

# Toward a Liberal Theory of Ideology - A Quasi-marxian Exploration

Jan Narveson, *University of Waterloo*

## Summary

This paper sketches a theory of "ideology" of broadly marxian type, but at once more general and more modest. Ideology is at work when there is an interest on the part of the rulers in bamboozling those they rule: acceptance by the ruled class of those ideas serves to support and enhance the power of the rulers. It also explains how this is not only possible but probably inevitable in a liberal democracy. It does not claim that ideological motivation necessarily invalidates all claims made by the rulers, or that its hold on the society is all-pervasive, or that ethical and political philosophy (say) are undermined because of its operation. It does suggest that liberal democracies are likely to be both less liberal and appreciably poorer as a result of the operation of ideological factors.

## Introduction

One of the more suggestive but not very satisfactory components of Marx's general theory was his theory of "ideology". As he expounded it, the ethics, religion, and philosophy (and maybe some other things), of a given "era" were part of a sort of conspiracy by the "ruling class", which he and his followers called the "bourgeoisie" and identified with the "capitalist" class. The effect of this conspiracy was to keep the masses in their place, construed somehow. Along with this went an implication that ideas used for this purpose were either false or perhaps meaningless. Being part of the ideology undermined their status as independent claims to truth. This seems to have led to Marx's tendency to reject ethics and ethical theory as meaningless shams, among many other things. Perhaps most unsatisfactorily of all, the scope of his claims was such that Marxism itself looks rather like one of the things that ought to have been undermined by his theory - surely an embarrassment for any self-respecting social theory.

The theory sketched here is not put forward essentially as an interpretation of Marx, though it does owe much of its inspiration to him; hence the subtitle 'quasi-marxian'. I shall, at any rate, be concerned to indicate where the proposal is and where it is not in agreement with (what I understand to be) Marx's version. It is, however, put forward in its own right. Nothing that follows should be understood to depend conceptually on anything's having been said or thought by Marx. (Since, as will be evident, I have no use whatever for Marx's economics or for his socialist political theories, the latter caveat is no doubt a welcome one to some).

The exposition here has two aims. First, there is the aim of generalizing the idea: making it independent of Marx's critique of capitalism, for instance, and in principle

applicable to any number of specific social configurations and economic arrangements. The second aim is to develop a modest but, I think, reasonably important application to our own day. There is ample room to suggest that a substantial ideological component affects, as a quite inherent side effect of our political system, the politics (and thus the economics) of the liberal-democratic societies that are dominant in our era.

### **Ideology Theory: Basics**

The essential components of an ideology theory would seem to be these:

- (1) a "ruling class" (which we will call 'R', for 'rulers'), distinguishable from a "ruled class" (we will call it 'C' for 'citizens');
- (2) a recognizable set of interests of R, *in conflict with* the interests of C, such that R is interested in its being the case that C has certain beliefs, which
- (3) are either false or meaningless, and which
- (4) R has the power to induce C to believe.

The central claim of the theory, then, is that in the political systems in question, rulers have an interest in, and the power to, bamboozle their subjects on matters of importance to the latter; and that, because they do, there is an appreciable probability that the idea and information disseminated by those rulers on those matters is both open to suspicion and likely to be worthwhile suspecting on the part of the citizens.

Let me caution that it need *not* be part of the burden of an ideology theory that the phenomena captured by it be all-pervasive or irresistible or even merely overwhelmingly dominant. In particular, for instance, nothing requires that *all* of the ideas which R would like C to believe are either false or contrary to C's interest. What is required, for an ideological theory to have scope, is only that *some* have those characteristics. Moreover, it is not flatly assumed that ideology is unjustifiable, overall. Perhaps in the grand perspective of all things, Plato's Big Lie might be benign after all? What is argued is only that the phenomenon of ideology in the sense we hope to capture here is important, and affords, so far as it goes, a *prima facie* significant kind of criticism of the operation of any polity in which it is a significant factor.

### **Ideology and Conflicting Interests**

The leading idea of any such theory is that ideas are *used as tools on behalf of the interests of the rulers*, and are so used in such a way as to go *against* the interests of the ruled - or at least, against their interests as *they* conceive them. Of course, when we say that "ideas" are so used, what we mean is that their *propagation* is so used. The reason why A tries to induce B to believe p is not because A *believes* p (or not only because of that; we must allow for the - rather important, I think - cases in which A also believes it), nor that it would be *useful to B* to believe p, but rather that it is *useful to A to have B believe p*.

Thus, to make the theory plausible, we need to show that the rulers whose behavior we are considering do have such an interest and that it is indeed contrary to the interest of subjects. The latter is essential, for, to remind the reader, it is by no means maintained that *all* ideas circulated by rulers involve this kind of conflict. If that were so, things would be far worse than they are; indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that they would be downright impossible. (How do you run a post office if *everything* the clerk tells the user is false or meaningless?). It is just that where the interests of R and C are at one with respect to p, and p is true, then we do not have "ideology" - we simply have education, enlightenment. One could use the term 'ideology' more broadly, shorn of any requirement that the ideas in question be either false or contrary to the interest of the subordinate class, but that seems rather pointless.

In saying such things, we imply that there is, in the cases in question, a *conflict of interests* between R and C. In attributing such conflicts, we have to be cautious about the sort of interests we have in mind, and the sort of evaluations being made.

First, we had better distinguish between a person's *interests*, generically, and her *self-interest*. We may be, and usually are, interested in all sorts of things, typically including various other people. When I am (positively) interested in you, then the fact that you do well, in the respects I am interested in, serves my interest as well, so far as it goes. It does so by serving this particular other-regarding interest in you.

There is an extremely important, and very difficult, question whether my interest in you must at some point or other be based on your self-interest. The thesis that they must would say, for instance, that if I claim to be positively interested in your welfare, then what I am interested in is that certain states of you obtain which are in your interests *tout court*: e.g., my interest that you will be fed is an interest in a state of you that can be defined independently of my interest. Of course, there could also be negative other-regarding interests: if I am a sadist, I might be interested in you starving or being tortured to death.

There can also be other-regarding interests whose objects are definable independently of the interests of the persons in whom the interest is taken. I could be interested in your having a characteristic about which you simply do not care, one way or the other.

Is it conceivable that I should have an interest in an irreducible relation between me and you, not definable independently of either of us? Some have talked as though some important personal relations, such as love, are like that. But - luckily - we need not pursue this further here. What matters is that for purposes of making good claims about ideology, we must specify interests of the ruled in a plausible, recognizable way, such that the range of ideas focussed on in the claim works contrary to their interest, in the sense that acceptance of them will motivate action (or inaction) on the part of C that is suboptimal from C's point of view.

Conflict of interest between one person and another obtains when what is in one person's interest is such that if it is realized, then the resulting state of affairs would be against the other's interest. In a straight zero-sum game, A's gain is B's loss, and vice versa. In most of the situations of interest to political philosophy, though, this special case

is not what is going on. Rather, it is that if x is done, then the result is worse for B and better for A, whether or not A actually *identified* his interest with B's loss. One not only hopes, but really supposes, and plausibly so, that modern "rulers" in the liberal democracies do not positively hate their subjects.

### Establishing Motivation

This requirement that the theory be able to characterize the opposed interests in a plausible way is an important one, for one of the main responsibilities of a theory of ideology is to provide plausible accounts of the motivations of the actors. Absent this, its purported explanation of the phenomena it considers would not be plausible. In Marx's case, for example, his theory is unable to explain why capitalists are supposed to be "interested" in doing down the proletariat, for that is an aim that makes no inherent sense in capitalist society, especially at the "class" level.

This point is an extremely important one, and it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the failure of Marx's own theory in regard to the motivational question. Marx supposed that there was a general conflict of interests between owners and workers, a conflict leading the owners to "exploit" their workers by paying extremely low wages. Now, owners do, of course, have an interest in minimizing their costs, which include wage costs. True. But on the other hand, they also have an interest in selling to as many people as possible. The latter interest requires that those people, the potential buyers, have enough income to buy the goods that the owners wish to sell to them. So which of these two interests is the greater? It doesn't take a lot of insight to see that the latter interest is the greater, by far. If nobody can afford his goods, the capitalist will go out of business no matter how badly he treats his own employees. But if everybody can afford them, on the other hand, then he will be able to afford to pay his employees well and still make money. A Marxian could counter this by claiming that capitalists were too short-sighted to see this, but if one takes that line, it goes counter to his insight that we should be talking about *objective* interests. Besides, Marx's standard case (rightly) was that of *mass* production. A mass-producer who doesn't see the wisdom of having millions of ready buyers able to buy has to have quite a lot less savvy than even Marx's theory can feel comfortable positing.

To put the point more generally, while we might try crediting people with a general interest in dominating others for its own sake, this does not seem a plausible view. What makes a lot more sense is when the domination in question results in some *independently specifiable* gain for the dominator. Thus the hold-up man may or may not want simply to dominate his victim, but if he's picked the right victim, then the result of his domination will be a considerable increase in the dominator's disposable income. And that does make sense. Almost no matter who the dominator is, it is understandable that he would be interested in increasing his disposable income - the class of potential dominators is very large indeed if that is the motive.

Note that there is no intention, and no need, to elevate pecuniary motivation to the status of an *a priori* truth. What makes money a plausible object of desire is precisely that it is *not* intrinsically valuable. Rather, it's that it can be exchanged for almost anything,

and so its *extrinsic* value is extraordinarily widely based. It was reasonable for Rawls to have classified income and wealth as "primary goods". For him to so classify domination, on the other hand, would have been, I think, bizarre. Such a hypothesis would have to be defended by resorting to spelunking in the murky caverns of depth psychology - not a move to be commended to the aspiring social theorist.

### Liberalism and Ideology

Another point of importance here is: who evaluates people's situations? Clearly it is possible for A to think that x is good for B when B does not himself think so. This could happen either because A believes some matter of fact that B doesn't, though such that if B did know it, then B would come to agree that x was good for B; *or* it could be due to a "basic value disagreement" between them. Suppose - to take an example dear to this writer's heart - they disagree about the intrinsic value of Mozart's quartets. A might think that B was better off listening to Mozart even if B manifestly hated it. But while he could think this, he has, according to the liberal, no business acting on that view. In the liberal view, the view about A's interests that is definitive for social purposes is A's. Each person is taken to be the ultimate authority on his or her own interests. (This might be distinguished from the claim that a person is the "best" judge of them. There is room for reasonable, as well as unreasonable, disagreement about that).

I shall, then, be advancing a Liberal theory of Ideology. The theory is that some people, the "ruling class(es)", tend to propagate half-truths and untruths to the ruled, who in consequence act so as to solidify, expand, and/or enhance the private interests of the rulers. Like all ideology theories, this one is Thrasymachean, except that Thrasymachus insisted on *defining* justice as 'the interest of the stronger party' - or anyway, so Plato's translators have him saying. That's silly. Of course what is in the interest of the stronger party isn't by definition just; but the rulers do it anyway. This is not necessarily because they are evil but merely because they are *people*, and thus can be expected to have a natural bias toward their own interests. In the theory being expounded here, the rulers propound as "just" various ideas and bits of information which are in fact either vacuous or false, and do so because it serves their interests as private persons that those things be generally believed, and are able to get people to accept them precisely because they are the rulers. From the liberal point of view, of course, this is a *misuse* of the ruling power. But conservatives could hold otherwise, in various ways that we needn't detail here.

An interesting further question is whether we should suppose that people have an interest in the truth, so that anyone attempting to induce someone to believe a false proposition is thereby working against that person's interest. If we were Plato, of course, we could just posit this. But - being liberals - we aren't, so we need an explanation. However, for present purposes we need only point out that what the class being bamboozled is being bamboozled *about* are things in which they have (other) interests. An intrinsic interest in knowing, for its own sake, while not altogether implausible, is fortunately unnecessary.

## Ideology and Truth

We may distinguish, for present purposes, three theses concerning the relation between ideological employment and truth that have been associated - rightly or wrongly - with Marxian ideology theory.

- (a) Crucial to ideology theory is the general idea that the use of ideas for "ideological" purposes *calls their truth into question*. (Or it may call their meaningfulness into question, but this has the same effect: if a sentence is meaningless, it is certainly not true, whatever else it may be).

Two further theses are, I shall argue, not crucial to it, but certainly have been major components of the Marxian versions. They are:

- (b) that certain *kinds* of ideas - notably moral ones - are *inherently* "ideological".

If we combine these two theses, and add that the prevailing ideas of an epoch are put into circulation by its rulers, then we arrive at the conclusion

- (c) that all normative ideas, or more precisely all normative moral and political ideas, are *inherently false or meaningless*, owing to their being hopelessly "ideological".

My proposal is that we should basically accept the first thesis, but, with some qualifications, reject the second and third.

(1) The fact that A's conveying of theses p to person B has that motivation on A's part is certainly *ground for suspicion* about p. But it is not in general a *sufficient* ground, and certainly not a logically sufficient ground for convicting p either of falsehood or meaningfulness. If A's *only* reason for saying something to B is to put B at some sort of disadvantage, then A is saying this for reasons having nothing to do with its truth. In this case, then, *his saying it* provides *no presumptive evidence* for its truth. This is important, for ordinarily when someone sincerely says something, this *does* provide such evidence. Obviously, it does not provide conclusive evidence. No one is infallible, people make mistakes, and so on. Nevertheless, people normally talk about things they know something about, and speak with a view to conveying information. And very often, the fact that some person whose motives we have no particular reason to suspect has said something is just about the only "evidence" the hearer has to go by. In the cases we have in mind, however - cases which include the ideological ones with which this paper is concerned - the truth is *randomly* correlated with the spontaneous statements of the "ideologist", that is, with those whose motive in speaking is, say, private profit or the promotion of some cause rather than the supplying of information.

Even so, though, that simply doesn't prove that p is false, nor that it is meaningless. It isn't just that the monkeys-typing-the-encyclopedia scenario is logically possible, but rather the fact that our inherent conceptual organization as information-managers is strongly enough oriented toward truth that it's just not plausible to suppose that everything said by an ideologist would be false. All it shows is that there is genuine reason for

suspicion. Given the character of our information source, *p* might very well be false, and that we therefore should not rely on *A* as a source of information about the matters *p* is concerned with. Independent verification is recommended.

In fact, as we all know, there are many kinds of statements that can lead us astray. There is, for example, the famous trilogy of "lies, damn lies, and statistics". In fact, the typical case in the modern world for the sort of theory I am sketching lies in the third class. More broadly, this is the class of "half-truths"<sup>1</sup> - characteristically much harder to detect than outright lies, often enough. Not always, to be sure - it depends a lot on how gullible *B* is and how much perceived ideological authority *B* is inclined to attribute to *A*. Hume's simple fisherfolk or unlearned peasantry will swallow stories of miracles that a more discerning individual would attach no credence to. Outright lies had better be addressed to those in a state of, as we may put it, epistemological destitution, or to those who are strongly motivated to believe *some* story and ill-equipped to check it out in the time available.

As to "damn lies", we might, for the sake of elegance, classify outright mystification in this category - things like religion, or Hegel's theory of the State. Being propositions that make no evident sense, though somehow imparting an uncomfortable feeling of profundity, they are obviously useful to the aspiring tyrant. What's more, because of their obscurity, they intrigue the scholarly and the philosophical so much that it is likely to be quite some time before the basically empty character of these propositions emerges in the light of rational reflection.

Statistics, however, are another matter. They are the new growth industry for the aspiring tyrant. The field is rife with possibilities. Ordinary people, even those with considerable education, don't understand statistical reasoning very well, and are easily led to believe what is false when it is presented in statistical guise. This remains true even - indeed, especially - when the "statistical" claims are expressed in nonstatistical terms. For example, high on the current list are claims to the effect that substance *x* is "dangerous", or "can lead to" such familiar evils as cancer, heart disease, etc. Indeed, the terms 'true' and 'false' become misleading in the area of statistics, where half-truths and tenth-truths are the problem, rather than simple "untruths". The false proposition that the Ruler, in the mouth of his agent, the civil servant, wishes to leave the public persuaded of is "this stuff is so dangerous as to constitute a good reason why *we* [that is, the government] should do something about it". Meanwhile, the true propositions that are all he has going for him are such as "this stuff leads to death in about one case in two hundred million". If the cost of the proposed program to deal with the stuff is the equivalent of, say, ten deaths in two hundred million, then it is not in the interest of the public to support that program. But who in the government is going to appreciate that point, subversive as it is to the (well-paid) involvement of the rulers?

A significant part of what I take to be the Marxian program that I do accept here, then, is the assumption that the particular purveyor of *p* need not be "lying" at all. He may be quite sincere in supposing that *p* is true. Yet the fact that he says it, given his interests, is nevertheless ground for caution. As the Marxists put it, this is a matter of the objective situations of the persons concerned, and not necessarily or primarily a matter of their

phenomenological surface motivations. The fact that your believing *p* would be in the purveyor's interests is an important point about the situation, and gives you reason to check it out. When the scientist dutifully reports that there is a serious problem about *x*, the public looks at his scientific credentials - but not the fact that he only gets his research grants if it seems that there *is* a "serious problem about *x*". Needless to say, the number of "serious problems" will skyrocket under these conditions. Yet the scientist may be perfectly serious when he says this.

A part of the Marxian program that I emphatically reject, however - if indeed it was his, which may be debatable - is the one that got him into most trouble: namely, the idea that the occurrence of an idea, especially a normative one, in these contexts *ipso facto* demonstrates either its falsity, or its lack of independent meaning. This is just a mistake, so far as I can see, but it is a very serious one. *Some* of the ideas that occur in these contexts may well be meaningless, in some suitably garden-variety sense of 'meaning': religious views, for instance.<sup>2</sup> But I assume that typical normative assertions, for instance, are meaningful, and their use in such contexts has no tendency to show that they are not. To repeat: their occurrence in these contexts is merely ground for suspicion, not for outright rejection.

However, the suspicions thus engendered can only be checked out if there are independent grounds for doing so. If, somehow, the very meaning of what you say is *totally* contingent on the context in which it is functioning as "ideology", then perhaps that renders it meaningless; at least it would seem to render it hopelessly untestable. An example might be afforded by the case of preachers and mystics who get people under their power by sheer force of animal magnetism, personal charisma. The person who succumbs to this power might find it impossible to explain what 'p' is supposed to mean, and might insist that either you take it or you leave it, for no independent check is possible, even in principle. ("I *know* that my Redeemer liveth - but don't ask me how I know it!") Cases like this are important for normative political purposes. Their main importance is that an enormous number of people do have beliefs of just that kind, and those beliefs characteristically imply (so he thinks) positions on public policy matters.

I take it to be clear that no public policy should ever be founded on claims having only that status; yet democracy, especially, provides no check whatever on the voter whose vote is subservient to his religious interests. This last is itself a normative claim, of course. But then, that normative claims in general, and political and moral ones in particular, are (that is, can perfectly well be) meaningful and susceptible to rational analysis and discussion independently of their occurrence in any ideological contexts, is a general presumption of my proposal, in marked contrast (at least apparently) to the Marxian version of the theory.

In fact, I suggest, there is no more reason why ethical or other normative propositions should figure as values of *p* for ideological purposes than factual, scientific, or even logical or mathematical ones. This is by no means to marry ethical naturalism. Let's grant that at the bottom of any practical argument we must have some normative premises. But those are just the *major* premises; the minor ones, as Aristotle noted, are and indeed must be of a factual character - for if they weren't, we would lose all connection of the basic value

premises with outputs to action. Now, what matters to A, our aspiring ideologue, is only that A can bamboozle B to the *practical* effects he wants by means of making the particular claim in question, and nowadays ideas with a "scientific" ring to them are at the top of the list. Marx's own shabby economic analysis, indeed, is, in my view, a fine example of the action here. Its claim to be "scientific", in contrast to the hopelessly "utopian" theories of its rivals, were a major source of its remarkable power to bamboozle, and they were in fact used to induce millions of people to act in ways that were deleterious to those people, though highly conducive to putting and keeping the Rulers, such as the members of the Communist Party, in power.

### Specifying the "Rulers"

This brings us naturally to the question of just who is the "ruling class?" Here we need to make a distinction between what we may call the *general* and the *special* forms of our theory. The general form doesn't have to be specific about this. It merely says that the ruling class are whatever people rule in the sense of 'rule' that the theory has to explicate. Having the power to make people do things, and in particular, enough to make it possible for them to get away with bamboozling people, in particular the power to make it quite probable that when they tell people that p, those people will believe p, is of course essential if the theory is going to work. Just which people the latter are is a matter for detailed empirical investigation. But the formal power to "make people do things", as I put it, is of course possessed by the government, by definition. Whoever is in the ruling class, the rulers should be!

*Special* instances of the theory would then need to supply specific values for the ruling-class variable, claiming that this or that group is in fact the ruling class, whether or not it looks like it. Marx, notoriously, proposed that the "capitalist" class were the culprits, by virtue of "owning the means of production". The special theory briefly sketched in this paper rejects Marx's analysis as not only completely off-base but as being itself ideological, in the sense relevant to theories of this type. Specifically, his version is (1) independently wrong - its arguments fallacious, its assumptions either false or meaningless, and quite unsubstantiated by the evidence, if evidence is allowed to be considered; yet (2) very much in the interests of a certain class, to wit the class of leaders and bureaucrats that would be spawned in systems formed under the influence of advocates of his views - and (3) against the interests of the people - specifically of the class of producers, broadly speaking, by which I mean to include, as Plato does, *both* the "proletariat" *and* the "bourgeoisie", even though ostensibly out to serve those interests. Whether Marxists deceived themselves is, on the construal developed here, beside the point; that they deceived those over whom they came to have so much power is central.

### Liberalism - A Primer

It is fashionable these days to suppose that any and all questions, including what used to be regarded as sheer questions of definition, are deep and dark, requiring elaborate, evasive, and "iffy" answers. Certainly liberalism is among the topics so treated. Nevertheless, I shall offer a thumbnail sketch of the basics of liberalism, in its most general sense.

There are two defining features. First, and obviously necessary but, definitely not sufficient, is that the *sole* purpose of government is to *serve the governed*. Government exists *exclusively* for their good. Members of government are, of course, people, and *inter alia*, good government, if that is possible, would serve their interests along with everyone else's. However, that is not to be from the claim of Thrasymachus, that the smart ruler exploits his position to the maximal advantage of himself.

It must, of course, since it is concerned with *all* the people, aim to promote the *common* good, not the good of any particular class.

The other condition is the *differentia* of liberalism. According to it, the good of the people is determined *by* those people themselves. More precisely, the good of any individual, for political purposes, is a matter on which that individual himself is the *ultimate authority*. Others may advise, suggest, attempt to persuade, even reprimand, but when it comes to identifying A's good, we must in the end consult A, not anyone else.

Condition (1) may not be beefed up. The ruler needn't be Thrasymachus. He may instead be Plato, in some version or other - equipped with a political outlook, a view of human nature, ideas of what life is all about. But Liberalism says that when he acts as a ruler, these views of his have *no special status*. He may not formulate government policy on their basis any more than on the basis of his own pecuniary interests. The government, must, as the modern theorists put it, be neutral as between any and all such views or theories: it may attend only to the interests of all individuals.

In so saying, the liberal is, of course, putting forth a theory himself. But it is not a theory of the same type - not a theory of how each person should live his life, but rather, a theory about how an agency entrusted with power over all ought to use that power, on the basis entirely of the interests of those they exercise it over in their on-going relations with each other.

Naturally there is disagreement about just how the liberal idea is to be realized. But what has been said is sufficient for identifying what is objectional about Ideology in government.

### **Liberal Ideology Theory**

In the version put forth here, then, the culprit class consists, in the first instance, literally of the rulers, that is, the holders of political power. Of course, in a democracy, these rulers are supposed to be, and in a quite straightforward sense really are, "the people", though at any given time, of course, only the majority or perhaps even more likely, a plurality. However, the set concerned may be reasonably expected to be rather larger than that. Just as Marx had to distinguish between the capitalists and their lackeys and dupes in order to accommodate the apparently extensive number of persons not officially capitalists whom yet he would have wanted to count as serving their interests, so we make here a similar distinction. Specifically, we mention the following:

- (a) officials, elected or otherwise (but especially otherwise), and the subordinates in their bureaucratic domains, who may be viewed as one sort of "lackey" class;
- (b) the majority voters, who give them their power, and so may be accounted among the primary conspirators, in one sense, even though they (along with the rest) are also ultimately fellow members of the bamboozled class. And finally, we have
- (c) the set of persons who in one way or another benefit by being aligned with the former classes: educators in publicly owned school or university systems, welfare recipients, trade unions benefiting from legislation entrenching their positions, journalists, and so on.

In a democratic election, the voters vote for some or other policy in the expectation that if they get their way, the rest of the people will be obliged to pay for some privilege or benefit collected by those who voted for it. This makes them the primary culprits, in a weak sense. As a refinement, however, we can identify, within the majority in question:

- (b1) the class of immediate beneficiaries of the proposed policy, which is not likely to be an outright majority nor even necessarily a majority of the majority who voted in the legislators (who in turn make the hoped-for policy a reality) but who have a strong interest in bamboozling the rest of the voters into accepting the ideological basis for this beneficiary class' preferment by the proposed policy; and
- (b2) the rest of the majority that ends up supporting them. Together, this class - which is a democracy is the ultimate ruling class, of course - sustains and empowers the (a) class, which in its turn may usefully be divided into
  - (a1) a small class of elected *legislators* and, in some systems, elected highest administrators or judges who enact, enforce, or interpret the "laws"; and
  - (a2) the rather large class of appointed officials who administer the policies in question at the lowest, middle, and next-to-highest levels, that is, the *bureaucracy*.

It is especially this latter class, a2, in whose interest it is to propagandize for the causes allegedly served by the policies in question. Bureaucratic imperialism holds sway. Ministers want larger ministries, their underlings want more secretaries and gofers, and all want job security, which is much promoted by convincing the public that they are Doing Good. And, indeed, convincing themselves while they're at it - who wants a civil servant who is insincere, after all?

A further effect should be noted. In a democratic system, the legislators are elected. But everybody gets the vote - both the civil servants and the rest of the populace. So once the civil servant class gets very large, and a very large fraction of the populace owes its living to The System, if we assume that people vote in their own perceived interests, we get the result that the legislature will be elected to a large extent by the very people who benefit from the sort of legislation that entrenches and expands the civil servant class. Even if civil servants are not in a majority, yet if they vote as a block, their influence on

the election will often be decisive. Where they are an absolute majority, as is readily conceivable (and probably true right now in Canada, for instance), their hold on the system will amount to an unbreakable hammerlock. Big Government in a democracy is thus self-perpetuating, regardless - within very wide limits - of its real contribution to the public good.

### **Sources of Ideological Control**

Finally, if we ask why this class is very likely to succeed, the short answer is that even though in liberal democracies there is a free press, yet the government's power to influence is quite enormous. As time goes by, of course, because of the last point made above, they will largely be preaching to the converted. Few bureaucrats are of the view that we should greatly reduce employment in *other* parts of the bureaucracy. And if, say, the Universities are all financed entirely by the State, it will not be surprising if policies involving an expansion of State power are very popular, and if many of them are readily brought to agree that the State is a doer of great good for the public, which would - of course! - suffer if left to their own devices. So people pointing to embarrassing counter-examples or the lack of any real evidence for proposed policies are readily shunted aside as voices crying in the wilderness. "Political Correctness" prevails, and considerations of independently confirmable truth are largely shunted aside.

Fleshing out such a theory on the empirical side would involve further detailing of the methods by which the ruling class in a democracy has scope and power to mislead the citizens in its own interests. We are here, of course, only setting forth broad outlines, within the confines of a journal-article length paper.

### **Summary**

This brief presentation is intended only to show how the general idea of ideology can be generalized out of its original Marxian setting, where it did not fare very well, and used to analyze political situations of the kind that Marxists did much to bring about, as well as to the familiar more or less liberal democracies that predominate in today's world. The conclusion drawn in the latter case is that democracy offers great scope for the operation of ideological factors in affecting the shape of policy and the design of institutions. And that it is not going to be easy to rectify the results, for the same reasons. Liberal democracy can be expected to give us a society much poorer, and a great deal less liberal, than people might have hoped, or indeed still imagine.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

1. I thank an anonymous reader for the Canadian Philosophical Association, to which this paper was first presented, for the suggestion that I increase the amount of attention paid to the category of half-truths. That, indeed, is where the main action is.

2. Lest I be thought to be displaying an anti-religious bias here, I point out that the "suitably garden-variety sense" in which religious claims are meaningless is the one needed for public affairs: *public* confirmability, on the basis of *publicly* observable evidence. Perhaps we get some insight into Marxian "materialism" in this respect if we think of it as calling for a "show-me" attitude when flummery is in the socio-political offing.

3. This paper was originally presented at the annual meetings of the Canadian Philosophical Association, at the University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, P.E.I., in June, 1992. Thanks are due for helpful comments from anonymous readers and discussants.