

# Contemporary Questions on Political Ideologies: From 'Proletarian Hegemony' to Post Pragmatism

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolutionary journey of the term 'Political Ideology' whereby highlighting the paradigms through which the ideology debate had to evolve. It analyses the lifecycle of the term and concept of 'Ideology', and how ideological hegemony has been restructured and portrayed by various schools of politics giving birth to both pragmatic and utopian debates. The paper highlights the importance of pursuing a newly innovated politics of ideological collaboration rather than the old and limited one of ideological confrontation. It raises questions about how and to what degree should scientific determinism be allowed to impact the concept of 'Ideology'. Although the author highlights the importance of neutralizing the term in a radically polarized world, she adds that the process of neutralization should never eradicate the scientific temper one attaches to the concept, as the unscientific war against radical polarization can only be won by sharpening the scientific temper of the under-represented and the exploited. It is important to differentiate between 'Ideology' and 'belief system', 'Ideology' and 'Utopia', 'Ideology' and 'Weltanschauung' or 'world view'. Moreover, the paper also discusses why innovative measures should be adopted by political parties and governments to preserve the uniqueness of the concept of 'Ideology'.

## 1. Introduction

Subsequent generations of Marxists displayed a more profound interest in arriving at the correct definition of 'Ideology' than did Marx himself [1-5]. Such a profound interest developed among the later Marxists because of the fact that Marx's pragmatic assumption of the disintegration of the capitalist society proved to be highly feasible, inspiring later Marxists to perceive ideology as one of the primordial factors behind the dogmatic resilience of the capitalist society's liberal political thought. Nevertheless, it is equally important for political scientists to focus on the evolutionary paradigms which determined the trajectory of the term 'Political Ideology'. For instance, how did all classes come to be perceived as the propounders of 'Political Ideology'?

Hence, for later Marxists such as Lenin, the term 'Political Ideology' therefore indicated the set of unique ideas of a particular social class [6-10]. This set of unique ideas represented their economic, political and socio-cultural ethos that displayed the ability to proliferate the respective interests of that particular social class irrespective of their social, political and economic status. However, it is equally important for political scientists to highlight on the fact that whenever we perceive political ideology as an intellectual possession of all classes - the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie -, the term 'Political Ideology' gets subsequently robbed of its original meaning [11-15].

## 2. Related Works

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was an ideological revolutionary and an Italian Marxist who attempted to provide pragmatic remedy to economic and political issues

originating from orthodox Marxism. Through his prominent work 'Prison Notebooks' (1929-35), Gramsci highlighted the importance of political and intellectual revolution by rejecting any model of 'scientific' determinism to materialize the theory of bourgeois hegemony. Although he never underplayed the importance of the 'economic nucleus', he stressed on the establishment of a rival 'Proletarian Hegemony' as the unquestioned dominance of the bourgeois political thought needs to be multi-dimensionally overthrown.

He was presumably one of the first proponents of 'Proletarian Hegemony' who also multi-dimensionally advanced the Marxist definition of 'Ideology'. Gramsci ([1935] 1971) highlighted that the factors nourishing the capitalist societal infrastructure are not just the unequal social, economic and political power distributary mechanisms, but rather the '**hegemony**' of bourgeois thought processes.

Hegemony refers to unabated and unquestioned dominance. Hegemony can be defined as the superiority or ascendancy of a single machinery of the societal infrastructure over other important machineries that also play a conducive role in operating the societal infrastructure. According to Marxists, ideological ascendancy is an implicit meaning of the term 'Hegemony'. Moreover, ideological hegemony highlights the capacity of capitalist societal norms to outshine other rival ideologies and thereby come to be revered as the ruling ideas of the age.

Gramsci also showcased before the world the intensity and the degree to which hegemony is embedded at each end every level of the societal infrastructure, namely, in everyday language, in educational institutions and mass media, in cinema and popular cultural, and even in societal art and

architecture. Nevertheless, Gramsci was also optimistic about the fact that this 'Bourgeois Hegemony' could be multi-dimensionally confronted at the political, economic, socio-cultural and intellectual level through the establishment and subsequent proliferation of a contending 'Proletarian Hegemony'. This 'Proletarian Hegemony', according to Gramsci, should be established and thereby proliferated according to socialist principles, ideas and value systems.

Concerns of the Frankfurt School mainly revolved around issues as diverse as the capacity of capitalism and unquestioned legitimacy of the bourgeois. Frankfurt School is a group of neo-Marxist who are mainly Germans who escaped the Nazis to later settle in the US. Herbert Marcuse is one of the most prominent members of the Frankfurt School, who, through his important work the 'One Dimensional Man' (1964), argues that the main reason behind the development of totalitarianism is advanced and rather unchecked industrial advancement. He further argues that unchecked industrial advancement leverages its capacity to manipulate the mainstream political and intellectual thought by completely outshining the valuable scholarship offered by the opposition groups. Marcuse goes on to contend that liberal capitalism masquerades indoctrination and ideological hegemony by concealing these abuses to freedom of thought under the veil of tolerance whereby engendering a false narrative of free speech, debate and argument. Therefore, according to Marcuse, liberal capitalism successfully serves a rather tyrannical political and societal narrative.

Various attempts have also been undertaken by non-Marxist scholars to bring about a comprehensive definition of 'Ideology'. Among them, mention should be made of German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), who stressed that humans are social animals and thus the ideas they represent are conditioned by their social environments. However, unlike Marx, he undermined the negative and pejorative connotations of ideology.

Through his prominent work 'Ideology and Utopia' ([1929] 1960), Mannheim strived to portray ideology as ruling thought processes that protect, defend and represent a particular social order. Moreover, he also added that these ruling thought processes chiefly represent the grievances, demands and interests of the ruling class.

Non-Marxists also portrayed utopias as idealized, delusional and hypothetical representations of the future world order that implicitly convey the importance of radical and fundamental societal transformation. The key question regarding utopia is this that has this non-Marxist narrative of utopia been conventionally designed to impartially serve the basic necessities of the under-represented and the oppressed? Or, is there any possibility for utopian belief systems to be practically incorporated in the society of the future?

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Karl Mannheim was also one of the most important scholars to objectively differentiate between 'particular' and 'total' concepts of ideology. The beliefs, value systems, thought processes and ideas of specific individuals, political

parties or groups are termed as 'particular' ideologies. On the other hand, the ideologies of the entire world order, society, social class or even a complete historical epoch which encompass the total 'Weltanschauung' or 'world view' are classified as 'particular' ideologies. According to this point of view, Islamism, Marxism and Liberal Capitalism can be classified as 'total' ideologies.

Mannheim further focused on the distorted portrayal of social reality by all ideological systems and utopias as all streams of ideological thought processes offer a myopic, opaque and rather selfish perspective of social reality. Nevertheless, he also focused on the importance of objective determinism in order to bring about a feasible narrative of the societal truth. Furthermore, objective determinism is the wealth of the 'socially unattached intelligentsia', a collection of scholars who alone deserve to participate in impartial quest to uncover the feasible societal reality because they have no vested economic and political interests of their own. Nevertheless, one of the most pragmatic questions with regard to the socially unattached intelligentsia is this that can they devise an ideological framework that transcends beyond ideology and brings in numerous deserving stakeholders in the entirety of the process?

The multifangled career of the concept of 'Ideology' was profoundly influenced by the emergence of totalitarian dictatorships during the interwar period. The trajectory of the concept of 'Ideology' was also determined by the intensification of ideological confrontations during the Cold War period, chiefly the 1950s and 1960s. One of the most pertinent unanswered questions regarding this is that how did liberal scholars perceive and portray Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy? How did they engender the world to perceive the role played by these 'official' ideologies as the one that orchestrate 'regimented obedience' by suppressing free speech, freedom of thought, debate and criticism? How did the Islamic world perceive these multi-dimensionally oppressive models?

Therefore, the 'end of ideology' debaters and scholars such as Karl Popper (1945), Hannah Arendt (1951), J. L. Talmon (1952) and Bernard Crick (1962) used the term 'Ideology' in an extremely sceptical manner reckoning Nazism, Fascism, Maoism and Communism as chief subjects of debate. According to them, ideologies are indeed myopic, opaque and thereby 'closed' systems to manipulate thought processes which blatantly claim a monopoly of representing the societal truth whereby displaying utmost intolerance to contradictory ideas and opposing thought processes. Ideologies can therefore be classified as 'secular religions' as they exhibit a 'totalizing' narrative that best serve as totalitarian instruments of societal control whereby engendering a system of oppression, obedience and subordination. However, the question is do all political and economic ideologies fall within the ambit of 'Ideology' by this definition? For instance, Popper 1945 argues that liberalism which strives to defend freedom, diversity, justice, tolerance and equality, is also one of the most prominent propounders of an 'open' system of thought.

The conservative approach towards arriving at the correct definition of 'Ideology' is quite unique because such an approach questions the unquestioned theories and abstract philosophies offered by both the Marxists and Non-Marxists. Therefore, it is not incorrect to conclude that Conservatism is the by-product of enlightenment as it gives birth to a neo-rationalism. Neo-rationalism can be defined as a sceptical approach which questions traditional rationalism to uncover the feasible societal reality whereby engendering inclusivity in the irrational models of growth and progress.

The idea of Conservatism emerges from the perspective of perceiving the reality as an infinitely complicated manifestation of the societal whole which is impossible for a limited human mind to fathom. Michael Oakeshott (1901-90) was one of the most influential exponents of this view. Through his 'Rationalism in Politics' (1962), Oakeshott argued that "in political activity men sail a boundless and bottomless sea". Therefore, according to this approach, can we conclude that ideologies are delusional, hypothetical and abstract systems of thought processes, value systems and ideas that not only attempt to explain but also distort, tarnish and masquerade the feasible societal reality because they aspire to comprehend the incomprehensible? Thus, according to a Conservative, ideology is nothing but an irrational, limited, regimented and dogmatic portrayal of the infinitely complicated societal truth. But, how far and to what degree are ideologies divorced from the infinitely complicated societal truth is the question of the day.

As ideologies masquerade the reality, Conservatives thus unequivocally reject the 'ideological' style of politics, simply because politics can be much more than just ideology. How far have the Conservatives been successfully able to rebuild an inclusive world by outrightly rejecting dogmatic and doctrinaire principles is also something to ponder over; because pure Conservative school of thought has also been infected by doctrinaire ideological politics of the 'New Right'. Before the ideological war on Conservative politics by the 'New Right', Conservatives have always been the representatives of the 'traditionalist stance' designed by Oakeshott, which upholds pragmatism and treats history as the unequivocal guide to unravel the truth.

### **3. The Impact of Pragmatism on the Ideology Debate**

Before analysing the impact of pragmatism on the ideology debate, let us first make an attempt to define 'Pragmatism'. Pragmatism refers to the approach that is determined by practical circumstances and materialistic developmental goals instead of ideological principles and objectives to deal with societal problems. However, pragmatism also stresses on the importance of pursuing humanity's philosophical goals. Eminent 'classical pragmatists' such as William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952) portrayed pragmatism as a prominent and feasible method to pacify humanity's metaphysical confrontations as it exhibits the capability to explain explain such confrontations by showcasing before the world their practical causes and consequences. Hence, there are numerous advantages of the pragmatic school of thought. Firstly, pragmatism necessitates governmental policies,

schemes and irrelevant political claims to be judged and justified based 'on their merits' and demerits, and most importantly on the basis of 'what works' and what does not. Thus, secondly, by practising and preaching pragmatism, a political thinker doesn't get outrightly detached from reality because pragmatic ideology opposes meagre utopian dreams. However, pragmatism can also be compared with a blind tendency to fulfill public objectives and demands whereby ignoring their political, ethical, socio-cultural and environmental ramifications as traditional pragmatists have always rejected the importance of principles and ideology. Thus, it just goes without saying that the focus of traditional pragmatism has mostly been to blindly follow the public rather than to lead them.

Political scientists since the 1960s have realised the importance of rejuvenating and expanding the ideology debate by adjusting it according to the demands and needs of the conventional political, economic and socio-cultural scenario. Hence, since the 1960s the term 'Ideology' started to be portrayed as a neutral, scientific and objective term because the political weightage from the term started to loose its undeserving gravity. For instance, Martin Seliger (1976) portrayed '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". Ideology can thus be defined as a collection of thoughts that lead to conscious action whether good or evil. Thus, the paradigm of 'Ideology' gained substantial expansion post 1960s, as it now encompassed both the positive and the negative connotations of the term. Moreover, since the 1960s the ideology debate became more multidimensional as political scientists not only stressed on the causes of 'Ideology' but also on its consequences whether good or evil, true or false, liberating or oppressive, and limited or expansive.

### **4. 'Ideology': How Far Inclusive?**

'Ideology' should be treated as a multifangled intellectual paradigm by social scientists, because it triggers a profound debate of inclusivity in modern political thought. However, should it practically encompass all 'isms' is the question of the day. How far and to what degree should it be allowed to impact contemporary political philosophies, namely of Marxism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Pragmatism and even Fascism, are also some noteworthy questions.

Moreover, the restrictions and pejorative connotations of the concept of 'Ideology' should also be kept in mind while blatantly propagating it. The concept of 'Ideology' also triggers a lot of hypocrisy. For instance, liberals condemn Marxism, Communism, Conservatism and Fascism as mere ideologies but blatantly deny that liberalism is also a hypothetical ideology. On the contrary, Marx classified Liberalism and Conservatism as superficial ideologies but portrayed Marxism as objective, feasible, profound and scientific. Traditional Conservatives do no less. They outrightly reject any ideological form of politics but classify Conservatism as the most feasible way to design the societal reality. Therefore, it is very important to inject more tolerance, freedom of thought, inclusivity and most

importantly universalism in the ideology debate, so that the prospects and degrees of ideological collaboration can practically be incorporated in a much more multidimensional way than it is today. Some political scientists also argue about the dangers of a neutralized concept of 'Ideology'. According to political scientists such as Andrew Heywood, the term 'Ideology' will completely lose its critical dimension and will be regarded as a void term if the political weightage attached to it gets completely neutralized. However, one should also keep in mind that neutralization of the term 'Ideology' is the need of our polarized and fragmented world which is endangered by plethora of unscientific political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental wars. Nevertheless, the process of neutralization should never eradicate the scientific temper one attaches to the term, as the above mentioned unscientific wars can only be won by sharpening the scientific temper of the under-represented and the exploited. There should also be sharp lines of differences drawn between 'Ideology' and 'belief system', 'Ideology' and 'Utopia', 'Ideology' and 'Weltanschauung' or 'world view'. Moreover, innovative measures should be taken up by popular culture, mass media, civil society organizations and even governments to preserve the uniqueness of the term 'Ideology'.

## 5. Conclusions

The term 'Ideology' and the ideology debate thereafter have gained their new currency as social-scientific instruments, thanks to the perspectives gifted by diverse schools of thought ranging from Marxism to Pragmatism, and from Liberalism to Ecologism. For instance, Liberalism since the Cold War period has been portraying 'Ideology' as a doctrinaire and officially sanctioned set of ideas which claim to be unquestionably truthful and scientific. Therefore, according to liberals, the very notion of 'Ideology' is implicitly oppressive, doctrinaire and thereby superficial and totalitarian, the key examples are that of Communism, Fascism and Maoism. Liberalism is also the best example of a classic ideology that blatantly propagates the importance of a ruling class.

Ecologists on the other hand, view all doctrinaire political ideologies as part of a super ideology of 'Industrialism'. Ideology, according to ecologists, is thus nothing but an arrogant and ignorant attempt to decipher the truth of unchecked capitalism and growth driven economics. The truth of such a capitalist attempt has largely been masqueraded not only by capitalist themselves but also by socialists and liberals who see the world through the lense of positivism.

Conservatives, on the contrary, have envisioned 'Ideology' as the ignorant manifestation of superficial rationalism. According to traditional Conservatives, all ideologies are absolutely unscientific, unreliable, myopic, abstract and opaque as these successfully obscure the societal reality by putting forth utopian dreams before the public which are neither achievable nor liberating. Hence, ideologies are elaborative representations of principles and ideas that lead to oppression of the underprivileged, Fascism, Nazism and Communism being the chief examples.

Socialists have also contributed their bit in reforming the ideology debate. Socialists following Marx have condemned 'Ideology' as a set of void ideas which masquerade the harsh reality of the class society whereby engendering utopian dreams, false consciousness and societal passivity among the under-represented, subordinate, oppressed, exploited and the underprivileged.

Although Marx himself highlighted the pejorative connotations of 'Ideology', later Marxists designed a more neutralized and expansive illustration of the term by classifying it as the set of unique ideas of each end every social class including the working class.

Regimes propagating Fascism and Nazism have outrightly rejected the importance of 'Ideology' by classifying it as a cliched and over-systematic manifestation of political behaviour which is based on superficial understanding of the political reality rather than pragmatism and passion. The Nazis, on the other hand, upheld their political perspective as 'Weltanschauung' or 'world view', and never through any ideological principle.

Feminism, chiefly Marxist Feminism, has portrayed 'Ideology' as just another method of the patriarchal society to subordinate, oppress and exploit women. According to them, ideology undertakes a negative trajectory as it is not only repressive but also legitimizes the repression of women. Moreover, feminists also criticize 'Ideology' as a sexist, misogynistic tool through which masculine attributes are categorized and legitimized as the only human norm.

Last but not the least, fundamentalists have leveraged 'Ideology' as an orthodox tool for social reconstruction according to the dominant religious agenda. By incorporating this method, the key religious text of the dominant religious agenda becomes the sole 'Ideology' of the entire community. With an aim to express the words spoken by God himself, fundamentalists also reject secularism and universalism by portraying them as meagre sinful thoughts which lack morality and ethics.

Therefore, we shall conclude that ideology debate is a double edged sword, which becomes ineffective without ideological collaboration.

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