Ideologies as theoretical models: a new approach towards morphological analysis

Abstract: *In this paper, I develop on the concerns specified by Maynard (2013) regarding 'inter-approach ignorance' in the study of ideologies as being exhibited to the detriment of morphological analysis. First, I provide an overview of this approach, I then identify an important 'blindspot' and detail on its significance – the case of grassroots movements and the initial 'decontestation'. Finally, I advance the view of ideologies as personal theoretical models to offer a starting point for resolving that drawback of morphological analysis, and present an overarching account that would satisfy the conceptual needs of both political theorists and political scientists.*

Keywords: *morphological analysis; studies of ideology; models of ideology; methods in political theory; inter-approach blindness;*

Introduction

Freeden's advocacy for the importance of studying ideologies in a rigorous manner , and his innovation in this field have been paramount in establishing an interest in better understanding this form of political thought (Freeden 2006). His own *ideological morphology* approach (Freeden 1994), has become one of the much-needed toolkits for operating with ideologies. Regardless of the steady increase in academic interest and prowess, Freeden makes a very interesting point in his "Ideology and Political Theory" (Freeden 2006): the rapid and capturing way in which ideologies are spread is still baffling for purveyors of eternal truths. In this sentence, he outlines a problem of social epistemology that needs to be resolved if one intends to bring the study of ideologies closer to a more thorough understanding of the connection between a thought-practice's conceptual significance and its reproduction in everyday life. Furthermore, conceding to a rationalistic approach towards the study of ideologies (Freeden's own morphological analysis) had had the effect of furthering the distinction between studying the texts of 'canonical ideologists' and studying the practical forms of certain ideologies in the actual political practices of real individuals (Maynard 2013: 301).

In this paper, I concentrate on ideological analysis in political theory, in the form of *morphological analysis*, its problematic characteristics in analysis and provide a proposition for a new, more integrative,

Mihai-Călin Căciuleanu

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, mihai.caciuleanu.15@politice.ro

course of action in this method of analysis. I will advance the view that ideologies should be viewed as models, in order for political theory to broaden the scope of its analysis and connect meaningfully with other relevant approaches in the study of ideologies. Using a model-theoretic view of science, I will detail how models represent the common denominator between *shared ideologies* and *personal ideologies*. Furthermore, I argue that this approach is one that permits and, more significantly, encourages collaboration and meaningful criticism between different perspectives in the study of ideologies. To accomplish that, first I will present a short overview of the contemporary morphological studying practices and their focus (or lack thereof) on *personal ideologies* and how this reflects on the future of this methodological approach. Second, I will present the model-theoretic view advanced in the philosophy of political science, developing on and defending the idea of ideologies as models, providing an argument for the adaptability of this approach in the case of emerging ideologies and New Social Movements. Finally, I will explain how this relates to other current approaches in the study of ideologies and offer my own remarks on where we should go from here.

The contemporary morphological study of ideologies

In this section, I look at the Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies (Freeden, Sargent and Stears 2013) and the Handbook of Political Theory (Gaus and Kukathas 2004) as two of the primary tools used for teaching the study of ideologies form a morphological perspective in Western academic tradition, thus preparing new generations of students to approach this object of study in a certain fix manner. These two handbooks do, of course, what they aim to, which is firstly to present the current status of their respective fields of interest. The Handbook of Political Theory dedicates a chapter to ideology, written by Freeden (2004:3-17), in which he describes the relation between ideology, political theory, and political science, which prompts the discussion of different methods and approaches. Moreover, the Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies creates an exhaustive review of the practice of studying ideology, with their respective methodological advantages and disadvantages (Freeden, Sargent, and Stears 2013). However, works that attempt multidisciplinary integration remain in the minority, with notable exceptions (Maynard 2013: 319). The fact of the matter is to be understood as follows: morphological analysis, as a clear and rigorous tool, is reproduced in analytically-oriented groups of political theorists interested in the study of ideologies.

Although objections to such an anecdotal choice of works might be relevant, the impact that this academic works have is undisputable in regards to this practice, a tool for *choosing and defending this method in regards to a particular purpose* is not to be found even when analyzing at a larger scale (Maynard 2013)

A clarification is necessary here, following the previous statement: the morphological analysis of ideology is not to be thought as the *only* hegemonic approach in the field of studying ideology. The same can be asserted about *all established methodologies*, *in their perceived areas of interest*. Thus, the problem is not that well-established approaches to the study of ideologies gather wide interest in political science, political psychology, political theory, or other fields interested in this subject. The issue becomes one of self-reference when tasked with defending a certain approach for a specific purpose; different approaches are *not mutually exclusive* – but they certainly appear to be used as such – and are *purpose sensitive* (Knight 2006). However, the choice of a specific method should be defended in regards to the task at hand,

rather than being chosen for a lack of engagement (not necessarily of the aspiring student alone, but of the academic 'tradition' or 'school of thought' itself) with competing and complementary views in fields subordinated to political science - in the largest definition of this domain (Maynard 2013: 314).

Maynard's (2013) incredible feat of identifying some of the paradigmatic parallelisms that mark the study of ideologies is central for the purpose of this paper; his map of current academic practices towards the study of ideologies identifies questions and problems that result from choosing one method and ignoring another in studying ideology. One of those questions regarding conceptual analysis in general is whether or not morphological (or, implicitly, conceptual) analysis is legitimate in ignoring the relation between intellectuals and individuals as common political actors (Maynard 2013: 318).

The approach pioneered by Freeden revived a somewhat dormant interest in conceptual analysis. Nonetheless, both this interest and the popularization of this method have been to the detriment of studying *personal ideologies* from a political theoretical perspective. *Personal ideologies* are specific ideological formations held by individuals - as opposed to *shared ideologies*, those found in groups (Maynard 2017). The action of largely ignoring the importance of this type of ideologies inside political theory is explained by the analytical focus of this method. The morphological analysis of ideology is centered on arguments of 'central' political figures and the expressions of ideology of relevant political formations – be they political parties, groups, organizations, institutions (Maynard 2013: 302; as is the case in Freeden 1999). To put it more clearly, Freeden's approach has been taken and applied almost only to *intellectual levels above the common individual*, leaving the connection between largescale influencers and individuals to be discussed through other parallel methods, such as political science's quantitative approach (Jennings 1992) or political psychology's focus on ideological formation (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004).

Morphological analysis offers insight into logical relations, tensions and contradictions between and within political concepts inside a certain ideology or ideological movement. The 'essentially contested' concepts put forward in a certain ideology are configured in a very specific manner (Freeden 1994) As such, this approach offers analysis on cultural as well as logical factors that determine a certain arrangement of political sub concepts, concepts and systems of concepts (Freeden 1994; Freeden 2013). However, it offers little insight for political theorists that are interested in this method in regards to how political thinkers influence *shared ideologies,* or, 'zooming in', *personal ideologies*. Providing an explanation or model for the causal relationship and/or relationship of influence between a political thinker, a group that adopts their particular 'decontestation', and an individual inside that group is paramount (at least) in the cases of New Social Movements (NSMs) and ad hoc grassroots ideological practices, as they are *ideologically undeterminable practical expressions* of certain (established) ideologies. By *ideologically undeterminable practices* I refer to the group or individual embodiment of a thought-practice that, in applying certain guiding principles and definitions of concepts towards the attainment of a desired (ideal or non-ideal) state of affairs, manages in fact to 'decontest' meanings of concepts *in an unstable and thus ever-changing way*. That is, in taking a particular course of action, a part of the self-recognized and self-imposed conceptual foundation loses its initial meaning, acquiring a new one that is *situation-dependent* and *incorporated temporarily* in the initial system of concepts, in a continuously decreasing process. In this sense, I refer to what can be dubbed as *primary decontestation*. Freeden (2013)

discusses already how concepts acquire a certain meaning that is only partially stable. In the emerging cases I am referring to, the process itself is one of instability in which certain stable moments could be found. However, the interest of study should be directed more to *what* drives those changes and *how* they become stable, when lacking a guarantor - a leader or a comprehensive political manifesto.

This is not a completely innovative definition, as it presents significant similarities with the understanding developed by the Essex School in the case of *empty signifiers* (Howarth, Stavrakakis, and Norval 2000). Once again, it is a piece of evidence of the interlocking contemporary approaches towards the study of ideologies. Attempting to provide yet another new approach is not only beside the point, but it may even harm the development of multidisciplinary frameworks that are so needed in the academic environment in this area (Maynard 2013: 319). What this definition, as well as the upcoming model in the next section, aims to do is to provide a starting point for a unified approach towards the study of *ideational change.* This is especially important in the case of NSMs and grassroots ideological practices, generally, as they present a high degree of heterogeneity (Pichardo 1997). As such, it is probable to encounter these ideological practical expressions not crystalized around a certain group of political thinkers and their thought, nor around a political manifesto, as is the case of political parties (see Freeden 1999). Nevertheless, morphological analysis is still possible, even if techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis would be incredibly effective as they can synthesize non-conceptual indicators (Wodak and Meyer 2001; Fairclough 2001). By analyzing, for example, key protest demands, actions, responses to recent events, official commentaries, or procedural arrangements, clues about the structural arrangement of political concepts can emerge. In the case of the now infamous anarchist New York General Assembly, in the midst of the Occupy Wall Street protests, the hermeneutical prowess of the morphological approach could have helped identify anarchist conceptions of political organization, power, identity, liberty, and so on, from the textual sources presented by the groups or by the news outlets that reported on them (e.g. Schwartz 2011). The idea is that, while the morphological approach details on the ever-changing meaning of political concepts, it is used to study *static* points of that specific ideology, points that are generally more stable and complete, providing clues about a myriad of concepts (Freeden 1994; Freeden 2004; Freeden 2013). While this is valuable in itself and provides one with knowledge about that specific point and the differences within two temporal points, it tells one almost nothing about the process itself. Studying emerging ideological movements and practices should take into account the great *volatility* of the structure of concepts and their arrangement that characterize the incipient period of these respective practices. More precisely, the users of the morphological approach should study as many moments as possible in that emerging period, 'fine-tuning' their temporal lens. Before I present the main implication and method for this, let us see why that is intuitively valuable for a student of ideology. This short-period longitudinal approach would give one a clearer view on the structural fluidity and determinacy that take place within that period, seeing the mutation process firsthand. In this sense, it may be necessary to view constantly redefined concepts and their internal structure in such a way that would allow for techniques used in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2001), in order to view *why* that ideological change happens, in the absence of strategic moves by political elites or key thinkers, as it is applied in the morphological approach (Maynard 2013: 302). Furthermore, an account of how key figures and illustrative thought emerge from grassroots movements is absent in this approach, largely ignoring the

role of *power,* while alternative accounts of this process form different approaches are sadly unrecognized (Maynard 2013: 316).

Models in the morphological analysis of ideology

In this more substantial section, I aim to provide only a starting point for the development of an integrative extension of morphological analysis. I divide this section in two parts, with the purpose of: (a) outlining a view of ideologies as models and its use within the approach of morphological analysis, and (b) explaining the use of such models in political theory and political science.

In order for the claim of this article to have any epistemic value, it is necessary to make some methodological clarification. In order to do that, I draw on Clarke and Primo's (2012) outstanding project of mapping the mistaken way in which political scientists think about models, namely the faulty idea that models can and should be tested in order to prove their truthfulness or the truth of the theory from which they stem. The authors hold that models are the central unit of interest in scientific practice and provide guidelines on how a political scientist should see a model and make use of it, respectively (Clarke and Primo 2012). Their model-based view brings models forward as *objects,* and thus exempt from truth-value and, implicitly, testing, as a significant body of literature in the philosophy of science supports (Contessa 2011, Suppe 2000, Tarski 1953, van Fraassen 1980). Models, like ideologies (Maynard 2017), are judged by their usefulness in pursuing a certain scientific endeavor, or at least they should be judged in this way (Clarke and Primo 2012:55). This serves to show that some incipient form of equivalency exists already between ideology and models, and I will detail further on such characteristics.

I take the opportunity here to address Popper's critique of Marxism as non-scientific, as I believe it shows a larger point regarding ideology. Popper's objection to Marxism is that it is non-falsifiable, in the sense that whatever situation arises that seems to contradict the predictions of Marxism, this ideology can bring about an explanatory mechanism as to why the prediction has failed to materialize (Feaver 1971). Of course, this is a special case, given Orthodox Marxism's use of historicism as a perceived scientific method, but ideologies integrate, explain and assert concepts in any form (Freeden 2013: 164). Regarding a larger critique, to the thinkers that dismiss ideologies as inferior forms of political thought, articulate answers exist already (Freeden 2006). Nonetheless, what my approach aims to do is provide a new starting point towards seeing ideologies as a part of the scientific method of political science, as models. For this purpose, I will use a definition of ideology that is non-pejorative as it serves more purposes for political theory and political science (Maynard 2013: 314). The most important features of ideologies that could make them to be used as models in political science (Clarke and Primo 2012: 59-60) are:

(1) *(Fictional) objects:* ideologies are patterns or maps of thinking about politics and understanding political reality (Freeden 2004: 6)

(2) *Reduced accuracy*: ideological 'decontestation' is never definitive, ideologies being marked by continuous structural fluidity (Freeden 2013: 154)

(3) *Partials*: the internal structure of a concept, as well as its structural position within a cluster, reflects only a fraction of the possible meanings of that concept. Moreover, as Freeden

puts it more eloquently, "no ideology can contain a complete map of political reality, let alone a total vision of politics" (Freeden 2013: 164). As such, ideologies give more weight to certain aspects and ignore others, in the same way models do, for a certain purpose;

(4) *Purpose-relative:* they are to be used for certain purposes, as they "provide directives, even plans, of action for public policy-making in an endeavour to uphold, justify, change or criticize the social and political arrangements of a state or other political community." (Freeden 2004: 6),

The question that arises now is 'what kind of models are *personal* ideologies?'. My argument is that they present the necessary similarities to be consider organizational theoretical models, used as a "framework wherein information may be defined, collected and ordered" (Hagget and Chorley 1967). Comprised of a complex system of normative, evaluative, and descriptive statements that act as guiding principles (Freeden 2004: 6), *(personal)* ideologies create a structure used to classify certain political concepts and, by extension, realities, in order of importance and desirability (Freeden 2013: 164), compatible with one of the roles of organizational models (Clarke and Primo 2012: 89). Thus, *personal* ideologies represent *organizational theoretical models that can be used to advance towards a certain political situation, through certain internally acceptable means*.

If this definition is correct, how can it be useful for political scientists and political theorists alike? I will refer to the discussion presented in the previous section, regarding *ideologically undeterminable practices*. If one accepts this definition, it is important to note that *personal ideologies* may present greater volatility than the thought of political thinkers and political groups (Buechler 1995). That is precisely the reason why it is so important to study the emergence of *ideologically undeterminable practices*, as they present an opportunity to study the interaction between personal models that produce the first act of 'decontestation'. Furthermore, if a political theorist is to look at the research on social identity theory in political psychology, they may find useful concepts regarding the formation of political identity (Jost, Banazi, and Nosek 2004). Regarding specifically the movements that lack ideological determination, maybe it is time put forward a different, 'bottoms-up' approach that looks at the emergence of stabilizing power, giving morphological analysis a new lens, through means that are present in connected approaches. Seeing ideologies as models can help establish a more clear connection between *personal ideologies* and *shared ideologies*, zooming in on a field that political theorists that prefer morphological analysis did not explore as much as other students of ideologies (Maynard 2013: 316). For political scientists, using morphological analysis to model ideology, could help to draw more or less specific conceptual maps to be used for evaluating political practices, institutions and figures through different lenses. Reversely, the method could be use to approach ideological profiles in populations in a way that escapes unidimensional placement (Buckle 2013 is an excellent example for this incredibly useful approach).

Conclusion

It may be argued that the way I propose to view ideologies is unnecessary, but this field of study is riddled with so much '"inter-approach ignorance" (Maynard 2013: 316) that efforts to systemize and organize are extremely necessary. Certainly, more broad and comprehensive attempts have been made in the past, as well as recently, to bring together connected approaches

in this field. For the purpose of the students of ideologies, these attempts represent a welcome opportunity to see dialogue and critique within different approaches. My modest contribution aimed to interpret the benefits of morphological analysis in a way that is more appealing outside of political theory. In addition, I tried to make a case for further connected developments within this field of study, focusing on the drawbacks of morphological analysis when dealing with power relations and grassroots movements that are yet to crystalize. By introducing the idea of initial 'decontestation' in ideologically undeterminable practices, the task becomes now to use a more 'zoomed in' approach to identify the moment of crystallization in emerging ideological groups. In doing so, one would be prompted with questions of power, identity, and discourse, and would need to engage in multidisciplinary reading, to the overall benefit of the studies of ideology. Thus, the definitions I have put forward aim to organize different concepts, rather than propose completely new ones, for the use of political scientists and political theorists alike in order to make reaching further within parallel literature an easier task.

More than anything else, this is an invitation to inter-approach dialogue and critique and aims to resolve one of the problems of the analyzed approach with similar, in order for this method to develop towards multidisciplinary.

References

Buckle, Tobias. 2013. "Surveying Ideology in Mass Populations: A New Conceptual Method." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18 (2):219-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2013.784014.

Buechler, Steven M. 1995. "New Social Movement Theories." *Sociological Quarterly* 36 (3):441-64.

Clarke, Kevin A, and David M Primo. 2012. *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representations.* Oxford University Press.

Contessa, Gabriele. 2011. "Scientific Models and Representations." In *The Continuum Companion to the Philosophy of Science*, edited by Steven French and Juha Saatsi. London: Continuum.

Dijk, Teun van. 1998. *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Sage.

Fairclough, Norman. 2009. "A Dialectical-Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research." In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, 2:162-87.

Feaver, George. 1971. "Popper and Marxism." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 4 (3-4):3-24.

Fraassen, Bas C. van. 1980. *The Scientific Image*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Freeden, Michael. 1994. "Political Concepts and Ideological Morphology." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 2 (2):140-64.

– 1999. "The Ideology of New Labour." *The Political Quarterly* 70 (1):42-51.

– 2004. "Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy." In *Handbook of Political Theory*, edited by Gerald F Gaus and Chandran Kukathas, 3-17. Sage.

– 2006. "Ideology and Political Theory." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11 (1):3-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310500395834.

– 2013. "The Morphological Analysis of Ideology." In , edited by Michael Freeden, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears, 150-76. OUP Ofxord.

Freeden, Michael, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Marc Stears, eds. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*. OUP Ofxord.

Gaus, Gerald F, and Chandran Kukathas, eds. 2004. *Handbook of Political Theory*. Sage.

Haggett, Peter, and Richard J Chorley. 1967. "Models, Paradigms, and the New Geography." In *Models in Geography*, edited by Peter Haggett and Richard J Chorley. London: Metuen.

Howarth, David Armine, Yannis Stavrakakis, and Aletta Norval, eds. 2000. *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies and Social Change*. Manchester University Press.

Jennings, M. Kent. 1992. "Ideological Thinking among Mass Publics and Political Elites." *Public Opinion Qaurterly* 56 (5):419-41.

Jost, John, Mahzarin Banaji, and Brian Nosek. 2004. "A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo." *Political Psychology* 25 (6):881-919.

Knight, Kathleen. 2006. "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century." *The American Political Science Review* 100 (4):619-26.

Maynard, Jonathan Leader. 2013. "A Map of the Field of Ideological Analysis." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18 (3):299–327. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2013.831589.

– 2017. "Ideological Analysis." In *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*, edited by Adrian Blau. Cambridge University Press.

Parkin, Frank. 1968. *Middle Class Radicalism*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Pichardo, Nelson A. 1997. "New Social Movements: A Critical Review." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:411-30.

Schwartz, Mattathias. 2011. "PRE-OCCUPIED: The Origins and Future of Occupy Wall Street." *The New Yorker*, November 28, 2011. https://web.archive.org/web/20140209055438/http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/11/28/111128fa_fact_schwartz?currentPage=all.

Supe, Fredercik. 2000. "Understanding Scientific Theories: An Assessment of Developments, 1969–1998." *Philosophy of Science* 67 (Supplement):S102-15.

Tarski, Alfred. 1953. "A General Method in Proofs of Undecidability." *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics*, no. 13:1-34.

Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer, eds. 2009. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage.