between the two are great; however, they are not the same. Let us now consider what distinguishes the two.

Reconsidering what an ideology is, it is necessarily a “system” of ideas. Terry Eagleton outlined four meanings of ideology, including that it is “ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power” whether these ideas are true or not.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of how one defines that system, it is the connected ideas which formulate a combined system that is an ideology. For example, it is clear that “humanism” is an ideology in that it represents a system of ideas that helps a particular ‘power’ dominate. However, it is *not* a fixed idea. Humanism, as an ideology, contains many theses and ideas, perhaps most central of which

---

<sup>21</sup> John F. Welsh, *Max Stirner’s Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 65.

<sup>22</sup> Zachary Isrow, *The Spectricity of Humanness: Spectral Ontology and Being-in-the-World* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 179-181.

<sup>23</sup> Althusser, 154-164.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 1.

is that “man” is supreme, rather than the divine. This, along with the other theses of humanism, turns it into an ideology. Here, though, we have an example of a fixed idea: “man.” Man as the “supreme” is a fixed idea, as it subjects one to itself – it fixates the individual’s mind on his being supreme; it turns the individual into the predicate. Thus, we may note that all ideologies are made up of fixed ideas, fixed ideas constitute ideology. In other words, all ideologies are fixed ideas, or a series of fixed ideas, but not all fixed ideas are ideologies, since there could be a fixed idea that is not a part of the constitution of any ideology.

Another difference between these that is important to be addressed regards Althusser’s conception of interpellation. According to Althusser, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, ideology ‘calls’ the individual and turns him into a subject, through bringing them to accept the role they fill in society. Gender roles, social roles, political role, and the like, are all brought about *via* interpellation which occurs due to the hold of ideology on the individual.

On the contrary, fixed ideas do not function through interpellation. A fixed idea subjects an individual strictly by means of the very fixation they instill within the individual. To see this, consider when Stirner writes “*People* is the name of the body, *State* of the spirit, of that *ruling person* that has hitherto suppressed me.”<sup>26</sup> ‘State,’ he claims, is just one of the fixed ideas that subjects the individual to itself. Interpellation is the process through which one’s identity is determined through ideological means. That is to say, it is how one’s identity is shaped by the ideological influence of culture. But this process and that of becoming a subject differ from each other in that the later, interpellation, does not ‘fix’ itself into any given state; the identity one is ‘given’ is not predetermined by a set fixation. Thus, we can suggest that the individual becomes a subject not due to interpellation, but rather because there is something placed higher or above the individual to which they submit themselves. There is not a specific role which the individual accepts and is interpellated to, *i.e.*, gender, social or otherwise, but instead the individual only accepts to be in a secondary state, secondary to whatever the fixed idea is, *i.e.*, God, Man, State, and the like.

---

<sup>25</sup> Althusser, 174.

<sup>26</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 242.

Therefore, the two, ideology and a fixed idea, are distinct from each other, although certainly related. If a fixed idea can be considered to be what constitutes an ideology, in the sense that an ideology is made up of a series of fixed ideas, then fixed ideas give rise to ideology. Fixed ideas are that which ideology cannot exist without, and which by virtue of themselves, as well as through ideology that is constructed out of them, subject the individual. If this is the case, then fixed ideas function more along the lines of the ideological state apparatuses, insofar as both use ideology to subject the individual. In short, they both seek to perpetuate themselves.

However, there is reason to keep the two distinct from each other. I have elsewhere noted that ideology and fixed ideas can be distinguished in the following two ways:

1. The ends which they serve are, though not entirely or by necessity, different.
2. The ideological state apparatus, as set forth by Althusser contains within it everything necessary to term it in itself, a fixed idea.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, although ideology is not itself a fixed idea, the ideological state apparatus is definitively so. Reflecting further on the second of these two points, will make it more clear that we must treat Althusser's ideological state apparatus itself as a fixed idea.

#### IV. The ideological state apparatus as a fixed idea

In the case of Althusser's conception of the ideological state apparatus, the interpellation of the individual to the ideological pressure exerted by any of the given apparatuses holds as its main agenda, ensuring that the primary ideology spreads producing the most productive society. It is for this reason that insofar as one lives in a society, the ideological agenda of that society is necessarily at work on the individual who is interpolated through the various state apparatuses – be it the church, school, etc. This is why Stirner talks of the importance of awakening a sense of freedom in individuals rather than merely educating them.<sup>28</sup> In other words, invoking a passion in the individual to pursue their own way of live, to discover and embrace truth, is the only real 'education'

<sup>27</sup> Isrow, "Political Theology Without Religion," 29.

<sup>28</sup> Max Stirner, *The False Principle of Our Education*, ed. James J. Martin (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles, 1967).

that can circumvent becoming an ideological state apparatus. It is not unlike Bloom's suggestion that "Education is the taming or domestication of the soul's raw passions – not suppressing or excising them, which would deprive the soul of its energy – but forming and informing them as art."<sup>29</sup> This is the only route education can take to avoid the decay of the individual.

Unfortunately, the ideological state apparatuses are so widely embedded into the fabric of social order that the ideological positions which are exerted through them are nearly inescapable for the individual. At every turn one is subjected to them. For even if one could, as Stirner or Bloom suggest, allow for the individual to embrace a freedom of thought so intense that it circumvents the ideological state apparatus of the school, to continue with this example, the individual will nevertheless be exposed to social pressures, themselves reactions to the ideological state apparatuses.

Indeed, there is a cultural pressure felt in one obtaining an education and this is part of the ideological agenda. But education operated as an ideological state apparatus dictates 'truth' to the individual and is not a breeding ground for innovation. As Ludwig von Mises wrote, and this is one thing with which I agree, "Education rears disciples, imitators, and routinists, not pioneers of new ideas and creative geniuses. The schools are not nurseries of progress and improvement, but conservatories of tradition and unvarying modes of thought."<sup>30</sup> Through setting up the parameters of thought approachable for the individual, the ideological state apparatus of education subjects the individual to it in a fundamental way. This holds true for the other modes of ideological state apparatuses as well.

We may therefore suggest, that it is only if the ideological state apparatus is itself a fixed idea, one which subjects the individual to itself, that the ideological state apparatus is able to function according to Althusser's conception of it. This then identifies the distinction between fixed idea and the ideological state apparatus – they are not the same, but rather Althusser's ideological state apparatuses are fixed ideas.

## V. Paths forward from fixed ideas

Having outlined the relationship between the two, how can we go about formulating an epistemology that is not governed by an external

---

<sup>29</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 71.

<sup>30</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (Auburn, AL: Ludwig van Mises Institute, 2007), 256.

determinant? To accomplish this seemingly impossible task, we must focus on two things:

1. The elimination of fixed ideas
2. A methodology of *apathetic skepticism*

An epistemology that is not governed by an ideological agenda, or not subjected to the ideological state apparatuses, requires that we eliminate all fixed ideas to which we are already subjected. Although this seems impossible, since how does one eliminate a fixed idea once they already possess it – or more accurately – once they are possessed by it? In my previous article on this subject, I argued that to “eliminate fixed ideas is no easy task; it is perhaps the most difficult of tasks. Not because it cannot be done, but because we have an aversion to being without them” and I still hold this as fundamentally correct.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the certain difficulty in doing so, eliminating fixed ideas is indeed possible—if it seems impossible, that is only because of the general comfort that they bring to us, even if we, on an intellectual level, see the problematic nature of them. Fixed ideas form a sort of ‘safe zone’ for us, for our beliefs and way of life. Living with fixed ideas can evade the responsibility one has to themselves. It is often the case that the individual “fears the responsibility of being free. It is often easier to let others make the decisions or to rely upon the letter of the law.”<sup>32</sup>

Nowhere is this more clear to me, than in academia, where specialization and narrow-focused agendas are strongly supported. Henry Giroux, a leading figure in critical pedagogy, writes that:

too many academics retreat into narrow specialisms, allow themselves to become adjuncts of the corporation, or align themselves with dominant interests that serve largely to consolidate authority rather than to critique its abuses. Refusing to take positions on controversial issues or to examine the role they might play in lessening human suffering, such academics become models of moral indifference and examples of what it means to disconnect learning from public life.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Isrow, “Political Theology Without Religion,” 30.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity: The Gospel of Liberation* (Claremont, RSA: D. Philip, 1976), 71.

<sup>33</sup> Henry A. Giroux, “Higher Education under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals,” *Thought and Action* 22 (2006): 64.

This is a growing problem in education generally, and it only furthers the hold of ideology, of fixed ideas which are commonly propagated by specialisms, showcasing further the need for individuals to take on the responsibility of eliminating fixed ideas Stirner advocates for. But how is this done?

To do so requires a new generalized epistemological starting point that positions the individual as their own sole fixed idea. Without any fixed ideas, other than that of themselves, the individual is led to the ability to rebuild an epistemology that accurately depicts and relates directly to the relationship between the individual and himself, as well as the world. This “beginning” is a state of *apathetic skepticism*. It denotes a state of indifference to truth. It may be unclear how this can ever be the case, but in fact, having eliminated fixed ideas, there is no other way for it to be. Any motive or stake one might have in truth stems directly from a fixed idea.

If we take, for example, truth in order to bring about change,<sup>34</sup> “change” becomes a fixed idea. Or, perhaps, we hold stake in truth for the sake of being “right.” Regardless of the stake one holds, it becomes a fixed idea. If we eliminate fixed ideas, then there is no stake that one can hold in truth, and if this is the case, then we begin not simply with no stake in truth, but from a standpoint of skepticism.

Despite holding no stake in truth, this does not subject one to a view of relativism. It does, however, require one to be skeptical about truth, especially absolute truth, until given enough reason and evidence to hold a position. Thus, the apathetic skeptic, holding no stake in truth, critically evaluates all views remaining in a state of *ποχή*, and thereby establishes for himself an existence lacking fixed ideas.

Beginning from this standpoint, and not serving any fixed ideas, one can build an epistemology, can formulate truth claims that are grounded in themselves, not in any fixed ideas or ideologies. They are thus, in every sense, of and for themselves. It is as Stirner writes, “If I concern myself for myself, the unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself.”<sup>35</sup> One can henceforth claim: “*Ich hab’ Mein’ Sach’ auf Nichts gestellt.*”<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 145.

<sup>35</sup> Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, 324.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 324. The English version reads: “I have set my affair on nothing.”

## VI. Conclusion

If, indeed, Stirner and Althusser are correct about ideology and its impact on our ability to be individually free and our own masters, then it is clear to see the importance of overturning our subjection to these ideologies and fixed ideas. Yet, the only way to remove ideological barriers, to free ourselves from our being subjected to fixed ideas, is to give ourselves a fixed idea, one rooted in indifference, in apathetic skepticism. In this way, although we may remain bound by ideology and fixed ideas, they are self-imposed and thus we remain with a genuine sense of autonomy. To do this, however, we must first confront models of education as it is through education that we develop an epistemological framework and derive autonomy through gained knowledge. As Allan Bloom wrote, it is education that “has within it the source of autonomy – the quest for and even discovery of the truth according to nature.”<sup>37</sup>

The problem then is not education itself, or any of the individual ideological state apparatuses, but rather that in their functioning as a propagator of ideological spread, that is, as fixed ideas, that there remains little room for the individual to reach their potential and help shape a more fulfilling future unshaped, or unburdened by the ideological agendas of the past. The individual must break free from the fixed ideas to which they are subjected. Although beginning from a standpoint of apathetic skepticism might seem antithetical to the philosophical spirit, it is in fact, I propose, the only means of producing true philosophical inquiry that does not bring with it the burden of ideological influence.

## References

- Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972.
- Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. New York: Verso, 1991.
- Giroux, Henry A. “Higher Education under Siege: Implications for Public Intellectuals.” *Thought and Action* 22 (2006): 63-78.
- Hanks, Chris. “Indoctrination and the Space of Reasons.” *Educational Theory* 58, no. 2 (2008): 193-212.

---

<sup>37</sup> Bloom, 254.

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005.

Hocutt, Max. "Indoctrination v. Education." *Academic Questions* 18, no. 3 (2005): 35-43.

Isrow, Zachary. "Political Theology Without Religion." *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 24-31.

Isrow, Zachary. *The Spectricity of Humanness: Spectral Ontology and Being-in-the-World*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022.

Kant, Immanuel. *Kant on Education (Über Pädagogik)*. Translated by Annette Churton. Introduction by Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids. Boston, MA: D. C. Heath & Co., 1906.

Mandeville, Bernard. *The Fable of the Bees Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*. Edited by Frederick Benjamin Kaye. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924.

Marx, Karl. "Theses on Feuerbach." In *Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker, 143-145. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978.

von Mises, Ludwig. *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig van Mises Institute, 2007.

Nolan, Albert. *Jesus Before Christianity: The Gospel of Liberation*. Claremont, RSA: D. Philip, 1976.

Schaffar, Birgit. "Changing the Definition of Education. On Kant's Educational Paradox Between Freedom and Restraint." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33, no. 1 (2013): 5-21.

Stirner, Max. *The Ego and Its Own*. Translated by David Leopold. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Stirner, Max. *The False Principle of Our Education*. Edited by James J. Martin. Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles, 1967.

Sears, Alan, and Andrew Hughes. "Citizenship: Education or Indoctrination." *Citizenship and Teacher Education* 2, no. 1 (2006): 3-17.

Welsh, John F. *Max Stirner's Dialectical Egoism: A New Interpretation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010.

