

# **IDEALS AND ILLUSIONS**

**By**

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**Abridged By: Safdar Hasan Siddiqi**

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We commonly protect ourselves from criticism – especially from self-criticism.

It lies within our power, if we so desire, to make the familiar world we inhabit more worthy of habitation by beings who aspire to be rational and are capable of love.

In no other century have so many human beings – men, women and children – suffered pain, anguish of heart, bitterness of spirit, despair and unnecessary death. The technical advances in science have created a world of plenty; yet millions are undernourished, thousands starve. Millions of human beings are subjected to tyrannous and stupid dictatorship; yet there has been a growing awareness that without freedom no society is worth of man.

The character of a community depends on the characters of the men and women who compose it.

We should have set clearly before our minds what it is we most deeply desire, the attainment of which would bring us inward peace – that is, happiness. Our most immediate need today is to know clearly what are the things that belong to our happiness. To know this is to begin to formulate a way of life. Some seem to desire power above all, power over other men to be used as means to the attaining of still more power over more and more human beings. This is a self-defeating ideal; the seeker after power cannot attain a state in which he can enjoy the contemplation of what he has; always he must be seeking more of the same kind, so that he does not experience the joy of resting in what he has. This joy is the mark of love – of love of persons, of art, of any good thing; it is withheld

from the tyrant and the man whose heart is wholly set on making money and yet more money.

I, you, they, are all human beings alive together, having many common experiences, sharing certain fundamental attitudes.

We need to be definite; thinking coherently and definitely enough. We shall fail in this task unless we are willing to think steadily; we shall also fail if we wholly lack any tenderness towards the traditions of our past – the wisdom handed down to us by men who were

Morality concerns action; *my* actions, *your* actions, *their* actions; and it starts from my actions. Our lives are not rounded wholes; we have diverse interests, various desires, divergent and even conflicting needs; we grow and change in the growing; our circumstances change, and we change with them. Our duty is to know clearly what it is we are in fact seeking. We shall fail in the task unless we are willing to think steadily; we shall also fail if we wholly lack any tenderness towards the traditions of our past – the wisdom handed down to us by men who were ignorant of the marvels of science, but not of the light of loving and being loved. As is one's philosophy, so is one's way of life.

"The quality of greatness does not consist in having weaker passions or greater virtue than ordinary men, but in being inspired by nobler aims. – La Rochefoucauld.

Moral confusion has penetrated to the mind and heart of the average individual. Human miseries come from the misuse of our intellectual powers, and of our failure to appropriate the goods that nature and science have so copiously provided.

Spiritual vigour and hard thinking are needed for discerning an ideal better than the actual state of affairs and not remote from the conditions of human life.

"Ideal" is to be taken to mean something worth having. When in the affairs of life we call a man "idealist" we ordinarily mean that he is influenced in his actions by *ideals*. –that is by his conception of what it is worthwhile to achieve, or to attempt to achieve. Often our ideals are not clearly thought out; we neglect some of the conditions in which they have to be realized. *To have ideals* is not the same as *to have impracticable ideals*. It is strictly nonsense to assume that *to have ideals* is not the same as *to have impracticable ideals*. It is strictly nonsense to assume that *to have ideals* is equivalent to *being*

*a visionary*, and that to be a visionary is equivalent to being a *utopian* (ideally perfect but impracticable). The utopian dreams that it is possible to eliminate self-assertion from politics and to base a political system on "morality alone." An idealist need not be a utopian, nor a realist a man without ideas, or with ideals and without moral compunction. Unless there be a goal for man beyond and outside of the historical process, our lives are without significance and our efforts are futile.

As Murry says, "Religion is the sob of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world the spirit of conditions utterly unspiritual. Man does not live by bread alone, nor is kindness enough to satisfy him. He has spiritual powers, creative energies, forward-looking hopes. If these be left undeveloped and unsatisfied, nothing else that man acquires can be felt as sustainingly worth while. "Conditions utterly unspiritual" are not fit for such a being as man. Specifically human excellences are rightly to be called *spiritual* excellences. These spiritual excellences are intellectual and moral capacities lacking which the life of human beings would be nasty and brutish. These spiritual excellences include love for human beings, delight in creative activities of all kinds, respect for truth, satisfaction in learning to know what is true about this world (which includes ourselves), loyalty to other human beings, generosity of thought and sympathy with those who suffer, hatred of cruelty and other evils, devotion to duty and steadfastness in seeking one's ideals, delight in the beauty of nature and in art – in short, the love and pursuit of what is worth while for its own sake. In this pursuit an individual does in fact have at times to suffer pain and to surrender what it would be good for him were it not for the incomputable needs of others, need which he recognizes as claims upon himself. This is another spiritual excellence. These excellences are to be found in *this* world. Everybody has certain ideals which determine the direction of his endeavours and his judgments.

Those whose aims appear to be limited to the acquisition and display of wealth, who mistake comfort with well-being, or those who are pre-occupied with the pleasures of the senses are said to be materialistic or to have material and in this sense a synonym of "material" is "wordly".

A human being is not merely a living organism; he is a creature with spiritual needs. These spiritual capacities can hardly, if at all, be developed under the condition of sweated labour or of acute poverty. Dr. Radha Krishnan of India says, "God and not the world of history is the true environment of our souls..... If good will, pure love and disinterestedness are our ideals, then our ethics must be rooted in otherworldliness."

The concentration upon reform and social use, as against the ideal of personal behaviour, is but one sign of the general tendency to postpone responsibility and effort.

The most extreme conflict is that between those who believe in the world of freedom and those who believe in the world of fate.

If we are to have clear ideas about the conduct of our lives, we cannot dispense with ideals. I must know what I judge to be of value. It is wise to distinguish the good man from the moral philosophers. We must each of us take the trouble to examine carefully the principles in accordance with which we act; we must not be content merely to follow the rules of our accepted code.

The American Declaration of Independence upholds that: "All men are created equal; that they are endowed by the Creator with inalienable rights; that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." For our purpose, it is enough to concentrate our attention upon the principle itself: all men alike ought to be free and happy. Happiness depends upon the enjoyment of both spiritual and material things. It includes the tremendous assertion that: *All men to be free each to shape his own mode of living in accordance with his own abilities and needs.*

The belief that earthly happiness is important while heavenly bliss await the righteous poor has been a characteristic Christian belief. The humanitarianism of Voltaire, Rousseau and Bentham spring from a passionate sympathy with the oppressed and the unhappy. They judged their suffering to be *evils* and, as such, calling for remedy here and now, in *this* world. Everywhere they saw men and women living in conditions that hindered their free and happy development as human beings, condition that was in no small measure the result

of social institutions arising from the structure of society on the basis of the distinction between the privileged and the unprivileged classes. Poverty and disease are not in themselves evil but only in so far as they are due to the sins of the rich.

Anything that hinders or makes impossible a right relationship between people: hatred of anyone; delight in the suffering of anyone, including deliberate cruelty; obtaining power over another and exercising it for his hurt, unkindness in all its various forms, include insensitiveness to other people's needs; using people exclusively for my own aims, as though they were things and thus without regard to their being also persons; indifference to truth; lack of self-control; fear These are indubitably spiritual evils..

To be poor (to lack money) is to be hindered in diverse ways from living as one would wish to live. Again, from lack of money men and women are forced to work without dignity. In this way subservience and obsequiousness are fostered.

To live without beautiful things is to be deprived of conditions necessary for the development of the human spirit.

We ought not always pursue experiences in which we should be happy. If we admit that, all men alike ought to be free and happy, we see reason why we should at times forego our own happiness.

It follows from what we have read before, the following principles come forward to be followed:

1. All men are created equal.
2. All men alike ought to be free and happy.
3. Happiness depends upon the enjoyment of both spiritual and material things.
4. All men are alike with respect to their capacity for happiness.
5. Everyone should be free to shape his own mode of living in accordance with his own abilities and needs.
6. There should be a passionate sympathy with the oppressed and the unhappy.
7. Men and women should be provided with conditions that do not hinder their free happy development as human beings.
8. Through faith and faith alone, self-suppression issues in a higher self-realization.
9. With small men no great thing can be achieved.

10. Anything that hinders or makes impossible a right relationship between people, hatred of anyone, including deliberate cruelty; obtaining power over anyone and exercising it for his benefit, unkindness in all its forms, including insensitiveness to
11. other people's needs; using people exclusively for one's own aims as though they were things and not persons; indifference to truth; lack of self-control, fear. These are spiritual evils.

Human beings have spiritual needs. These are the needs that differentiate men from other animals; if they are left unsatisfied, then men are nothing other than animals. The enjoying of art and of beauty in nature is specifically human. Art and learning are serious activities, having worth in themselves. A demand is not moral unless its fulfillment would realize something worth realizing. A moral demand is that something should be done with reference to good and evil. An ethical situation is one in which good or evil is present.

Human beings each need conditions which are the same for all – for example, food, water, warmth, play, loving and being loved, and so on, indefinitely but not infinitely.

To be civilized is "to experience the most intense and exquisite state of mind"; the completely civilized man possesses "Reasonableness and a Sense of Values", from which springs "a taste for truth and beauty, tolerance, intellectual honesty, fastidiousness, a sense of humour, good manners, curiosity, a dislike of vulgarity, brutality and overemphasis, freedom from superstition and prudery a fearless acceptance of the good things of life, a desire for complete self-expression and for a liberal education, a contempt for utilitarianism and philistinism, and two words – sweetness and light. If all people, or a large majority of people, were thus "civilized", we should be living happier lives today in a civilization based on liberty and justice. A "civilized man" must be sensitive and intelligent.

A man cannot be himself apart from his fellows; to be in good relations to other people is necessary in order that he should himself develop what he has in him to be. Nearly all people would like to be in good relations with other people, but to be in these good relations involves that these others should not be prevented from developing and using their capacities.

To be reasonable is to look at a situation in the light of the whole situation. If our sensibilities are unblunted we cannot ignore today the tragic happenings in our world. Not to ignore them is to be forced to do something about them; to do something it is first necessary to make clear to ourselves our political ideals.

### **We will build a better world**

We must go on thinking less about ourselves and more for one another, for so and so only can we hope to make the world a better place and life a worthier thing. Plain and unspectacular devotion is required for "building a better world."

It is in the hour of a nation's need that the citizens rise above their private, narrow selves and are capable of sacrificing everything for the nation's good.

To live strenuously for an ideal is more difficult and exacting than to be prepared to die for it. *The democratic ideal is founded upon the moral principle that all men alike ought to be free and happy.* It requires a temper of mind free from suspicion of others, from hatred of the foreigner and from intolerance. It requires further an active sympathy with those who are suppressed.

The building of a better world is not impossible. In what ways does the world need to be made better? The answer to this question can be given only if we know clearly what is wrong with the world. At the outset we must be clear what we mean by "the world." It means "the community of which we are members."

There is among ordinary men and women an extraordinary lack of culture and a complete unawareness of the want of it. Culture involves activity of thought, a quick perception of what is beautiful and a passionate need for it., and humane feeling that transcends the bounds of one's own limited self. Culture requires a balance of material and spiritual values. Such a balance cannot be achieved without effort. A civilized society, and consequently every society in which there is a high level of culture, must have a desire for and respect for knowledge.

A free and happy person is one whose impulses are controlled by self-discipline with an aim in view.

The cultural value of science lies not at all in any brilliant application of of scientific knowledge to the control of natural process but in its

power to educate and form the minds of men. Science can flourish only when men are free. Science is by its nature objective, impersonal and independent of individual caprice. In the study of science the narrow limits of self are transcended. What matters to a scientist is not that the theory is his but that it is true, or an approximation to the truth.

Democracy is a vision of good living; it is not an easy ideal; it requires sacrifice to achieve and to maintain. It would not be worth attaining unless it meant not only material welfare but also the developing of the excellences characteristic of the human spirit.

If we are to build the better world, we must certainly eliminate unnecessary misery, the suffering inflicted by men upon men. This better world will not come of itself. It can be born only by the active and almost unceasing efforts of those who have accepted the ideal of making "the world a better place and life a worthier thing." To build this better world will be difficult; it cannot be built once for all, but must be continually renewed. It may never be built; it may not even be begun.

From Isaiah to Karl Marx the prophets have spoken with one voice. In the golden age to which they look forward there will be liberty, peace, justice and brotherly love. "Nation shall no more lift sword against nation"; "the free development of each will lead to the free development of all"; "the world shall be full of knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'

The ideal of Fascism is power and the glorification of the State; the ideal of democracy is the development of free and happy human beings; their most fundamental difference lies in their different conception of the worth of human beings as individuals worthy of respect.

Our belief is strong that that ruthless domination is not a worthy goal of effort, that lying, repression, cruelty and hatred of other people are evil. We must, then, believe that truth, freedom, tolerance and love are worth pursuing.

The ideal of an association of human beings in a society in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all did not originate with Marx and Engels; it goes as far back as two and a half thousand years – a short time in the life long history of man's slow and halting development.



We are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes; wealth we employ not for talk and ostentation but when there is a real use of it. Precarious are the spiritual values of civilization: freedom, respect for other men, respect for truth and delight in knowledge, love of beauty. These are civilized excellences; they result only by cultivation, acquired with difficulty and easily lost. They are the first values to be lost when men fight one another. Moreover, the lusts for power, the joy of cruelty, the pride of dominance, still have their attraction. Accordingly, to maintain a civilized society we have to be constantly on guard against their primitive and natural impulses.

Democracy is a vision of good living, an ideal of a moral and spiritual order. Democracy as an ideal is a form of society, an association of free men in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all. So far all that can be said to have been achieved in "the Western Democracies" is the political machinery of democracy. Democracy is a political form of government by the people and for the people. The cardinal principle of democracy is liberty, and it is opposed to any system which tends to sacrifice men's freedom. Democracy with its responsibility to the people legislates for the common welfare and aims to remove any barriers of economic privilege or monopoly which hinder the free development of the life of the people. Democracy is a moral and spiritual order. The fundamental principle of democracy is an ethical principle that *all men alike ought to be free and happy*. That is, men ought to be free each to develop what he (or she) has in him (or her) to become.

The economic order should be such as to permit that all men should in fact have the chance to live free and happy lives. In a society in which a few individuals are very wealthy and many are very poor it is probable that both the wealthy and the poor will not lead free and happy lives.

Democracy is neither a materialistic ideal nor one easy to achieve. If democracy is taken seriously, it is concerned with the welfare of every member of the community; great effort has been required to take the first steps to its realization, and continuous vigilance is needed to maintain what has so far been achieved. The democratic ideal does not confine a man within the limitations of his own narrowly conceived self-interest; it widens his interests to include all men.

To achieve this ideal we must make such political machinery as will enable every man to have his needs considered and to contribute to the working of this machinery according to his ability. No one must be slave to another nor subject to the arbitrary will of any of his fellows, whether he lead or be led. We must create an economic order as to allow every man the satisfaction of his primary needs and to permit the development of himself as an individual.

Individuality means that my thoughts are really the outcome of my thinking; that my decisions are in the like manner mine; that I feel myself to be a growing thing. Hence the first essential of individuality is freedom of thought – i.e., intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom is the most priceless possession of the members of a democracy; without it, indeed, there is no democracy. I must be free to make up my own mind.

In all matters touching public affairs I stand in need of information and usually also of guidance. Consequently relevant information must be freely accessible to me. In a democracy government must be by discussion. Such discussion must be valueless unless the participants are well-informed, able and ready to think for themselves, and not afraid to say what they think.

The ideal of democracy does not permit of a Leader, whose function is to initiate and determine policy, leaving the citizen to be led by promises and propaganda blindly to obey his dictates and acquiesce in decisions made for them, not by them.

Democracy demands a great deal of the citizen. It demands self-discipline, submission to laws democratically established, willingness to participate in political discussion, willingness to serve others and thus to encourage in oneself those friendly feelings for other persons which find their highest expression in love.

We need to speak more plainly, even if less elegantly. We do distinguish between right and wrong action, and between good and evil states of affairs, and between duty and inclination.

The peculiarity of conscience is that it reflects on actions from the point of view of their rightness and wrongness. Conscience issues in action and makes judgments about action; it relates to the situations in which choices are being made. Hence conscience is felt as having authority. But conscience is not merely an intellectual faculty, or a judging faculty, but a banaviour-directing faculty. It is certain that

one man's conscience may direct him to do one thing which another man's conscience would forbid. Conscience is not infallible; conscience, no less than intellect, may err; but it has authority; it directs my actions. There is no appeal for me to anything beyond my conscience.

Unless man is immortal – unless there is a conscious life after death for the individual – the very idea of morality ceases to possess any significance. Belief in hell and heaven is logically necessary to the distinction between right and wrong. In order that *my life* should have significance I must continue to live after death.

Certainly to believe that we are not responsible for our actions, that reason is to be disregarded, that argument is not worthwhile, that the claims of an individual are of no account – all this would be disastrous, because we should be believing what was false.

One can choose one's course by an effort of will, and reason is the surest guide. To be reasonable is to have regard to the whole situation that is relevant. To act reasonably is to act in the light of such relevant knowledge.

There is much that is good in our world and that we are able to preserve and increase this good.

Life is not a game for which rules can be prescribed once for all. It is no illusion but an uncontested fact that here and now we know that here and now we know that hatred, cruelty, intolerance and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness and truth are good.

John Keats says: "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced." Even if ethical principles are eternal and immutable it is certain that they need to be re-interpreted for every period and re-thought by every generation. Our moral beliefs, our standards of right and wrong, our conceptions of our relations to other men undergo some change as our modes of living change. We cannot free ourselves from the past nor avoid affecting those who are to come after us.

There are at least three factors that determine social change: economic structure, the possession of power – especially naked power – and ideas. An idea of a certain state of affairs as worth realizing is an ideal.

The way before us is hard, but it is not impossible to make it lead towards a world where men can be free and happy because they are

not afraid of the truth, however uncomfortable, and have learnt that love casts out fear and brings peace.

March 4, 2008.

Notes from " Ideas and Illusions"

**By L. Susan Stebbing**

**Compiled by Safdar Hasan Siddiqi**

**Without freedom no society is worthy of men.**

**The character of a community depends on the character of men and women who compose it.**

**What men believe – i.e., their ideas – what men seek to attain – i.e., their ideals – are also factors in determining social change.**

**A real statesman is actuated by an ideal – i.e., he seeks to achieve a state of affairs that he judges to be worthwhile.**

**Unless there be a goal for man beyond and outside of the historical process, our lives are without significance and our efforts futile.**

**There are spiritual excellencies in and of this temporal world . These are intellectual and moral capacities. These excellences include love for human beings, delight in creative activities of all kinds, respect for truth, satisfaction in learning to know what is true about this world and ourselves, loyalty to other human beings, generosity of thought and sympathy with those who suffer, hatred of cruelty and other evils, devotion to duty and steadfastness in seeking one's ideals delight in the beauty and in art.**

**Everybody has certain ideals, which determine the direction of his endeavours and his judgement.**

**It is not difficult to know what we ought to do but the difficulty lies in doing it.**

**Happiness depends upon the enjoyment of both spiritual and material things.**

**With small men no great thing can really be accomplished.**

**The non-theoretical person, if he be not immoral, is at peace with reality; and the man who in any degree has made**

this point of view his own becomes more and more reconciled to the world and to life.

All the grand sources of human suffering are in great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort.

Enduring pain bravely and self-forgetfully, and thus without bitterness may enrich a personality in a way in which perhaps nothing else does.

If our ideal is to fit ourselves for a heaven to come, not upon this earth but only after death, then it is reasonable enough not to care about making this world a place where men and women can be free and happy.

The completely civilized man possesses "Reasonableness and a Sense of Values", from which spring a sense of humour, good manners, curiosity, a dislike of vulgarity, brutality and overemphasis, freedom from superstition and prudery, a fearless acceptance of the good things of life, a desire for complete self-expression and for a liberal education, a contempt of utilitarianism and philistines. A "civilized man" must be sensitive and intelligent.

A man cannot be himself apart from his fellows; to be in good relations to other people is necessary in order that he should himself develop what he has in him to be.

To regard a stranger as a man like themselves is a step towards friendly feeling.

We must go on thinking less about ourselves and more for one another, for so and so only we hope to make the world a better place and life a worthier thing.

To live strenuously for an ideal is more difficult and exacting than to be prepared to die for it.

The democratic ideal is founded upon the moral principle that all men alike ought to be free and happy.

Culture requires a balance of material and spiritual values. Such a balance cannot be achieved without effort. A civilized society, and consequently every society in which there is a high level of culture, must have a desire for and respect for knowledge.

A free and happy person is one whose impulses are controlled by self-discipline with an aim in view.

Democracy is a vision of good living, an ideal of a moral and spiritual order.

Spiritual values of civilization are freedom, respect for other men, issuing in tolerance and humanity, respect for truth and delight in knowledge, love of beauty.

. Democracy as an ideal is a form of society, an association of free men in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.

The cardinal principle of democracy is liberty, and it is opposed to any system which tends to sacrifice men's freedom. Democracy with its responsibility to the people legislates for the common welfare and aims to remove any barriers of economic privilege and monopoly, which hinder the free development of the life of the people.

Democracy is a moral and spiritual order. To regard democracy as nothing more than "a political form of government" is to miss what matters most.

The fundamental principle of democracy is an ethical principle viz., all men alike ought to be free and happy. That is, men are all individuals, and as such ought to be free each to develop what he (or she) has it in him (or her) to become.

All that is necessary is that the economic order should be such as to permit that all men should in fact have the chance to live free and happy lives.

If democracy is taken seriously, it is concerned with the welfare of every member of the community; it is so far from being easy that great effort has been required to take the first steps to its realization, and continued vigilance is needed to maintain what has so far been achieved. The democratic ideal does not confine a man within the limitations of his own narrowly conceived self-interest, it widens his interest to include all men.

No one must be subjected to the arbitrary will of any of his fellows. We must create such an economic order as to allow to every man the satisfaction of his primary needs and to permit the development of himself as an individual.

Individuality means that one's thoughts really the outcome of his thinking, not the repetition of someone else's thought; that his desires are in like manner his; that he knows and feels himself to be a growing thing. The first essential of individuality is freedom of thought – i.e., intellectual freedom. It is quite impossible to overstress the importance of intellectual freedom; it is the most priceless possession of the members of a democracy; without it indeed there is no democracy. I must be free to make up my own mind.

In a democracy a government must be by discussion. Such discussion must be valueless unless the participants are well-informed, able and ready to think for themselves and not afraid to say what they think.

Democracy demands a great deal of its citizens. It demands self-discipline, submission to laws democratically established, willingness to participate in political discussion, willingness to serve others and thus to encourage in oneself those friendly feelings for other persons which find their highest expression in love.

It is no illusion but a non-contested fact that here and now we know that hatred, cruelty, intolerance, and indifference to human misery are evil; that love, kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, and truth are good.

Our moral beliefs, our standards of right and wrong, our conception of our relations to other men undergo some change as our modes of living change.

There are at least other factors that determine social change: economic structure, the possession of power – especially naked power – and ideas.

An idea of a certain state of affairs as worth realizing is an ideal.

The way before us is hard, but it is not impossible to make it lead towards a world where men can be free and happy because they are not afraid of the truth, however uncomfortable, and have learnt that love casts out fear and brings peace.