

# IDEOLOGICAL FREEDOM AND THE RESULTING AXIOLOGICAL TENSION<sup>1</sup>

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[İdeolojik Özgürlük ve Ucundaki Aksiyolojik Gerilim]

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## ABSTRACT

There is a fundamentally important philosophical problem with the notion of ideological freedom: If an individual is ideologically free, it means she may hold a certain body of beliefs and may act on the basis of principles derived from this body of beliefs. When the same freedom goes for other individuals, different world-views emerge leading to different body of actions in the same context among those people living together. Different actions will naturally conflict. These conflicting actions resulting from different world-views can be ordered by laws and rules in order to ensure the peace of this group of individuals, but the internal systems of beliefs that these individuals possess will not accord with their restricted actions. Nor will it comply with some of others' actions allowed by the established order. The situation will ultimately give rise to an "axiological tension" for most of the individuals. In order to ease this tension, it is usually put forward that some social behaviors such as "tolerance," "connivance," and "allowance" should be implemented among individuals of different ideologies. This paper claims that such a behavioral approach that aims to implement the above social behaviors does not resolve the problem. On the contrary, it creates further problems.

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The paper, instead, claims that the background metaphysical and epistemological beliefs should be the focus and it examines three apparent options in this sense: (i) revising the extant, (ii) stressing on the common, and (iii) generating new metaphysical and epistemological beliefs that can be shared by all relevant parties. The last option, this paper claims, is the most promising one to overcome the problem of axiological tension.

**Keywords:** Ideological freedom, axiological tension, ideological respect.

## ÖZET

İdeolojik özgürlük kavramı yeterince analiz edildiğinde bizi köklü bir problemle baş başa bırakmaktadır: Bir bireyin ideolojik olarak özgür olması demek, söz konusu bireyin belli bir inanç kümesine sahip olması ve bu inançların oluşturduğu ilkelere dayanarak eylemde bulunabilmesi demektir. Fakat aynı özgürlük diğer bireyler için de geçerli olduğunda farklı dünya görüşleri ortaya çıkar ve bu dünya görüşleri bir arada yaşayan insanların aynı konuda farklı türlerde eylemde bulunmalarına yol açar. Dünya görüşlerine bağlı olarak farklılaşan eylemler doğal olarak çelişecektir. Birlikte yaşayan bu bireylerin barışını sağlamak için, çelişen eylemler, üretilen yasa ve kurallarla sınırlanarak düzenlenebilir, fakat bireylerin sahip olduğu iç inanç sistemleri onların “sınırlanan eylemleri” ile uyuşmayacaktır. Aynı iç inanç sistemleri diğerlerinin yasa ve kurallar tarafından “izin verilen” eylemlerinin bir kısmı ile de uyuşmayacaktır. Bu uyumsuzluk durumu pek çok bireyin iç dünyasında nihai kerte bir tür "aksiyolojik gerilime" neden olacaktır. Bu gerilimi azaltmak ya da yok etmek için “tolerans,” “hoşgörü,” “izin verme” gibi bazı sosyal davranışların farklı ideolojilere mensup bireyler arasında teşvik edilmesi yaygın bir şekilde bir çözüm olarak öne sürülmektedir. Makale bu türden sosyal davranışların teşvik edilmesini öngören davranışsal yaklaşımın problemi çözmek şöyle dursun başka problemler yarattığını öne sürmektedir. Makale bunun yerine arka planda yer alan metafizik ve epistemolojik inançlara odaklanması gerektiğini savunmakta ve bu anlamda üç bariz seçeneği masaya yatırmaktadır: (i) Var olanı gözden geçirme, (ii) ortak olana vurgu yapma, (iii) ilgili bütün tarafların paylaşabileceği yeni metafizik ve epistemolojik inançlar üretme. Son olarak makale, bu son seçeneğin en ümit verici seçenek olduğunu savunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İdeolojik özgürlük, aksiyolojik gerilim, ideolojik saygı.

## I. Introduction-The Problem

The etymological root of ‘ideology’ is apparent. It consists of two words, idea and logos, whose meanings we are quite familiar of. The terminological meaning of ‘ideology,’ on the other hand, is not stable across different disciplines. Philosophically, we can construe it as meaning a “*body of beliefs*” that governs, in a principle manner, human religious, scientific, political, economic, moral and legal actions. “Freedom,” likewise, is a term used almost generically in various contexts. It basically means the ability to act without any restraint. But when combined with the adjective “ideological,” we should understand not a freedom of action, but something like a freedom of thinking. So, the term “ideological freedom” should mean the ability to think and to possess ideas without any restraint.

Understood this way, there seems to be a fundamental problem with the notion of “ideological freedom.” If an individual is ideologically free, it means she may hold a certain body of beliefs and may act on the basis of principles deduced from this body of beliefs. But when the same type of freedom goes for other individuals around this one, conflicts arise. For ideological freedom creates different world-views. And these world-views lead to different bodies of actions in different groups of people living together. Actions depending on different world-views can be ordered in order to ensure the peace of this group of individuals, but the internal system of beliefs these individuals possess will not accord with their restricted actions. Nor will it comply with some of others’ actions allowed by the established order. The key notion here, I postulate, should be “ideological respect.” How can individuals of different world-views gain a kind of ideological respect based on which their internal system of beliefs (their ideology) comply both with their restricted actions and others’ allowed actions they do not approve? What kind of sustainable grounds should individuals rest on in order to have such an ideological respect?

To answer these questions, I will first examine the problem, described above, with respect to conflicting actions, and claim that those actions can be resolved simply by means of an established legal order. But this resolution, in turn, causes another problem, which is philosophically more serious. This problem, and the one I will concentrate on, arises from a tension between restricted and/or allowed actions by the established legal order and the individuals’ ideological beliefs—the principles of their ideology. I will attempt to analyze this internal tension in detail, and conclude

that it cannot be eased on a basis of social behaviors but can be dispelled significantly on the basis of underlying ontological and epistemological beliefs, and thus resulting axiological system.

## **II. Axiological Tension**

Suppose John is a religious person; Jack is a Marxist individual, and Tom defines himself nationalist. All three have different ideologies. For several reasons (and does not matter what these reasons are) they have to live in the same community. They actually need each other for practical reasons, say economic reasons. They produce different things, and these differing products not only serve out each other, but also complete each other's life. In a word, they cannot leave the society they all live in. But their different ideologies lead them to act differently as well. John, for example, wants to base both his individual and social life on religious principles. Jack, on the other hand, wishes a religion-free society stressing on economic equality. Tom considers national values the most superior. And so on.

Nevertheless, these wishes conflict with each other on several occasions. Take the education system, for instance. Religious John, for example, wants a non-secular education system influenced by religious values, which is strongly rejected by Marxist Jack. Tom wants national values be the most dominant in public and private schools, which is considered racist by Marxist Jack and over-emphasizing by religious John. Marxist Jack wants a type of education system purely governed by scientific and rational principles, which is completely rejected by religious John and considered deficient by Nationalist Tom.

One way to resolve this conflict of action is to make proper laws so that the parties are not bothered by each others' public and individual actions. And this is what is being done mostly. Laws restrict some of individuals' action. Each individual sacrifices some due to the restricting laws and resulting legal punishments. This is just a practical solution. People agree to this situation because they know that not only some of their own actions are restricted, but also some of others' actions are restricted as well. Perhaps this provides them a kind of psychological relief. Nevertheless, resolving the conflict of action by making proper laws also creates, in turn, a more serious problem, which I would like to dub it as "axiological tension."

The psychological aspect of axiological conflicts is significant and quite relevant to the problem we are about to deal with. And there are noteworthy studies on this aspect of the problem among the literature (see, for example, Pomeroy 2005). But the kind of axiological tension we are primarily focused on concerns the philosophical aspect of the problem. This axiological tension results from the discrepancy between what individuals believe and their restricted actions as well as others' allowed actions. Take religious John, for instance. He believes that it is wrong to drink alcohol, which may be done comfortably by Marxist Jack and nationalist Tom. Or it may be a waste of precious worldly time, for Marxist Jack, to pray a higher power, which is actually done obediently by religious John, and perhaps occasionally by nationalist Tom. It is painful to watch the murder of a famous person from a minority group for Marxist Jack and religious John, which might be considered a deserved end by nationalist Tom. Further examples can be built. The crucial fact is that all have to watch unwillingly the others' allowed actions that they do not approve. And the resulting discrepancy creates an axiological tension in their inside world. This is not easy for them indeed. They bear this tension, because the laws dictate so. But the philosophical consequences are not so easy to bear—the consequences that are constitutive of the philosophical aspect of this tension, which is the main target of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

Surely the degree of the axiological tension depends on the value set each individual upholds, and perhaps on some personal traits. But there should be some common influences of the tension on individuals. One obvious first thought is that individuals begin to suspect their own values. This happens because if an individual has to watch constantly others' actions that contradict with her own values, it is apparent that she will ultimately begin to question some related elements in her own value set. It does not matter what the outcome will be. The questioning itself would create imbalance in her identity. Granted, there should be some distinction between positive and negative questioning. Positive questioning is an affirmative attitude the individual takes towards her own values. It usually leads the individual to sustain her values more firmly at the end of the questioning process. Negative questioning, on the other hand, is a negative approach and may cause the individual to be detached from her relevant values at the end. It is the one the axiological tension most likely brings about.

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<sup>2</sup>We should specifically note that the tension we are targeting here does not result from intra-personally conflicting values; rather it results particularly from the conflicts between values held and actions done by individuals. Nevertheless, intra-personally conflicting values are also related to the issue at hand. For a special case of those values that conflict in the value system of individuals, see Brink (2003).

Here the more important question is whether this negative questioning resulting from the axiological tension causes any damage on the individual's self-perception. The answer to the question seems to be "yes." Once the individual begins to question her own values negatively, and does this constantly, some ontological and epistemological damages on the individual's self-perception are inevitable. Take religious John for example. He constantly sees people around him doing "sinful" things while he tries to refrain himself from those sinful things. However, as it happens most usually in such cases, after a while, individuals' resistance gets unzipped, and their attachment (like John's attachment) to their religious values gets loosen. John couldn't help but begins to do some of those sinful things he wouldn't do otherwise. Obviously this would have several negative effects on his self-perception. It is, in fact, almost impossible to conceive of a philosophically healthy self-perception with this kind of axiological tension.

### **III. Some Ineffective Approaches to Axiological Tension**

How can this and other negative influences on individuals' self-perception be eliminated? In other words, how can an individual preserve herself from the ontological and epistemological damages coming from the axiological tension? There can be several ways to handle with this problem. To mention some, one may, for example, try to isolate herself from others in order to minimize her exposure to others' values she does not approve, so that she can still hold on a solid and firm axiological ground. But this is not always easy to do. Isolation is the hardest way to follow in modern societies because of the necessities of living together. One may, nevertheless, keep herself active in the society but attempt to devalue others' principles and morals. This would, however, increase the degree of the axiological tension one suffers from. Recall that the axiological tension not only results from the discrepancy between one's own values and one's restricted actions but also the mismatch between one's own values and others' allowed actions that she does not approve.

Perhaps one reasonable (and most commonly employed) method is to build up and promote some social values and resulting behaviors, which is supposed to minimize the tension the individual is exposed to. Several notions immediately come to mind in such a behavioral path such as "tolerance," "connivance" and "patience." Particularly the notion of tolerance has been worn out a lot in the literature and in the context of interreligious dialogue. The mentality behind encouraging these and other social behaviors is quite clear: Religious John, Marxist Jack and nationalist Tom

will all tolerate or connive at or be patient with each other's actions so that (1) there will be no social conflict among relevant parties, and (2) they will minimize the axiological tension they possibly suffer from. The problem is that the former objective may be accomplished, but the latter one is not achievable at all. On the contrary, these social values and behaviors would easily add additional undesirable aspects to the tension, which we will come to in a moment.

So, encouraging social behaviors among individuals in order to ease the tension is not likely to contribute to the solution either.<sup>3</sup> For it misses the following important fact: Values sustained by a given individual are not built up out of thin air. They are indeed supervenient on more fundamental elements that constitute the individual's self-perception. These elements are ontological and epistemic acceptances by which the individuals interpret his existence and the surrounding environment. A rough description of the bottom-up<sup>4</sup> formation of values would be like this: The epistemic agent first ideally determines what exists in his surroundings. And then begin to interpret the relations between the existing things. Or it can happen vice versa. The agent first collects information about the nature of relations between the things, and then determines what exists and what does not. Or these two happen together—this stage of the process does not matter for the point we are attempting to make. Nevertheless, these ontological and epistemological processes would eventually expose the agent to some epistemic barriers that she cannot go beyond, which would ultimately lead her to metaphysical beliefs—beliefs that concern what is going on behind the barriers. Finally values emerge on the basis of all these metaphysical and epistemological beliefs. They do not pop up suddenly without any reason. The ontological and epistemological processes are the grounds values supervene on.

If the story behind holding values is roughly like this, promoting social values and corresponding behaviors while disregarding the background ontological and epistemological story will do nothing good and useful. Those social values and behaviors like tolerance, connivance, patience etc. will not function as they are expected to since they will not be bolstered up with a background ontology and

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<sup>3</sup> What we are primarily interested in are, of course, not social norms that emerged under the influence of a kind of goal-based social contract. We are instead primarily concerned with individually adopted values, their dynamic structure and conflicts between these values and actions. There is a wide range of literature regarding the emergence of social norms. For example, for an evaluation of the extants and an outline theory, see Opp (2001 and 2002).

<sup>4</sup> There should be of course other ways for individuals to gain values. Top-down gaining may be one of those, which implies that first the value is held by the individual for some reason, and then a corresponding ontology and epistemology is established. What we are primarily interested in is the bottom-up formation of values since we believe that the axiological tension primarily results from this kind of formation of values, which exhibits more resistance to dispelling the tension.

epistemology. On the contrary, the promoted values and resulting behaviors are likely to create a kind of hypocrisy among relevant parties. Take religious John, for example. He is encouraged to hold such a social value like tolerance towards members of other religions, *without* substantial ontological and epistemological backup. He tolerates (or attempts to tolerate) people of other faiths around him when they do things he does not approve. But deep inside, John cannot sustain this social behavior with requisite substantial elements of his worldview. He cannot help but feels himself to be insincere, because the internal dynamics of his value system does not match well with those social behaviors he shows to others.

#### **IV. Possible Solutions and Attached Problems**

It is then apparent that a favorable solution to the problem of axiological tension should seriously consider the individual's background ontological and epistemological acceptances. And the resulting behaviors should get their sincerity from substantial metaphysical and epistemological beliefs. The solution should also produce a type of mental state that we can call "ideological respect," by which the individual does not seemingly tolerate others but she deeply respects their values and corresponding behaviors. How can such a mental state and resulting psychological situation be achieved? The answer lies in a deep analysis of the interrelations between metaphysical beliefs, epistemological beliefs and values deriving from the former two. It is a huge area of analysis and certainly go beyond the scope of this paper. But we can at least point out what would work and what would not with respect to having such an ideological respect sustained with substantial metaphysical and epistemological elements.

The goal is to help individuals to gain such an ideological respect, which will provide the individuals with maximum ideological freedom while minimizing the axiological tension. Now we grant that such a value cannot be added to individuals' value system without a requisite doxastic support. Individuals will not possess the corresponding mental state unless the individual's background metaphysical and epistemological beliefs should substantially back up this mental state. This means a change should occur in the vicinity of metaphysical and epistemological beliefs first, not in the system of values, in order for such a value to be held or the corresponding mental state to be possessed by individuals. Three possible ways come to mind immediately in order for such a change to occur: (1) Revising the extant, (2) Stressing on the common and (3) Generating the new. Let us briefly consider these three possibilities.



*1. Revising the Extant Metaphysical and Epistemological Beliefs:* Recall the predicament John, Jack and Tom has to deal with. One may think that the axiological tension they experience can be eased if their extant metaphysical and epistemological beliefs are changed in a way that these beliefs do not cause the axiological tension anymore. And they can properly hold the value of ideological respect and possess the relevant mental state. This approach, however, is a little bit naïve. One problem is that it is many times impossible to make a single change in the established principles of ideologies. Take nationalist Tom, for example. How is it possible to change his belief that only the language of his nation should be the education language in schools, so that he can ideologically respects the mother tongues of minority groups and let them to be educated in their own languages? The problem gets worse in the case of religious groups because of the transcendental roots of faiths. Reinterpretation is possible surely, but even reinterpretation does not let substantial revision.

*2. Stressing on the Common Metaphysical and Epistemological Beliefs:* One may also think that Societies are not completely compartmentalized. Individuals of different ideologies share beliefs and values. Those common beliefs they enjoy constitute an intersecting vicinity of metaphysics and epistemology. Perhaps by emphasizing on those shared metaphysical and epistemological beliefs, the axiological tension felt by those individuals can be eased significantly, if not be dispelled. This approach, however, is not likely to achieve the goal of implementing the ideological respect either. The reason is that what are mostly shared by individuals of different ideologies are not the primary basic metaphysical and epistemological beliefs; rather those are either secondary opinions having a secondary effect or have no effects at all in sustaining the desired value of ideological respect. Consider John, Jack and Tom again. They share beliefs and opinions such as that their children should get a good education; the economic conditions of poor people should be uplifted to a better stage; politicians should not lie; the legal system should work fast and more effectively; more scientific studies and research should be carried out to develop the country and so on. But these are secondary or higher-level beliefs that are not the constitutive cause of the values, but are resulted from the values themselves. What we need, instead, are fundamental beliefs belonging to the core set of principles employed by the ideologies. Such fundamental beliefs, however, are the characteristics of the ideologies, which distinguish each from the others. It is almost impossible to find shared ones among those.

3. *Generating New Metaphysical and Epistemological Acceptances That Can Be Shared by All:* The final possibility, then, is to generate new fundamental beliefs that could be shared by different groups of individuals having different ideologies. These beliefs are supposed to be fundamental in the sense that they can be integrated well into central parts of different ideologies simultaneously. It is such kind of fundamental beliefs that can enable the individuals of different ideologies to hold the value of ideological respect and to possess the relevant mental state. One might think that such an approach is just unrealistic for two reasons. First the approach disregards the reality of belief formation for individuals, or construes it too simple. Second, the approach misses the self-preserving and resisting nature of ideologies to new beliefs and acceptances. Both concerns are worth to examine, but are removable as well by the fact that there are some actual examples of embracing new metaphysical and epistemological beliefs common to all members of different ideologies.

Consider beliefs on human rights. There seems to be no reason to reject the idea that new beliefs on human rights could perfectly be generated, and individuals of different ideologies could perfectly integrate them into the central part of their metaphysics and epistemology. This, indeed, happens in a lot of cases during the rapid mental ideological development of a society. Or take the issues arising from the lack of justice in a society. It is obvious that any individual of such a society would be ready to embrace new principles and values based on those principles that would help develop social, economic, and political or other kinds of justice the society. Examples can be multiplied. The core idea here is that individuals of different worldviews can accommodate new metaphysical and epistemological beliefs among the core beliefs of their economic, political, and even religious ideology on the condition that those new fundamental beliefs are either the derivative of, or harmonious with their extant belief system in their essence. These examples and others considered, this last option seems to be the best option to resolve the problem of axiological tension.

Let us summarize what we have examined so far. When applied to all individuals of different ideologies, ideological freedom—which can be considered as a species of freedom of thought—causes a problem that I call “axiological tension.” This tension results from a discrepancy the individuals experience as they live together. And the discrepancy occurs between the established values of individuals and their restricted actions as well as others’ allowed actions. In order to ease this axiological tension, if not to dispel it completely, several approaches might be taken including

the behavioral approach whose aim is to implement some social behaviors without emphasizing any background metaphysical and epistemological beliefs. We have argued that such a behavioral approach is not likely to ease the tension; rather it is likely to cause additional problems such as lack of insincerity. A favorable solution would, instead, should consider seriously the relevant background metaphysical and epistemological beliefs that sustain the related values. In this manner, we have briefly examined three possible ways of handling the beliefs in question. We have concluded that there are problems with all the three. The third one, nevertheless, which is to generate new metaphysical and epistemological beliefs that can be shared by all, is the most promising one in order to ease the axiological tension.

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