

# Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge

---

Volume 1

Issue 2 *Spiritual Renaissances & Social  
Reconstructions*

Article 3

---

10-1-2002

## Conspicuous Conflict

L. M. Damian  
*SUNY Oneonta*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture>



Part of the [Politics and Social Change Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Damian, L. M. (2002) "Conspicuous Conflict," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol1/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at UMass Boston. For more information, please contact [library.uasc@umb.edu](mailto:library.uasc@umb.edu).



## *Conspicuous Conflict*

**L. M. Damian**

-----  
For millennia, the human race has had the ability to manipulate its environment for its own benefit. This ability gives members of the species a feeling of power to which many of them become fixated. The more easily or effectively they can do the manipulating, the greater the euphoria and prestige they gain.

Power is a means to achieve happiness for some, but it does not equal happiness. There has been an underlying dogma in many ideas about life, society, and politics that glorifies power and prestige, urges everybody to acquire them, and promotes inequality. People seek political influence over others, more property than they need, popularity for the sake of being seen as an important figure by others, and to further the ends of their particular interest group(s). The ideology that power and prestige bring superiority, a presumably desirable end, brings about constant conflict among humans.

It is this conflict driving our species that poses a problem for me; I shall have no part in it. Regardless, conflicting groups need my peers and I to pass on their ideology to the younger generation in order to continue the vicious cycle. People are being socialized into this mode of thought from their earliest days. Escape from conflict is not an exact science, but I intend to relate to the reader my experience in doing it and my philosophies behind it.

An explanation of the ideology of pow-

er and prestige is necessary in understanding how it is a problem. Power, the ability to manipulate one's environment effectively, and prestige, the quality of being admirable enough to have influence over others, are sometimes seen as a means to happiness; other times they are *considered* happiness. A main element in this belief system is that it is better to have more influence, goods, or prestige than one's fellow humans. An individual's worth is not measured in itself but relative to that of another. It is not enough to be worthy; one must be *worthier* than other members of society. Other ideologies are often used as a disguise to hide these premises I have just mentioned. Systems, both formal and informal, are designed to perpetuate it using another ideology as a red herring. A "trickle down of 'truth'" effect takes place when macro-level agents of socialization (institutions and mass media) socialize micro-level agents (peers, family, and community), who proceed to coerce others to attach themselves to the belief system.

When I claim that the system needs my peers and I to pass on their ideology to the younger generation, it can be said that I consider the ideology to have adverse effects on humans' everyday lives. It causes "conspicuous conflict" (to be defined later) between individuals, institutions, private groups, and nations. The conflict only brings about more social and psychological problems like stigma, strain, and an illusory sense of empowerment. Value is determined by an economic system rather than by the individuals involved in a transaction. Power and prestige seekers have distorted inspiring philosophies of the past. Philosophy is actually discouraged by supporters of this ideology, as they attempt to prevent people from seeing extensively. To begin my discourse I will first discuss Mannheim's conceptions of ideology and utopia, his sociology of knowledge being relevant to my realization of my own problems and biases.

## MANNHEIM'S CONCEPTION OF IDEOLOGY

Karl Mannheim's book *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) was written to clarify epistemological information and create a new perspective in sociology—the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim makes some excellent points while establishing himself as an intellectual innovator. His model of a “general conception of ideology” combines the analysis of ideology with that of one's own view of the world (Tamdgidi 4). Individuals who take on this sort of thinking will understand their situations more effectively, as their new mode of thought lessens their biases (Tamdgidi 5). The “collective unconscious” of which Mannheim speaks is the product of people's not being able to transcend their socially acquired biases (Tamdgidi 6). Mannheim even claims that gaining control of “the collective unconscious” which determines our socio-political thinking is the problem of our age (Tamdgidi 6). This objective analysis is indeed important in determining where one stands in relation to ideology. Mannheim's model is one I have consciously and subconsciously used in understanding that conspicuous conflict is the engine of the power and prestige ideology at all levels.

My first experiences that I can remember with micro-level socialization into a system driven by the ideology of power and prestige are my original encounters with athletics. Athletics are a paradigm because they stress competition and appearance. Promising young athletes are labeled as generally good people, while underachieving sportsmen are given labels like “loser” and ostracized. “Losers” seek to improve their station through competitive sports because it is now viewed as their ticket to popularity. They have been socialized to believe that if they are not better than others, then they are worse and not simply sufficient of themselves. They are

taught to see their more powerful and prestigious peers as worthy, by those very same peers who decide the group's fickle opinion. Conspicuous conflict, in this case, operates horizontally. Peers, community, and family socialize each other at the micro-level.

I have myself seen such things occur in gym class, on various community sports teams, or in the lessons of certain coaches and teachers. Their “pep talks” about winning reflected the ideology that has been such a problem for me. They seemed harmless until I realized the encouraging words were a mandate to succeed or face stigma. If I had no skill to lend, not only was I unworthy of myself, I was wronging the entire team and being a “loser.” Quitting, a viable escape from any unfavorable activity (also a solution to many of the problems I had with the politics of youth athletics) is not an option to conspicuous competitors, because it involves a mentality they have not been socialized to understand. They saw me, one who does not hunger for power and prestige as having a weak and inherently unfavorable nature. I felt it was better to do something I enjoyed than do something to be better than someone else. Recreation is supposed to be fun, not a popularity contest. I may have even enjoyed sports if it were not for the drama involved.

I have encountered several institutions in my life that have attempted to socialize me into their battles for power and prestige on the macro-level. In my experiences with these parties, I was not being told to compete for my own glory, but the glory of the group to which they said I belonged. For example, secondary school teachers have taught me to be loyal to, and have faith in, my country through various media. When I was told to say the pledge of allegiance (which I stopped reciting in 8th grade), I was learning through repetition to have pride in the nation in which I lived for no reason other than because I lived there. I

was taught that it was the fate of white settlers not only to live in what is now the U.S., but also to *own* it and drive its previous occupants, Native Americans, into destitution. This was called *Manifest Destiny*. To even call something like that an actualization of fate is a glorification of power and prestige. When I attended religious instruction, Sunday school, I was told that I was a Roman Catholic. I was supposed to think in a certain mode; others who disagreed with this mode were wrong, evil, or even going to hell. The main theme in these examples is as follows: My nation, my race, and the Roman Catholic church (large groups with interests all their own) seek to socialize me into believing their views through the use of institutions (school, religious instruction, etc.), so that I might align with their groups and bring them more power and prestige.

Large groups with special interests are always involved in a conspicuous conflict against each other, so they fool potential followers into thinking that membership will earn them power and prestige. The glory, however, is given to group leaders while the job of socializing the next batch of members is given to the existing ones. My teachers in the aforementioned institutions were not people of high position; they voluntarily perpetuated a belief system with which they agreed of their own free will. They failed to realize that they benefited little from their association with interest groups.

The democratic pluralist party-system, with all its “options and diverse opinions,” is a prime example of how large interest groups take advantage of the citizenry while making them love it. The U.S. population, being so diverse, has solidarity with respect to very few issues (Baradat 118). It assumes that individuals’ interests will only be successfully represented by a party system (Baradat 119); “... in this system the *interest group* is sandwiched between the people and the legislature” (Baradat 119). Pluralist candidates “represent” the ideas of a mass of citizens, yet they implicitly rep-

resent their own interests as well. This interest of course is to gain power and prestige in the name of another ideology. The party system must appeal to people with conflicting views. Candidates are forced to blur, create, or eliminate the issues, augmenting the collective unconscious. Conspicuous conflict begins when things like issue advocacy ads turn party against party and citizen against citizen. All of them compete in the name of some actual or imagined cause because more power to their party means more power to them. Baradat even comments on this aspect of pluralist democracy, “The victorious side of any issue will not necessarily be the side with the largest following (a principle of a society where the power and prestige is equally distributed, i.e. a democratic one); it will be the side with the greatest power” (Baradat 121; commentary in parentheses added). Indeed the elite theory seems true. An oligarchy of pluralist parties maintains “their dominant position through economic, social, school, and family relationships” (Baradat 121). All these associations between the individual and society are also micro/macro-level agents of socialization into conspicuous conflict.

If I had given my allegiance to the various interest groups that tried to socialize me in their images, my thoughts would not be my own. What worries me even more about these groups is that they have affected, or might affect, members of my family who are without a general conception of ideology. I have a four-year-old sister who will be attending school in two years; will she believe the dogma that so clouds the thinking of my seventeen-year-old sister? If I am to have children, will I be able to teach them how to be objective and holistic in their thinking, or will they identify with a faction and refute my advice?

## **CONSPICUOUS CONFLICT: AN INTRODUCTION**

The power and prestige ideology has been, and will be, a problem for me for some time. I seek contentment in having what I need and some of what I want. I do not care for others' opinions of me, for with contentment comes the serenity to be myself without having anything to prove to anybody.

Individuals, institutions, private groups, and nations are all caught up in a conspicuous conflict to be better than the opposition. One party can never come out on top because another party will soon be "better" and begin the conflict anew. It is a perpetual cycle, one in which few are ever content with their worth. They start to experience stigma and strain in their everyday lives, as the quest for worth hinders their development. The conflict operates on micro and macro levels, vertically and horizontally through classes. People involved in it draw their power and esteem from those who view them as powerful and esteemed, and in doing so they become brass idols of their own design. One needs only to disbelieve in the empowerment of a participant(s) in the cycle, and that individual/group's value becomes null and void. The illusory empowerment is only based on the opinions of viewers and not the subject. Nevertheless, humans are raised to internalize a lust for conspicuous conflict and the sense of worth it brings. The "collective unconscious" is not a new problem; it has been continuously reproduced by ideology from the beginning. Before rational ideology was even employed, collective unconscious was created by the need to honor the gods, the love of raping and pillaging, or a number of other "irrational" motives. The motives, I argue, were rational; regardless of the explanations surrounding irrational ideology, people were driven by a lust for power and prestige. Leaders in these origi-

nal societies needed a reason to justify (1) that everyone is living as a unit, and (2) that everyone is living under him as a unit. Now the need to live within a social structure justifies itself by the nature of society's being in existence for so long. In other words, the burden of proving the first truth is gone; society is accepted as a favorable thing.

## **NATIONALISM AND CONSPICUOUS CONFLICT**

"With the emergence of the nation-state, nationalism was developed as its ideological justification, and patriotism evolved as an expression of loyalty to the nation-state... Nationalism calls on people to identify with the interests of their national group and to support the creation of a state—a nation-state—to support those interests" (Baradat 45). Nationalism is the ideology tied closest to power and prestige. Of course it began before the nation-state, on the tribal level, when nations were not yet states. Because power and prestige manifest themselves into a kind of "patriotism" at the individual, community, national, and other levels, it can be said that they are hidden behind nationalism. Yet nationalism is a major method of socialization, as I have already related earlier. Governments incorporate nationalistic lessons into so many different areas of school curricula (Baradat 58). The persuasive route present in nationalism is peripheral, which internalizes the information more so than it changes a subject's mind (Baradat 58). The subject is "elevated" to a new position as part of something, which is greater than his position as an individual (Baradat 60).

Fascism and Nazism, two very similar ideologies, are ideal reflections of the most basic power and prestige ideologies; they do little to hide the true motives behind righteousness. Baradat describes them as "reactionary" ideologies because they are a huge step back in political thought and

practice (Baradat 227). Their two well-known leaders, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, could not succeed within the systems in which they lived (Baradat 230, 232). Both came from societies wracked by turmoil at the time (Baradat 230, 232). Mussolini failed in his conspicuous political conflict, while Hitler failed in his artistic conflict (Baradat 203, 232). Their attempts at being better than others brought them much strain. Fascism and Nazism were the instruments used by these men to disguise their more grandiose attempts at gaining power and prestige. Mussolini, after rising to power used the organic theory of the state to justify himself and create a need for his people to join in his conspicuous conflict. Organic theory claims that the state is like a living organism, and those within it are good if they remain part of it (Baradat 245). The masses then proceeded to join his conflict and make it their own; they would attain "... the purest, most 'heroic' existence possible" (Baradat 245). Hitler justified his regime and the people's need to love it through the concept of Volkish essence. He said that this essence was present in all the German people who were portrayed as a people in constant conflict that always won their battles (Baradat 237). The essence gave them a status above others, which was proven by winning wars (Baradat 237). Both of the two leaders sought to augment their power and prestige by hiding behind primitive ideology; once their worth had been "proven" to others, they proceeded to internalize their lusts into the minds of the masses. The masses then mobilized in an effort to acquire more power and prestige, and the conspicuous conflict led to WWII. The model does not deviate much from the primitive ones.

### **CONSPICUOUS CONFLICT IN "THE PEOPLE'S" IDEOLOGY**

Conspicuous conflict is not fueled by a

power elite only, for those who hold no power and prestige also seek to prove their worth to others. Theories of democracy and socialism are replete with claims that power and prestige lie in the hands of the people. The social contract theory of nationalism states that there is an agreement between rulers and ruled; therefore there are certain obligations that rulers have to their people (Baradat 55). It introduces popular sovereignty, the concept that the power and prestige of a nation lie in its people (Baradat 55). If the people are not pleased by the state of affairs, they have the right to impose themselves on the rulers. This seems like a fair claim, but it fuels conspicuous conflict. "The people" in this case are only people who lend themselves to a particular ideology, not all people. Indeed many ideological/utopian supporters have evoked the power of the masses based on what *they* perceive to be right.

Michael Moore, author of *Downsize This* and star of his video documentary *The Big One*, is an advocate of people. He appeals to the humor of his viewers, while taking up the cause of making a "fair" environment for everyone. *The Big One* is the story of Moore's book-signing tour in which he visits corporate headquarters across the country. All the businesses in question had recently been downsizing, leaving many Americans unemployed. Spokespeople for the companies said that the changes were made to remain competitive and minimize cost of production and purchase. Their conflict was horizontal across a business elite; Moore's conflict was vertical, from the people to the corporations. Moore's method for dealing with the corporations is rather rhetorical, and proposes that power and prestige go to the people. He would have the legal rights of corporations to do what they do, however, unethical, taken away. Thousands of middle-class stockholders (average citizens) would not be happy if Moore had his way. The working-class people would then have

the advantage. Also, Moore went on his political prank-spree with the backing of Random House, a large business, while promoting his book about how corporations are cheating the American worker—his ideology. If someone like me had done such things, I would have been arrested. It can be said that the outcomes of Moore's actions are precarious. More action and conflict, not solutions, is created by his methodology. This is not to say that he does not realize serious social problems in American capitalism. His approach is definitely informative, yet it is also more confrontational a method than is needed. Corporations, though they hold much influence in the lives of many, have an illusory sense of empowerment drawn for consumers. I feel that it would be more effective and less confrontational for the American consumer to boycott corporate goods and start their own businesses. Innovation, not conflict, I argue, will weaken the conglomerate hold on the American consumer.

Socialist movements also make for a slew of interesting conspicuous conflict. Orthodox socialists comprise one group of conspicuous combatants. Adhering to Marx's original hypothesis, they did not violently confront the existing powers (Baradat 194). The orthodox socialists failed when they started excluding potential friends who did not adhere completely to their ideology. Followers would not cooperate with the existing non-socialist government to stimulate reform; this caused them not to vote, which had very detrimental effects (Baradat 194). When the government decided to make reforms that would improve proletariat's conditions, the orthodox socialists did not help (Baradat 194). They held to their ideology that their power and prestige made them too good to cooperate with willing parties. A conflict was created in the name of what was "right;" those both involved and uninvolved suffered. Conspicuous conflict intended to

damage the elite instead damaged the people.

Lenin is said to have "made Marxism a political reality" (Baradat 193). This may be true, but Lenin's methods were also a base for continuous conflict. He stayed true to Marx's original theory that socialism is not possible without revolution (Baradat 197). Differing from Marx, however, Lenin suggested that this revolution is the only thing that will develop the class-consciousness needed for a socialist society (Baradat 197). Leninist socialism was centered on the idea that the vanguard of the proletariat would create class-consciousness through war (Baradat 198). Marx thought that the trade unions and other agitators will educate the working class (Baradat 197). Their role would be to educate the more ignorant members of the proletariat, but involve no other major task (Baradat 198). In Lenin's theory, the Bolsheviks are the vanguard that creates a consciousness through revolution. After rising to power they would represent the proletariat but still act as dictators over them (Baradat 198). The Comintern was also created during such a dictatorship (Baradat 198). The job of this office was to spread communism to the whole world (Baradat 198). Here we see a conspicuous conflict between the people and the government, between the Bolshevik proletariat and the average working class and between the communist government and all governments that do not agree with it. Such conflict is not conducive to creating a better life for many; it makes life better for the Bolsheviks and their constituents.

Beneficent revolutions of the people can even be confounded by conspicuous conflict. Cuba's revolution falls under this category. Fidel Castro, a Cuban who had little love for American influence in Cuba, led the coup (Baradat 218). He enlisted the help of the people who were fed up with the inequality the U.S. had caused in his country since the defeat of the Spanish (Baradat

218). He promised, "... reform and land redistribution" (Baradat 218). The U.S., having lost their influence in Cuba, set on a course to ruin Castro's government when the revolution was successful (Baradat 218). Though not a communist himself, Castro was forced to ally his country with the USSR and whatever political views they held true (Baradat 218). Such alignment involved Cuba in conspicuous conflict between the "free world" and the Soviet bloc. Castro, previous to establishing communism in Cuba, had the best of intentions. By joining the Soviets he subjected himself to their interests and made a powerful enemy, the U.S., even though he may not have cared at all for either side. The association was made out of necessity for power and prestige. Castro had to socialize his people with "anti-Yankee" rhetoric and Soviet ideals (Baradat 221). The Cuban people became caught in the Cold War when they should have been building their country.

The U.S., to this day, still outwardly spites Castro's efforts to improve Cuba (Baradat 219). The movie *Fidel* is a subtle example of this. The film glorifies Castro until America begins to interfere with Cuban affairs after the revolution. It begins to portray him as a politically inept tyrant who never kept his promises to the people. At the film's end, he is shown as being even more of an old, decrepit failure. I consider this an agent of socialization into conspicuous conflict because Castro has not failed as much as the movie suggests. Despite embargoes and political sanctions Castro has improved health care, housing, racial equality, and other social aspects since his rise to power (Baradat 220). He also still enjoys widespread popular support (Baradat 221). Though his regime has not always been beneficent, I believe that conspicuous conflict confounded his reaching his goal and harmed the Cuban people.

## AMERICAN CAPITALISM AND CONSPICUOUS CONFLICT

Businesses take full advantage of how people perceive power and prestige as desirable; they are the major driving forces behind conspicuous conflict based on image in capitalist societies. In such societies, power and prestige are closely associated with one's possessions. I have been taught that success is measured in money, not contentment and subsistence. I would rather have what I need and a few things I want with minimal effort (i.e. lead a simple life) than work more and more just to find myself bound to capital. My view is, however, not the consensus of the masses; I see my fellow man and woman in a battle—conspicuous consumption in this case—to overtly consume goods, because they are raised to believe that such consumption is a sign of power and high status. The conflict becomes a problem for me when I am constantly being told to pursue success in a "conventional sense." My parents told me to go to college, not for the sake of being educated and worldly, but so that I can afford "nice things" and not "be a bum for the rest of my life." I do not see success as being affluent, with a bi-level in the suburbs, two and one-third children, and a job working for someone else. I find it difficult to take what I can from college without getting myself bound to a system in which I do not wish to participate. There is so much pressure, created by conspicuous conflict, to abandon romance and live in a "default reality."

The film *Affluenza* portrays the consumer society as I have just done. *Affluenza* aggrandizes power and prestige through material ownership. The idea of owning as many things as possible is favored by the many. The means to do just that is provided by credit card companies and banks. Citizens go out and flaunt the power and prestige that accompany the ability to spend



infinitely. They conspicuously compete with each other, seeing who can buy how much of what and to whom he/she should display it. Consumers' joy does not last forever though; many of them fall into debt, yet loans can be taken and cash advances can be made to eliminate debt for a short while. Of course more debt accumulates and one can be driven to poverty through the conflict for the highest affluence. This conflict is the "American Dream." Persuasion to make it one's own dream comes from all sides. The battle is omnidirectional across classes and races in any consumer society.

### **CRITICISM OF BOTH MANNHEIM'S AND MY OWN IDEOLOGICAL TENDENCIES**

Mannheim, by comparing ideology to utopia, acted ideological himself. He was right in equating ideological thought with the utopian mentality by recognizing that they both distort reality. He claimed that transcendence of ideological/utopian biases was possible for the detached intellectuals (Tamdgidi 22). The detached intellectuals were to be the grand interpreters of reality and roots of knowledge (Tamdgidi 18). They would educate others and wage intellectual and/or political battles against the powers-that-be. Mannheim erred when he did not consider his own ideological and utopian biases (Tamdgidi 17). What Mannheim ignored was that the detached intellectuals who sought to transcend ideological/utopian biases themselves were socially rooted (Tamdgidi 26). Their detachment did not mean that they were free from stratification based on status and labor (Tamdgidi 26). If the "social determination of thought" logic holds, then, the present ideological system would fade and produce a utopian aristocracy ruled by detached intellectuals. His new class would have power and prestige derived from

transcendental knowledge as well as the people's believing such knowledge to be true. Mannheim's theory was benevolent enough to start, but his utopian goal involved a formula for changing the possessors of the power and prestige, not the elimination of them. This is a common mistake that people who are "doing right" make.

Back in high school, I also behaved like a utopian thinker. I was involved in conspicuous conflict based on image, which is fundamental to power and prestige at all levels. In school it was important to wear the latest clothes that were in-style and exhibit certain popular beliefs and attitudes. For example, a favorable individual would wear major name brand clothing and hold the opinion that skateboarders were unlikely dirtbags. Conversely, there was also a pop-counterculture faction that held beliefs opposite of those in the first faction (these two groups did not get along). It was to the latter faction that, for a short time in my adolescence, I gave my allegiance. My internal conflict emerged when I was too caught up in the cycle of conspicuous conflict. I was not a fanatic, but I did attempt to be cool for three years by being anti-cool. Three great friendships of mine were lost at the time when our anti-cool alliance was broken by anti-cooler friends. We turned against each other until about one year ago.

Though conspicuous conflict has posed many problems for me, it may have benefited me in some ways. My experiences with it played a major role in what I know and how I think today. Also, perhaps conspicuous conflict must exist, at least in part, to motivate people who do not think like me so things get accomplished. Maybe I need it to carry on my present lifestyle. I cannot tell if I have such a retreatist attitude because I am a coward or because I know better. Finally, my dilemma is that in preaching my philosophies to people, I sometimes become very ideological myself using the power of suggestion.

The whole experience made me realize that conspicuous conflict occurs with respect to many different perspectives on one issue. Others and myself were not trying to maintain our images through conformity; we did it by conspicuously maintaining an unpopular image to be assimilated into a popular non-conformist group. Now the conflict within me is over; I no longer measure my worth in how many people I call friends, in how many illegal things I can do, or in how many “invite only” parties I attend. It does not pay to be a tin god with a lot of stress. I found I am happier including people of good character in my life rather than excluding the ones I once truly appreciated to augment my power and prestige.

If this essay is ideological in itself, then it identifies most with the principles of anarchism. Certainly people were able to live before there was government, and surely they would have to do *something* if government were to disappear tomorrow. Certainly if I am not inclined to serial killing by my nature I would not change my mind if the laws were not there. Since a very young age I have held beliefs similar to those of Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy viewed the state as violent, dishonest, and exploitative to its people (Baradat 149). He sympathized with peasants who could get nowhere in life because institutions and government stood in their way (Baradat 149). He realized, as I have, that power and prestige create illusory empowerment and status. His proposition regarding the overthrow of government was to simply ignore the state (disbelieve in its power) (Baradat 151). He advocated passive resistance (Baradat 151); revolution changes the law before the mentality, rendering it ineffective. Government violence against a non-violent protestor would be considered absurd (Baradat 151). My philosophy builds on that.

I believe that the beating and killing of non-violent protestors leave the conspicuous combatants in a state of bitter irony. Here is a model: One or more persons de-

cide they wish to end conspicuous conflict; they neither want to gain power or prestige or be subject to them (a rather noble and equitable claim). Conspicuous combatants find no satisfaction in and of themselves and need others to prove their worth, so they attempt to socialize the non-combatants. The latter will have no part in it, and the former take it one step further by using violence. The combatant flaunts his power and prestige, using it to harm the non-combatant in an inelegant attempt at proving his case. If all the non-combatants end up dead, then to whom will the combatants prove themselves? They will be the rulers of nothing but a lot of corpses. Try to involve me in this conspicuous conflict, kill me if my lack of participation labels me as weak; I'll be laughing on the inside because I won.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PHILOSOPHY

To develop a better understanding of how my argument works one must understand the importance of philosophy, my own point of view, and the importance of “extensive” perception. Leon Baradat differentiates ideology from philosophy in three main ways. First he says that philosophy develops a greater understanding of life through a holistic and critical thought process, while ideology does not deal so much with particulars as it does one or a few aspects of life (Baradat 10). Second, ideology is made to make a mass of people think and act in a certain way, and philosophy can be directed at individuals or groups (Baradat 11). The main distinction here is that philosophy helps a single person better his or her life on said person's own terms; ideology maps a course to happiness for aggregates of persons with differing interests and mentalities (Baradat 11). The final distinction is very important. Philosophy encourages one to ask deep and meaningful questions about whatever topic

is being contemplated, yet from there it is the job of the philosopher to determine if there is an appropriate course of action and what it might be (Baradat 11). Ideology's approach to answering questions is much more dogmatic. It "defines" the problem and gives an all-purpose solution (Baradat 11).

"Unlike philosophy, ideology invariably demands that people change the world to suit themselves. People are not asked to investigate the complex and underlying variables of human existence" (Baradat 11). The latter quote illuminates the essence of the power and prestige ideology. It is such a simple idea that demands its followers abandon free thought for a cause that may, or may not, be the best thing to support. My analysis of the situation is as follows: Ideology is meant to instill optimism in a sizeable amount of people through dogma, and the optimism motivates them to continue building a better mousetrap. Philosophy guides the individual to enlightenment in respect to his or her situation, and makes one realize that he or she is *in a mouse in a trap of one's own design* and must either get out or adapt accordingly.

## PERCEIVING THE ESSENCE OF THINGS

Extensive perception, perceiving something as it is and not as it is labeled, is at the core of realizing the problems created by power and prestige. This definition begs the question of course; how is something perceived as it "is"? I assert that "something" can be many things at one time, and to deny that abstraction goes in only one direction is absurd. Ideology stresses intensive perception, perceiving things as they are labeled (from one perspective alone). John Berger offers some valuable concepts about perception that explain the importance of "seeing" extensively. He says that

people see changes in respect to their situations, or in respect to the stimulus being presented in a certain time and space (Berger 14, 19). "Seeing comes before words," means that sensation comes before perception (Berger 7). Abstraction takes place in many directions as the viewer, the stimulus, or the stimulus's pairing with another stimulus changes. An image made in one time period takes on a whole new meaning in another temporal context (Berger 10). Reproduction of images has allowed for them to be shown in part to create new meaning (Berger 20).

Power and prestige hungry people use abstraction to their advantage. They find the meaning or label that fits their ideology and glorify it, while promising a better future. Berger gives the period of European oil painting as an example of how ideas get limited by their ideological purveyors. Oil paintings illustrated the wealth and property of the powerful and prestigious and gave a market value to appearance (which comes before perception) (Berger 87). Symbols (added into a painting by the artist) that have a deeper meaning not associated with the ruling class go unnoticed or are considered unimportant (Berger 91). Seeing these paintings, or anything for that matter, extensively exposes one to many ideas, which would be true about the object being perceived. Ideology attempts to limit these ideas by teaching its subjects to see intensively. The ability of the ruling class to show things to others in part, or in the wrong context, only furthers the need to think extensively about the world around them.

To help others understand how unimportant power and prestige are I must relate a little philosophical anecdote. Human existence is a small part of reality. Mitochondria, beings with their own DNA that live inside organic cells, are another part. They live within a universe all their own while also existing in ours. Humans have their respective universe, but anthropocen-

tric reasoning makes us think that ours is the only one. We do not realize that no matter how much we can reason we are still a very small part of the totality of things. To know one's insignificant place in the universe is very belittling, yet it makes one think. If one becomes the most powerful and prestigious entity in the world by the opinions of others, then is one also weak relative to his situation as a human? Men have the power to destroy their world as much with bombs as with a virus—the simplest form of life which has the power to eliminate even the most powerful and prestigious person. Constantly fighting to be the most important speck of dust does not seem so appealing when one considers the universe as a whole. Would not a life of leisure and simple subsistence be preferable to one of incessant conflict?

To say that only the ideological ruling class tries to limit an individual's perception to amplify its power and prestige is itself a limited assessment of the situation. Ideology comes from all sides, and simply ending society would not end conspicuous conflict. Individuals limit their own perception by believing in pre-packaged meanings of life. Some skeptical readers may be wondering as to what I am suggesting. I am not advocating a prudent, passive, and unmotivated society. I wish to help people measure their worth absolutely and not obsess over being the best. I also hope that agents of socialization will start to teach children to be true to themselves, think of their own ideas, and find their own purpose. Is someone with talent no longer talented if no one appreciates his or her talent? Should such a talented person no longer believe in the worth of his or her ability and seek to impress rather than achieve? I think that if people strive to be worthy of their own judgment and not mistake it for their own when it belongs to others, that conflict would bring progress or equilibrium, not just power and prestige. The ability to control one's thoughts and

actions without using it to display superiority is a truly noble thing.

#### REFERENCES

- Baradat, Leon P. (2003). *Political Ideologies: Their Origins and Impact*. New 8th edition. NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Berger, John. (1995). *Ways of Seeing*. London: Viking Press.
- Mannheim, Karl. (1936/1985). *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. NY: Harcourt Brace & Co.
- Tamdgidi, M.H. (Behrooz). (2002). "Ideology and Utopia in Mannheim: Towards the Sociology of Self-Knowledge." In *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, Vol. I, No. 1, Spring, pp. 120-140.
- Films:
- "Affluenza." (1997). Bullfrog Films. (56 minutes).
- "The Big One." (1998). Miramax Home Entertainment. (90 minutes).
- "Fidel." (2002). Artisan (Fox Video). (140 minutes).