

CHAPTER



Political Ideologies and Why They Matter

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Preview

All people are political thinkers. Whether they know it or not, people use political ideas and concepts whenever they express their opinion or speak their mind. Everyday language is littered with terms such as ‘freedom’, ‘fairness’, ‘equality’, ‘justice’ and ‘rights’. In the same way, words such as ‘conservative’, ‘liberal’, ‘socialist’, ‘communist’ and ‘fascist’ are regularly employed by people either to describe their own views, or those of others. However, even though such terms are familiar, even commonplace, they are seldom used with any precision or a clear grasp of their meaning. What, for instance, is ‘equality’? What does it mean to say that all people are equal? Are people born equal; should they be treated by society as if they are equal? Should people have equal rights, equal opportunities, equal political influence, equal wages? Similarly, words such as ‘socialist’ or ‘fascist’ are commonly mis-

used. What does it mean to call someone a ‘fascist’? What values or beliefs do fascists hold, and why do they hold them? How do socialist views differ from those of, say, liberals, conservatives or anarchists? This book examines the substantive ideas and beliefs of the major political ideologies.

This introductory chapter reflects on the nature of political ideology. It does so by examining the role of ideas in politics, the life and (sometimes convoluted) times of the concept of ideology, the structure of ideological thought, the extent to which ideologies conform to a left/right divide, and the changing landscape of political ideologies. In the process, it discusses issues such as why and when a body of political thought should be classified as an ideology (as well as what this implies) and whether there is evidence that so-called ‘new’ ideologies are in the process of displacing the ‘classical’ ideologies of old. The notion of the end of ideology is examined in Chapter 12.

The role of ideas

Not all political thinkers have accepted that ideas and ideologies are of much importance. Politics has sometimes been thought to be little more than a naked struggle for power. If this is true, political ideas are mere propaganda, a form of words or collection of slogans designed to win votes or attract popular support. Ideas and ideologies are therefore simply ‘window dressing’, used to conceal the deeper realities of political life. The opposite argument has also been put, however. The UK economist John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), for example, argued that the world is ruled by little other than the ideas of economic theorists and political philosophers. As he put it in the closing pages of his *General Theory*:

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. (Keynes [1936] 1963)

This position highlights the degree to which beliefs and theories provide the wellspring of human action. The world is ultimately ruled by ‘academic scribblers’. Such a view suggests, for instance, that modern capitalism (see p. 97) developed, in important respects, out of the classical economics of Adam Smith (see p. 52) and David Ricardo (1772–1823), that Soviet communism was shaped significantly by the writing of Karl Marx (see p. 124) and V. I. Lenin (see p. 124), and that the history of Nazi Germany can only be understood by reference to the doctrines advanced in Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

In reality, both of these accounts of political life are one-sided and inadequate. Political ideas are not merely a passive reflection of vested interests or personal ambition, but have the capacity to inspire and guide political action itself and so to shape material life. At the same time, political ideas do not emerge in a vacuum: they do not drop from the sky like rain. All political ideas are moulded by the social and historical circumstances in which they develop and by the political ambitions they serve. Quite simply, political thought and political practice are inseparably linked. Any balanced and persuasive account of political life must therefore acknowledge the constant interplay between ideas and ideologies on the one hand, and historical and social forces on the other.

Ideas and ideologies influence political life in a number of ways. They:

- structure political understanding and so set goals and inspire activism
- shape the nature of political systems
- act as a form of social cement.

In the first place, ideologies provide a perspective, or ‘lens’, through which the world is understood and explained. People do not see the world as it is, but only as they expect it to be: in other words, they see it through a veil of ingrained beliefs,

opinions and assumptions. Whether consciously or subconsciously, everyone subscribes to a set of political beliefs and values that guide their behaviour and influence their conduct. Political ideas and ideologies thus set goals that inspire political activism. In this respect, politicians are subject to two very different influences. Without doubt, all politicians want power. This forces them to be pragmatic, to adopt those policies and ideas that are electorally popular or win favour with powerful groups, such as business or the military. However, politicians seldom seek power simply for its own sake. They also possess beliefs, values and convictions (if to different degrees) about what to do with power when it is achieved.

Second, political ideologies help to shape the nature of political systems. Systems of government vary considerably throughout the world and are always associated with particular values or principles. Absolute monarchies were based on deeply established religious ideas, notably the divine right of kings. The political systems in most contemporary western countries are founded on a set of liberal-democratic principles. Western states are typically founded on a commitment to limited and constitutional government, as well as the belief that government should be representative, in the sense that it is based on regular and competitive elections. In the same way, traditional communist political systems conformed to the principles of Marxism–Leninism. Even the fact that the world is divided into a collection of nation-states and that government power is usually located at the national level reflects the impact of political ideas, in this case of nationalism and, more specifically, the principle of national self-determination.

Finally, political ideas and ideologies can act as a form of social cement, providing social groups, and indeed whole societies, with a set of unifying beliefs and values. Political ideologies have commonly been associated with particular social classes – for example, liberalism with the middle classes, conservatism with the landed aristocracy, socialism with the working class, and so on. These ideas reflect the life experiences, interests and aspirations of a social class, and therefore help to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. However, ideas and ideologies can also succeed in binding together divergent groups and classes within a society. For instance, there is a unifying bedrock of liberal-democratic values in most western states, while in Muslim countries Islam has established a common set of moral principles and beliefs. In providing society with a unified political culture, political ideas help to promote order and social stability. Nevertheless, a unifying set of political ideas and values can develop naturally within a society, or it can be enforced from above in an attempt to manufacture obedience and exercise control. The clearest examples of such ‘official’ ideologies have been found in fascist, communist and religious fundamentalist regimes.

Views of ideology

This book is primarily a study of political ideologies, rather than an analysis of the nature of ideology. Much confusion stems from the fact that, though obviously related, ‘ideology’ and ‘ideologies’ are quite different things to study. To examine

‘ideology’ is to consider a particular *type* of political thought, distinct from, say, political science or political philosophy. The study of political ideology thus involves reflection on questions about the nature, role and significance of this category of thought, and about which sets of political ideas and arguments should be classified as ideologies. For instance, is ideology true or false, liberating or oppressive, or inevitable or merely transitory? Similarly, are nationalism and multiculturalism ideologies in the same sense as liberalism and socialism?

On the other hand, to study ‘ideologies’ is to be concerned with analysing the *content* of political thought, to be interested in the ideas, doctrines and theories that have been advanced by and within the various ideological traditions. For example, what can liberalism tell us about freedom? Why have socialists traditionally supported equality? How do anarchists defend the idea of a stateless society? Why have fascists regarded struggle and war as healthy? In order to examine such ‘content’ issues, however, it is necessary to consider the ‘type’ of political thought we are dealing with. Before discussing the characteristic ideas and doctrines of the so-called ideologies, we need to reflect on why these sets of ideas have been categorized as ideologies. More importantly, what does the categorization tell us? What can we learn about, for instance, liberalism, socialism, feminism and fascism from the fact that they are classified as ideologies?

The first problem confronting any discussion of the nature of ideology is that there is no settled or agreed definition of the term, only a collection of rival definitions. As David McLellan (1995) commented, ‘Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences.’ Few political terms have been the subject of such deep and impassioned controversy. This has occurred for two reasons. In the first place, as all concepts of ideology acknowledge a link between theory and practice, the term uncovers highly contentious debates about the role of ideas in politics and the relationship between beliefs and theories on the one hand, and material life or political conduct on the other. Second, the concept of ideology has not been able to stand apart from the ongoing struggle between and among political ideologies. For much of its history, the term ‘ideology’ has been used as a political weapon, a device with which to condemn or criticize rival sets of ideas or belief systems. Not until the second half of the twentieth century was a neutral and apparently objective concept of ideology widely employed, and even then disagreements persisted over the social role and political significance of ideology. Among the meanings that have been attached to ideology are the following:

- a political belief system
- an action-orientated set of political ideas
- the ideas of the ruling class
- the world-view of a particular social class or social group
- political ideas that embody or articulate class or social interests
- ideas that propagate false consciousness among the exploited or oppressed
- ideas that situate the individual within a social context and generate a sense of collective belonging

- an officially sanctioned set of ideas used to legitimize a political system or regime
- an all-embracing political doctrine that claims a monopoly of truth
- an abstract and highly systematic set of political ideas.

The origins of the term are nevertheless clear. The word ideology was coined during the French Revolution by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836), and was first used in public in 1796. For de Tracy, *idéologie* referred to a new ‘science of ideas’, literally an *idea*-ology. With a rationalist zeal typical of the **Enlightenment**, he believed that it was possible to uncover the origins of ideas objectively, and proclaimed that this new science would come to enjoy the same status as established sciences such as

ENLIGHTENMENT

An intellectual movement that reached its height in the eighteenth century and challenged traditional beliefs in religion, politics and learning in general in the name of reason and progress.

biology and zoology. More boldly, since all forms of enquiry are based on ideas, de Tracy suggested that ideology would eventually come to be recognized as the queen of the sciences. However, despite these high expectations, this original meaning of the term has had little impact on later usage, which has been influenced by both Marxist and non-Marxist thinking.

Marxist views

The career of ideology as a key political term stems from the use made of it in the writings of Karl Marx. Marx’s use of the term, and the interest shown in it by later generations of Marxist thinkers, largely explains the prominence ideology enjoys in modern social and political thought. Yet the meaning Marx ascribed to the concept is very different from the one usually accorded it in mainstream political analysis. Marx used the term in the title of his early work *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1970), written with his lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–95). This also contains Marx’s clearest description of his view of ideology:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels, [1846] 1970)

FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

A Marxist term denoting the delusion and mystification that prevents subordinate classes from recognizing the fact of their own exploitation.

Marx’s concept of ideology has a number of crucial features. First, ideology is about *delusion* and mystification: it perpetrates a false or mistaken view of the world, what Engels later referred to as ‘**false consciousness**’. Marx used ideology as a critical concept, the purpose of which is to unmask a process of systematic

mystification. His own ideas he classified as scientific, because they were designed accurately to uncover the workings of history and society. The contrast between ideology and science, between falsehood and truth, was thus vital to Marx's use of the term. Second, ideology is linked to the *class system*. Marx believed that the distortion implicit in ideology stems from the fact that it reflects the interests and perspective on society of the ruling class. The ruling class is unwilling to recognize itself as an oppressor and, equally, is anxious to reconcile the oppressed to their oppression. The class system is thus presented upside down, a notion Marx conveyed through the image of the camera obscura, the inverted picture that is produced by a camera lens or the human eye. Liberalism, which portrays rights that can only be exercised by the propertied and privileged as universal entitlements, is therefore the classic example of ideology.

Third, ideology is a manifestation of *power*. In concealing the contradictions on which capitalism, in common with all class societies, is based, ideology serves to hide from the exploited proletariat the fact of its own exploitation, and thereby upholds a system of unequal class power. Ideology literally constitutes the 'ruling' ideas of the age. Finally, Marx treated ideology as a *temporary* phenomenon. Ideology will only continue so long as the class system that generates it survives. The proletariat – in Marx's view, the 'grave digger' of capitalism – is destined not to establish another form of class society, but rather to abolish class inequality altogether by bringing about the collective ownership of wealth. The interests of the proletariat thus coincide with those of society as a whole. The proletariat, in short, does not need ideology because it is the only class that needs no illusions.

Later generations of Marxists, if anything, showed a greater interest in ideology than did Marx himself. This largely stems from the fact that Marx's confident prediction of capitalism's doom proved to be highly optimistic, encouraging later Marxists to focus on ideology as one of the factors explaining the unexpected resilience of the capitalist mode of production. However, important shifts in the meaning of the term also took place. In particular, all classes came to be seen to possess ideologies. In *What Is to Be Done?* ([1902] 1988), Lenin thus described the ideas of the proletariat as 'socialist ideology' or 'Marxist ideology', phrases that would have been absurd for Marx. For Lenin and most later Marxists, ideology referred to the distinctive ideas of a particular social class, ideas that advance its interests regardless of its class position. However, as all classes, the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie, have an ideology, the term was robbed of its negative or pejorative connotations. Ideology no longer implied necessary falsehood and mystification, and no longer stood in contrast to science; indeed, 'scientific socialism' (Marxism) was recognized as a form of proletarian ideology.

HEGEMONY

The ascendancy or domination of one element of a system over others; for Marxists, hegemony implies ideological domination.

The Marxist theory of ideology was perhaps developed furthest by Antonio Gramsci (see p. 125). Gramsci ([1935] 1971) argued that the capitalist class system is upheld not simply by unequal economic and political power, but by what he termed the '**hegemony**'

of bourgeois ideas and theories. Hegemony means leadership or domination and, in the sense of ideological hegemony, it refers to the capacity of bourgeois ideas to displace rival views and become, in effect, the common sense of the age. Gramsci highlighted the degree to which ideology is embedded at every level in society: in its art and literature; in its education system and mass media; in everyday language; and in popular culture. This bourgeois hegemony, Gramsci insisted, could only be challenged at the political and intellectual level, which means through the establishment of a rival 'proletarian hegemony', based on socialist principles, values and theories.

The capacity of capitalism to achieve stability by manufacturing legitimacy was also a particular concern of the Frankfurt School, a group of mainly German neo-Marxists who fled the Nazis and later settled in the USA. Its most widely known member, Herbert Marcuse (see p. 125), argued in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) that advanced industrial society has developed a 'totalitarian' character through the capacity of its ideology to manipulate thought and deny expression to oppositional views. By manufacturing false needs and turning humans into voracious consumers, modern societies are able to paralyse criticism through the spread of widespread and stultifying affluence. According to Marcuse, even the tolerance that appears to characterize liberal capitalism serves a repressive purpose, in that it creates the impression of free debate and argument, thereby concealing the extent to which indoctrination and ideological control take place.

Non-Marxist views

One of the earliest attempts to construct a non-Marxist concept of ideology was undertaken by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947). Like Marx, he acknowledged that people's ideas are shaped by their social circumstances, but, in contrast to Marx, he strove to rid ideology of its negative implications. In *Ideology and Utopia* ([1929] 1960), Mannheim portrayed ideologies as thought systems that serve to defend a particular social order, and that broadly express the interests of its dominant or ruling group. Utopias, on the other hand, are idealized representations of the future that imply the need for radical social change, invariably serving the interests of oppressed or subordinate groups. He further distinguished between 'particular' and 'total' conceptions of ideology. 'Particular' ideologies are the ideas and beliefs of specific individuals, groups or parties, while 'total' ideologies encompass the entire *Weltanschauung*, or 'world-view', of a social class, society or even historical period. In this sense, Marxism, liberal capitalism and Islamism can each be regarded as 'total' ideologies. Mannheim nevertheless held that all ideological systems, including utopias, are distorted, because each offers a partial, and necessarily self-interested, view of social reality. However, he argued that the attempt to uncover objective truth need not be abandoned altogether. According to Mannheim, objectivity is strictly the preserve of the 'socially unattached



PERSPECTIVES ON... IDEOLOGY

LIBERALS, particularly during the Cold War period, have viewed ideology as an officially sanctioned belief system that claims a monopoly of truth, often through a spurious claim to be scientific. Ideology is therefore inherently repressive, even totalitarian; its prime examples are communism and fascism.

CONSERVATIVES have traditionally regarded ideology as a manifestation of the arrogance of rationalism. Ideologies are elaborate systems of thought that are dangerous or unreliable because, being abstracted from reality, they establish principles and goals that lead to repression, or are simply unachievable. In this light, socialism and liberalism are clearly ideological.

SOCIALISTS, following Marx, have seen ideology as a body of ideas that conceal the contradictions of class society, thereby promoting false consciousness and political passivity among subordinate classes. Liberalism is the classic ruling-class ideology. Later Marxists adopted a neutral concept of ideology, regarding it as the distinctive ideas of any social class, including the working class.

FASCISTS are often dismissive of ideology as an over-systematic, dry and intellectualized form of political understanding based on mere reason rather than passion and the will. The Nazis preferred to portray their own ideas as a *Weltanschauung* or 'world-view', and not as a systematic philosophy.

GREENS have tended to regard all conventional political doctrines as part of a super-ideology of industrialism. Ideology is thus tainted by its association with arrogant humanism and growth-orientated economics – liberalism and socialism being its most obvious examples.

ISLAMISTS have treated key religious texts as ideology, on the grounds that, by expressing the revealed word of God, they provide a programme for comprehensive social reconstruction. Secular ideologies, by contrast, are rejected because they are not founded on religious principles and so lack moral substance.

intelligentsia', a class of intellectuals who alone can engage in disciplined and dispassionate enquiry because they have no economic interests of their own.

The subsequent career of the concept was marked deeply by the emergence of totalitarian dictatorships in the inter-war period, and by the heightened ideological tensions of the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. Liberal theorists in particular portrayed the regimes that developed in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia as historically new and uniquely oppressive systems of rule, and highlighted the role played by 'official' ideologies in suppressing debate and criticism, and promoting regimented obedience. Writers as different as Karl Popper (1945), Hannah Arendt (1951), J. L. Talmon (1952) and Bernard Crick (1962) and the 'end

Key concept

Pragmatism

Pragmatism, broadly defined, refers to behaviour that is shaped in accordance with practical circumstances and goals, rather than principles or ideological objectives. As a philosophical tradition, associated with 'classical pragmatists' such as William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952), pragmatism is a method for settling

metaphysical disputes that seeks to clarify the meaning of concepts and hypotheses by identifying their practical consequences. The benefits of pragmatism in politics are that it allows policies and political assertions to be judged 'on their merits' (on the basis of 'what works'), and that it prevents ideology from becoming divorced from reality and turning into mere wishful thinking. Critics, however, equate pragmatism with a lack of principle or a tendency to follow public opinion rather than lead it.

of ideology' theorists examined in Chapter 12, came to use the term 'ideology' in a highly restrictive manner, seeing fascism and communism as its prime examples. According to this usage, ideologies are 'closed' systems of thought, which, by claiming a monopoly of truth, refuse to tolerate opposing ideas and rival beliefs. Ideologies are thus 'secular religions'; they possess a 'totalizing' character and serve as instruments of social control, ensuring compliance and subordination. However, not all political creeds are ideologies by this standard. For instance, liberalism, based as it is on a fundamental commitment to freedom, tolerance and diversity, is the clearest example of an 'open' system of thought (Popper, 1945).

A distinctively conservative concept of ideology can also be identified. This is based on a long-standing conservative distrust of abstract principles and philosophies, born out of a sceptical attitude towards rationalism (see p. 31) and progress. The world is viewed as infinitely complex and largely beyond the capacity of the human mind to fathom. The foremost modern exponent of this view was Michael Oakeshott (see p. 85). 'In political activity', Oakeshott argued in *Rationalism in Politics* (1962), 'men sail a boundless and bottomless sea'. From this perspective, ideologies are seen as abstract systems of thought, sets of ideas that are destined to simplify and distort social reality because they claim to explain what is, frankly, incomprehensible. Ideology is thus equated with dogmatism: fixed or doctrinaire beliefs that are divorced from the complexities of the real world. Conservatives have therefore rejected the 'ideological' style of politics, based on attempts to reshape the world in accordance with a set of abstract principles or pre-established theories. Until infected by the highly ideological politics of the New Right, conservatives had preferred to adopt what Oakeshott called a 'traditionalist stance', which spurns ideology in favour of pragmatism (see p. 9), and looks to experience and history as the surest guides to human conduct.

Since the 1960s, however, the term 'ideology' has gained a wider currency through being refashioned according to the needs of conventional social and political analysis. This has established ideology as a neutral and objective concept, the political baggage once attached to it having been removed. Martin Seliger (1976),

for example, defined an ideology as ‘a set of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify the ends and means of organized social action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order.’ An ideology is therefore an action-orientated system of thought. So defined, ideologies are neither good nor bad, true nor false, open nor closed, liberating nor oppressive – they can be all these things.

The clear merit of this social-scientific concept is that it is inclusive, in the sense that it can be applied to all ‘isms’, to liberalism as well as Marxism, to conservatism as well as fascism, and so on. The drawback of any negative concept of ideology is that it is highly restrictive. Marx saw liberal and conservative ideas as ideological but regarded his own as scientific; liberals classify communism and fascism as ideologies but refuse to accept that liberalism is also one; traditional conservatives condemn liberalism, Marxism and fascism as ideological but portray conservatism as merely a ‘disposition’. However, any neutral concept of ideology also has its dangers. In particular, in offloading its political baggage the term may be rendered so bland and generalized that it loses its critical edge completely. If ideology is interchangeable with terms such as ‘belief system’, ‘world-view’, ‘doctrine’ or ‘political philosophy’, what is the point of continuing to pretend that it has a separate and distinctive meaning?

Contours of ideology

Any short or single-sentence definition of ideology is likely to provoke more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, it provides a useful and necessary starting point. In this book, ideology is understood as the following:

An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore have the following features. They:

- (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a ‘world-view’
- (b) advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the ‘good society’
- (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b). (See Figure 1.1.)

This definition is neither original nor novel, and is entirely in line with the social-scientific usage of the term. It nevertheless draws attention to some of the important and distinctive features of the phenomenon of ideology. In particular, it emphasizes that the complexity of ideology derives from the fact that it straddles the conventional boundaries between descriptive and

NORMATIVE

The prescription of values and standards of conduct; what ‘should be’ rather than what ‘is’.

normative thought, and between political theory and

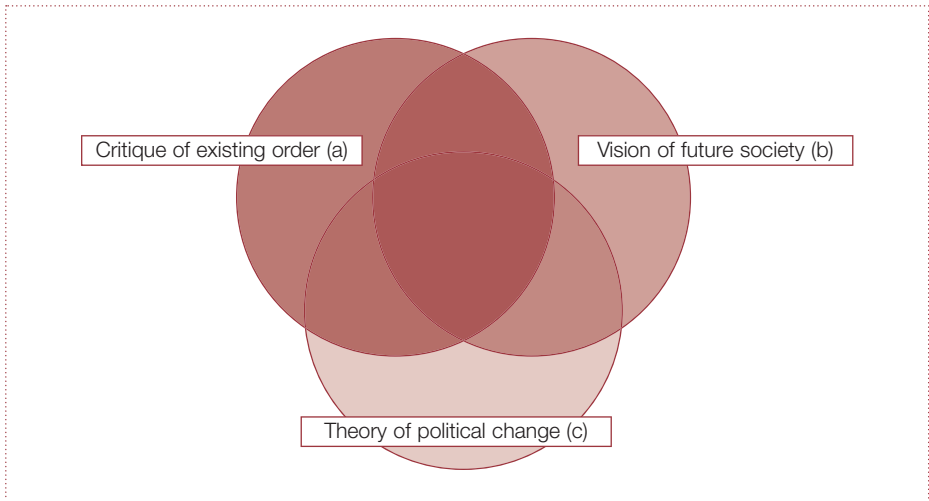


Figure 1.1 Features of ideology

political practice. Ideology, in short, brings about two kinds of synthesis: between understanding and commitment, and between thought and action.

Fusing understanding and commitment

In relation to the first synthesis, ideology blurs the distinction between what ‘is’ and what ‘should be’. Ideologies are descriptive in that, in effect, they provide individuals and groups with an intellectual map of how their society works and, more broadly, with a general view of the world. This, for instance, helps to explain the important integrative capacity of ideology, its ability to ‘situate’ people within a particular social environment. However, such descriptive understanding is deeply embedded within a set of normative or prescriptive beliefs, both about the adequacy of present social arrangements and about the nature of any alternative or future society. Ideology therefore has a powerful emotional or affective character: it is a means of expressing hopes and fears, sympathies and hatreds, as well as of articulating beliefs and understanding.

As (a) and (b) listed above are linked, ‘facts’ in ideologies inevitably tend to merge into and become confused with ‘values’. One of the implications of this is that no clear distinction can be made between ideology and science. In this light, it is helpful to treat ideologies as **paradigms**, in the sense employed by Thomas

PARADIGM

A set of related principles, doctrines and theories that help to structure the process of intellectual enquiry.

Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). Kuhn defined a paradigm as ‘the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by members of a given community’. In effect, it constitutes a framework within which the search for political

knowledge takes place, a language of political discourse. For instance, much of academic political science and, still more clearly, mainstream economics, draws on individualist and rationalist assumptions that have an unmistakable liberal heritage. The notion of ideology as an intellectual framework, or political language, is also important because it highlights the depth at which ideology structures human understanding. The tendency to deny that one's own beliefs are ideological (often while condemning other people for committing precisely the same sin) can be explained by the fact that, in providing the very concepts through which the world becomes intelligible, our own ideology is effectively invisible. We fail, or refuse, to recognize that we look at the world through a veil of theories, presuppositions and assumptions that shape what we see and thereby impose meaning on the world. As Gramsci pointed out, ideology comes to assume the status of 'common sense'.

Fusing thought and action

The second synthesis, the fusion of thought and action, reflected in the linkage between (b) and (c) in the list above, is no less significant. Seliger (1976) drew attention to this when referring to what he called the 'fundamental' and 'operative' levels of ideology. At a fundamental level, ideologies resemble political philosophies in that they deal with abstract ideas and theories, and their proponents may at times seem to be engaged in dispassionate enquiry. Although the term 'ideologue' is often reserved for crude or self-conscious supporters of particular ideologies, respected political philosophers such as John Locke (see p. 52), John Stuart Mill (see p. 53) and Friedrich Hayek (see p. 84) each worked within and contributed to ideological traditions. At an operative level, however, ideologies take the form of broad political movements, engaged in popular mobilization and the struggle for power. Ideology in this guise may be expressed in 'sloganizing', political rhetoric, party manifestos and government policies. While ideologies must, strictly speaking, be both idea-orientated and action-orientated, certain ideologies are undoubtedly stronger on one level than the other. For instance, fascism has always emphasized operative goals and, if you like, the politics of the deed. Anarchism, on the other hand, especially since the mid-twentieth century, has largely survived at a fundamental or philosophical level.

Nevertheless, ideologies invariably lack the clear shape and internal consistency of political philosophies: they are only *more* or *less* coherent. This apparent shapelessness stems in part from the fact that ideologies are not hermetically sealed systems of thought; rather, they are, typically, fluid sets of ideas that overlap with other ideologies and shade into one another. This not only fosters ideological development but also leads to the emergence of hybrid ideological forms, such as liberal conservatism, socialist feminism and conservative nationalism. Moreover, each ideology contains a range of divergent, even rival, traditions and viewpoints. Not uncommonly, disputes between supporters of the same ideology are more passionate and bitter than arguments between supporters of rival ideologies, because what is at stake is the true nature of the ideology in question – what is 'true' socialism, 'true' liberalism or 'true' anarchism?

Such conflicts, both between and within ideological traditions, are made more confusing by the fact that they are often played out with the use of the same political vocabulary, each side investing terms such as ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘justice’ and ‘equality’ with their own meanings. This highlights the problem of what W. B. Gallie (1955–6) termed ‘essentially contested concepts’. These are concepts about which there is such deep controversy that no settled or agreed definition can ever be developed. In this sense, the concept of ideology is certainly ‘essentially contested’, as indeed are the other terms examined in the ‘Perspectives on ...’ boxes found in this book.

Clearly, however, there must be a limit to the incoherence or shapelessness of ideologies. There must be a point at which, by abandoning a particularly cherished principle or embracing a previously derided theory, an ideology loses its identity or, perhaps, is absorbed into a rival ideology. Could liberalism remain liberalism if it abandoned its commitment to liberty? Would socialism any longer be socialism if it developed an appetite for violence and war? One way of dealing with this problem, following Michael Freeden (1996), is to highlight the morphology, the form and structure, of an ideology in terms of its key concepts, in the same way that the arrangement of furniture in a room helps us to distinguish between a kitchen, a bedroom, a lounge, and so on. Each ideology is therefore characterized by a cluster of core, adjacent and peripheral concepts, not all of which need be present for a theory or a doctrine to be recognized as belonging to that ideology. A kitchen, for instance, does not cease to be a kitchen simply because the sink or the cooker is removed. Similarly, a kitchen remains a kitchen over time despite the arrival of new inventions such as dishwashers and microwave ovens.

However, ideologies may be either ‘thick’ or ‘thin’, in terms of the configuration of their conceptual furniture. Whereas liberalism, conservatism and socialism are based on a broad and distinctive set of values, doctrines and beliefs, others, such as anarchism and feminism, are more thin-centred, often having a ‘cross-cutting’ character, in that they incorporate elements from ‘thicker’ ideological traditions (see Figure 1.2). This also explains why there is (perhaps unresolvable) debate and

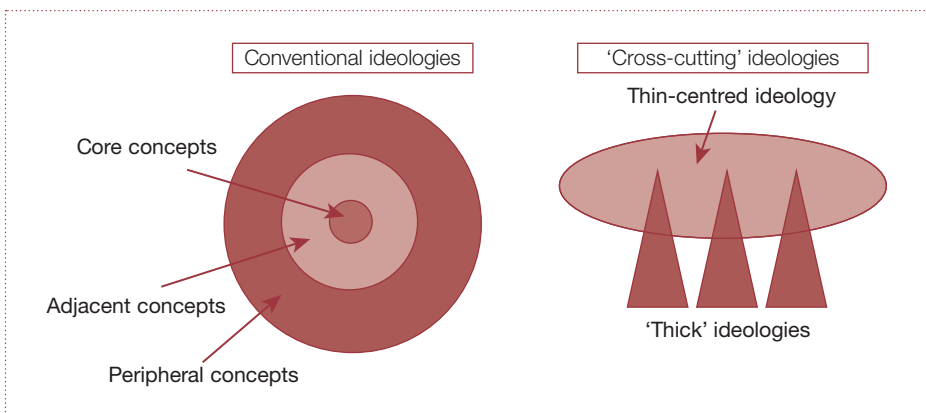


Figure 1.2 Contrasting ideological structures

confusion about whether nationalism and multiculturalism in particular are ideologies in their own right or merely embellishments to other, 'host', ideologies. But what does this tell us about the relationship between ideology, truth and power?

Ideology, truth and power

For Marx, as we have seen, ideology was the implacable enemy of truth. Falsehood is implicit in ideology because, being the creation of the ruling class, its purpose is to disguise exploitation and oppression. Nevertheless, as Mannheim recognized, to follow Marx in believing that the proletariat needs no illusion or ideology is to accept a highly romanticized view of the working masses as the emancipators of humankind. However, Mannheim's own solution to this problem, a faith in free-floating intellectuals, does not get us much further. All people's views are shaped, consciously or subconsciously, by broader social and cultural factors, and while education may enable them to defend these views more fluently and persuasively, there is little evidence that it makes those views any less subjective or any more dispassionate.

This implies that there exists no objective standard of truth against which ideologies can be judged. Indeed, to suggest that ideologies can be deemed to be either true or false is to miss the vital point that they embody values, dreams and aspirations that are, by their very nature, not susceptible to scientific analysis. No one can 'prove' that one theory of justice is preferable to any other, any more than rival conceptions of human nature can be tested by surgical intervention to demonstrate once and for all that human beings possess rights, are entitled to freedom, or are naturally selfish or naturally sociable. Ideologies are embraced less because they stand up to scrutiny and logical analysis, and more because they help individuals, groups and societies to make sense of the world in which they live. As Andrew Vincent (2009) put it, 'We examine ideology as fellow travellers, not as neutral observers.'

Nevertheless, ideologies undoubtedly embody a claim to uncover truth; in this sense, they can be seen, in Michel Foucault's (1991) words, as 'regimes of truth'. By providing us with a language of political discourse, a set of assumptions and presuppositions about how society does and should work, ideology structures both what we think and how we act. As a 'regime of truth', ideology is always linked to power. In a world of competing truths, values and theories, ideologies seek to prioritize certain values over others, and to invest legitimacy in particular theories or sets of meanings. Furthermore, as ideologies provide intellectual maps of the social world, they help to establish the relationship between individuals and groups on the one hand, and the larger structure of power on the other. Ideologies therefore play a crucial role in either upholding the prevailing power structure (by portraying it as fair, natural, rightful or whatever) or in weakening or challenging it, by highlighting its iniquities or injustices and by drawing attention to the attractions of alternative power structures.

Left and right

The origins of the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ in politics date back to the French Revolution and the seating arrangements of radicals and aristocrats at the first meeting of the Estates General in 1789. The left/right divide therefore originally reflected the stark choice between revolution and reaction. The terms have subsequently been used to highlight a divide that supposedly runs throughout the world of political thought and action, helping both to provide insight into the nature of particular ideologies and to uncover relationships between political ideologies more generally. Left and right are usually understood as the poles of a political spectrum, enabling people to talk about the ‘centre-left’, the ‘far right’ and so on. This is in line with a linear political spectrum that travels from left wing to right wing, as shown in Figure 1.3. However, the terms left and right have been used to draw attention to a variety of distinctions.

Stemming from their original meanings, left and right have been used to sum up contrasting attitudes to political change in general, left-wing thinking welcoming change, usually based on a belief in **progress**, while right-wing thinking resists change and seeks to defend the **status quo**. Inspired by works such as Adorno et al.’s *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), attempts have been made to explain ideological differences, and especially rival attitudes to change, in terms of people’s psychological needs, motives and desires (Jost et al., 2003). In this light, conservative ideology, to take one example, is shaped by a deep psychological aversion to uncertainty and instability (an idea examined in Chapter 3). An alternative construction of the left/right divide focuses on different attitudes to economic organization and the role of the state. Left-wing views thus support intervention and collectivism (see p. 99), while right-wing views favour the market and individualism (see p. 28). Bobbio (1996), by

PROGRESS

Moving forward; the belief that history is characterized by human advancement underpinned by the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom.

STATUS QUO

The existing state of affairs.

contrast, argued that the fundamental basis for the distinction between left and right lies in differing attitudes to equality, left-wingers advocating greater equality while right-wingers treat equality as either impossible or undesirable. This may also help to explain the continuing relevance of the left/right divide, as the ‘great problem of inequality’ remains unresolved at both national and global levels.



Figure 1.3 Linear spectrum

As a means of providing insight into the character of political ideologies and how they relate to one another, the traditional linear political spectrum nevertheless has a range of drawbacks. These include the following:

- As all ideologies contain rival, or even contradictory, elements, locating them clearly on a linear political spectrum against a single criterion can be notoriously difficult. Anarchism, for instance, can be seen as either ultra-left-wing or ultra-right-wing, since it encompasses both anarcho-communist and anarcho-capitalist tendencies. Similarly, although fascism is usually portrayed as a ‘far right’ ideology, it contains elements that have a ‘leftist’ character, not least an anti-capitalist strain that articulates hostility towards big business.
- The ideologies that are traditionally placed at the extreme wings of the linear spectrum may have more in common with one another than they do with their ‘centrist’ neighbours. During the Cold War period in particular, it was widely claimed that communism and fascism resembled one another by virtue of a shared tendency towards totalitarianism (see p. 207). Such a view led to the idea that the political spectrum should be horseshoe-shaped, not linear (see Figure 1.4).
- As political ideologies manifest themselves differently in different geographical contexts, it may be impossible to assign them an agreed left/right identity. Thus, while in the USA liberalism is viewed as more left-wing than conservatism (the former being linked to ‘big’ government and the latter to ‘minimal’ government), the opposite is often the case in continental Europe, where it is common for liberalism to be associated with free-market thinking, and conservatism to be associated with social intervention, especially when it is influenced by Christian democracy.
- As political ideologies are fluid entities, capable, some would argue, of almost constant re-invention, our notions of left and right must be regularly updated. This fluidity can be seen in the case of reformist socialist parties in many parts of the world, which, since the 1980s, have tended to distance themselves from a belief in nationalization and welfare and, instead, embrace market economics. The implication of this for the left/right divide

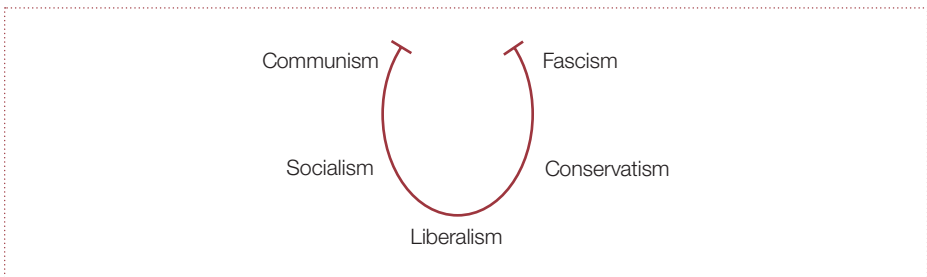


Figure 1.4 Horseshoe spectrum

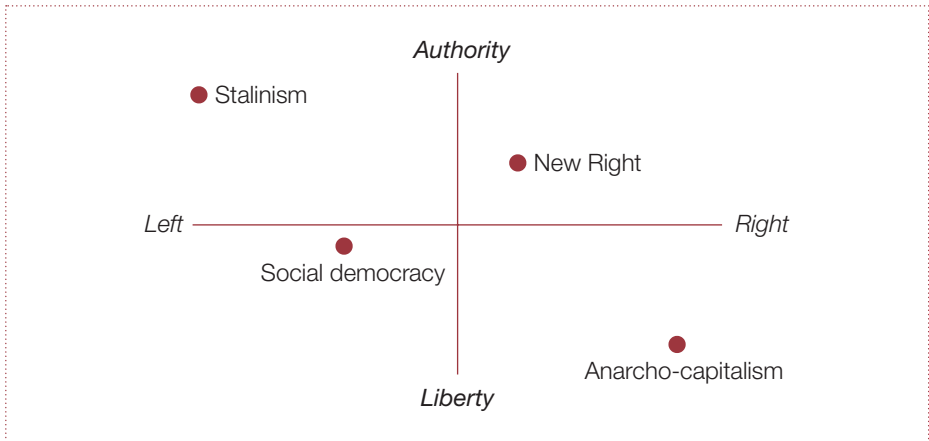


Figure 1.5 Two-dimensional spectrum

is either that reformist socialism has shifted to the right, moving from the centre-left to the centre-right, or that the spectrum itself has shifted to the right, redefining reformist socialism, and therefore leftism, in the process.

- A final drawback is that as ideological debate has developed and broadened over the years, the linear spectrum has seemed increasingly simplistic and generalized, the left/right divide only capturing one dimension of a more complex series of political interactions. This has given rise to the idea of the two-dimensional spectrum, with, as pioneered by Eysenck (1964), a liberty/authority vertical axis being added to the established left/right horizontal axis (see Figure 1.5). Others, however, have gone further and argued that the left/right divide has effectively been rendered redundant as a result of the advent of so-called ‘new’ ideological traditions. This notion is discussed in Chapter 12 (see pp. 327–8).

New ideologies for old?

Ideology may have been an inseparable feature of politics since the late eighteenth century (it is often traced back to the 1789 French Revolution), but its content has changed significantly over time, with the rate of ideological transformation having accelerated since the 1960s. New ideologies have emerged, some once-potent ideologies have faded in significance, and all ideologies have gone through a process of sometimes radical redefinition and renewal. Political ideology arose out of a transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. In simple terms, the earliest, or ‘classical’, ideological traditions – liberalism, conservatism and socialism – developed as contrasting attempts to shape emergent industrial society. While liberalism championed the cause of individualism, the market and, initially at least,

minimal government, conservatism stood in defence of an increasingly embattled *ancien régime*, and socialism advanced the quite different vision of a society based on community, equality and cooperation.

As the nineteenth century progressed, each of these ideologies acquired a clearer doctrinal character, and came to be associated with a particular social class or stratum of society. Simply put, liberalism was the ideology of the rising middle class, conservatism was the ideology of the aristocracy or nobility, and socialism was the ideology of the growing working class. In turn, political parties developed to articulate the interests of these classes and to give 'operative' expression to the various ideologies. These parties therefore typically had a programmatic character. The central theme that emerged from ideological argument and debate during this period was the battle between two rival economic philosophies: capitalism and socialism. Political ideology thus had a strong economic focus. The battle lines between capitalism and socialism were significantly sharpened by the 1917 Russian Revolution, which created the world's first socialist state. Indeed, throughout what is sometimes called the 'short' twentieth century (from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the collapse of communism in 1989–91), and particularly during the Cold War period (1945–90), international politics was structured along ideological lines, as the capitalist West confronted the communist East.

However, since around the 1960s, the ideological landscape has been transformed. Not only have major changes occurred within established or 'classical' ideologies (for instance, in the rise of the New Left, the New Right and, most dramatically, with the collapse of orthodox communism), but a series of 'new' ideological traditions have also emerged. The most significant of these are set out in Figure 1.6. The designation of these ideologies as 'new' can nevertheless be misleading, as each of them has roots that stretch back to the nineteenth century, if not beyond. Moreover, they have also tended to draw heavily on existing, mainstream ideologies, giving them, typically, a hybrid or cross-cutting character. These ideologies are 'new', though, in the sense that they have given particular areas of ideological debate a prominence they never previously enjoyed. In the process, they have fostered the emergence of fresh and challenging ideological perspectives. But why

'Classical' ideologies	'New' ideologies
Liberalism	Feminism
Conservatism	Green ideology
Socialism	Multiculturalism
Nationalism	Islamism
Anarchism	
Fascism (?)	

Figure 1.6 'Classical' and 'new' ideologies

has this process of ideological transformation occurred? The three main reasons are the following:

- the emergence of postindustrial societies and ‘new’ social movements
- the collapse of communism and the changing world order
- the rise of globalization and of cosmopolitan sensibilities.

The structure and nature of modern societies have undergone a profound process of change since about the 1950s. Social thinkers have heralded this change in a variety of ways. For example, Beck (1992) proclaimed the transition from the ‘first’ to the ‘second’ modernity, Giddens (1994) analysed the shift from ‘simple’ to ‘reflexive’ modernity, while Baumann (2000) discussed the change from ‘solid’ to ‘liquid’ modernity. At the heart of these changes, however, is the transition from industrial societies to postindustrial ones. Industrial societies tended to be solidaristic, in that they were based on relatively clear class divisions (crudely, those between capital and labour), which, in turn, helped to structure the political process, including the party system, interest-group competition and ideological debate. Postindustrial societies are different in a number of ways. They tend, in the first place, to be more affluent societies, in which the struggle for material subsistence has become less pressing for a growing proportion of people. In conditions of wider prosperity, individuals express more interest in ‘quality of life’ or ‘postmaterial’ issues. These are typically concerned with morality, political justice and personal fulfilment, and include issues such as gender equality, world peace, cultural recognition, environmental protection and animal rights. Second, the structure of society and the nature of social connectedness have altered. Whereas industrial societies tended to generate ‘thick’ social bonds, based on social class and nationality in particular, postindustrial societies tend to be characterized by growing **individualization** and ‘thinner’ and more fluid social bonds. This has been reflected in the growth of so-called ‘new’ **social movements**, such as the women’s movement, the environmental or green movement and the peace movement, which have played a key role in reshaping political identities and articulating new ideological agendas.

The ideological ramifications of the collapse of communism have been profound and wide-ranging, and, in many ways, continue to unfold. The ideology most clearly affected has been socialism. Revolutionary socialism, especially in its Soviet-style, Marxist–Leninist guise, was revealed as a spent force, both because of the economic failings of central planning and because of the system’s association with state authoritarianism (see p. 74). However, democratic socialism has also been affected; some argue that it has been fatally compromised. In particular, democratic socialists have lost faith in ‘top-down’ state control, and have come to accept the market as the only reliable means of generating wealth. The collapse of communism, and the general retreat from socialism, has provided opportunities for new

INDIVIDUALIZATION

The process through which people are encouraged to see themselves as individuals, possibly at the expense of their sense of social/moral responsibility.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

A collective body distinguished by a high level of commitment and political activism, but often lacking clear organization.

Key concept

Globalization

Globalization is the emergence of a web of interconnectedness which means that our lives are shaped increasingly by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us, thus giving rise to 'supraterritorial' connections between people. However, globalization is a complex process that has a range of manifestations. *Economic* globalization

is the process through which national economies have, to a greater or lesser extent, been absorbed into a single global economy. *Cultural* globalization is the process whereby information, commodities and images produced in one part of the world have entered into a global flow that tends to 'flatten out' cultural differences worldwide. *Political* globalization is the process through which policy-making responsibilities have been passed from national governments to international organizations.

ideological forces. Chief among these have been nationalism, particularly ethnic nationalism, which has displaced Marxism–Leninism as the leading ideology in many postcommunist states, and religious fundamentalism (see p. 188), which, in its various forms, has had profound significance in the developing world. The advent of global terrorism, through the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, and the initiation of the so-called 'war on terror' had further consequences for political ideologies. The 'war on terror' highlighted the emergence of new ideological battle lines that, some believe, may define global politics in the twenty-first century. In the widely discussed if highly controversial thesis of Samuel Huntington (see p. 329), the ideological battle between capitalism and communism has been displaced by a 'clash of civilizations' (see p. 310), in which the most significant division is between Islam and the West.

Globalization (see p. 20) is not a single process but a complex of processes, sometimes overlapping and interlocking but also, at times, contradictory and oppositional ones. In its economic, cultural and political forms, globalization forges connections between previously unconnected people, communities, institutions and societies. This interconnectedness, however, has had sharply contrasting implications. On the one hand, it has stimulated homogenizing trends that have seen a 'flattening out' of economic, cultural and other differences between the countries and regions of the world. In ideological terms, this homogenizing trend has been closely associated with the advance of liberalism, whether in the form of a liberal economic order (based

COSMOPOLITANISM

The belief that the world constitutes a single moral, and possibly political, community, in that people have obligations towards all other people in the world (see p. 191).

on free trade and free markets), the spread of liberal democracy (see p. 40), or the growth of **cosmopolitan** sensibilities, often linked to the idea of human rights (see p. 58). However, on the other hand, globalization has been a distinctively asymmetrical process that has spawned new forms of inequality and generated a range of oppositional forces. These include a strengthening of

religious fundamentalism in the developing world, leading, as Benjamin Barber (1995) put it, to a confrontation between ‘Jihad’ and ‘MacWorld’, and the emergence of an anti-globalization or anti-capitalist movement in the developed world that has recast, and sometimes bolstered, the ideas of anarchism, feminism and green ideology.

The ‘new’ ideologies are not only new, but also differ from ‘classical’ ideologies in a range of other ways. This has altered the focus and sometimes the terms of ideological debate. Three broad differences can be identified. In the first place, there has been a shift away from economics and towards culture. Liberalism, conservatism and socialism were primarily concerned with issues of economic organization, or at least their moral vision was grounded in a particular economic model. By contrast, and in their various ways, the ‘new’ ideologies are more interested in culture than in economics: their primary concerns tend to be orientated around people’s values, beliefs and ways of life, rather than economic well-being or even social justice.

Second, there has been a shift from social politics to identity politics (see p. 282). Identity links the personal to the social, in seeing the individual as ‘embedded’ in a particular cultural, social, institutional and ideological context, but it also highlights the scope for personal choice and self-definition, reflecting a general social trend towards individualization. In this sense, the ‘new’ ideologies offer individuals not worked-out sets of political solutions that ‘fit’ their social position, but, rather, provide them with a range of ideological options. This means that political activism has become, in effect, a lifestyle choice.

UNIVERSALISM

The belief that it is possible to uncover certain values and principles that are applicable to all people and all societies, regardless of historical, cultural and other differences.

PARTICULARISM

The belief that historical, cultural and other differences between people and societies are more significant than what they have in common.

Finally, there has been a shift from **universalism** to **particularism**. Whereas, most clearly, liberalism and socialism shared an Enlightenment faith in reason and progress, reflecting the belief that there is a common core to human identity shared by people everywhere, ‘new’ ideologies, such as feminism, ethnic nationalism, multiculturalism and the various forms of religious fundamentalism, stress the importance of factors such as gender, locality, culture and ethnicity. In that sense, they practise the ‘politics of difference’ rather than the politics of universal emancipation.

Using this book

This book examines each ideology or ideological tradition in turn. They are organized, roughly, in chronological terms, so that the larger process of ideological development, whereby one ideology influences others and so on, can be mapped out. Each chapter has the same general structure:

- Following a Preview, which highlights the broad nature of the ideology, the origins and historical development of the ideology in question are examined.

- The next main section explains and analyses the core themes of the ideology, the values, doctrines and theories that, taken together, define the shape or morphology of the ideology. This section highlights what is distinctive about each ideological tradition, but also notes overlaps with other ideologies, where relevant.
- The following sections deal with the sub-traditions that characterize each and every political ideology. The focus here is not only on the distinctive features of each sub-tradition, many of which are, in any case, hybrid ideological constructs (conservative nationalism, socialist feminism, liberal multiculturalism and so on), but also on the internal coherence, or lack of coherence, of the ideology as a whole. This section therefore focuses on areas of disagreement between supporters of the same ideology.
- The final main section examines contemporary developments within the ideological tradition in question and reflects, in particular, on how, and to what extent, it has been reshaped in the light of globalizing tendencies.
- Definitions of key terms, highlighted in the text, appear on the page where they are used, instead of in a separate glossary.
- Boxed material can be found in each chapter, providing more information about:
 - major thinkers in each tradition
 - key concepts
 - major events in the history of the ideology
 - rival perspectives on important political themes
 - points of tension within each ideology
 - how the ideology is configured internally.
- Each chapter concludes with a list of questions for discussion, and suggestions for further reading. A full bibliography appears at the end of the book.
- As a navigational aid, the index entries for material in boxes are in **bold**, and the on-page definitions are in *italics*.
- The companion website features, among other things, a searchable glossary of key terms, advice about websites to support further study, and articles and other material relevant to political ideologies.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Are ‘practical men’ really the slaves of ‘academic scribblers’ (Keynes)?
- How does the Marxist concept of ideology differ from the mainstream concept?
- Is ideology necessarily false? If so, why?
- Can ‘socially unattached’ intellectuals rise above ideology?
- Are all political ideas ideological, or only some of them?
- To what extent do ideologies differ in terms of their conceptual structure?
- How does an ideology differ from a philosophy?
- To what extent does the left/right divide aid our understanding of political ideologies?
- How should the political spectrum be presented, and why?
- What is new about the ‘new’ ideologies?
- To what extent has ideological commitment become a life-style choice?
- Does the rise of ‘new’ ideologies mean that the old ones are now defunct?



FURTHER READING

Festenstein, M. and M. Kenny, *Political Ideologies: A Reader and Guide* (2005). A very useful collection of extracts from key texts on ideology and ideologies, supported by lucid commentaries.

Freeden, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (2004). An accessible and lively introduction to the concept: an excellent starting place.

Freeden, M. et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (2015). A wide-ranging, up-to-date and authoritative account of debates about the nature of ideology and the shape of the various ideological traditions.

McLellan, D., *Ideology* (1995). A clear and short yet comprehensive introduction to the elusive concept of ideology.