Politics

Political Philosophy and Theory; UK Politics; Politics and International Studies

Chapter   1
Introduction: Understanding Ideology

1. The role of ideas
2. What is ideology?
3. Left, centre and right
4. The rise and fall of ideologies

All people are political thinkers. Whether they know it or not, people use political ideas and concepts whenever they express their opinions or speak their mind. Everyday language is littered with terms such as 'freedom', 'fairness', 'equality', 'justice' and 'rights'. In the same way, words such as 'conservative', 'liberal', 'socialist', 'communist' and 'fascist' are regularly employed by people either to describe their own views, or those of others. However, even though such terms are familiar, even commonplace, they are seldom used with any precision or a clear grasp of their meaning. What, for instance, is 'equality'? What does it mean to say that all people are equal? Are people born equal, should they be treated by society as if they are equal? Should people have equal rights, equal opportunities, equal political influence, equal wages? Similarly, words such as 'communist' or 'fascist' are commonly misused. What does it mean to call someone a 'fascist'? What values or beliefs do fascists hold, and why do they hold them? How do communist views differ from those of, say, liberals, conservatives or socialists? This book examines the substantive ideas and beliefs of the major political ideologies. This introductory chapter considers the role of ideas in politics, the nature of political ideology, the value of the left/right spectrum in classifying ideologies, and the main challenges that confront ideologies in the twenty-first century.

The role of ideas

Not all political thinkers have accepted that ideas and ideologies are of much importance. Politics has sometimes been thought to be little more than a naked struggle for power. If this is true, political ideas are mere propaganda, a form of words or slogans designed to win votes or attract popular support. Ideas and ideologies are therefore simply 'window dressing', used to conceal the deeper realities of political life. This is certainly a position supported by behaviourism, the school of psychology associated with John B. Watson (1878–1958) and B. F. Skinner (1904–90). From the perspective of behaviourism, human beings are little more than biological machines, conditioned to act (or, more correctly, react) to external stimuli. The thinking subject, together with their ideas, values, feelings and intentions, is simply an irrelevance. A very similar view also informed 'dialectical materialism', the crude form of Marxism that dominated intellectual enquiry in the Soviet Union and other orthodox communist states. This held that political ideas can only be understood in the light of the economic or class

interests of those who express them. Ideas have a 'material basis', they have no meaning or significance on their own. Orthodox Marxists therefore analyse politics strictly in terms of social class and treat political ideologies as nothing more than an expression of the interests of particular classes.

The opposite argument has also been put. John Maynard Keynes (see p. 61), for example, argued that the world is ruled by little other than the ideas of economists and political philosophers. As he put it in the closing pages of his General Theory:

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

(Keynes [1936] 1963, p. 383)

Far from dismissing ideas as being conditioned responses to practical circumstances, this position highlights the degree to which beliefs and theories provide the wellspring of human action. The world is ultimately ruled by 'academic scribblers'. Such a view suggests, for instance, that modern capitalism, in important respects, developed out of the classical economics of Adam Smith (see p. 52) and David Ricardo (1772–1823), that Soviet communism was significantly shaped by the writing of Karl Marx (see p. 126) and V. I. Lenin (see p. 132), and that the history of Nazi Germany can only be understood by reference to the doctrines advanced in Hitler's Mein Kampf.

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

Ideas and ideologies influence political life in a number of ways. In the first place, they provide a perspective through which the world is understood and explained. People do not see the world as it is, but only as they expect it to be; in other words, they see it through a veil of ingrained beliefs, opinions and assumptions. Whether consciously or unconsciously, everyone subscribes to a set of political beliefs and values that guide their behaviour and influence their conduct. Political ideas and ideologies thus set goals that inspire political activity. In this respect politicians are subject to two very different influences. Without doubt, all politicians want power. This forces them to be pragmatic, to adopt those policies and ideas that are electorally popular or win favour with powerful groups such as business or the army. However, politicians seldom seek power simply for its own sake. They also possess beliefs, values and convictions about what to do with power when it is achieved.

The balance between pragmatic and ideological considerations clearly varies from politician to politician, and also at different stages in a politician's career. Some, for example Adolf Hitler (see p. 221), have been fiercely, even fanatically, committed to a clear set of ideological goals. Hitler's writings are shot through with virulent anti-Semitism (see p. 233) and openly discuss his desire to found a German-dominated, racial empire in eastern Europe. Marxist revolutionaries such as Lenin have been dedicated to the goal of building a classless, communist society. However, no politician can afford to be blinded by ideological conviction: at the very least, strategic compromises have to be made if power is to won and retained. Anti-Semitic attacks undoubtedly increased in Germany after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in 1933, but it was not until the war years that Hitler embarked upon the policy of racial extermination that some have believed was always his goal. In Lenin's case, despite a distaste for capitalism, in 1921 he introduced the New Economic Policy, which permitted the re-emergence of limited private enterprise in Russia. Other politicians, notably but by no means exclusively those in the USA, have come to be regarded as little more than political commodities. They have been packaged and have sold themselves on the basis of image and personality, paying little or no attention to ideas or policies. Nevertheless, US politicians are not simply power-seeking pragmatists. The importance of ideas and values in US politics is concealed by the fact that the two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, share the same broad ideological goals. Most US politicians subscribe to what has been called the 'American ideology', a set of liberal-capitalist values about the virtues of a free market economy and respect for the principles embodied in the US Constitution.

Political ideas also help to shape the nature of political systems. Systems of government vary considerably throughout the world and are always associated with particular values or principles. Absolute monarchies are based upon deeply established religious ideas, notably the divine right of kings. The political systems in most contemporary western countries are founded upon a set of liberal-democratic principles. Western states typically respect the ideas of limited and constitutional government, and also believe that government should be representative, based upon regular and competitive elections. In the same way, traditional communist political systems conformed to the principles of Marxism–Leninism. Communist states were dominated by a single party, a ruling Communist Party, whose authority rested upon Lenin's belief that the Communist Party alone represents the interests of the working class. Even the fact that the world is divided into a collection of nation-states and that government power is usually located at the national level reflects the impact of political ideas, in this case of nationalism and, more specifically, the principle of national self-determination.

Finally, political ideas and ideologies can act as a form of social cement, providing social groups, and indeed whole societies, with a set of unifying beliefs and values. Political ideologies have commonly been associated with particular social classes – for example, liberalism with the middle classes, conservatism with the landed aristocracy, socialism with the working class and so forth. These ideas reflect the life experiences, interests and aspirations of a social class, and therefore help to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. However, ideas and ideologies can also succeed in binding together divergent groups and classes within a society. For instance, there is unifying bedrock of liberal-democratic values in most western states, while in Muslim countries Islam has established a common set of moral principles and beliefs. In providing society with a unified political culture, political ideas help to promote order and social stability.

A unifying set of political ideas and values can develop naturally within a society. However, it can also be enforced from above in an attempt to manufacture obedience and thereby operates as a form of social control. The values of elite groups such as political and military leaders, government officials, landowners or industrialists may diverge significantly from those of the masses. Ruling elites may use political ideas to contain opposition and restrict debate through a process of ideological manipulation. This was most obvious in regimes that possessed 'official' ideologies such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In both cases official or politically 'reliable' beliefs, those of national socialism and Marxism–Leninism respectively, dominated political life and indeed all social institutions, art, culture, education, the media and so on. Opposing views and beliefs were simply censored or suppressed. Some argue that a more subtle form of ideological manipulation occurs in all societies. This can be seen in the Marxist belief, examined in the next section, that the culture of capitalist societies is dominated by ideas that serve the interests of the economically dominant class.

What is ideology?

This book is primarily a study of political ideologies, rather than an analysis of the nature of ideology. Much confusion stems from the fact that, though obviously related, 'ideology' and 'ideologies' are quite different things to study. To examine 'ideology' is to consider a particular type of political thought, distinct from, say, political science or political philosophy. To study political ideology is to analyse the nature, role and significance of this category of thought, and to reflect on questions such as which sets of political ideas and arguments should be classified as ideologies. For instance, is ideology liberating or oppressive, true or false, and so forth. Similarly, are conservatism and nationalism ideologies in the same sense as liberalism and socialism?

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

Concepts of ideology

The first problem confronting any discussion of the nature of ideology is the fact that there is no settled or agreed definition of the term, only a collection of rival definitions. As David McLellan (1995) put it, 'Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences.' Few political terms have been the subject of such deep and impassioned controversy. This has occurred for two reasons. In the first place, as all concepts of ideology acknowledge a link between theory and practice, the term uncovers highly contentious debates, considered in the previous section, about the role of ideas in politics and the relationship between beliefs and

theories on the one hand, and material life or political conduct on the other. Secondly, the concept of ideology has not been able to stand apart from the ongoing struggle between and amongst political ideologies. For much of its history the term ideology has been used as a political weapon, a device with which to condemn or criticize rival sets of ideas or belief systems. Not until the second half of the twentieth century was a neutral and apparently objective concept of ideology widely employed, and even then disagreements persisted over the social role and political significance of ideology. Among the meanings that have been attached to ideology are the following:

- A political belief system.
- An action-orientated set of political ideas.
- The ideas of the ruling class.
- The world-view of a particular social class or social group.
- Political ideas that embody or articulate class or social interests.
- Ideas that propagate false consciousness amongst the exploited or oppressed.
- Ideas that situate the individual within a social context and generate a sense of collective belonging.
- An officially sanctioned set of ideas used to legitimize a political system or regime.
- An all-embracing political doctrine that claims a monopoly of truth.
- An abstract and highly systematic set of political ideams.

The origins of the term are nevertheless clear. The word ideology was coined during the French Revolution by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836), and was first used in public in 1796. For de Tracy, idéologie referred to a new 'science of ideas', literally an idea-ology. With a rationalist zeal typical of the Enlightenment, he believed that it was possible objectively to uncover the origins of ideas, and proclaimed that this new science would come to enjoy the same status as established sciences such as biology and zoology. More boldly, since all forms of enquiry are based on ideas, de Tracy suggested that ideology would eventually come to be recognized as the queen of the sciences. However, despite these high expectations, this original meaning of the term has had little impact on later usage.

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

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

(Marx and Engels, 1970, p. 64)

Marx's concept of ideology has a number of crucial features. First, ideology is about delusion and mystification; it perpetrates a false or mistaken view of the world, what Engels later referred to as 'false consciousness'. Marx used ideology as a critical concept, whose purpose is to unmask a process of systematic mystification. His own ideas he classified as scientific, because they were designed accurately to uncover the workings of history and society. The contrast between ideology and science, between falsehood and truth, is thus vital to Marx's use of the term. Second, ideology is linked to the class system. Marx believed that the distortion implicit in ideology stems from the fact that it reflects the interests and perspective on society of the ruling class. The ruling class is unwilling to recognize itself as an oppressor and, equally, is anxious to reconcile the oppressed to their oppression. The class system is thus presented upside down, a notion Marx conveyed through the image of the camera obscura, the inverted picture that is produced by a camera lens or the human eye. Liberalism, which portrays rights that can only be exercised by the propertied and privileged as universal entitlements, is therefore the classic example of ideology.

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

Later generations of Marxists have, if anything, shown greater interest in ideology than Marx did himself. This largely reflects the fact that Marx's confident prediction of capitalism's doom proved to be highly optimistic, encouraging later Marxists to focus on ideology as one of the factors explaining the unexpected resilience of the capitalist mode of production. However, important shifts in the meaning of the term also took place. Most importantly, all classes came to be seen to possess ideologies. In What is to be Done? ([1902] 1988) Lenin thus described the ideas of the proletariat as 'socialist ideology' or 'Marxist ideology', phrases that would have been absurd for Marx. For Lenin and most twentieth-century Marxists, ideology referred to the distinctive ideas of a particular social class, ideas that advance its interests regardless of its class position. However as all classes, the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie, have an ideology, the term was robbed of its negative or pejorative connotations. Ideology no longer implied necessary falsehood and mystification, and no longer stood in contrast to science; indeed 'scientific socialism' (Marxism) was recognized as form of proletarian ideology. Nevertheless, although Lenin's concept of ideology was essentially neutral, he was well aware of the role ideology played in upholding the capitalist system. Enslaved by 'bourgeois ideology', the proletariat, Lenin argued, would never achieve class consciousness on its own, hence he pointed to the need for a 'vanguard' party to guide the working masses towards the realization of their revolutionary potential.

The Marxist theory of ideology was perhaps developed furthest by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci ([1935] 1971) argued that the capitalist class system is upheld not simply by unequal economic and political power, but by what he termed the 'hegemony' of bourgeois ideas and theories. Hegemony means leadership or domination, and in the sense of ideological hegemony it refers to the capacity of bourgeois ideas to displace rival views and become, in effect, the commonsense of the age. Gramsci highlighted the degree to which ideology is embedded at every level in society, in its art and literature, in its education system and mass media, in everyday language and popular culture. This bourgeois hegemony, Gramsci insisted, could only be challenged at the political and intellectual level, which means through the establishment of a rival 'proletarian hegemony', based on socialist principles, values and theories.

The capacity of capitalism to achieve stability by manufacturing legitimacy was also a particular concern of the Frankfurt School, a group of mainly German neo-Marxists who fled the Nazis and later settled in the USA. Its most widely known member, Herbert Marcuse (see p. 136), argued in One Dimensional Man (1964) that advanced industrial society has developed a 'totalitarian' character in the capacity of its ideology to manipulate thought and deny expression to oppositional views.

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

Italian Marxist and social theorist. The son of a minor public official, Gramsci joined the Socialist Party in 1913, becoming in 1921 the general secretary of the newly formed Italian Communist Party. He was elected to the Italian Parliament in 1924, but was imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926. He remained incarcerated until his death.

In Prison Notebooks (Gramsci, 1971), written between 1929 and 1935, Gramsci tried to redress the emphasis within orthodox Marxism upon economic or material factors. He rejected any form of 'scientific' determinism by stressing, through the theory of hegemony, the importance of the political and intellectual struggle. Gramsci remained throughout his life a Leninist and a revolutionary. His stress on revolutionary commitment and 'optimism of the will' also endeared him to the new left.

By manufacturing false needs and turning humans into voracious consumers, modern societies are able to paralyse criticism through the spread of widespread and stultifying affluence. According to Marcuse, even the apparent tolerance of liberal capitalism serves a repressive purpose in that it creates the impression of free debate and argument, thereby concealing the extent to which indoctrination and ideological control take place.

One of the earliest attempts to construct a non-Marxist concept of ideology was undertaken by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947). Like Marx, he acknowledged that people's ideas are shaped by their social circumstances, but, in contrast to Marx, he strove to rid ideology of its negative implications. In Ideology and Utopia ([1929] 1960) Mannheim portrayed ideologies as thought systems that serve to defend a particular social order, and that broadly express the interests of its dominant or ruling group. Utopias, on the other hand, are idealized representations of the future that imply the need for radical social change, invariably serving the interests of oppressed or subordinate groups. He further distinguished between 'particular' and

'total' conceptions of ideology. 'Particular' ideologies are the ideas and beliefs of specific individuals, groups or parties, while 'total' ideologies encompass the entire Weltanschauung, or 'world-view', of a social class, society or even historical period. In this sense, Marxism, liberal capitalism and Islamic fundamentalism can each be regarded as 'total' ideologies. Mannheim nevertheless held that all ideological systems, including utopias, are distorted, because each offers a partial and necessarily self-interested view of social reality. However, he argued that the attempt to uncover objective truth need not be abandoned altogether. According to Mannheim, objectivity is strictly the preserve of the 'socially unattached intelligentsia', a class of intellectuals who alone can engage in disciplined and dispassionate enquiry because they have no economic interests of their own.

The subsequent career of the concept was deeply marked by the emergence of totalitarian dictatorships in the inter-war period, and by the heightened ideological tensions of the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. Liberal theorists in particular portrayed the regimes that developed in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia as historically new and uniquely oppressive systems of rule, and highlighted the role played by 'official' ideologies in suppressing debate and criticism and promoting regimented obedience. Writers as different as Karl Popper (1902–94), Hannah Arendt (1906–75), J. L. Talmon and Bernard Crick, and the 'end of ideology' theorists examined in Chapter 11, came to use the term ideology in a highly restrictive manner, seeing fascism and communism as its prime examples. According to this usage, ideologies are 'closed' systems of thought, which, by claiming a monopoly of truth, refuse to tolerate opposing ideas and rival beliefs. Ideologies are thus 'secular religions'; they possess a 'totalizing' character and serve as instruments of social control, ensuring compliance and subordination. However, not all political creeds are ideologies by this standard. For instance, liberalism, based as it is on a fundamental commitment to freedom, tolerance and diversity, is the clearest example of an 'open' system of thought (Popper, 1945).

A distinctively conservative concept of ideology can also be identified. This is based upon a long-standing conservative distrust of abstract principles and philosophies, born out of a sceptical attitude towards rationalism and progress. The world is viewed as infinitely complex and largely beyond the capacity of the human mind to fathom. The foremost modern exponent of this view was the British political philosopher Michael Oakeshott (1901–90). 'In political activity', Oakeshott argued in Rationalism in Politics (1962), 'men sail a boundless and bottomless sea'. From this perspective, ideologies are seen as abstract systems of thought, sets of ideas that are destined to simplify and distort social reality because they claim to explain what is, frankly, incomprehensible. Ideology is thus equated with dogmatism, fixed or doctrinaire beliefs that are divorced from the complexities of the real world. Conservatives have therefore rejected the 'ideological' style of politics, based on attempts to reshape the world in accordance with a set of abstract principles or pre-established theories. Until infected by the highly ideological politics of the new right, conservatives had preferred to adopt what Oakeshott called a 'traditionalist stance', which spurns ideology in favour of pragmatism, and looks to experience and history as the surest guides to human conduct.

Pragmatism

Pragmatism refers generally to a concern with practical circumstances rather than theoretical beliefs, with what can be achieved in the real world, as opposed to what should be achieved in an ideal world. As a philosophical doctrine (most commonly associated with philosophers such as William James (1842–1910) and John Dewey (1859–1952) pragmatism holds that the meaning and justification of beliefs should be judged by their practical consequences. Though by definition a pragmatic style of politics is non-ideological, it does not amount to unprincipled opportunism. Pragmatism suggests a cautious attitude towards change that rejects sweeping reforms and revolution as a descent into the unknown, and prefers instead incremental adjustments and, perhaps, evolutionary progress.

Since the 1960s, however, the term ideology has gained a wider currency through being refashioned according to the needs of conventional social and political analysis. This has established ideology as a neutral and objective concept, the political baggage once attached to it having been removed. Martin Seliger (1976), for example, defined an ideology as 'a set of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify the ends and means of organized social action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order'. An ideology is therefore an action-orientated system of thought. So defined, ideologies are neither good nor bad, true nor false, open nor closed, liberating nor oppressive – they can be all these things.

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

Ideology, truth and power

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

An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a

'world-view', (b) advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the 'good society', and (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b).

This definition is neither original nor novel, and it is entirely in line with the social-scientific usage of the term. It nevertheless draws attention to some of the important and distinctive features of the phenomenon of ideology. In particular it emphasizes that the complexity of ideology derives from the fact that it straddles the conventional boundaries between descriptive and normative thought, and between political theory and political practice. Ideology, in short, brings about two kinds of synthesis: between understanding and commitment, and between thought and action.

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

As (a) and (b) above are linked, 'facts' in ideologies inevitably tend to merge into and become confused with 'values'. One of the implications of this is that no clear distinction can be made between ideology and science. In this light, it is helpful to treat ideologies as paradigms, in the sense employed by Thomas Kuhn in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962). An ideology, then, can be seen as a set of principles, doctrines and theories that help to structure the process of intellectual enquiry. In effect it constitutes a framework within which the search for political knowledge takes place, a language of political discourse. For instance, much of academic political science and, still more clearly, mainstream economics draws upon individualist and rationalist assumptions that have an unmistakable liberal heritage. The notion of ideology as an intellectual framework or political language is also important because it highlights the depth at which ideology structures human understanding. The tendency to deny that one's own beliefs are ideological (often while condemning other people for committing precisely this sin) can be explained by the fact that, in providing the very concepts through which the world becomes intelligible, our ideology is effectively invisible. We fail or refuse to recognize that we look at the world through a veil of theories, presuppositions and assumptions that shape what we see and thereby impose meaning on the world.

The second synthesis, the fusion of thought and action, reflected in the linkage between (b) and (c) above, is no less significant. Seliger (1976) drew attention to this when referring to what he called the 'fundamental' and 'operative' levels of ideology. At a fundamental level, ideologies resemble political philosophies in that they deal with abstract ideas and theories, and their proponents may at times seem to be engaged in dispassionate enquiry. Although the term 'ideologue' is often reserved for crude or self-conscious supporters of particular ideologies, respected political philosophers such as John Locke (see p. 39), John Stuart Mill (see p. 31) and

Friedrich Hayek (see p. 95) each worked within and contributed to ideological traditions. At an operative level, however, ideologies take the form of broad political movements, engaged in popular mobilization and the struggle for power. Ideology in this guise may be expressed in sloganizing, political rhetoric, party manifestos and government policies. While ideologies must, strictly speaking, be both idea-orientated and action-orientated, certain ideologies are undoubtedly stronger on one level than the other. For instance, fascism has always emphasized operative goals and, if you like, the politics of the deed. Anarchism, on the other hand, especially since the mid-twentieth century, has largely survived at a fundamental or philosophical level.

Nevertheless, ideologies invariably lack the clear shape and internal consistency of political philosophies; they are only more or less coherent. This apparent shapelessness stems in part from the fact that ideologies are not hermetically sealed systems of thought; rather they are, typically, fluid sets of ideas that overlap with other ideologies and shade into one another. This not only fosters ideological development but also leads to the emergence of hybrid ideological forms, such as liberal conservatism, socialist feminism and conservative nationalism. Moreover, each ideology contains a range of divergent, even rival traditions and viewpoints. Not uncommonly, disputes between supporters of the same ideology are more passionate and bitter than arguments between supporters of rival ideologies, because what is at stake is the true nature of the ideology in question – what is 'true' socialism, 'true' liberalism or 'true' anarchism? Such conflicts, both between and within ideological traditions, are made more confusing by the fact that they are often played out with the use of the same political vocabulary, each side investing terms such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'justice' and 'equality' with their own meanings. This highlights the problem of what W. B. Gallie (1955–6) termed 'essentially contested concepts'. These are concepts about which there is such deep controversy that no settled or agreed definition can ever be developed. In this sense, the concept of ideology is certainly 'essentially contested', as indeed are the other terms examined in the 'Perspectives on …' boxes.

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

What does this tell us about the relationship between ideology and truth? For Marx, as we have seen, ideology was the implacable enemy of truth. Falsehood is implicit in ideology because,

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

This implies that there exists no objective standard of truth against which ideologies can be judged. Indeed, to suggest that ideologies can be deemed to be either true or false is to miss the vital point that they embody

Perspectives on …

Ideology

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

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

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

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

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

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

values, dreams and aspirations that are, by their very nature, not susceptible to scientific analysis. No one can 'prove' that one theory of justice is preferable to any other, any more than rival conceptions of human nature can be tested by surgical intervention to demonstrate once and for all that human beings possess rights, are entitled to freedom, or are naturally selfish or naturally sociable. Ideologies are embraced less because they stand up to scrutiny and logical analysis, and more because they help individuals, groups and societies to make sense of the world in which they live. As Andrew Vincent (1995, p. 20) put it, 'We examine ideology as fellow travellers, not as neutral observers.'

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

Left, right and centre

Many attempts have been made to categorize political ideas and ideologies, and to relate them to one another. The most familiar and firmly established method of doing this is the left–right political spectrum. This is a linear spectrum that locates political beliefs at some point between two extremes, the far left and the far right. Terms such as 'left wing' or 'right wing' are widely used to sum up a person's political beliefs or position, and groups of people are referred to collectively as 'the left', 'the right' and indeed 'the centre'. There is also broad agreement about where different ideas and ideologies are located along this spectrum. Most people would recognize the spectrum depicted in Figure 1.1.

Although familiar, it is far more difficult to establish precisely what the spectrum means and how helpful it is in defining and describing political views. The origin of the terms 'left' and 'right' dates back to the French Revolution and the seating arrangements adopted by the different groups Figure 1.1 Linear spectrum at the first meeting of the Estates-General in 1789.

Communism   Socialism   Liberalism   Conservatism   Fascism
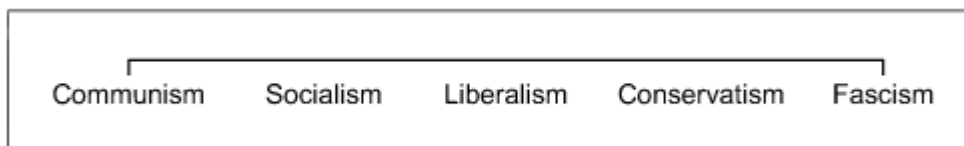
Aristocrats who supported the king sat to his right, while radicals, members of the Third Estate, sat to his left. A similar seating pattern was followed in the subsequent French Assemblies. The term 'right' was soon understood to mean reactionary or monarchist, and the term 'left' implied

revolutionary or egalitarian sympathies. In contemporary politics, however, the left–right divide has become increasingly complex and no longer reflects a simple choice between revolution and reaction. For example, although right-wing views may often be reactionary and preach a return to an earlier and better time, fascism, on the extreme right, has also been revolutionary, and in the case of Italian fascism, positively forward-looking. Similarly, although left-wing views have usually been progressive or revolutionary, socialists and communists have at times resisted change. For instance, they have sought to defend the welfare state, or to prevent centrally planned economies from being reformed or abolished.

The linear spectrum is commonly understood to reflect different political values or contrasting views about economic policy. In terms of values, the spectrum is sometimes said to reflect different attitudes towards equality. Left-wingers are committed to equality and are optimistic about the possibility of achieving it. Right-wingers typically reject equality as either undesirable or impossible to achieve. This is closely related to different attitudes towards the economy, and in particular the ownership of wealth. Communists, on the far left, have believed in a state-planned economy; socialists and modern liberals have defended the mixed economy and government regulation; right-wing conservatives are committed to free-market capitalism and private property. All such interpretations, however, involve inconsistencies. For instance, fascist regimes have practised economic management and state control, despite being on the far right of the spectrum. Moreover, it is unclear where anarchism should be placed on the linear spectrum. Anarchists are strongly committed to the idea of equality, which would normally place them on the far left of the spectrum, but their opposition to all forms of economic management and any form of government may suggest that they should be on the far right.

The weakness of the linear spectrum is that it tries to reduce politics to a single dimension, and suggests that political views can be classified according to merely one criterion, be it one's attitude to change, view of Figure 1.2 Horseshoe spectrum equality or economic philosophy.


Figure 1.2 Horseshoe spectrum
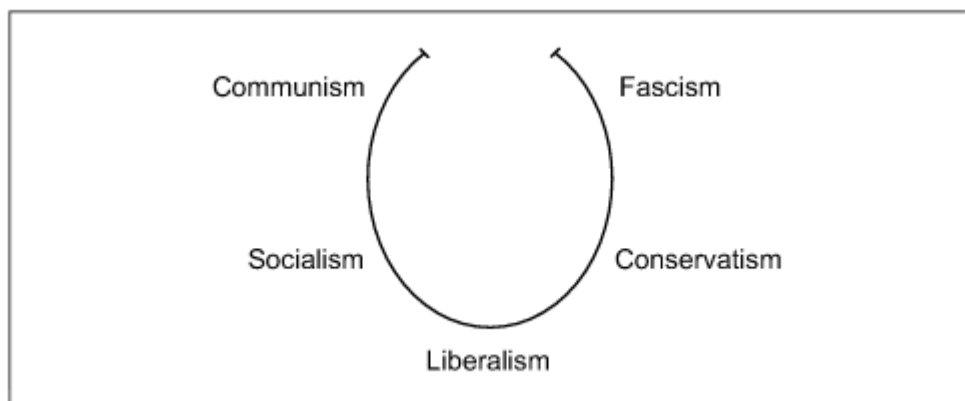
Political ideologies are in fact highly complex collections of beliefs, values and doctrines, which any kind of spectrum is forced to oversimplify. Attempts have nevertheless been made to develop more sophisticated political spectrums that embody two or more dimensions. The linear spectrum, for example, has sometimes been criticized because the ideologies at its extremes, communism and fascism, exhibit similarities. In particular, communist and fascist regimes have both developed repressive, authoritarian forms of political rule, which some have described as

'totalitarian'. As a result, an alternative political spectrum might be horseshoe-shaped, indicating that the extreme points on the left and the right tend to converge, distinguishing both from the 'democratic' beliefs of liberalism, socialism and conservatism (Figure 1.2).

Another spectrum was proposed by Hans Eysenck in Sense and Nonsense in Psychology (1964). Eysenck took the conventional left–right spectrum as the horizontal axis of his spectrum, but added a vertical axis that measured political attitudes that were at one extreme 'tough minded' or authoritarian, and at the other 'tender minded' or democratic. Political ideas can therefore be positioned on both the left–right axis and the 'tough' and 'tender' axis. In this case the differences between, for instance, Nazism and Stalinism can be made clear by placing these at opposite extremes of the left–right axis, while their similarities can be emphasized by placing both firmly at the 'tough minded' extreme of the vertical axis (Figure 1.3).

However, all such spectrums raise difficulties because they tend to simplify and generalize highly complex sets of political ideas. At best, they are a shorthand method of describing political ideas or beliefs, and must always be used with caution. In fact a growing body of literature advocates abandoning the left–right divide altogether. As Giddens (1994) pointed out, the emergence of new political issues such as feminism, animal rights and the environment has rendered the conventional ideas Figure 1.3 Two-dimensional spectrum of left and right largely redundant.
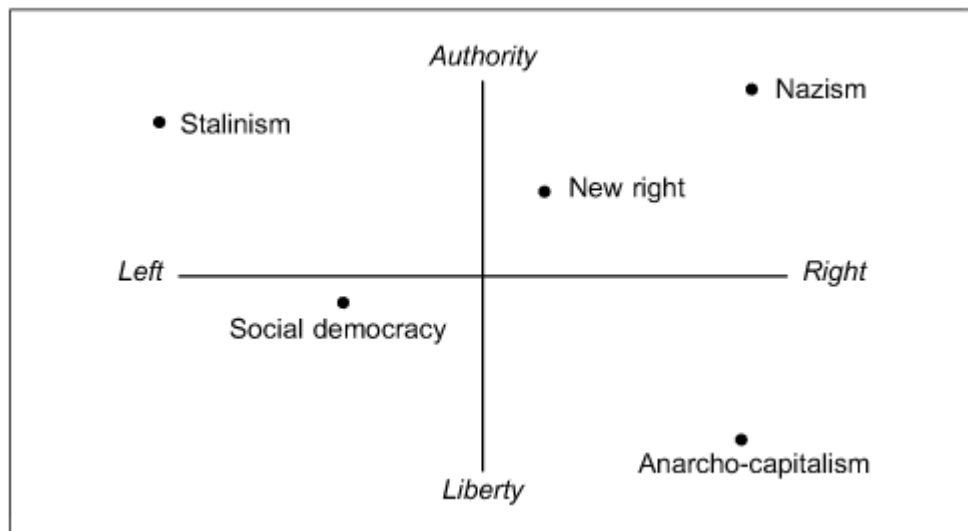
The green movement stated this boldly in adopting slogans such as 'not left or right but ahead'. The shift away from old class polarities has also furthered this process, leading to a situation in which, for instance, conservatives have developed a growing taste for radicalism and ideological politics, and socialists have evinced an enthusiasm for competition and the market. In sharp contrast, however, Norberto Bobbio (1996) has argued that, since left and right essentially reflect different attitudes towards equality, the terms are far from irrelevant in a world characterized by new patterns of societal inequality and widening global inequalities.

Political ideologies in the twenty-first century

Since the late twentieth century a series of political, social and cultural upheavals has refashioned the world in which we live, creating the impression that history is 'speeding up'. With hindsight, the two hundred years from the Fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, or, more briefly, the period from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, appear to have been characterized by continuity and relative stability, at least by comparison with the uncertainty, even shapelessness, of the contemporary world. Marx's comment that 'All that is solid melts into air', made in 1848, has come to have an eerie but unmistakable relevance. For some, these developments mark the passing of the 'age of ideologies', implying that the major ideologies are now, effectively, disengaged from the political world they once interpreted and helped to shape. Such arguments are examined in the final chapter of the book. At the very least, the major ideological traditions are having to adjust to, and are in some cases are being re-defined by, a series of new and often interlinked challenges. The most significant of these are the following:

- The changing world order
- Postmodernity and 'post-isms'
- Globalization

The changing world order

World order has been significantly changed as a result of the end of the Cold War, brought about by the collapse of communism in the eastern European revolutions of 1989–91, and, more recently, by the advent of global terrorism (see p. 304). The 'long' Cold War – or what Hobsbawm (1994) referred to as the 'short' twentieth century, 1914–91 – was marked by an ideological battle between capitalism and communism, which was significantly intensified by the emergence of the USA and the Soviet Union as rival superpowers in the post-Second World War period. The ideological ramifications of the collapse of communism have been profound and wide-ranging, but remain the subject of debate. The earliest and initially most influential interpretation was that the demise of communism had left western-style liberal democracy, particularly in its US form, as the sole viable ideological model worldwide. This view was advanced though the so-called 'end of history' thesis, discussed in Chapter 11. Such developments have certainly had a profound affect upon socialism. Revolutionary socialism, especially in its Soviet-style, Marxist-Leninist guise, appears to be a spent force, both in the developing world and in postcommunist states. Democratic socialism has nevertheless also been affected; some argue that it has been fatally compromised. In particular, the failure of central planning has weakened faith even in more modest versions of 'top-down' state control, forcing democratic socialists to accept the market as the only reliable means of generating wealth. These developments are examined in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The ramifications of the end of the Cold War have not been confined to socialist ideology, however. For example, far from bringing about the victory of universal liberalism, the collapse of communism has resulted in the emergence of a range of ideological forces. Chief amongst these have been nationalism, particularly ethnic nationalism, which has displaced Marxism-

Leninism as the leading ideology in many postcommunist states, and religious fundamentalism, which, in its various forms, has had growing influence in the developing world. Moreover, even ideologies that were meant to profit from the 'death of socialism', notably liberalism and conservatism, have been affected in sometimes odd ways. To some extent, the strength and coherence of liberalism and conservatism in the twentieth century had derived from the fact that they were defined in opposition to a socialist or communist 'enemy'. For instance, the new right emerged in the late twentieth century to express general antipathy towards 'creeping socialism', and particular hostility towards Soviet communism. The collapse or retrenchment of their traditional enemy means that in the twenty-first century liberalism and conservatism are each becoming more shapeless and differentiated.

September 11, 2001, the date of the devastating terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, has widely been interpreted as 'the day the world changed'. However, it is less clear how it has changed and what its implications are, or might be, for the major ideologies. The advent of global terrorism has undoubtedly had major international and national consequences. Internationally, under the auspices of George W. Bush's 'war on terror', the USA has adopted an increasingly forward and, in some respects, unilateralist foreign policy. Examples of this include the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Nevertheless, the ideological consequences of such actions are difficult to predict. On the one hand, if the 'war on terror' succeeds in constraining or destroying anti-western religious militancy and in toppling those who give it support, it may, in the long term, help to universalize liberal-democratic values and institutions. On the other hand, in line with Samuel Huntington's (1993) 'clash of civilizations' thesis, it may provoke a still more bitter anti-American and anti-western backlash and further strengthen fundamentalist religion. At a national level, global terrorism has served to bolster the state generally and, in particular, to ground state authority more firmly in its capacity to protect citizens and maintain security. In The Shield of Achilles (2002), Philip Bobbitt thus argued that the state is essentially a 'warmaking institution'. To the extent that the terrorist threat establishes the primacy of order and state security over a concern with civil liberties and individual rights it may be associated with a drift towards conservatism and the erosion of liberal sensibilities.

Postmodernity

The birth of political ideologies can be traced back to the processes through which the modern world came into existence. The process of modernization had social, political and cultural dimensions. Socially, it was linked to the emergence of increasingly market-orientated and capitalist economies, dominated by new social classes, the middle class and the working class. Politically, it involved the replacement of monarchical absolutism by the advance of constitutional and, in due course, democratic government. Culturally, it took the form of the spread of Enlightenment ideas and views, which challenged traditional beliefs in religion, politics and learning in general based upon a commitment to the principles of reason and progress. The 'core' political ideologies, the ones out of which later ideologies emerged or developed in opposition to – liberalism, conservatism and socialism – reflected contrasting responses to the process of modernization.

If the major political ideologies were, in their various ways, products of modernization, the transition from a modern to a postmodern society cannot but have profound significance for their roles and character. While modern societies were structured by industrialization and class solidarity, postmodern societies are increasingly fragmented and pluralistic 'information societies' in which individuals are transformed from producers to consumers, and individualism replaces class, religious and ethnic loyalties. Postmodernity, sometimes portrayed as late modernity, has both thrown up new ideological movements and transformed established ones. The former tendency has been reflected in the growing importance of so-called 'lifestyle' and 'identity' issues, linked to the rise of postmaterial sensibilities and the declining ability of class to generate a meaningful sense of social identity. This has been evident since the 1960s in the growth of new social movements – the peace movement, the women's movement, the gay movement, the green movement and so on – and in the emergence of new ideological traditions, notably radical feminism and ecologism. New ideological thinking has also been stimulated by attempts to blend established ideological traditions with the ideas of postmodernism (see p. 323). This has given rise to variety of 'post-isms', examples of which include 'post-liberalism', 'post-Marxism' and 'post-feminism'. These are each discussed in their appropriate chapters. The prospects of postmodernism displacing conventional ideological thinking altogether are examined in Chapter 11.

Globalization

Globalization is a slippery and elusive concept. The major theme in globalization is the emergence, in Kenichi Ohmae's (1989) words, of a 'borderless world', the tendency of traditional political borders, based on national and state boundaries, to become permeable. Globalization thus reconfigures social space in that territory matters less because an increasing range of connections have a 'transworld' or 'transborder' character. Obvious examples of this include the greater ease with which transnational corporations are able to relocate production and investment, the fact that financial markets react almost immediately to economic events anywhere in the world, and the emergence of so-called global goods, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's beefburgers, Nike running shoes and Starbucks coffee houses, that are available almost worldwide.

Globalization affects political ideologies in a variety of ways. First, it has major implications for nationalism and for other ideological projects that are based upon the nation. For example, political nationalism, linked to national self-determination, may have become redundant in a world in which nation-states operate in 'post-sovereign' conditions. On the other hand, forms of cultural, ethnic and religious nationalism may be strengthened by the fact that the state is losing its capacity to generate political allegiance and civic loyalty. Modern liberalism and social democracy have been compromised by the declining viability of national economic strategies, such as Keynesian demand management, and conservatism is having to grapple with globalization's tendency to weakening tradition and national identity. Second, globalization is by no means a neutral ideological force in its own right. Rather, it has gone hand in hand with neoliberalism, in that it has strengthened the market at the expense of the state. Third, globalization has generated a range of oppositional forces. These include a strengthening of religious fundamentalism in the developing world, where globalization is often viewed as form of western or specifically US imperialism, and an anti-globalization or anti-capitalist movement

in the developed world that has drawn, variously, on the ideas of socialism, anarchism, feminism and ecologism. The idea of globalization as ideology is discussed in Chapter 11.

Further reading

Eagleton, T., Ideology: An Introduction (London and New York, 1991). An examination of the different definitions of ideology that considers the ideas of key Marxist thinkers through to the various post-structuralists.

Freeden, M., Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). An examination of the major ideologies that pays particular attention to their conceptual morphology.

Journal of Political Ideologies (Abingdon, UK and Cambridge, Mass., USA: Carfax Publishing). A journal, published since 1996, that analyses the nature of political ideology and examines concrete ideological traditions; demanding but wide-ranging and authoritative.

McLellan, D., Ideology (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2nd edn 1995). A clear and short yet comprehensive introduction to the elusive concept of ideology.

Schwartzmantel, J. The Age of Ideology: Political Ideologies from the American Revolution to Post-Modern Times (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). A broad-ranging analysis of how the major ideological traditions are coping with the challenge of postmodern society.

Seliger, M., Ideology and Politics (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976). A very thorough account of ideology, considered by some to be the classic treatment of the subject.

Thompson, J. B., Studies in the Theory of Ideology (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). A good introduction to debates about the nature and significance of ideology.