

How does an ideology differ from an opinion?

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1 Introduction: opinion \Leftrightarrow ideology

Superficial treatment of this subject is an appealing option, so much that it is often exercised on the lines of: an ideology is a framework of ideas based on claim to objective truth, often to its own scientific nature; while an opinion is individual belief or judgement based on partial knowledge, usually not derived by scientific methods, nor from scientific sources. We could add that ideology always states its own non-ideological status, relegating others to mere ideology, *defining itself through distance towards an Other* (Žižek, 1998, pg 66), or in the words of Althusser, “ideology has no outside” (Althusser, 1971, pg 175). But that still leaves us of short of anything convincing. In fact, in a space of a short essay, this subject can only be scratched, which makes our goal to try to turn a scratch into a deeper cut, into an opening for further investigations.

2 “Reading” the textbook

Given the importance of concept of ideology for political science, let’s start from basics, reading the recommended textbook for the subject this essay is written for, Andrew Haywood’s “Politics”. There are some important points that Haywood makes in his introduction to political ideologies, perfect to open up the subject:

“Ideology is one of the most controversial concepts encountered in political analysis.” – followed by few sentences on each of major ideologies (marxism, liberalism, conservatism) – “The drawback of each of these usages, however, is that, as they are negative or pejorative, they restrict the application of the term. Certain political doctrines, in other words, are excluded from the category of ‘ideologies’. Marx for instance, insisted that his idea were scientific, not ideological, liberals have denied that liberalism should be views as an ideology, and conservatives have traditionally claimed to embrace a pragmatic, rather than ideological

style of politics.” (Heywood, 1997, pg 42,43).

Then suddenly, for no immediately discernible reason, Heywood completely loses the plot by ending the chapter with:

“An inclusive definition of ‘ideology’ (one that applies to all political traditions) must therefore be neutral: it must reject the notion that ideologies are ‘good’ or ‘bad’, true or false, or liberating or oppressive. This is the virtue of the modern, social-scientific meaning of the term, which treats ideology as an action-oriented belief system, and interrelated set of ideas that in some way guides or inspired political action.” (Heywood, 1997, pg 43).

Current function of Heywood’s book as an active¹ textbook in higher education merits reflection: fascism is surely both ‘bad’ (bad in whatever way you like) and oppressive, so was the ideology that justified slavery - to take examples where attributes can be assigned without much doubt. More important, liberal capitalism, in relation to feudalism, was a liberating ideology. “Social-scientific” meaning which Heywood hails is both wrong and, following Slavoj Žižek, ideological². Furthermore, claims of conservatism that:

- it could only be seen as ideology because it is based on abstraction of concrete activity and “*the only only concrete manner of activity detectable is one*” ... “*dependent upon a traditional manner of behavior*”, while Marxism is not even an ideology since “*it is inappropriate account of irrelevance of the activity from which it has been abstracted from*”, based on experience “*often irrelevant activities such as was, the conduct of Industry or Trade Unions negotiations*” (Oakeshott, 1991, pg 56);

¹Used at Goldsmiths College, London, in 2005 syllabus.

²Žižek claims that both “to renounce the very notion of extra-ideological reality and accept that all we are dealing with are symbolic fictions, the plurality of discursive universes, never ‘reality’” is post-modern ideology par-excellence, and that at the same time “Perhaps, following Kant [...] ideology is not all; it is possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from it, *but this place from which one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality*” (? , pg 17). See Žižek’s essay for suggestion on construction of this empty space.

- it isn't actually ideology because ideologies are abstract systems of thought, and since man is incapable of rationalizing the world, anything other than what comes from tradition is thus ideological i.e. all systems of thought that are products of Enlightenment are ideological because of their abstraction inherent in man's inability to rationalize the world(Oakeshott, 1991)!

are equally problematic. What about natural sciences, medicine, technology, as results of rationalization? As to political sphere, we live in the world dominated by liberalism, in the world where still its largest state, China, is a society built on Marxism. Or, are conservatives suggesting that almost entire human race lives somehow unreal materialization of some forms of abstract thought? Oxford dictionary of English "abstract" entry says: *separated from what is real or concrete, thoughts of separately form facts*, which renders conservative proposition meaningless. Yet, we find it straight in the introduction to ideology chapter of political science textbook. Has liberal scientific criteria – basis for liberal own claim to non-ideological status – been suspended momentarily by mistake, or is it something inherent to it that allows this suspension happen?

It is precisely at paradoxes like this one, that critique of ideology can shed some light. And, as a confirmation that speed of light travels fastest, even as a metaphor in text, word that follows above quote in Haywood's book is "Liberalism", chapter that starts with "Any account of political ideologies must start with liberalism. This is because liberalism is, in effect, the ideology of industrialized West." (Heywood, 1997, pg 43). Following his own premise, can we then attribute Haywood's total lapse in his own way of practicing political science to ruling ideology? To do that we need to define what do we mean by ideology first, and since Haywood failed to do so, we need to look further than his textbook - starting at the root of Haywood's definition of ideology: Daniel Bell and his 1960 essay *The end of ideology in the West*.

3 Daniel Bell, public interest: liberalism or neo-conservatism?

If we were to accept what David Bell or Francis Fukuyama had to tell us, there would be not much to say today on this subject: ideologies in the West would have ended half a century ago, and more recently, liberal capitalist democracy would have been recognized as the final, universalized, governance³. According to Bell

ideology “which once was a road to action, has come to an end.”, and “Such calamities as the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet pact, the concentration camps, the suppression of the Hungarian workers, form one chain; such social changes as the modification of capitalism, the rise of Welfare State, another”. [...] “old ideologies have lost their ”truth” and their power to persuade” [...] “In the Western world, therefore, there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of Welfare State [...], a system of mixed economy and political pluralism. In that sense too, the ideological age has ended”.(Bell, 1961, pg 402,403)

We get a usual package of Stalinism as representation of all communism and of Western rough consensus on liberal economy – a message little different from political propaganda used in the Cold War, and not that far from Fukuyama’s end of history either. Together with his technocratic claims, like one on technical skill becoming more important than property(Bell, 1961, pg 398), Bell offers 14 pages of terrible mess, unashamedly(?) ideological in the middle of it all. His core claims aren’t even sustainable within short space that essay occupies, yet, it significantly features into Routledge’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* under entry for *ideology*. Few years after Bell’s collection

³liberal democracy may constitute the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and the “final form of human government,” and as such constituted the “end of history.”(Fukuyama, 1992, By Way of an Introduction)

on ideology was published, he went on to form *Public Interest*, magazine on whose publication board today sits Francis Fukuyama! AHA! Ideological line is being preserved, Bell's project of yet another attempt to proclaim own ideology as objective truth – specifically technology and economy in his case – and as the only option left, since all other ideologies ended, is in good hands. No wonder than the only time Jorge Larraín mentions him in his *The Concept of Ideology* is when talking about the ideology of technological rationality: “Curiously enough, this ideology is shared by those like Daniel Bell, who, talk about the end of ideology.” (Larraín, 1979, pg 208). Publication was defined by absolute conviction of founders in ability to distinguish between ideological articles, and others: “We shall doubtless publish ideological articles, if they seem particularly challenging and perceptive. But, we hope, not many; and not often.” (Bell and Kristol, 1965,). It was Bell who wrote few years earlier: “The point is that ideologists are ‘terrible simplifiers’”. Indeed. In 1995, co-founder of *Public Interest* Irving Kristol wrote about their own development:

One such current was what came to be called “neoconservatism,” and its origins can be traced to the founding of The Public Interest 30 years ago. Not that the founders of this journal had any such political goal. We were all liberals, of a kind, in 1965. But it turned out that most of us were the kind of liberals who were destined to play a role in the conservative revival. (Kristol, 1995,).

It fits well then that definition they used for the term *public interest* was one by Walter Lippmann! Let's recall what the man who coined the term Cold War in 1947, man who “inspired” Noam Chomsky to name his ground breaking media/political theory works *Necessary Illusions* and *Manufacturing Consent*, wrote on one of today's corner stones of American political practice, *Public Opinion*:

The established leaders of any organization have great natural advantages. They are believed to have better sources of informa-

tion. [...] they have a very great deal of control over the access to the facts. Every official is in some degree a censor. And since no one can suppress information, either by concealing it or forgetting to mention it, without some notion of what he wishes the public to know, every leader is in some degree a propagandist. [...] The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out. It has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based on analysis [...] as a result of psychological research, coupled with the modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner.

In this breath taking passage, Lippmann wrote as if he lived through 2004 USA elections⁴:

Within the life of the generation now in control of affairs, persuasion has become a self-conscious art and a regular organ of popular government. [...] the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political premise.

In todays words: two terms for Bush, won with mind boggling budget(Press, 2004) that allowed republicans by far biggest use of TV adds in the history of US elections, coupled with firm coalition with new-born Christians, with constant mention in public speeches of God, good, evil and freedom. Who can say that they calculated on such mixture of religious fundamentalism and neo-conservatism holding the office in only world super power today, all in the name of democracy and, ironically enough, against fundamentalists, along with complete disrespect for international bodies⁵. Or, like Lippmann

⁴it is vivid descriptions like this one that should fuel suspicion in time travel and alien abduction; is this not pure Orwell before Orwell?

⁵“Kyoto agreement is dead”, in the words and acts of G Bush; no American soldier will be tried in Hague court, while US is exerting pressure on ex-Yugoslav states to hand over their accused, or else!

warned us:

Under the impact of propaganda, not necessarily in the sinister meaning of the word alone, the old constants of our thinking have become variables. It is no longer possible, for example, to believe in the original dogma of democracy; that the knowledge needed for the management of human affairs comes up spontaneously from the human heart.

Let's not forget that this was written in *1921*, when onslaught of modern media (tv, internet) wasn't even on the horizon! Although it was Lippmann's thought that directly – no need for translations through re-reading – provided inspiration for today's neo-conservatives, it was Leo Strauss who gave such ideas philosophical grounding and history by re-reading the classical works, and creating obscure mix (Lobe, 2003), practice of which we're witnessing in politics today. Although religion and deception both feature at the top of it, it is belief in elitism that lends itself as a theoretical and practical spine, another of Lippmann's visions:

In the absence of institutions and education by which the environment is so successfully reported that the realities of public life stand out sharply against self-centered opinion, the common interests very largely elude public opinion entirely, and can be managed only by a specialized class whose personal interests reach beyond the locality. (Lippmann)

And finally, as if he watched those unconvincing election speeches of American Democrats in 2004 campaign, Lippmann strikes at the core difference between two elites:

Therefore, if you had asked a pioneer democrat where the information was to come from on which the will of the people was to be based, he would have been puzzled by the question. It would have seemed a little as if you had asked him where his life or his soul came from. (Lippmann)

From seemingly innocent definition of ideology, presented in political theory class as one of the main strands of it, we're knees deep into ideology itself: from the roots of neo-conservatism that Bell and his Public Interest represent, to the link with religious fundamentalism – via Lippmann's elites and Strauss' philosophical formulation of it through rejection of modernism and acceptance of religion as a possible form of *deception*. If Steger is right, we have arrived at – what he proposes as ideology practiced by the USA last decade, especially last few years (he separates pre and post 9/11 phases) – *new ideology of globalization* (Steger, February 2005). The question for us that should not be avoided is: *WHAT IS THIS ONCE-LIBERAL-TURNED-NEO-CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGICAL ROOT DOING IN political theory LECTURE as one of the few, if not the main (according to Haywood) “social-scientific” theories of ideology?* One would hope that, precisely for the lack of what it claims to achieve for Haywood (scientific method), Bell's method will be challenged, and unless this essay is proven wrong in its core claims, removed from syllabus. Or at least that its status will be updated, its exploding lack of coherence on several fundamental claims it makes noted, and its recent abandonment by some of the main theoreticians of ideology, even liberal ones, mentioned⁶.

⁶Liberal theorist of ideology Michael Freeden is clear in his dismissal of Bell's theory, whom he even doesn't mention anywhere in the book: “Twice, in the mid-twentieth century and towards its end, we have been informed that the age of ideologies is over. Twice this prove to be incorrect. But here the student of ideology have been at fault, for failing to identify as ideologies certain phenomena placed right under their eyes [...] the end of ideology would be – to put it simply – no less than the end of politics” (Freeden, 2001, pg 2). Larrain didn't even bothered with Bell, apart from the comment on how pointless Bell's - given that Bell, in the same essay, clearly subscribed to technological rationalism, for of ideology in itself. I pointed to numerous other inconsistencies in Bell above.

4 Instead of a conclusion, Bell unpacked: reckless scientist who choose wise?

There can not be, and we stated that at the beginning, conclusions on the subject of ideology in such a short space. There would be no point in studying ideology through the premises of the ideology that shaped what we're being taught, all under the premise of objective science. Although – not that it applies to Goldsmiths, but it is worth mentioning – a story well told significantly increases the chance of being convincing. With any candy⁷, unwrapping comes first.

If the above analysis stands, two conclusions arise: first, as a social scientist, Bell was reckless at best, cunning ideologist at worst - which one of the two is irrelevant, truth might as well lie somewhere in-between. In his introduction to 1961 edition of “End of Ideology” collection, he responded to some criticism acknowledging existence of right-wing ideologies, and his reduction of the term – well, he called it a “focus of his discussion” – to the left-wing meaning, writing that “the word *ideology* was a product of the 'left'”(Bell, 1961, pg 17). Imagine a physicist who researches an area that Albert Einstein discovered, who acknowledges, but rejects Einstein's work, and 'focuses' on other theories of the subject given – because Einstein was an active communist in later life? Hard? Well, that's what Bell, knowingly, did. Reckless might be a compliment after all.

On the other hand, Bell's choice of ideology, technocratic rationalism, was, if we are to follow Žižek, and indeed many other theorists who hold

⁷Would anyone argue that ideologies aren't appealing, addictive and satisfying, no matter what the result? i.e. we eat it obsessively, we love every moment of it, and eventually we die of the heart attack or of some other major organ failure caused by what we ate. Was fascism then not the ultimate junk food? the ultimate candy - addictive, irresistible, messenger of joy and death. Well, we don't know. Liberalism and neo-conservatism are on the run, and if the ecological catastrophe, or another world war, gets us all, for survivors, fascism will sound like a Cadbury's chocolate on a rainy day in central London, after a miserable 12 hour day at work, waiting in a queue for a local burger that somehow tastes not-as-good-as-it-usually-does, followed by a news that public transport collapsed due to unforeseen circumstances - and cabs are anyway too expensive and impossible to get when it rains.

those views, choice of what is predominant ideology today:

In postpolitics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties who compete for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists and public opinion specialists, for example) and liberal multiculturalists; via the process of negotiation of interests a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus.(Žižek, Summer 1998)

No wonder US former president Clinton didn't like it when his advisors broke him the news⁸ that it is neo-conservative ideology – technocratic rationalism controlling the markets of all commodities – that lies at the hearth of possible liberal strong hold. In the words of Dalmatian proverb “Samo ti pizdi!”. Closest translation of this cultural bullet-gem would be: a relaxed man who has some superior knowledge, or wisdom, telling someone who talks a lot, with a smile, or sense of blissful satisfaction, to continue with his rants – since wise man knows that all the performative power of speech isn't strong enough to overpower some kernel that he knows of. Neo-conservatives need liberals to talk about democracy, specific “narrow, formal-procedural understanding of democracy”, low-intensity or thin-democracy(Steger, February 2005), since liberals are far more convincing at it: there's less to lie about it from their position, and it satisfies “enlightened” man's “need” for “self-governance” that it created i.e. neo-cons make liberals deal with the demand that they created in the first place, and then get on with business - of course, liberals do get their reward. Wrapping is appealing (liberal promises) and even the candy (only readers own ideological interpellation will suffice here now⁹) is sweet! It eventually kills us, but hey, we die at some point anyway, what the

⁸Clinton's famous words on his realization that those who operate markets are crucial to his reelection: “You mean to tell me that the success of my program and my reelection hinges on the Federal Reserve and a bunch of fucking bond traders?”(Woodward, 1994)

⁹There are two ways to look at the attraction of any ideological hegemony: one is through some specific content that it produces, that which appeals to subjects of hegemony; another is through processes that produce such content. Whichever reveals more on the root of its success to legitimate itself – and thus to ensure continuation of existing relations of domination – somewhere between the two, within the processes itself, *majority*

fuss. And what more do we want then? A bitter, ugly looking, pill instead? Some say that indeed, that's what communism in East Europe was like.

On this devilish (Lippmann/Strauss combo) mix of academic bigotry (Bell's *if it's by the Left, it can't be science*), at which hearth lies liberal/neo-conservatives symbiosis¹⁰, one is tempted to cross fertilize Joseph Goebbels' infamous statement "When i hear word 'culture', i reach for my gun", and its rephrase by cynical producer from Godard's *Le Mépris* "When i hear word 'culture', i reach for my cheque-book"¹¹ into more appropriate today: "*When i hear word 'democracy', i reach for my cheque-book.*"¹²

has to be able to recognize its authentic longings(Žižek, 1999, pg 184) if hegemony is to be successful. For more on this see Žižek's *Why Are Ruling Ideas Not the Ideas of Those Who Rule?*(Žižek, 1999). Althusserian concept of ideological interpellation is expanded on by Žižek in *I. Imaginary mis/recognition*(Žižek, 2001, pg 10). The reason interpellation has to remain reader's own for now is that, at the moment, there is no theory which is able to simulate the process of hegemonic ideology at work.

¹⁰That neo-conservative's power relies on liberal promises and false fulfilments, and that it is questionable whether liberals can get power on their own, are propositions that definitely need further investigation.

¹¹Žižek's initial gun/cheque-book parallel is a foundation for this.(Žižek, 1998, pg 22)

¹²In addition to the central analysis of this essay, there are several instances of democracy as commodity that come to mind:

- Seven hundred millions of dollars(Press, 2004), spent by Republican party alone in the 2004 USA elections
- Berlusconi's rise to power in Italy within a year of forming party supported with his own cash and media/entertainment empire
- Lord Sainsbury's cynical position in UK Labour government as science minister, his several million pounds annual gift to the party, and his multi-billion pounds worth food industry
- race by US companies for billions of dollars worth of contracts of Iraq "reconstruction", once "democracy" is established
- BEA Systems' acquisition of 4th biggest US arms manufacturer(Systems, 2005), because of all the military vehicles deployed in recent wars that are due for servicing and renewal
- buy out of almost all companies worth anything in the East Europe's more "democratic" states.

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