

Opinion

It is important to examine our presuppositions

While recently reading a book titled *Propaganda* by Jacques Ellul, I was struck by some powerful observations made in the book. Ellul maintains that there are "four great collective sociological presuppositions" in the world today. They are "that man's aim in life is happiness, that man is naturally good, that history develops in endless progress, and that everything is matter." These presuppositions are held by every nation state that shares in modern technology, both East and West blocs alike.



Brian Frederick

These presuppositions constitute "a collection of feelings, beliefs, and images by which one unconsciously judges events and things without questioning them, or even noticing them. This collection is shared by all who belong to the same society or group. It draws its strength from the fact it rests on tacit agreement." They lie deeper than political opinions and ideologies. Thus it is possible for communism and capitalism to disagree on the surface while sharing these basic assumptions on a deeper level.

While Ellul's book discusses how

these presuppositions are used by propaganda, I would like to comment on their implications for our world.

Man's aim in life is happiness. This establishes individual happiness as the supreme goal in life. In accordance with it, man judges the good of a particular action not by whether it is right but by whether he thinks it will make him happy. It gives rise to the philosophy that man should be permitted to choose to do whatever he likes as long as he does not hurt anyone else. It is opposed to other views such as Christianity, which teaches that man's aim in life is to obey God.

Man is naturally good. This presupposition has great significance in the area of man's relation to the state. Christianity teaches that man is fundamentally evil, and as such, needs a divine savior to deliver him from his depravity. If man is good, however, he does not need a deity to deliver him from his problems. His problems do not originate within him but are a product of social structures that force him to act in certain ways.

Thus, the poor are poor, not because of any defect within themselves, but because society exploits them or does not give them a fair chance. Criminals are not responsible for their actions for their crimes are not the product of a wicked heart but of society that cor-

rupted them. Man does not have to take responsibility for his actions or answer to God for his life. Man can say, "It's not my fault; society made me this way."

To solve the world's problems, then, it is necessary to remold society in such a way that it will allow man's inherent goodness to flourish, so that society will not corrupt his innocence. Government becomes man's savior, the tool used by reformers to remake society, and people become guinea pigs for social experimentation.

History develops in endless progress. If we pause to reflect for a moment, we shall see how thoroughly this notion saturates our whole society. Progress holds that history is a continual evolution. Things progress from lower to higher orders and from bad to good. Man is continually advancing and conquering new frontiers.

Because we buy the myth of progress, car manufacturers at least make superficial changes in their car models each year. Cars must look like they are advancing if consumers are to buy them. Everything from toothpaste to laundry detergent comes out in "new and improved" formulas, and the consumer feels obligated to purchase the new brand in order to keep up with progress.

In the face of the myth of progress, everything that is of the past must be replaced by that which is new. The old is

good only temporarily and is to be promptly discarded when the new arrives. By definition the new is always better than the old. Thus we see many movements whose aim is to deliver us from some vestige of the past.

Everything is matter. Man is merely a collection of chemicals that has evolved over millions of years to reach this present level of development. Reality consists only of what man can perceive with his five senses. The spiritual realm has no existence of its own, but is only a figment of man's imagination. God is merely primitive man's invention to explain natural phenomena that he did not understand. Man has no eternal spirit; he is an intelligent animal who has no existence after death. Man has no master but himself; he answers to no higher being.

These presuppositions have been widely accepted for the past century. Nearly all the organized action we see in the modern world depends on them. That these myths underlie everything we do is not immediately apparent for they are accepted subconsciously. They hold our minds so securely as if they were sacred truth that anyone who questions them publicly is mocked or ignored.

To act upon false assumptions produces disastrous results. There is plenty of evidence that suggests that these assumptions may not be true, if one is will-

ing to consider such evidence. And consider it we should, lest acting upon the presuppositions perpetrate horrors upon mankind.

One may legitimately question whether happiness should be the highest aim. History gives at least much support to the position that it is evil as it does to the position that man's cruel deeds are a product of his conditions. One can ask whether progress is real, necessary or even desirable. And science, which has limited its definition to dealing only with what which may be known through the senses, is unequipped to determine whether there is a higher realm.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, the great Russian novelist, lived in the era when the presuppositions came to be widely accepted, and men began to try to apply them to society. Of such men he wrote: "They aim at justice, but, determined by Christ, they will end by flooding the world with blood..." I maintain that the twentieth century has borne a pregnant witness to the truth of his prophecy, for it has witnessed the great blood-letting and barbarism the world has ever known.

It would perhaps, behoove us to check our premises before continuing any farther along our present course.

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Wanted: government fink

I don't like seeing anyone out of work, but I didn't lapse into a funk when Larry Speakes was dumped from his \$250,000 job as a front man for a New York banking house.



Mike Royko

Technically, Speakes resigned. But he left because Merrill Lynch shoved him out the door. They were uncomfortable having an admitted liar and fink as their public relations man.

Speakes has always thought of himself as a clever fellow. Watching him perform as the White House press secretary, you could almost see him oozing self-satisfaction.

Although he had never been a reporter, preferring a career as a flunky for Washington politicians, he obviously felt superior to those who earn their living by asking questions.

And to demonstrate his his mental nimbleness, as he now admits, he hoked up phony lines and told the press that Reagan had actually said them.

Actually, the lines weren't especially memorable. On a slow day, Jesse Jackson can come up with a dozen that are better and make them rhyme, too.

But Speakes was proud of them. So proud, in fact, that when he recently put out a book about his White House spokesman days, he couldn't resist bragging about putting words in Reagan's mouth.

This became news, although I don't know why. There's nothing new about flunkies composing sentences for politicians. Most politicians use hired speech writers. Some pay others to write entire books on which they slap their names. Before becoming president, John F. Kennedy won a Pulitzer Prize for a history book without having to tap a single typewriter key.

For that matter, Speakes wasn't literate enough to write his own fink book. He paid someone to put his words into understandable, although banal, form.

About the only thing that made his disclosure interesting was that Reagan said he wasn't aware that Speakes had been making up quotes.

That meant Reagan either didn't know what he had said or, when he read his words in the newspapers, he thought that he had said them. Or maybe it meant that he simply didn't pay any attention to what the press said he said.

This, to some Washington observers, was evidence that Reagan might be "out of touch" with what is happening around him.

There's nothing shocking about that. Only recently, we were told that when Reagan meets with visiting dignitaries, aides give him little cue cards so he'll remember to say "Good morning, George," or "Welcome to the White House," or "Nice to meet you, too."

Almost from the beginning of his presidency, Reagan has been hailed as one of the most out-of-touch presidents in our history. That's been one of the secrets of his success. In a world that is too complicated, the majority of Americans choose to be out of touch with reality. Some use drugs or booze to disconnect. Others fade into their TV sets. And with their votes, or lack of them, they said they preferred an out-of-touch leader.

Being a clever fellow, though, Speakes figured that by finking about how out of touch Reagan was, and how he, Speakes, could put words in Reagan's mouth, the book would get oodles of free publicity that would help sales.

And I'm sure it has. But it turns out that Speakes is surprisingly dopey for someone so clever.

It didn't occur to him that an image-conscious outfit like Merrill Lynch might say: "Holy bottom line, we're paying this guy \$250,000 a year to be our spokesman. And now he's telling the world that he's a liar and a tattle-tale fink. If he'll fink on a president, how do we know he won't fink on us? Tell him to turn in his key to the executive washroom. And change the lock."

So now the clever fellow is out of work. The quick-fix publicity will subside, and in a week or two his book will start gathering dust in the bookstores.

And Speakes will discover that \$250,000-a-year jobs aren't that easy to come by. It's one thing to walk out of the White House with a lot of political clout and a reputation for being able to think fast on your feet. It's something else when the most recent item on your resume is that you were sacked by Merrill Lynch.

I suppose he can take out an ad. It could say something like:

"Position wanted. Top-level experience as congressional aide, White House press officer and corporate spokesman. Advanced training in finkery, back-stabbing and ingratitude."

Lots of luck. But he'd be wise to check the location of his nearest unemployment comp office.

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Mail Call

Eliminate the tradition

EDITOR:

Many Americans were shocked by the recent outbursts of racial violence accompanying minor "intrusions" into all-white communities like Howard Beach and Forsyth County. Such incidents are even more disturbing when they occur at universities, ostensibly centers of learning.

The erection of an anti-apartheid shanty was all that was necessary to stir up deep-seated racist sentiments on the Texas A&M campus. The outrageous display of fear and ignorance created by Mr. Reed and Mr. Nelson cannot be ignored by the University administration. The University has obviously failed in its education of these two seniors. If the administration is as committed to education as it is to football, it will take this incident as a call to action and start a special program to teach students about racism.

The SAA shanty may do little to improve the lives of black South Africans, but it may have done a great service to the university by revealing the presence of social attitudes that are unacceptable in an academic environment. If students and administrators care about this university, they will see to it that the tradition of racism is eliminated at Texas A&M.

Adam Bangs, grad student

A criminal offense

EDITOR:

All of the students here have undoubtedly noticed the "computer access fee" which we have no choice about paying. Doesn't this mean that the computers on campus are our RIGHT to use, not just a privilege?

My computer account has been locked off for the last month. The reason is that I allegedly logged on to a computer account and played a game. Personally, I do not see what great crime in this.

I know two student employees at the CSC who were accused, fired and then arrested for this dastardly deed. Meanwhile another CSC employee physically attacked a friend of mine in a crowded computer room. This employee is still working at the CSC.

So, if you have an account on the University's computer system, don't play any games or you might end up in jail tomorrow. From this example, you may find better luck in beating up innocent bystanders.

Michael Denison '91

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The Battalion

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