

# Ideological Analysis

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## 1. Introduction

The last two decades have seen a proliferation of academic work on ideology (Freeden et al. 2013: v). While the study of ideology is older than this (Larrain 1979; McLellan 1995), recent developments have made it increasingly appropriate to speak of ‘ideology studies’ or ‘ideological analysis’ as a distinct interdisciplinary field of research within the humanities and social sciences. Researchers of ideology have made significant methodological, theoretical and empirical advances, in disciplines as diverse as political theory (Freeden 1996), intellectual history (Tully 1983; Skinner 2002b), political psychology (Rosenberg 1988; Jost and Major 2001; Jost et al. 2009a; Haidt et al. 2009), discourse analysis (Howarth et al. 2000; Fairclough 2010), political science (Knight 2006; Carmines and D’Amico 2015), sociology (Boudon 1989), and social and cultural studies (Eagleton 1991; Hall 1996; Shelby 2003). Indeed, the biggest problem facing the contemporary study of ideology is the fragmentation of work across disciplines – one thing this chapter attempts to address (for existing interdisciplinary work see: Žižek 1994a; van Dijk 1998; Freeden 2007; Freeden et al. 2013). But while problems and lacunae remain, ideological analysis is currently at a high point of sophistication, diversity and output (for guideline maps to such contemporary research, see: Norval (2000), Leader Maynard (2013), and Leader Maynard and Mildemberger, forthcoming).

The overwhelming bulk of this work has occurred within research domains that could loosely be described as *empirical*. But that is not the focus of this chapter. I contend that ideological analysis is also important for the sort of conceptual and normative political theory covered in most chapters of this volume. Some theorists, notably the leading ideology scholar Michael Freedden, have argued for the relevance of ideological analysis to political theory by advocating a broad conceptualisation of the latter: where political theory goes beyond conceptual and normative analysis to include theoretical reflection about empirical features of politics (Freedden 2005b; Freedden 2006; Freedden 2008; Freedden 2013b: especially Ch. 1 & 2). There are merits to this argument, but this is also not my approach here. Instead, I’m happy to limit the scope of normative political theory to a normative form – though I assume that this encompasses a broad range of ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ theorising (Valentini 2012). I will show how ideological analysis can support such normative political theory (although my discussion should be useful for those engaged in empirical work too). In section 1, I discuss how to conceptualise ideology, before going on, in section 2, to explain how ideological analysis can be valuable for normative political theory, arguing that political theorists need to attend to it more frequently. Finally, in the more substantive section 3, I offer an integrative account of how to engage in rigorous ideological analysis.

At many points my comments are necessarily cursory. My objective here is to offer the most practically useful guide to engaging in ideological analysis for scholars and students. Offering the fullest justification for every piece of advice I give would make it impossible to explain that advice clearly. Instead, my bibliographical references

should serve to link readers to key texts which examine the corresponding issues in more depth.

## 2. The meaning of ideology

To analyse ideology is to be concerned with two important features of human beings. First, **ideological analysis requires a recognition that different individuals, groups, institutions or societies are characterised by *distinctive idiosyncratic worldviews* that meaningfully shape their political thought and political behaviour.** To understand, explain or predict what they say, think and do, we therefore need to identify and study those worldviews. This stands in contrast to modes of political analysis that present human beings as fundamentally mentally alike – as, for example, uniform rational actors – or as overwhelmingly governed by forces that render distinctive worldviews irrelevant – like class position or a universal set of material self-interests. Second, ideological analysis reflects an awareness that we cannot simply study the role of individual ‘ideas’ in isolation. **To explain why human beings buy into certain ideas, and to explain how and why those ideas affect their behaviour in certain ways, we have to appreciate how those ideas operate as part of broader *systems of ideas*.** Taken on its own, for example, the way many of the materially worst-off members of liberal democracies support low spending on the sorts of social services they would benefit from, and simultaneously support tax cuts for the wealthiest, looks almost inexplicable (Jost and Hunyady 2005). Yet such a view is often just one component of a set of ideological claims regarding the historically demonstrated superiority of the small free market state, the need to minimise taxes and state spending in order to promote (wealthy) ‘job-creators’, the alluring promise that wealth and success are accessible to every individual who works hard, and the demand to avoid dangerous ‘socialist’ notions that would create a slippery slope to an authoritarian, unfree society. Once this interlocking system of ideas is brought into focus, the reasons some individuals might accept such ideas becomes clearer.

Ideological analysis is thus concerned with the excavation and forensic examination of distinctive systems of ideas and the powerful role they play in political life. Yet ideological analysis has frequently been undermined by the infamous diversity of meanings that have been attached to the term ‘ideology’ (Eagleton 1991: 1-2; Freedman 1996: 13, 47; van Dijk 1998: 1; McLellan 1995: 1; Humphrey 2005: 225, 227). To remedy this problem, I offer a definition of ideology below that reflects dominant contemporary usages amongst theorists of ideology – which I suggest have finally started to converge on a shared understanding (Leader Maynard and Mildenberger, forthcoming). But regardless of whether readers find my definition amenable or not, **it is always critical to clarify what one means by ‘ideology’.** And in doing so, scholars must avoid what Matthew Humphrey (2005: 299) has aptly labelled the stipulative error: justifying particular definitions (against competitors) by superficially empirical assertions about ‘what ideology is’, when how to classify different bits of the empirical world is precisely what is being disagreed over in conceptual disputes. Rather, **different definitions should be justified according to how functionally useful they are for research.**

This functional usefulness should be assessed with reference to three main considerations:

- (a) essential features about the way ideology has been used in general academic and lay discourse – for example, it would be a drawback of a particular conception if it ended up asserting that phenomena universally seen as ideologies, like liberalism, communism or socialism, were in fact not ideologies;
- (b) the functional usefulness of the conception for the *specific research project* at hand;
- (c) the functional usefulness of the conception for *broader academic understanding across projects and disciplines* – highly idiosyncratic conceptions, that are liable to promote confusion or fragmentation in usage across different research communities, are undesirable.

Since (b) and (c) can pull us in opposite directions, striking a balance between them is necessary.

So there needn't be one single definition of ideology that all theorists should use. But in this chapter I follow recent trends in ideological analysis by suggesting that **political theorists should use a conception of ideology that is both broad and non-pejorative** – respectively, that it encompasses a large range of idea-systems and thought practices, and that it does not assume that ideology is necessarily false, inflexible, poorly formulated, or otherwise 'bad'. Such a conception is recommended by two of the most sustained conceptual investigations into ideology, by Malcolm Hamilton (1987), and John Gerring (1997), and has been favoured by many other leading theorists (van Dijk 1998: 11-12; Freedon 1996; Knight 2006; Jost 2006). Following their advice, I advocate the use of the following definition (closely resembling Hamilton's):

A political ideology is a distinctive system of normative and/or reputedly factual ideas, typically shared by members of groups or societies, which shapes their understandings of their political world and guides their political behaviour.

This definition is not so broad that *all* sets of ideas become indistinguishably ideological, but it rejects assertions (by politicians or political theorists) that certain political worldviews are 'beyond ideology', 'not ideological but pragmatic' (see also: Bell 1960; Freedon 2005a; Coote 2014). Such claims frequently suggest exceptionalism, cryptonormativity, and an attempt at partisan and contestable political tactics rather than sound conceptual distinctions (Žižek 1994b; Freedon 2005a; Worsnip 2015). In this broad and non-pejorative conception, ideologies denote whatever distinctive idea-systems people do in fact use to think about politics. No human being can engage in some kind of perfectly rational disembodied reflection about politics that simply 'sees the world as it is' uninfluenced by prior thinking. Instead every individual's political thinking occurs via networks of values, meanings, narratives, theories, assumptions, concepts, expectations, exemplars, past experiences, images, stereotypes, and beliefs about matters of fact already existing in their mind (Geertz 1964; Berger and Luckmann 1967; Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Wittgenstein 2001; Baurmann 2007). These networks of ideas vary, at least somewhat, from person to person, group to group, and society to society, which is what makes them important objects of study. In this conception ideology is not

reprehensible but inescapable. As Aletta Norval (2000: 316) writes: 'It is this emphasis on the ubiquity of ideology ... that is at the heart of contemporary approaches to the question of ideology.'

This broad and non-pejorative conception stands in contrast to more 'negative' or 'critical' conceptions that have been historically prominent in the study of ideology, especially in Marxist theory, but are increasingly unpopular (van Dijk 1998: 3; Leader Maynard and Mildenerger, forthcoming). Such negative conceptions vary in the pejorative connotations they attach to ideology – ideologies might be defined as 'false consciousness', or oppression-legitimizing systems, or especially fanatical or dogmatic forms of belief, or some other unfavourable mode of thought. Advocates of such conceptions of ideology frequently argued that such connotations are essential for the concept of ideology to retain any critical power and normative relevance (Larrain 1979: 15, 52, 118; Thompson 1984: 4, 12 & 82; Boudon 1989: 24-30; Rosen 2000: 393-5). But this argument has consistently been offered as a non-sequitur. There is no reason why a concept needs to be *defined* pejoratively in order to be *useful* for critical or otherwise normatively evaluative work (Larrain 1979: 77; McLellan 1995: 23; Freedman 2005a: 262; Steger 2008: 4-5). As Teun van Dijk (1998: 11) argues :

Does [the] more general conception of ideology take away the critical edge of the enterprise, as is sometimes suggested, or prevent ideological critique? Of course it does not. No more than that the use of the general concept of 'power' precludes a critical analysis of power *abuse*, as well as solidarity with the forms of counter-power we call resistance.

What *is* lost with a broad and non-pejorative conception of ideology is the ability to critique something *simply by labelling it ideology*. But this sort of terminological smearing is not the limit of normative critique, nor a persuasive form of it. And a key problem with pejorative conceptions of ideology is that they tend to encourage a prejudicial form of analysis. It is notable that some of the major non-Marxist figures to deploy them were, ironically, anti-Communist scholars during the Cold War. For these figures, the concept of ideology denoted 'extremist', 'totalitarian' and 'anti-modern' views outside the mainstream of Western politics. Such an understanding amounted, as Terry Eagleton (1991: 4) aptly caricatures, to the claim 'that the Soviet Union is in the grip of ideology while the United States sees things as they really are'. In these examples and others, pejorative definitions conceptually encode the sorts of normative commitments political theory is intended to render explicit and subject to interrogation and reflection.

By contrast, broad and non-pejorative conceptions allow us to conduct a more open-minded and rigorous form of analysis where, as Humphrey (2005: 237) puts it, 'ideological forms are not presupposed but emerge through careful empirical analysis of thought instantiations.' And they also allow us to avoid high levels of fragmentation in scholarly understandings of ideology, by keeping the master concept inclusive, but leaving room for the identification of subtypes of ideology that might be dogmatic, irrational, etc.

We should therefore maintain a distinction drawn by Freeden (1996: 27-8, 133; 2013b: 52-3) between *ideological analysis* (the study of real world ideologies) and *ideologizing* (the construction of ideologies, which occurs partly through political theory). These two activities are always entangled. Since we all think about politics under the influence of our various respective ideologies there may be no *completely* neutral social-science or analytical philosophy. But it is vital to recognize a difference between the construction of our own concepts and normative principles, and the efforts to find out what are or were the extant concepts and normative principles (and other ideas) of others (Weber 2009: 145-6). This chapter explains how to do the latter in ways which inform, support or otherwise take a central role in the former.

I make three further remarks about the meaning of ideology. First, **an important distinction should be drawn between what we might call *personal ideologies*, by which I mean the particular ideologies of individual people, and *group ideologies***, that describe the systems of ideas held in common by groups. Ideologies ultimately exist in minds (though they have emergent social aspects too), and groups do not truly have minds, so imputing ideologies to groups represents something of a metaphorical abstraction, though a benign and often productive one (Thagard 2010). Every member of a group inevitably has slightly distinct ways of thinking – slightly different personal ideologies. But scholars can and usually do talk of group ideologies to make generalizations about important similarities between these personal ideologies of members of the group, and to draw attention to emergent properties of ideologies as they become consciously identified in social discourse and embedded in institutions and practices. There is nothing mysterious about this in and of itself (though of course such generalizations can be formulated erroneously), and a productive analogy can be drawn with the way we talk about languages. Just as every ‘conservative’ thinks in a somewhat different way, so every speaker of ‘Spanish’ or ‘Urdu’ will speak in a unique, idiosyncratic manner. But in both scholarly and lay talk, we can productively talk about the language they speak in common, in a way that generalises about key similarities without denying individual variation (van Dijk 1998: 30). So too with ideology. And like languages, the ideologies we talk about can involve varying levels of generalization – from low (Al Qaeda leadership ideology, IMF neo-liberalism) to medium (Rawlsian liberalism, Stalinism) to high (socialism, conservatism). **Labelling ideological sub-types in this way is useful for retaining conceptual precision in the sorts of ideologies we are talking about.**

Second, **it is important to appreciate that ideologies are substantively rich phenomena.** It is common to talk about ideologies as defined by certain core concepts, values, political ambitions or dominant narratives. But ideologies are built from all of these and a vast array of other sorts of idea or idea-cluster: identities, myths, memories, stereotypes, epistemic rules, beliefs about matters of fact, rhetorical repertoires, strategic preferences, exemplars, expectations, horizons of possibility, images, lived experiences, and so forth. Human beings differ in their thinking on all of these, often in important ways that exert a powerful effect over their broader thinking and behaviour. By thinking of ideologies as complex networks of a vast array of notions, one can engage seriously with the idiosyncratic forms of thinking that characterise particular individuals and groups in the real world.

Third, while I advocate a somewhat ‘cognitive’ understanding of ideologies, **it is vital to recognise the inextricable relationship between ideology and discourse** (van

Dijk 2013). Since it is arduous and ineffective to invent new ways of talking from scratch on every issue, ideologies are characterized by certain ways of talking, certain rhetorical repertoires, and certain arguments and justifications. These are picked up and reused by individuals to engage in argument, legitimation, persuasion, sophistry, and so forth. And individuals' ideologies are, in turn, shaped by the discourse of themselves and others – as new ideas are encountered in communication, engaged with, and rejected or internalised. Many ideologies are also represented socially in discourse, picking up social meanings and connotations, and they may inhabit social movements and become embedded in social institutions and groups through discourses and practices (van Dijk 1998: Ch. 3). Ideological analysis is thus inevitably concerned with not just how people think, but also how they talk and act.

### 3. Why should normative political theorists use ideological analysis?

In this section I provide four main reasons to think that ideological analysis can be of deep relevance to the kind of normative political theory that is the focus of this volume.

#### 3.1. Evaluating institutions and ideologies

Perhaps most obviously, ideologies may be essential components of the operation or legitimation of various institutions and social processes that are problematic (or progressive) from a normative political theory standpoint. Put simply, ideologies have major social and political effects, and are involved in the use of social and political power. There are two key ways in which ideological analysis supports political theory in grappling with such effects.

First, **ideological analysis allows us to diagnose the normative failings of existing political institutions by illustrating the problematic ideologies they generate** (or, conversely, identify normatively beneficial aspects of institutions by showing the beneficial ideologies they generate). For example, diagnoses of the normative dangers of unregulated private media in emerging democracies should examine the way in which such media tend to produce nationalistic and racist political discourses (Price 2000; Mann 2005). Similarly, assessments of the value of two-party over multiparty electoral systems should consider how the former may narrow the ideological landscape of society (which could be seen as good or bad), encouraging people to coalesce into just two major ideological camps but also incentivising movement towards 'centrist' and away from 'extremist' ideological positions (Sartori 1976: 178-9; Evans 2002). Analysing how such outcomes are created, why they might be normatively problematic or desirable, and the normative permissibility (and efficacy) of potential political responses, will all rest on ideological analysis.

Second, **ideological analysis allows us to critique particular ideologies by illustrating the flawed socio-political institutions they generate or sustain** (or, conversely, identify strengths of particular ideologies by highlighting their role in desirable socio-political arrangements). For example, free-market ideologies may reproduce idealised understandings of property and markets that efface awareness of racial hierarchies in the real-world economic system (Mills 1999; Shelby 2003). But this suggestion relies on empirical claims about the impact certain ideological notions have on political thinking and, thereby, on economic and political behaviour. Such ideological analysis may include interrogation and critique of certain concepts or ideas

used by political thinkers and actors (see Olsthoorn's chapter in this volume). This may reveal historically changing connotations and assumptions that are involved in particular speech acts, and shed light on the impact of different interpretations of different concepts on political outcomes (Ball et al. 1989: ix; Freedman 1996: 100-117; Skinner 2002b: 114-21 & 158-74). Again, all such critique of existing systems of political thought and talk needs to be grounded in ideological analysis.

Frequently, the ideological notions that produce institutions or practices, and the ideological notions those institutions or practices produce, are simultaneously relevant. For example, evaluations of the policy of racial profiling might be concerned with the way its political rationale relies on crude racial constructs and ignorance of structural causes of crimes, *and* with how it encourages racist stereotypes of certain ethnic groups as having a propensity to criminality (Shelby 2003: 175-6). Evaluations of fee-paying schools might be concerned both with the way they entrench misconceptions of the added educational value such schools generate (if much of their superior performance is simply because they attract already high-performing students) *and* with how such misconceptions legitimate and sustain support for private schools (Swift 2003: 21-3). Most obviously, Marxist and post-Marxist traditions of normative theory have long engaged in analysis of both how ideology serves to legitimate domination, political exclusion and various other forms of political injustice *and* the way those practices reproduce the legitimating ideology (Žižek 1994b; Laclau 2007). Given the vital role ideology continues to play in the legitimation and operation of a panoply of leading political and social institutions, this form of ideological analysis (shorn of implications that ideology is always malign) ought to feature more extensively across contemporary normative political theory.

More generally, normative evaluation of the *general role of ideologies* in political life is central to many questions in political theory. Ideological diversity is a critical ingredient of a free society, and the fact that human political thought and behaviour occurs under the influence of distinctive ideologies is non-contingent and inescapable. All political theory – ideal and non-ideal alike – therefore needs to grapple with this general role of ideology. The ideological nature of human beings may pose obstacles to certain accounts of rational citizenship, deliberation in democratic discourse, solidarity in a civic community, neutrality in state institutions, and fair distribution of political, communicative, epistemic, and material resources. Ideological analysis is therefore relevant to the comparative normative evaluation of theories and institutions with respect to all these questions.

### **3.2. Assessing political theory's principles in real world contexts**

The first reason for thinking that ideological analysis is relevant to political theory highlights the relevance of ideology to all sorts of normative political theorising. But there is a further reason to think ideological analysis important to the degree that political theory moves away from ideal-type theorising and becomes 'non-ideal' (Valentini 2012; see also the chapter by Schmidt in this volume) or 'realist' (Galston 2010; see also the chapter by Jubb in this volume). In such situations, **ideological analysis is needed to assess the likely real-world effects of certain moral or political principles in practice**, and consequently their viability and normative attractiveness. Such forms of non-ideal normative political theory are concerned not just with reflection on moral rightness in some 'ultimate' sense, but the actual application of

political theory to the world, and the design of political prescriptions and norms to guide policy. How real-world agents – perceiving, thinking and acting under the influence of real world ideologies – would actually operationalize normative principles is thus a key question. As Jennifer Welsh (2010: 424) notes: ‘principles, when adopted, always take on a life of their own. It is difficult to control their meaning, or to avoid their misuse’. Predicting how this ‘life of their own’ will unfold ought to be a critical component of the assessment of normative principles at the non-ideal level.

Ideological analysis supports these sorts of non-ideal and realist assessments in four ways. First, it may provide *contextual knowledge about actually existing ideologies in particular circumstances*. Failure to analyze the nature and power of these extant ideologies can undermine normative theorizing about the right way to approach injustice. For example, a range of left-wing terrorist groups in the 1970s and 1980s believed that a few symbolic acts of violence would expose the fragility of the capitalist order and inspire a mass revolution, and acted accordingly (Tsintsadze-Maass and Maass 2014). This legitimization of deadly political violence involved a wildly naïve failure to appreciate the power and breadth and depth of internalization of liberal, free-market ideologies in modern Western societies. A parallel problem might be thought to exist in neoconservative or neoliberal theories of why military intervention in countries to spread democracy should be legitimate. Such theories carry many flaws, but these include a fundamental blindness to the complex ideological terrain of target states, and the radicalizing ideological consequences of militarized action on both its victims and on the interveners themselves (Doris and Murphy 2007; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011). The problem is no less salient for other political strategies – one needs to know the ideological context of a proposed policy to predict the normatively relevant consequences. Normative political theorists have not been completely blind to this. Members of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), for example, advanced the international norm of a ‘responsibility to protect’ in 2001 partly in the belief that this concept would do a better job than the previous concept of ‘humanitarian intervention’ at reconciling competing attitudes and commitments in the extant ideologies of Western democracies, developing world states, and authoritarian great powers (Evans 2011). This, it was hoped, would be more efficacious in giving ‘the responsibility to protect’ the force and political traction needed to save lives.

Second, ideological analysis may *reveal general tendencies in political thinking* – whether rooted in basic psychological propensities with roots in human nature, cultural dispositions, or something else – which are critical in foreseeing how political ideas will play out in practice. For example, leading political psychology research on ideology demonstrates strong human tendencies towards ‘system-justification’ and ‘just world thinking’ (a predisposition to rationalize the existing political system and its consequences as just). This research also shows that humans have a preference for epistemic satisfaction, i.e. achieving a set of beliefs which seem satisfying for a range of underlying psychological motives, rather than epistemic optimization, i.e. making sure that one is actually right (Furnham 2003; Jost and Hunyady 2005). This is highly relevant for non-ideal political theory, since it problematizes any assumptions that most individuals will respond to policies as rational, contemplative actors, and reveals key psychological supports for injustice and barriers to political and social reform. Again, political thinkers have not completely eschewed this line of theorising. John

Stuart Mill's (1869/2008) defence of free speech rested fundamentally on empirical assumptions about how political thinking evolved, progressively, in a society, and about how false or oppressive ideological notions could best be countered given the way human thinking and discourse worked.

Third, partly but not solely through the first two ways, ideological analysis may provide the *methods and skills for reflecting on how a certain normative system or prescription will play out in the political thinking of real world actors* – focusing not on logical implications of arguments and claims under rigorous philosophical analysis, but the likely forms of reasoning, assumptions, and attitudes such arguments and claims might encourage in actual political practice by citizens and elites. Once again, examples of such an approach already exist. And Isaiah Berlin's famous (1969) critique of 'positive liberty' did not necessarily deny any normative attractiveness to that notion in the abstract. Many of Berlin's concerns lay instead with the attitudes and assumptions positive liberty subtly encouraged, and the sorts of pernicious political programmes it could be mobilised to legitimate. In the sense I mean it here, Berlin's political theory involved a form of ideological analysis: imagining how a concept would operate in 'actual political thinking' (Freedman 2008: 197).

Fourth and finally, a range of *context-specific questions* for political theory may also arise at the non-ideal/realist level for which ideological analysis is particularly relevant (see also the chapters by Schmidtz and by Jubb in this volume). How, for example, should we know what political institutions or policies to implement in a state formerly under an ideological monopoly but now emerging into competitive party politics? Or in a society increasingly polarized across apparently irreconcilable ideological divisions? Or in a state whose unity and future stands in question in the face of nationalistic ideological groups? Or in a context where radicalizing violent ideologies appear to thrive through institutions long thought essential to free speech? To grapple with such questions in detail, political theorists need a developed understanding of how ideologies operate in these various contexts.

In all such instances, particular normative concepts or principles are being advanced in non-ideal theory because of assessments of extant ideologies, the ideological tendencies of human beings in general, how particular normative claims would work in practice as ideology, or the specific ideological dynamics of real-world problems. Yet whilst I have noted that such lines of theorizing are more common than is perhaps consciously appreciated, they are often grounded on speculation by political theorists rather than rigorous, empirically grounded ideological analysis. Consider, for example, Raymond Geuss' (2003: 285-6) interesting but entirely unsubstantiated claim that Rawlsian political theory underpinned neoliberal economic policies and a rise in global inequality in the 1970s and 1980s. This could be investigated through ideological analysis. Instead, Geuss bases his argument on the mere correlation of Rawls being influential in American universities with rising inequality – a classically invalid causal inference (see also Sagar 2014). Even ICISS, Mill and Berlin, though they do rest their arguments on some sort of ideological analysis, do not deploy any rigorous or developed methodology for doing this. Consequently their conclusions are contentious: it is not clear that R2P has successfully evaded the ideological connotations of humanitarian intervention (Chandler 2004), substantial evidence exists against Mill's theories of the epistemic benefits of free speech (Edelman 1977; Vigna and Gentzkow 2010; Ipsos MORI 2014), and it is questionable

whether Berlin's distinction between negative and positive liberty effectively maps onto real world divergences in actual political thinking (see also Skinner 2002a: 238-9; Nelson 2005). More generally, normative political theorists interested in non-ideal or realist approaches have not engaged in detail with ideological analysis (Freedman 2012).

So, done in a sophisticated manner, ideological analysis could increase the solidity of the empirical assumptions on which non-ideal and realist political theory arguments rest. It could even provide empirical evidence of how particular normative concepts or principles *have* played out in practice in the past. Ideological analysis might reveal, for example, how notions of liberal toleration can encourage unintended belief in moral relativism, how claims about inheritance rights can undermine awareness of inequality in the initial distribution of resources, or how arguments that the targeting of 'human shields' is permissible can encourage a cognitive slippery slope in the perception of when violence against civilians is legitimate. None of these effects definitively establishes the unacceptability of the normative beliefs or claims in question. But, *if they exist*, they may be considered relevant marks against such beliefs or claims. This form of ideological analysis of normative concepts and principles might be particularly crucial to any form of 'critical' political theory (in the broadest sense) that seeks to expose the unintended justificatory power of various normative concepts and principles.

### **3.3. Exposing ideological assumptions behind arguments in political theory**

Ideological analysis also **allows an interrogation of the validity of normative arguments in and of themselves by exposing their background ideological assumptions**. Sophisticated ideological analysis involves seeking out the full range of contextual, idiosyncratic notions within which individual claims are embedded, which shapes their specific meaning, and which explains their plausibility to those espousing them. Normative political theorists are very used to seeking out the principles and values that logically precede certain claims, but these may not be the only sorts of ideas or the only form of support that ideological notions lend to an argument. Revealing the beliefs about matters of fact, the narratives, the familiar stereotypes, the particular interpretations of concepts, and so forth connected to a certain argument may be vital for both (a) understanding why another political theorist (including a historical thinker) considers that argument plausible, and (b) thoroughly assessing the argument's defensibility.

Perhaps the most important use of this mode of ideological analysis is that which serves to maximize a theorist's own self-critical rigour – subjecting their own political theory to ideological analysis, to unpack not just the analytical assumptions on which the argument formally rests, but the other attached notions which might explain the moral intuitions behind key claims. Ideological analysis might, for example, expose particularistic commitments rooted in certain moral worldviews, cultural perspectives, or historical epochs that are wrongly presumed to reflect universal moral assumptions (which is not to presume that there can never be such universals, just that particularistic beliefs can often masquerade as them). Political theorists and philosophers are sophisticated thinkers, but not without their own ideological environments and standpoints, nor are they immune to the well-researched psychological tendencies like just-world thinking or consistency bias mentioned

earlier. Rigorous political theory should critically examine those environments, standpoints and possible tendencies in analysing claims by political theorists themselves.

### 3.4. Encouraging creative political theory

Finally, ideological analysis can be a powerful method for spurring creativity in formulating new ideas, concepts and arguments. I gently suggest that many sections of normative political theory – whilst valuable and sophisticated – are not as innovative as they could be, taking the form of seemingly interminable debates over a narrow set of basic questions between a narrow set of well-established standpoints. **Ideological analysis should be used to enable a rigorous engagement with the thought-systems of other periods in history, and other cultures in our present** (see the chapter by Ackerly and Bajpai in this volume). In doing this we might discover new concepts, ideas and claims that open up unexplored political-theoretic spaces (though it is important to avoid a ‘touristic’ approach, where ideas seem alluringly exotic but are used anachronistically and without real understanding). When one considers all the possible (and historically existing) ideological positions that can be generated, it should be clear that contemporary political theory in predominantly western academic institutions occupies only a small portion of this possible ideological ‘statespace’ (Homer-Dixon, forthcoming). Many of the potential normative positions may be unexplored for good reason – being patently incoherent, radically counterintuitive, or reprehensible in light of moral commitments which we are loath to part from. But it is unlikely that contemporary political theory exhausts the plausible normative realm. The classic example of a form of such ideological analysis yielding notions of normative interest concerns ‘republican liberty’, which has frequently – from the nineteenth century writings of Benjamin Constant to the contemporary work of Quentin Skinner – been rooted in an ideological excavation of earlier systems of political thought (Constant 1988; Skinner 1998/2012). And ideological analysis may not only support such projects through the investigation of existing but temporally or culturally distant ideologies. It may also support innovative normative political theory by allowing us to schematize and map out *potential* normative positions, irrespective of whether these have been actually espoused by historical or contemporary cultures (Freedman 2013a: 118; Homer-Dixon, forthcoming).

### 3.5. Summary: the need for ideological analysis in normative political theory

These four uses of ideological analysis suggest that **it should be taken seriously by scholars doing normative political theory**. This point needs wider recognition, since all four will be increasingly important enterprises as the discipline looks ahead to the rest of the twenty-first century, for two reasons. First, many of these uses of ideological analysis for normative political theory assume that one is engaging in a fairly non-ideal, empirically engaged, and perhaps applied project, or at least serve that sort of political theory in more obvious ways than they serve ideal theory. Such forms of non-ideal political theory are increasingly popular, creating an increasing need for rigorous ideological analysis. This should not, though, be taken to marginalize ideal theory or obscure how my first, third and fourth uses for ideological analysis all could (and should) be deployed in ideal political theory.

Second, in the remainder of this century, political theory is inevitably going to become more internationalized and globally integrated, with deeper engagement between western intellectual traditions and those from the many other parts of humanity's cultural heritage. This is going to be a challenging but intellectually vital process. Cross-cultural fertilization in political theory will expose divergences on issues and assumptions long thought settled within particular academies and paradigms. And it will force scholars from all nations to encounter claims, arguments, theories and political problems that they struggle to understand on a superficial examination, rooted as they are in assumptions, beliefs, ways of reasoning and contexts unfamiliar to the scholar's own ideological position. For such engagement to be productive rather than lead to radical misunderstanding and bemusement, political theorists on both sides of cultural, ideological, and theoretical divides are going to have to get better at ideological analysis, especially in my second and third senses: to properly interpret, interrogate, and engage with each other's positions, and evaluate the (possibly varying) applicability of certain normative concepts and principles to diverse ideological contexts.

#### 4. How to do ideological analysis

As I noted in my introduction, a problematic feature of the developing field of ideological analysis is that work on ideology remains very fragmented across disciplines. Since these different disciplines generally display contrasting strengths and weaknesses, I suggest that if we are to get to grips with ideology, **it is vital to deploy an integrative approach** (the best cross-disciplinary compendium is provided by Freeden et al. 2013). Intellectual historians and political theorists have generated sophisticated methods for examining and conceptualising the *content* of ideology. Political psychologists and sociologists have conducted extensive research on some of the *causes* of ideological attachment – why people internalize the ideological positions they do. Political scientists and discourse theorists, meanwhile, have studied extensively the *effects* of ideology on behaviour. Yet all three of these aspects of ideology are relevant for political theorists.

##### 4.1. Uncovering ideological content

Studying ideology is fundamentally about examining how actual people think. As such, to say anything of consequence about ideology, **we need to find out something about the actual contents of the ideology in question**. Too often, scholars studying ideology eschew this task. Instead they presume that ideological content is familiar and uncomplicated, by reducing it to a label, or a point on a crude dimension – such as the 7-point scale from 'Extremely Conservative' to 'Extremely Liberal' used in US election surveys – which is often presumed to self-evidently denote a set of policy preferences, or normative standpoints, or value attitudes. This might be defensible for certain limited forms of correlational analysis in political science, but it is of little use to normative political theory (and most other fields). Consequently, **effective ideological analysis requires that researchers deploy methods that actually collect rich data on, and engage seriously with, real world political thinking** (Freeden 2013b).

I suggest that there are four primary methods of collecting such data: (i) *behavioural inference* – reaching conclusions about individuals' ideologies in light of

the ways they behave; (ii) *textual analysis* – examining ideas expressed in *any* forms of communication, including non-verbal works, which exist independently of the analyst; (iii) *inquiry* – the attempt to directly solicit ideas or beliefs out of individuals through questioning – including qualitative methods like interviewing and quantitative methods like surveying; and (iv) *neuroscientific methods* – the study of neurological processes in an individual’s brain and wider nervous system. I will concentrate on inquiry and textual analysis, the two methods likely to be most useful for political theorists interested in real-world ideologies.

Defensible ideological analysis rests on interpreting texts and responses to inquiries rigorously and accurately – drawing plausible conclusions about individuals’ thinking from the data contained therein, including non-verbal instances of communication. The deep methodology of this practice is the subject of an extensive literature and considerable debate in the discipline of hermeneutics (the theory and practice of interpretation). It is beyond my capacity to reproduce that literature here (but see Blau’s chapter in this volume, as well as Skinner 2002b; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006; Wodak and Meyer 2009; Fairclough 2010). Instead I wish to list some key practical pointers on how to interpret data in order to build pictures of the ideologies of certain individuals or groups.

The most important pointer in this respect is that to generate reliable accounts of an ideology, **researchers need to avoid the cardinal hermeneutic sin of *accontextualism***. I use this label to refer to the general tendency to assume that individuals, across cultures, spaces, and times, generally hold a set of basic perceptions, beliefs, values and interests pretty close to that of the analyst, or the analyst’s society (Boudon 1989: 74-80, 95-6; Skinner 2002b). The contrary fact that individuals actually hold highly diverse sets of such beliefs doesn’t imply that individuals are wildly irrational, or deny that there are also commonalities in the way individuals think. But as Skinner points out: ‘what is rational to believe depends in large measure on the nature of our other beliefs’ and as a result, we should ‘interpret specific beliefs by placing them in the context of other beliefs [and] interpret systems of belief by placing them in wider intellectual frameworks’ (Skinner 2002b: 4-5). This includes asking what it is feasible to assume individuals were expressing and thinking given the intellectual resources and dominant ideological environment in which they were writing/speaking (Skinner 1974: 283 & 289; Baurmann 2007).

Matters are further complicated, however, by the possibility that individuals may be engaging in dissimulation, irony, rhetoric or some other form of speech which does not sincerely reflect their views. Hence the importance of attending to not just what bearers of ideology are *saying* but what they appear to be *doing* – e.g. lobbying for support, trying to persuade, satirizing another, making the interviewer happy, saying what they ‘ought’ to, etc. (Skinner 2002b: 2-4; Tully 1983: 490-94; George and Bennett 2005: 99-108). **Ideological analysts must attend to the possible strategic purposes of a particular text or expression and to the intended audience.**

The obvious implication of contextualism is that ideological analysis rests in large part on gathering considerable information on the context of the ideology in question. This might be done through examining relevant historical or cultural studies, through absorbing as much of the discourse produced by the individual or group we are studying as possible, through studying primary data (i.e. other cultural products and discourse fragments) from the relevant context, and so forth. The burden here

could easily become unmanageable for a normative political theorist who is not primarily an ideological analyst, but interested in ideological analysis for the four reasons I listed in section 2. But a more modest contextualism is possible: where we take seriously underlying differences in the cultural and political environment of those we are studying and ourselves, and **are aware of the necessarily tentative nature of interpretations of the thinking of others in light of uncertainty about their broader ideological assumptions derived from their social context.**

With such a hermeneutic sensitivity, researchers might proceed by **asking a series of structured questions about the ideological data (texts or interview responses) they are able to gather.** Exactly what questions researchers ask will relate to their objectives, but I shall propose a possible core list as a starting point. The speakers (or authors) being studied might be institutions, movements, political parties, or other group entities as well as specific individuals, but we should still ask **who are the actual specific individuals who have authored apparent statements of group entities as a whole, and how ideologically heterogeneous might the broader group be.**

- 1) What has the speaker seemed to say, and what do they seem to be doing in saying this?
- 2) What are the concepts and terms that make up the speaker's expressions, and what are the most plausible meanings of those concepts and terms that the speaker would attach to them? (In interview methods, such meanings might be solicited by further questioning.)
- 3) What beliefs, arguments or other ideas do these concepts and terms together seem to express?
- 4) Are there reasons to believe that the speaker does not sincerely hold those beliefs/arguments or other ideas? On all available evidence, does it seem fair (it will never be certain) to assume that these reflect the speaker's own views? If not, why are they being said – and what might this tell us, if not about the speaker's own ideology, about the broader ideologies of others in the context in which they are speaking?
- 5) What possible ideas, not explicitly expressed by the speaker (a) might lend comprehensibility and consonance to their overall ideological system and (b) might there be good reasons to believe the speaker held consciously or unconsciously?
- 6) What appears to be the *ideological structure* of the speaker's ideas? By this I mean the relationships between the various ideas – relationships which might be logical (presupposition, inference, entailment, etc.), semantic (connotation, inclusion, exclusion, clarification, is a subset of), emotional (attraction, antipathy, felt association), causal (producing, requiring, precluding, encouraging) or something else?

By asking these questions, a researcher can start to put together a picture of the system of ideas that constitutes an individual's ideology, *or* the part of their ideology relating to some particular defined question or issue. That picture might be rendered in detailed, prose description, it might be conceptualized dimensionally on a single dimension or multidimensional space (although, as I have suggested, this may oversimplify ideological content too heavily for the political theorists) or it might be

visualized through a form of concept mapping, such as the Cognitive-Affective Mapping methodology developed by Paul Thagard and colleagues at the University of Waterloo (Thagard 2012). The reliability of this picture rests on the open-mindedness, free exploration, and interpretive honesty of the researcher. It is all too easy for scholars, superficially deploying appropriate data collection methods, considering context, and asking the right sorts of interpretive questions, to ‘see what they want to see’. Ideological analysis must **always attend to this danger of contrived, biased analysis, explicitly consider alternative interpretations, and explain why they have been rejected.**

#### 4.2. Explaining ideological attachment

I already mentioned the strong tendency for individuals to engage in system-justification and just world thinking: to adopt the default *assumption* that outcomes are fair, with individuals deserving what they get, even when evidence for this is lacking (Jost et al. 2003; Jost and Hunyady 2005). That this is often a default assumption obviously doesn’t mean it is always felt – perceptions of unfairness and injustice are fundamental and widespread in human thinking. But it is just one of the pieces of evidence that shows how ideological belief-formation is driven by a broad range of underlying *psychological motives* and *social processes* (both of which are deeply interrelated). Political theorists may frequently be concerned with the role of such psychological and social causes of ideology in their analysis.

Key psychological motives driving belief formation include:

- (i) *epistemic motives* – sincere concerns with working out what is true;
- (ii) *cognitive dissonance minimization* (also known as *consistency bias*) – a desire to maintain consonance in one’s belief system, even when this involves adopting beliefs not supported by evidence;
- (iii) *self-esteem motives* – the need for a sense of self-worth, social standing, superiority, belonging, recognition, and life purpose;
- (iv) *cognitive efficiency concerns* – the drive to avoid overly burdensome mental activities;
- (v) *comprehensibility motives* – the need to find the world comprehensible, determinate and not worryingly uncertain;
- (vi) *anxiety suppression* – for example, about death, ethical propriety, sexual performance, the wrongness of past decisions and commitments, and so forth.

This is not a comprehensive list but highlights some of the key findings in psychological research that could be of relevance in considering how political ideologies form (see, in general: Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Boudon 1989; Pinker 1998; Boudon 1999; Jost and Major 2001; Jost et al. 2009b; Kahneman 2012; Varki and Brower 2013).

Key social processes driving belief formation include:

- (i) *ideational resources* – the availability of ideas, concepts or frameworks of reasoning in the discourses accessible to the individual;
- (ii) *discursive saturation* – the saturation of ideas into discourse within the particular social networks or media environments in which the individual is embedded, such that those ideas appear to be ‘common sense’;

- (iii) *epistemic dependence* – where an individual relies on certain epistemic authorities that appear credible (or which the individual lacks more credible alternatives to) for information which is difficult for them to personally verify;
- (iv) *groupthink* – the tendency of individuals to adopt the beliefs, or at least the *avowed* beliefs, of the majority around them;
- (v) *ideological incentivization* – the attachment of desirable material or symbolic outcomes to the adoption of a belief, or at least the *avowed* adoption of a belief;
- (vi) *rhetorical presentation* – the skilful deployment of rhetorical devices and emotional appeals in communication that encourage internalization of certain ideas

Again, this list is a tentative summary of major themes in existing research, rather than a comprehensive list (see in general: Berger and Luckmann 1967; Hardwig 1985; Simonds 1989; Boudon 1989; Fairclough 2001; Skinner 2002b; Baurmann 2007; Rydgren 2009).

These psychological and social processes that shape ideological attachment should help political theorists construct plausible pictures of the ideologies of real world individuals, explain a wide range of just and unjust states of affairs, and assess the viability of certain political prescriptions and strategies. They are at the root of why certain sorts of legitimating practices are effective, certain key realities denied, certain human consequences of actions or policies ignored. That is not to suggest that such processes are immutable, universal or constant across individuals and societies – on the contrary, they vary and might themselves be targets of political reform by prescriptive theory. But this is just another reason to believe that political theorists should attempt to understand and analyse them.

### 4.3. Analysing the effects of ideologies

But constructing an accurate understanding of extant ideologies, and the psychological and social processes that encourage them, is unlikely to be the only activity of interest to the political theorist. **Ideological analysis should then involve an examination of *what political and social effects these ideologies have.***

Ideologies provide cognitively necessary repertoires for *thinking* and socially comprehensible repertoires for *talking*: they enable, constrain and shape political thought and discourse. They *constitute individuals' own thinking* about subjects and provide them with ideas, arguments, concepts and claims to *instrumentally use* (for a range of sincere or strategic purposes) in communication with others. The broadest effect of ideology, via both these avenues, is to provide individuals and groups with the intellectual resources used to think and talk about that world, thereby constructing their understanding of social reality (Searle 1995; Tileagă 2007: 722; Thagard 2012: 51-2). But in particular, ideologies shape individuals' conceptions of what is desirable, and what is permissible – as I term it, they *motivate* and *legitimate* certain forms of action, including the establishment and maintenance of institutions and other political arrangements.

Unpacking these effects comprehensively would take at least a book. Aiming only to generate ideas and focusing attention for researchers, I shall provide a fairly ad hoc list of particularly significant sorts of beliefs that are generated by, and constitute, ideologies. Ideologies contain:

- (i) Notions of the *proper members of a society or group*, and conceptualizations of the borders between those proper members and others, between the in-group and the out-group. In particular, ideologies shape notions of *differential obligations owed to different categories of person* (Tileagă 2007; Opotow 1990; Tajfel 1974; Hammack 2008; Huddy 2001).
- (ii) Latent assumptions or explicit judgements regarding the *prototypical, expected, and proper behaviour* or characteristics of members of a society or group. In particular, ideologies determine the characteristics/attitudes/behaviour to which praise, glory and status, on the one hand, and shame, disempowerment, and exclusion are attached to (Huddy 2001: 133-7, 143-5; Finlayson 2012).
- (iii) Specification of *key objectives, ends, and anticipated futures* towards which a society or group is aiming, and programmes of collective action for getting there (Mullins 1972: 510).
- (iv) Assertion of *values* and objects, perhaps of a quasi-sacred or truly sacred nature, to which individuals and groups feel deep emotional attachment (Atran and Axelrod 2008).
- (v) Identification of *key problems, threats, challenges or obstacles* to its objectives and ends that a society or group faces (van Dijk 1998: 66).
- (vi) Conceptions of the relevant '*field of possibilities*' – the set of policies, strategies, or institutional arrangements that are feasible, imaginable or otherwise warrant consideration. What is excluded from this field of possibilities (presented as impossible, infeasible, futile, idealistic, utopian, etc.) may be as important as what is included (Foucault 1982: 789-92; Crawford 2002: 20).
- (vii) Specific *normative prohibitions and normative obligations*, for individuals, for collective actors or institutions, and for a society at large (van Dijk 2013: 74-7; Crawford 2002).
- (viii) *Characterisations, whether impressionistic or detailed, of rival groups and competitors*, within or without a polity, and their objectives, characteristics, own ideologies, and current activities (Shenhav 2006; Hammack 2008).
- (ix) Particular *beliefs about matters of fact*, whether true or false, whether inchoate and vague or specific and dense, whether rooted in narratives and imagery or statistics and apparent evidence (Hochschild 2001).
- (x) Epistemological or ontological '*meta-beliefs*' about how to determine what one should believe, for example, by affirming empirical, exegetical, faith-based, or intuitionist epistemic rules (Crawford 2002: 19).

Through different configurations of such ideas, ideologies define the key political differences between individuals and groups, as well as the commonalities and unquestioned common sense on which many political arrangements rest. Critically, **political theorists must recognize that the ideas in question are often generated only unconsciously or semi-consciously, and they might be produced by subtle rhetorical devices and discursive techniques** – the classic focus of critical theorists and discourse analysts. For example, 'Critical Discourse Analysts' are interested in processes like *nominalization*, the way in which the consistent rendering of social events as nouns ('the recession', 'urban decay', 'homelessness', 'suppression of the

protests') disguises the human agency responsible for such events, instead presenting them as natural, agentless, happenings or default features of the world (Billig 2008). Interrogating such discursive devices and techniques can be important to analysing how the ideas that make up ideologies are successfully disseminated, and why they lead to certain outcomes.

Via such ideas, ideologies critically shape the decision-making and the patterns of life of whole societies and particular political actors by shaping what appears desirable and legitimate – whether amongst the elites who directly make government policies or the ordinary citizens who may engage in a variety of politically salient activities to contest or reinforce them. Consequently, they have substantial political outcomes – producing or affecting the actual and possible political states of affairs which political theorists analyse, diagnose, critique, alter, or recommend.

## 5. Conclusion

Ideological analysis is difficult, often tentative, and always open to contestation and challenge. I have certainly not exhausted key methodological precepts and techniques. Nor are the many points of advice or empirical claims about human thinking that I have asserted immune from criticism. What this chapter might do, I hope, is two things: to show political theorists that ideological analysis matters to a far greater extent than is generally appreciated, and to show them how they can do it better. An expanded engagement with ideology in political theory is an exciting direction for the discipline, and suggests a panoply of potential research projects. But for it to be successful, political theorists need to draw on interdisciplinary research on ideology more thoroughly, and reflect on how to study ideology more deeply.

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