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FIELD ESSAY

Ideology: A Definitional Analysis

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What does "ideology" mean? As a preliminary step to answering this much-asked question, I collected what seemed to be the most thoughtful and/or influential definitions circulating within the social sciences in the postwar decades. A quick perusal of these definitions reveals the extent to which ideology remains a highly flexible conceptual tool (see Table 1). One is struck not only by the cumulative number of different attributes that writers find essential, but by their more than occasional contradictions. To some, ideology is dogmatic, while to others it carries connotations of political sophistication; to some it refers to dominant modes of thought, and to others it refers primarily to those most alienated by the status quo (e.g., revolutionary movements and parties). To some it is based in the concrete interests of a social class, while to others it is characterized by an absence of economic self-interest. One could continue, but the point is already apparent: not only is ideology farflung, it also encompasses a good many definitional traits which are directly at odds with one another.

Indeed, it has become customary to begin any discussion of ideology with some observation concerning its semantic promiscuity. Few concepts in the social science lexicon have occasioned so much discussion, so much

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1 Since it was not always possible to find a parsimonious statement of the writer's understanding of the concept, in these cases I strung together the most important passages in his or her discussion or paraphrased the discussion.


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"An organization of opinions, attitudes, and values—a way of thinking about man and society. We may speak of an individual's total ideology or of his ideology with respect to different areas of social life; politics, economics, religion, minority groups, and so forth" (Adorno et al. 1950: 2).

"A consistent integrated pattern of thoughts and beliefs explaining man's attitude towards life and his existence in society, and advocating a conduct and action pattern responsive to and commensurate with such thoughts and beliefs" (Loewenstein 1953: 52).

"A particularly elaborate, close-woven, and far-ranging structure of attitudes. By origin and usage its connotations are primarily political, although the scope of the structure is such that we expect an ideology to encompass content outside the political order as narrowly defined. . . . A highly differentiated attitude structure, [with] its parts . . . organized in a coherent fashion. . . . Must be capped by concepts of a high order of abstraction. . . . [Must supply] a manageable number of ordering dimensions that permit the person to make sense of a broad range of events" (Campbell et al. 1960: 192-93).

"A body of concepts [which]: (1) deal with the questions: Who will be the rulers? How will the rulers be selected? By what principles will they govern? (2) constitute an argument; that is, they are intended to persuade and to counter opposing views; (3) integrally affect some of the major values of life; (4) embrace a program for the defense or reform or abolition of important social institutions; (5) are, in part, rationalizations of groups interests—but not necessarily the interests of all groups espousing them; (6) are normative, ethical, moral in tone and content; (7) are . . . torn from their context in a broader belief system, and share the structural and stylistic properties of that system" (Lane 1962: 14-15).

"Systems of belief that are elaborate, integrated, and coherent, that justify the exercise of power, explain and judge historical events, identify political right and wrong, set forth the interconnections (causal and moral) between politics and other spheres of activity" (McClosky 1964: 362).

A belief-system that includes: (1) a wide range of opinions; (2) high attitude consistency (aka "constraint" or "economy"); and (3) abstract conceptualizations (e.g., "liberal," "conservative") (paraphrase of Converse 1964).


"The reflection of process and structure in the consciousness of those involved—the product of action" (Nettl 1967: 100).

"A typically dogmatic, i.e., rigid and impermeable, approach to politics" (Sartori 1969: 402).

"A logically coherent system of symbols which, within a more or less sophisticated conception of history, links the cognitive and evaluative perception of social condition—especially its prospects for the future—to a program of collective action for the maintenance, alteration, or transformation of society" (Mullins 1974: 235).
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"Sets of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organised social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order" (Seliger 1976: 11).

"A system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain" (Hamilton 1987: 39).

"An emotion-laden, myth-saturated, action-related system of beliefs and values about people and society, legitimacy and authority, that is acquired to a large extent as a matter of faith and habit. The myths and values of ideology are communicated through symbols in a simplified, economical, and efficient manner. Ideological beliefs are more or less coherent, more or less articulate, more or less open to new evidence and information. Ideologies have a high potential for mass mobilization, manipulation, and control; in that sense, they are mobilized belief systems" (Rejai 1991: 11).

disagreement, and so much selfconscious discussion of the disagreement, as "ideology." Condemned time and again for its semantic excesses, for its bulbous unclarity, the concept of ideology remains, against all odds, a central term of social science discourse.

How, then, are we to understand this semantic confusion, and how are we to deal with it? Five common approaches can be identified among writers in the social sciences: operationalization, terminological reshuffling, intellectual history, etiology, and multivocality. In the following section, I outline each of these endeavors and demonstrate their limitations. I then proceed to a new approach which comprehensively maps the meanings of ideology onto a single, reasonably concise, semantic grid. I conclude with a brief discussion of "core" meanings for ideology, and a plea for context-dependent methods of definition.

COMMON APPROACHES

1. Operationalization

Among those who study "behavior" in American politics, discussion of ideology has centered on a single empirical question: how ideological is the mass public (compared, that is, with political elites)? There have been a good many twists and turns in this debate since it was introduced by Campbell et al. (1960), McClosky et al. (1960), Converse (1964), and McClosky (1964). But the debate over the ideological proclivities of the mass public does not seem much closer to resolution today than it did in the 1960s. The reason for

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this lack of resolution has something to do with problems of data incommensurability through time and differing methods of operationalizing variables, as generally recognized.

Less often recognized are the various problems of definition inherent in the concept of ideology. Is an "ideological" mode of thought characterized by abstraction, internal consistency, external contrast, endurance through time, rationality, sophistication, a hierarchical ordering of idea-elements, parsimony—or some combination of these characteristics? Is it separate from group affiliation and/or party affiliation? Such questions, which merely scratch the surface of scholarly debate among behavioralists, are "definitional" in the sense that no answer can claim a priori precedence over another. Each definitional attribute may, of course, be operationalized in different ways, raising a second tier of disputes.

Indeed, some writers take the position that definitional tasks are contained within—and rightfully subservient to—tasks of operationalization. "It matters primarily not what you call it, but how you measure it," is the implicit approach of many behavioralists. Although there is surely much to be said for a pragmatic/empirical approach to concept definition, this has not proven an entirely successful strategy in the instant case. To the behavioral school, one must counterpose Sartori's (1970: 1038) dictum that "concept formation stands prior to quantification." One must, in other words, have some idea of what one is looking for before one can find it. When concepts are defined "backwards"—by working out methods of measurement first—it may only complicate the task of social science inquiry since this encourages a rather facile approach to definition (slapping a term onto a set of empirical findings without much consideration of the term's previous definition, or alternative labels that might be more appropriate). In any case, there has been little discussion of varying usages and meanings of ideology among behavioralists, a matter this study attempts to rectify. My hunch is that behavioralists may have more to learn from a close examination of the term—including its usage in other corners of the social science world—than from another empirical wack at the evidence.

2. Terminological Reshuffling

In the face of ideology's inadequacies, some writers advocate abandoning the term entirely, or at least severely circumscribing its use. Converse (1964),

for example, eschews ideology for "belief-system" (see also Naess et al. 1956: 171). Others have fled from ideology to worldview, attitude, symbol, myth, value, philosophy, rhetoric, culture, and various combinations of these core terms (often qualified by "system" or "political"). However, attempts to banish this semantic troublemaker in favor of other, presumably more manageable, alternatives have met with only partial success. (Witness: the continuance of "ideology" in social science discourse.) How, then, might we explain the failure to legislate a satisfactory alternative to ideology when writers are virtually unanimous in declaring its ambiguities?

First, many of these neologisms fail to capture the political connotations of ideology. One may, of course, rectify this problem by specifying "political worldview" ("political belief," "political sophistication," and so forth) but this results in an awkward compound noun. Second, these alternative terms tend to miss the sense in which ideology groups together a large number of ideas in a single, reasonably coherent, package. "Belief," "myth," "value," "attitude," and "symbol" are too small to replace ideology in most contexts in which that term has been applied. Here one may add the qualifier "system" (belief-system, symbol-system, et al.), but this leaves one with another rather unwieldy verbal instrument. Ideology's endurance, one may surmise, is at least partially derived from its admirable compactness. Third, simply replacing ideology with some neologism is not likely, by itself, to resolve the conceptual muddle into which the concept has fallen. As Cobb (1973: 124) and Seliktar (1986: 325) ruefully observe, belief-system seems to have accrued the same overlapping and incoherent meanings that its adoption was intended to avoid.

Finally, ideology has several centuries of established usage behind it. Whatever one might think about the utility of the term, it is firmly entrenched within lay and scholarly discourse. (One, rather crude, estimation of the continued significance of this concept in the social sciences can be gleaned from the Social Sciences Citation Index. In 1992, the Index listed roughly 800 citations under the subject-headings "ideological," "ideologies," and "ideology." ) Concepts derive their force partly from inertia. Once established within the language, it is virtually impossible to dislodge an existing term.

It may well be that ideology's meanings have been stretched too far—that it has colonized the regions occupied by near-synonyms and has, in this sense, muddied the semantic field. One might reasonably propose to pare down the definitional associations of this octopoid term (as recommended below). However, it does not seem practical to propose its abolition. Whether because of its parsimony, its long-established position in popular and academic discourse, or because of some set of associated traits which are deemed useful—and not sufficiently conveyed by neighboring concepts—ideology remains a fixture in
the work of political scientists, social psychologists, political anthropologists, sociologists, and historians.

3. Intellectual history

A third approach, which I shall label intellectual history, takes matters of definition more seriously but does not move us closer to a usable definition of the concept. Surprisingly, the concept of ideology has been turned up under virtually every academic stone. Machiavelli, Bacon, Locke, Condillac, Comte, Feuerbach, Hegel, Pareto, Sorel, Durkheim, Lukacs, Gramsci, Weber, Mannheim, Kuhn, Freud (and later psychoanalytically oriented theorists like Ricoeur and Lacan), Marx, the Frankfurt School, and a whole range of neo- or post-marxists (e.g., Castoriadis, Lefort, Habermas), structuralists (e.g., Levi-Strauss, Kristeva, Barthes), and poststructuralists (e.g., Bourdieu, and the Tel Quel crew) have been incorporated as touchstones in the ongoing debate over what ideology means. Virtually all social theorists, linguists, and political philosophers worth their salt now have a "concept of ideology," which surely qualifies it as one of the most versatile concepts in political theory.4

Yet, it is important to note that ideology was not a key term in the work of most of these theorists. Gramsci, his interpreters freely admit, "rarely uses the term ideology itself, but rather a range of terms ["philosophies," "conceptions of the world," "systems of thought," "forms of consciousness"] that serve, more or less, as equivalents" (Hall et al. 1977: 46). Weber, according to McLellan (1986: 35), "very rarely mentioned the word 'ideology.'" Pareto spoke of "derivation," Sorel of "political myth," Lukacs of "class consciousness" (Plamenatz 1970: 24-27), and Castoriadis of the "social imaginary" (Thompson 1984: 17). It may be appropriate to broaden the concept of ideology to include these near-synonyms, but it should be understood that in doing so the writer is conflating the meaning of two (or more) terms. We are well-advised to bring an attitude of suspicion toward such acts of terminological legerdemain.

Moreover, in cases where ideology is a frequent referent the term is often employed in an equivocal fashion. In Marx’s German Ideology, one writer re-

ports, *Ideologie* "is used about 50 times, but no normative, descriptive or real definition is given. Most of the occurrences are such that little can be inferred with a high degree of certainty as to which connotations were intended by the author, if any" (Naess et al. 1956: 154; see also McLellan 1986: 10). Mannheim (1960), for his part, used ideology in at least two, very different, ways. Thus, although one can certainly locate "traditions" of usage—marxist, weberian, structuralist, and so forth—the identification of intellectual traditions blurs semantic distinctions within each tradition and within individual works. It may be useful to explore such semantic tensions within the work of a particular writer or group of writers; however, such attention to detail, while admirable, is not likely to lead to a comprehensive or usably-concise definition of the concept.

4. Etiology

A fourth approach to defining ideology is explanatory. How do ideologies originate, what shapes and sustains them, and what influences their transformation? These closely related questions have provided an intriguing and enduring puzzle for social scientists. The origins of the modern phenomenon called ideology have been located in the English Revolution (Walzer 1969), the French Revolution (Bendix 1964; Laponce 1981; Mullins 1972: 504; Rejai 1991), and in a long chain of interconnected developments, including the displacement of "traditional" modes of thought, the rise of nation-states, the invention of mass communications media (printing presses, mass circulation newspapers), the installation of democratic regimes and the collapse of the elite monopoly on political power (Bendix 1964; Geertz 1964/1973: 220-21; Loewenstein 1969: 344). Ideological thinking has been explained by basic cognitive features of the human psyche,5 patterns of childrearing,6 a developmental model of

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5 The gist of Laponce's wideranging work is to be found in the proposition that "the association of power and sacredness with right rather than left—first by religious then by political thought—is rooted in the universal dominance of the right hand" (1981: 11). The more usual assumption vis-à-vis the psychological fractions of ideology is that such constellations of ideas and values are outgrowths of a basic psychological need to explain the world and each individual's place within it (e.g., Minar 1961: 322).

6 Merelman (1969: 762) argues: "the frustrations and anxieties which inadequate child rearing methods produce may inhibit the identification process and prevent the growth of cognitive and evaluational skills sufficient for the development of political ideology. Furthermore, the imposition of excessive physical punishment and frustration on normally ideological people may induce a regression to less ideological conceptual frameworks."
political cognition, social strain, cultural strain (Bluhm 1974: 14), personality structures (Adorno et al. 1950; Tetlock 1983), irrational features of the cultural landscape, situations of crisis (Shils 1967: 69), premodern cleavages (Liipset and Rokkan 1967), the absence of economic development, particular organizational structures (Barnes 1966), types of electoral systems, levels of political mobilization and communications technologies (Loewenstein 1969: 343; Nettl 1967), group interests, constituencies (the rank-and-file of an ideological grouping), an intelligentsia, critical historical events, and ideologies themselves.  

Each of these causal arguments offers a slightly different perspective on how the concept of ideology should be defined. (Indeed, so varied are the answers to this question that any attempt to survey the field is, at best, only suggestive.) Thus, none lead to a satisfactory general definition of the concept—one serviceable, that is, beyond the confines of a single theory. Consequently, theories of ideology are probably best considered as fodder for empirical investigation, not as a method of definition.

5. Multivocality

If each attempt at defining ideology seems problematic, why not simply withdraw from the Sisyphean task of legislating a “good” definition and instead accept the multivalent and mutually contradictory senses which now inhabit the term? Unfortunately, taking a laissez-faire attitude toward this definitional problem neither resolves the conceptual muddle nor relieves us of the task of definition. What it says, in effect, is that the practitioner is on his/her own.

Moreover, those writers who advocate letting a thousand definitions bloom generally end up distinguishing adequate from inadequate definitional properties of this charged term. Eagleton (1991: 1), for example, defines his task as one of assessing “what is valuable or can be discarded” in the etymological history of the concept. One wonders what differentiates this strategy from

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7 Rosenberg (1988) views ideology as the product of one of three successive forms of political thinking—“sequential,” “linear,” and “systematic”—each of which conditions how the political realm is understood by the individual.

8 See Geertz (1964/1973) for a review of this genre, which is rooted in the work of Durkheim, Weber, and Parsons. See also Johnson (1968) and White (1961).

9 Loewenstein (1969: 335) declares: “the main well-spring of ideologies is the irrational, supplied by religious beliefs; superstitions; the impact of the supernatural, mythologies; legends, folklore; and, in general, symbolizations and manifestations of national traditions and environmental conditions.”

10 The basic values (e.g., equality, individualism) or systems of thought (e.g., liberalism, communism) of an ideology are often endowed with causal significance. An ideology appears, and endures in large part because of its own persuasiveness.
that which might normally be pursued. Eagleton apparently intends to leave us with several acceptable usages (which he admits are often mutually contradictory), rather than one "Grand Global Theory," as he puts it (1991: 7). But this more relaxed definitional standard leaves Eagleton facing the same essential problem facing every writer on the subject: which properties of ideology are to be considered invaluable, which dispensable, and why?

It may not be possible, even were one so inclined, to avoid meddling with the definitional properties of ideology. Studies on this subject, as on any subject, must participate in the ongoing interpretive battle over what the key terms mean. Any work on ideology, if successful, alters our understandings of ideology. (This might be called the Heisenberg principle of concept formation.) Thus, it is fatuous for a writer to insist that he or she has no definitional preferences, even if those preferences are understood to apply only for a single purpose or within a single context.

6. A New Approach to an Old Topic

The foregoing arguments can be briefly restated. First, recurring disputes over ideology stem not merely from disagreement over method and measurement but also from disagreement over what ideology is, which is to say, over matters of definition. Problems of definition have not been resolved by resort to new terminology, to "history," or to the causes of ideology; nor can such problems be avoided simply by embracing the plenitude of definitional traits now inhabiting the term.

If we must, therefore, define ideology, how might we best carry out this difficult task? As it is, some writers spend a good deal of time and effort canvassing the—now lengthy—list of works dealing with ideology in order to find that definition which is most appropriate to the work at hand. Doing a thorough job of this would be a Herculean effort. Most writers, one imagines, read Converse (1964), Geertz (1964/1973), or Lichtheim (1967)—depending on their methodological and ideological proclivities—and a few additional pieces, leaving the matter go at that. Definitions are commonly lifted from one of these works, or constructed de novo, presumably without much knowledge of the concept's various employments. Surely, this is not a healthy state of affairs. It is neither time-efficient nor productive of scholarly exchange (since people are often talking of very different things when they invoke the term "ideology").

What I propose is not another best-definition. This ploy has been tried many times\(^1\) and with very little success, as the continued proliferation of meanings attests. Rather, I shall set forth two general arguments that should

serve to delimit the process of concept formation with respect to this critical term. In the following section I shall set out, in a reasonably comprehensive fashion, all definitional attributes commonly associated with "ideology" within contemporary social science work. In this way, writers can quickly and easily survey the field of semantic possibilities, choosing those attributes which best suit their individual purposes. Second, I shall argue that all definitions must contain—though they need not be limited to—a set of "core" attributes (attributes common to all but the most idiosyncratic work on ideology).

With a core definition to stand upon, and a range of options to choose from (large, but not unlimited), writers should be able arrive at a definition that will advance their theoretical and empirical claims without digging through a mass of published work "on ideology" and without unnecessarily muddying the semantic field. To be sure, writers will still be talking about somewhat different things when they employ the I-word. However, this multivocality would be limited to a range of established options (discouraging completely idiosyncratic uses of the term), and rooted in the core attributes of the concept. This extensive survey of the field, if successful, will not only provide a conceptual toolkit for those in need of "a definition of ideology" but also a way of understanding, and adjudicating between, that immense and diverse set of studies which now rely on this travel-weary term.

A Comprehensive Framework

The following framework contains all attributes regularly associated with "ideology" in contemporary social science discourse, arranged in logically related parts (see Table 2). Idiosyncratic usages are ignored.12 Since there has been so much work devoted explicitly to the meaning of this concept, I draw primarily upon these more selfconscious endeavors, rather than upon works which merely employ the term (defining it summarily, if at all).

1. Location

Where is ideology located—in the mind, in behavior, and or in language?

(a) Thought. The traditional, common sense, approach is to look at ideol-

12 Feuer, for example, insists that "Every ideology in some fashion repeats the Mosaic myth,—the dramatic story of the liberation of the Hebrew tribes by Moses" (1975: 1). To include claims of this sort would produce a typology which is unhelpfully long and not indicative of academic or ordinary usage. Some suggested attributes are clearly interpretations of definitions. Putnam (1971: 655), for example, notes that a political actor may be said to be ideological when he is "extremist." What he means here, I think, is that many of the definitional traits assigned to ideologues are drawn from the example of extremist groups. It would be quite unusual, however, for an author to define, a priori, only groups with extreme views as ideologues.
ogy (which meant originally a "science of ideas") as a set of beliefs, values, principles, attitudes, and/or ideals—in short, as a type of political thinking.

(b) Behavior. Ideologies, however, unlike political philosophies, are not isolated from real-world political dilemmas. Rather, ideologies direct, or at least influence, political behavior. It is impossible, therefore, to study ideological phenomena as purely ideational. Secondly, behavioral patterns are of more political and social relevance than patterns of thought (or, for that matter, of expression). We are more concerned with what political actors do than what they say or believe. For these related reasons, writers have often resolved to treat ideology primarily as a set of practices (e.g., Thompson 1984: 195).

(c) Language. A third basic approach to the definition of ideology attempts to transcend the belief/behavior divide by defining the concept by reference to a set of linguistic symbols, or discourse. The rules, regularities, and principles of any ideology, according to this contemporary line of argument, derive not so much from the intentions of the ideologists (their values and beliefs), but rather from the linguistic norms in which they are embedded. It is impossible, therefore, to evaluate values, beliefs, attitudes, and principles independently of the speech, or speech-acts, in which they are manifested. "Ideological thinking" is inseparable from—and perhaps even secondary to—"ideological language." Conservatives, therefore, might be defined as those who evaluate the political world with a particular set of linguistic symbols, rather than those who believe in God, family, and country. Ideology, Eagleton (1991: 11) writes, is "the medium in which men and women fight out their social and political battles at the level of signs, meanings and representations." Downs (1957: 96)
refers to ideology as "a verbal image of the good society." Thompson (1984: 89–90), although wishing to view linguistic practice as inseparable from other (nonlinguistic) practices, nonetheless explores the possibility that "the language of everyday life is the very locus of ideology and the very site of the meaning which sustains relations of domination." Ellul (quoted in Loewenstein 1953: 68) concurs that ideology exists in and through linguistic practices—in this case, official state and party propaganda. This is also the general approach of the "Cambridge school" of historians (although not always under the rubric of "ideology").

It is important to recognize that the debate over "location" is not simply a debate over how to measure ideology. For some, certainly, the investigation of behavior and/or language is simply a convenient, and perhaps more reliable, method of testing what an individual believes. Thought, in this sense, remains the central desideratum. However, there are many others who argue that behavior (verbal and nonverbal) cannot be separated from thought or—even more radically—that behavior should be granted priority in defining an individual's ideology. To observe, for example, that someone addresses a superior by a particular title may be more meaningful, in certain contexts, than to ask why he does so. The more deeply ingrained a social practice, the more it has a tendency to lose its quality as an intentional activity. Ideology, in this sense, refers to the "un-thought" (discussed below).

2. Subject Matter

What is ideology about? Here we can differentiate between three basic positions, according to which ideology pertains to politics, power, or the world at-large.

(a) Politics. Politics is the "home turf" of ideology, and remains its most common referent. Seliger (1976: 120) builds a spirited defense of the proposition that "politics is inseparable from ideology." To move beyond "the political"—even as broadly defined—Seliger and others argue, is to move beyond the generally understood meaning of the term and beyond the sphere to which many of its common attributes properly apply.

(b) Power. Yet, even those who would prefer (one supposes) a narrower interpretation of this peripatetic term find its territory difficult to demarcate. Campbell et al. (1960) note that "by origin and usage its connotations are primarily political, [but] the scope of the structure is such that we expect an ideology to encompass content outside the political order as narrowly defined—social and economic relationships, and even matters of religion, education, and the like." Consequently,

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ideology is often defined as pertaining more broadly to relationships based on power, coercion, or domination. "Ideologies," writes Birnbaum, "appear wherever systematic factual assertions about society contain . . . evaluations of the distribution of power," including "aesthetic and moral statements about the human situation" (1960: 91). One currently popular definition of ideology is "discourse plus power"—more generally, "the ways in which meaning (or signification) serve to sustain relations of domination" (Thompson 1984: 4).

(c) *The world at-large.* A final, and even broader, view of ideology is also possible (and, indeed, quite common). Marx and Engels, for example, sometimes use "ideology" as a vast receptacle for all conscious and relatively organized ideational phenomena.14 "The distinction should always be made," they write, "between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production . . . and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological—forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."15 Aron, in even more sweeping terms, refers to ideology as "all ideas or patterns of ideas accepted by individuals or groups as true or valid, irrespective of either their origin or their quality" (quoted in Loewenstein 1953: 52). The same sense is brought forth in a much-quoted passage from Walsby (1947: 145), defining the topic as "the complete system of cognitive assumptions and affective identifications which manifest themselves in, or underlie, the thought, speech, aims, interests, ideals, ethical standards, actions—in short, the behaviour—of an individual human being." This also replicates the sense of one of Mannheim's (1960; quoted in Hamilton 1987: 21) basic definitions of ideology—as "the total structure of the mind of an epoch or class." Wuthnow (1981) also defines ideology as a subset of culture, the only difference being that the term ideology represents *shared* meanings. Geertz (1964/1973: 218–19), in one of the most influential discussions of the subject, describes ideologises as "maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience." In this sense of the word, ideology is virtually indistinguishable from *worldview, cultural system, symbol-system, or belief-system.*16 There are, certainly, political implications to such concepts, but there need be no explicit political content.

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14 As we shall see, this is not the only meaning of ideology implied by Marx and Engels—more specific connotations will be discussed below.

15 *Contribution to the Critique of Political Philosophy* (quoted in Williams 1983: 156). In the *German Ideology* they refer, along similar lines, to "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness..." (Marx and Engels 1970: 47).

16 See also Adorno et al. (1950: 2), Ashford (1972: 27), Cobb (1973), Harris (1968), Roucek (1944: 479), and examples discussed in Naess et al. (1956: 162-63).
3. Subject

Who has ideologies? Who are the “ideologists”? Three basic responses have been given to this question.

(a) Social class. From the Marxist perspective ideology refers primarily to the views of a particular social class (Marx and Engels 1970). Particular ideologies, Althusser (1971: 159) affirms, in a nod to Marxist convention, “always express class positions.”

(b) Any group. However, the sense of ideology being tied to a particular economic station has eroded in recent years. Duverger (1951/59) writes: “To a certain extent political ideologies themselves correspond to class attitudes, but the correspondence is neither general nor absolute. Ideologies are never simple epiphenomena in relation to the socioeconomic structure, and some are related to class in ways that are indirect and of minor importance.” Most writers now refer broadly, to “a specific, socially significant group or class” (Eagleton 1991: 29). The OED says that ideologies relate “to politics or society, or to the conduct of a class or group” (622). Lane (1962: 15) is most emphatic: Ideologies “are group beliefs that individuals borrow; most people acquire an ideology by identifying (or disidentifying) with a social group.”

(c) Any group or individual. Finally, many writers have applied the word ideology as a property that might be possessed by a single individual. While it has usually been considered a central aspect of ideologies that they be “shared,” this does not reflect upon other presumably ideological characteristics (e.g., coherence, political orientation, action orientation . . .). There may be no reason to exclude an individual from the category “ideological” just because others cannot be found who share his or her views; and, in fact, we commonly speak of “X’s ideology,” as if it were distinguishable from all others.

4. Position

Ideology has often been identified as the hallmark of a group in a particular strategic position within society. Here, as in so many other respects, there has been little agreement over which status is more ideological—an “in-group” whose ideology legitimates a relationship of domination, or an “out-group” whose ideology is a protest against an exclusionary or discriminatory social hierarchy.

(a) Dominant. The classical reference-point for ideology as domination is Marx and Engels (1970: 64), who write: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” Many contemporary writers have moved from this class-specific understanding of domination to a
more general notion of "structures of domination." Ideology, in this sense, "bolsters stable institutional arrangements by explaining, justifying, and prompting support for a particular stratification system whose failure or demise will lead to the disintegration of a particular pattern of control" (Wilson 1992: 19). This understanding of ideology is not limited to writers of a Marxist or leftist extraction. Apter (1964: 18), who could scarcely be accused of either, writes "ideology helps to support an elite and to justify the exercise of power" (see also Thompson 1984: 89-90).

(b) Subordinate. Yet, at the same time, ideology is commonly associated with movements of the extreme left or right. Indeed, the most coherent, abstract, stable, and sharply differentiated sets of beliefs, these writers have noted, often emanate from those groups or individuals protesting the existing sociopolitical order (e.g., Feuer 1975). Ideologists, Putnam (1971: 655) writes, are commonly described as "Alienated" and "Extremist." Shils (1967: 66), in the same vein, writes: "Ideologies...entail an aggressive alienation from the existing society." These sorts of definitional attributes are more likely to describe those groups protesting the status quo than those benefiting from it. Raymond Williams (1983: 154) reports that the terms ideology and revolutionary were often equated in the nineteenth century—a equation, one might add, that persists into the twentieth century.

5. Function

(a) Explaining. Ideology, Geertz (1964/1973: 218-19) writes, "is...the attempt...to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them."

(b) Repressing. Propaganda, however, is the selfconscious manipulation of symbols to achieve a given effect. Thompson (1984: 86-86) acknowledges that "ideology allows only certain things to be communicated and discussed... It not only 'expresses' but also 'represses'". Most writers would agree that in studying ideology one is paying attention not merely to that portion of the belief-system which has been selfconsciously projected, but also to that which remains submerged.

(c) Integrated. Perhaps the foremost exponent of ideologies as mechanisms of social integration was Talcott Parsons. In The Social System (1951: 349-50), Parsons wrote of ideology as "a system of beliefs, held in common by the members of a collectivity... which is oriented to the evaluative integration of the collectivity, by interpretation of the empirical nature of the collectivity and

of the situation in which it is placed, the processes by which it has developed to its given state, the goals to which its members are collectively oriented, and their relation to the future course of events." Here, ideology functions to bind individuals to a community by establishing an authoritative set of norms and values (Apter 1964: 18-21; Parsons 1951: 349; Plamenatz 1970: 31). Ideologies "provide the individual with a sense of identity and belonging" serving to achieve "social solidarity and cohesion" (Rejai 1991: 17).

(d) Motivating. Both scholarly usage and ordinary understandings of the term ideology suggest that ideologies are action-oriented. They seek not merely to describe the world but also to mold it. 18 Where publicly declared, ideologies are aimed at an audience (not formed "in the abstract") with the intent of influencing opinion. Even where an ideology is not officially or openly articulated, its intent is still prescriptive (or, if you prefer, "programmatic") in that the holder of the ideology is enjoined by his or her ideology to act. Ideologies "furnish guides for action" (McClosky 1964: 362). By organizing and interpreting the world an ideology helps the subject to act within that world. Ideologists do not passively accept the prevailing winds of historical change; they embrace, reject, or seek to regulate the course of history, presenting an implicit or explicit vision of the good life, the ideal world. Ideology, it is argued, forms the nexus between ideas and actions.

That ideology is action-oriented should not, however, be confused with the idea that ideologies are acted upon all the time, or that political action is primarily the product of ideologies. "The significance of ideology," Mullins (1972: 509) states succinctly, "is not that it causes one to do but that it gives one cause for doing." The OED, similarly, cites ideology's function in "justifying actions" (622). Ideologies, in this sense, offer a way of overcoming the difficulties inherent in collective action without (or supplementary to) a coercive apparatus and material incentives.

(e) Legitimating. Ideology also legitimates. Usually, by this it is meant that ideologies distort, and that they do so in defense of dominant social groups (e.g., Eagleton 1991: 6). One might note with irony that the legitimation function of ideology is understood to be illegitimate. However, one can also find the concept of legitimation (though not, perhaps, the term) used in a more value-neutral manner. In this sense, ideology "legitimates"—i.e., make legitimate—actions, whether or not those actions are in support of or in revolt against the established order.

6. Motivation

Many writers have considered motivation to be in some way determinative of ideology. Three equally influential positions can be discerned. According to the first, ideologies are rooted in interests; according to the second, it is the absence of material interest in a set of ideas which defines an ideology; according to the third it is the absence of short-term interests (or "expediency") which must be present in order for a set of attitudes to claim the status of an ideology.

(a) Interest-based. The notion of ideologies as interest-based can be traced back at least as far as Marx and Engels (1970: 64; see also 47, 57), who write: "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. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships." Just as the notion of power was gradually extended from its original Marxian roots in social class, the notion of "interest" has undergone a like permutation. The interests of an ideologue may refer not simply to the material interests of his or her class but, more broadly, to group interests and even to self-interest, and to a set of tangible and intangible interests which include position, status, power, and perquisite.19 "An ideology," Elster writes, "is a set of beliefs of values that can be explained through the (non-cognitive) interest or position of some social group" (1982: 123). Whether the ideology actually serves the interests of the group in question, or is dysfunctional in this respect, the origin of the system of values is thought to be traceable to the social position of the group in question (on this point, see Geertz 1964/1973).

(b) Non-interest based. Yet, we are also quite familiar in contemporary works of social science with the notion that matters of ideology are removed from matters of "self-interest," and particularly from material self-interest (e.g. Crewe and Searing 1988: 362-63; Kritzer 1978: 486). This sense of the term can be found as far back as Napoleon. An early biographer of the Emperor, writing shortly after his death, testifies that his subject used ideology to refer to "every species of theory . . . resting in no respect upon the basis of self-interest" (Scott, Napoleon, 1827, quoted in Williams 1983: 154).

(c) Non-expedient. A third position in the motivation debate is held by those who argue that while interest in the broad sense may be ideological, interest in the narrow sense of expediency is not. "[I]t matters," write Campbell

et al. (1960: 203–204) "whether self-interest proceeds in a simple and naked sense, or has indeed become imbedded in some broader ideological structure." What the writers wish to distinguish is "self-interest in a primitive and short-sighted sense, and the operation of self-interest within a structure of attitudes that might reasonably be labeled an 'ideology.'" In both the second and third senses (above), ideology may be employed as a residual category—standing for those actions, statements, or beliefs for which no self-interested basis can be discovered.  

7. Cognitive/Affective Structure

Sixteen types of cognitive/affective structure have commonly been applied to ideology (or ideologists).

(a) Coherence (internal). There is little question among analysts of ideology that the internal structure of a set of values and beliefs must be coherent in order for it to be considered "ideological." However, exactly how coherent, or what exactly constitutes coherence, remains a subject of great debate. The fuzziness of this central ideological characteristic is abetted by its number of near-synonyms—including consistency, integrated, structure, system, organization, logical interrelationship, and the ever-popular constraint. Each refers, with a slightly different emphasis, to the degree of likeness, agreement, or "fit" characterizing the various elements or manifestations of an ideology.

(b) Contrast (external). The idea of internal coherence implies a degree of contrast between the ideology in question and surrounding ideologies (or the general political culture). A value, belief, or attitude is ideological only with reference to something else which is not, or which is differently ideological. If there is little to distinguish the beliefs and values of a party or movement from its competitors in a political system then it has failed a crucial test. If all political parties within a country are equally "conservative" then it would appear that the ideology of "conservativism" applies to the country at-large rather than to any individual party. Contrast is a matter which, under various rubrics, has inspired a great quantity of study; it is the driving question, for example, behind spatial models of electoral behavior 21 and behind the eternal argument over whether American politics is "consensual" or "conflictual" (see McClosky et al. 1960; McClosky 1964; Sternsher 1975).

(c) Abstraction. Ideology is also commonly viewed as an abstract endeavor. "Ideal or abstract speculation," specifies the OED (622). Campbell et al. (1960:

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20 On the difficulties of defining an "interest," see Citrin and Green (1990) and Kingdon (1993).

21 Strom (1990) offers an excellent synthesis of this literature.
193) echo this traditional sense of the word, referring to ideology as a cognitive structure "capped by concepts of a high order of abstraction."  

(d) Specificity. Along with endorsements of ideology's abstraction, one also finds frequent endorsements of its concreteness—its specificity. Ideologies, in contrast to political philosophies, writes Keohane (1976: 97), "must be simple and concrete if they are to be effective." For many writers, a set of values becomes ideological only insofar as it specifies a concrete program, a set of issue-positions. It is this, arguably, that differentiates ideologies from belief-systems, philosophical systems, and cultural systems.  

(e) Hierarchy. Campbell et al. (1960: 190) expected idea-units to be organized in a hierarchical fashion, "in which more specific attitudes interact with attitudes towards the more general class of objects in which the specific object is seen to belong." Working from this vision, Peffley and Hurwitz (1985) create a hierarchical model of ideological reasoning, in which specific issue-attitudes are related to more general attitudes and, finally, to notions of liberalism and conservatism. The authors assume that, generally speaking, values drive issue-positions, rather than the reverse.  

(f) Stability. Although stability does not appear in many formal definitions, most writers would probably agree that a set of values and beliefs must endure for some length of time in order to warrant the appellation "ideology" (see Achen 1975; Converse 1964: 238; Erikson 1979; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986: 64). "Parties of the 'left' and 'right' do not trade positions from election to election," Campbell et al. (1960: 189) note. "Assuming stability in parallel values in individuals, it would follow that partisan preferences would be pursued for long periods of time." More recently, Klingemann et al. (1994: 36) describe an "ideology model" of party behavior, in which "parties in power follow more closely a policy reflecting longstanding ideology than one reflecting current programmatic emphases." Frequent and repeated changes of political perspective, in other words, are usually considered good evidence of a lack of ideological commitment. Under such circumstances it can be assumed that a group or individual is responding to nonideological demands (interests, expediency, coercion) or simply has no developed beliefs and values about politics at all.  

(g) Knowledge. Another cognitive characteristic commonly associated with ideological modes of thought is summarizable in the term political knowledge. Political knowledge, one might note, may be operationalized so as to account not simply for the gross number of factual observations or responses

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an individual is able to make, but also for the range over which these observations/responses fall (see Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964, 1990; Smith 1989).

(h) **Sophistication.** A related—but rather different—cognitive trait commonly associated with ideologues is that of sophistication. While political knowledge, coherence, and abstractness refer to various particular aspects of cognitive processing, political sophistication refers to the general character of the reasoning process—including, therefore, some or all of the foregoing attributes. This is not an easy concept to nail down; indeed, political scientists laboring under this rubric have encountered many of the same definitional problems currently roiling work on ideology (Luskin 1987: 1993). Writers have been unable to agree, for example, whether sophistication is indicated by a greater or lesser number of dimensions within a given ideology (Luskin 1987: 863). Ideology, in any case, in much of the political science literature refers to the highest—i.e., most sophisticated—level of political reasoning found among the general public.

(i) **Facticity.** Ideology, according to one view, is defined by its “facticity.” Unlike other types of communication, ideology makes statements with truth-claims—ideas which “purport to be factual, and also carry a more or less explicit evaluation of the “facts” (Ashford 1972: 26; see also Birnbaum 1960: 91; Hamilton 1987).

(j) **Simplicity.** Sutton et al. (1956: 4–5; quoted in Geertz 1964/1973: 209) claim that “Ideology tends to be simple and clear-cut, even where its simplicity and clarity do less than justice.” Gould and Kolb (1964: 315) write of ideology as the explanation of “complex social phenomena with a view to directing and simplifying sociopolitical choices facing individuals and groups” (see also McClosky 1958; Oakeshott 1962: 114–27; Tetlock 1983).

(k) **Distortion.** One of the most common and longest-standing elements associated with ideology is that of distortion. “[Each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it,” write Marx and Engels (1970: 65–66), “is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.” In Marx's writings, and particularly in the *German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1970: 119), a “realm of real history” is counterposed to a “realm of ideology.” This sense of distortion is likewise the gist of Mannheim’s “particular” definition of ideology, which denotes a “more or less conscious disguise . . . of the real nature of a situation

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23 See Campbell et al. (1960) and Converse (1964). Smith (1989: 226) defines sophistication as including knowledge, but acknowledges the ambiguity of this point.
the true recognition of which would not be in accord with [the ideologists'] interests" (quoted in Naess et al. 1956: 166). Althusser offers a modern variation on the “distortion” theme. “Ideology,” he writes (1971: 162), “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” In poststructuralist circles ideology is apt to be used as a synonym for “closure”—that circumstance in which naturally free-floating processes of signification are blocked or prematurely ended (e.g., Thompson 1984: 196). Eagleton (1991: 6) writes of ideologies “denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and obscuring social reality in ways convenient to itself...[e.g.] masking or suppressing social conflicts,” papering them over with “an imaginary resolution of real contradictions” (see also Putnam 1971: 655).

Distortion is thus the end-product of many operations traditionally viewed as ideological: legitimation, naturalization (the depiction of fabricated circumstances as “natural”), popularization, “the illicit union of fact and value” (Adams 1989: 137; Minar 1961: 323), “systematically distorted communication” (Habermas 1984), the (unsubstantiated) claim to “moral certainty” (Adams 1989: 139; Naess 1956: 166), the use of unverifiable truth-claims (Sartori 1969: 403). In all such cases, the description of ideology as distortion rests on an implicit epistemological contrast between “ideological” and scientific, or truthful, forms of analysis.24

(l) Conviction. Most writers would probably agree (even if they do not state as a formal definitional premise) that ideological beliefs are strongly held—that there is an element of conviction to any ideology. Ideology is often equated with a deep, passionate, or emotional sort of commitment (Bell 1960: 370-71; Neuman 1981: 1239; Rejai 1971; Sartori 1969). In an attempt to reorient the discussion of ideology among mass publics, Sniderman and Tetlock (1986: 63) claim that ideology “is better understood as a set of root likes and dislikes rather than an assemblage of abstractions.” It is, therefore, an affective rather than cognitive aspect of thought that may determine how people understand and relate to political issues.

(m) Insincerity. By the same token, ideology has often been used to indicate the speaker’s lack of commitment, her insincerity. One hears, for example, that politicians reiterate “ideologies” which they do not believe and which they do not implement once ensconced in public office. This is ideology in this sense of “mere ideology,” and carries the same connotations as “mere rhetoric.”

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(n) Dogmatism. "It is to the doctrine of the ideologues," said Napoleon, "to this diffuse metaphysics, which in a contrived manner seeks to find the primary causes and on this foundation would erect the legislation of peoples, instead of adapting the laws to a knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history—to which one must attribute all the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful France" (quoted in Williams 1983: 154). Marx and Engels (1970: 68) also refer repeatedly to society's ideologists as "dogmatic." To many writers of the postwar generation, ideologies were "secular religions," characterized by their obstinacy in face of facts, counterarguments, and opposition of any sort.25 A good summation of this view is provided by Loewenstein (1969: 335), who writes: "It is characteristic of the religious that it does not admit degrees of acceptance. Being absolute by nature it must either be accepted or rejected; there are only believers and heretics. Most modern political ideologies have become religion-affected in the sense that a particular thought and belief pattern embodies values that are considered absolute by its adherents. To the masses the ideological belief is a substitute for eroded religious values. Even liberal ideologies whose specific value-content is tolerance and relativism, assume, when exposed to the competitive antithesis of totalitarianism, the absolutist coloration of the 'either-or.'" The sense of ideology as dogmatism is enshrined in the OED ("held implicitly or adopted as a whole and maintained regardless of the course of events"—622) and repeated in countless evaluations of the subject. Ideologists are "guided by a belief system which is 'closed,' rigid, resistant to new information," writes Putnam (1971: 655) in his compendium of definitions. One of the strongest statements of this perspective is to be found in Sartori's (1969: 402) controversial claim that "the ideological mentality represents a typically dogmatic, i.e., rigid and impermeable, approach to politics."26

(o) Consciousness. One common view has it that the ideologist should "be able to explicate those principles" of the ideology to which he or she is thought to belong (Kritzer 1978: 485-86). Ideology is "an explicit, consciously held belief system" (Putnam 1971: 655). "Ideology," another writer asserts, "pertains to that part of consciousness which can be said; it has a public objectivity which enables the projects it promotes to be discussed among strangers" (Thompson 1984: 85). An even stronger sense of explicitness is the achievement of written form. According to Thompson (1984: 85-86), "writing was and still is its principal medium." This moves us into what is undoubtedly the


26 For commentary, see Mullins (1974).
most explicit form any ideology can achieve—and the form which many would say is the most quintessentially “ideological”—*propaganda*.

(p) *Unconsciousness.* While, as noted, many writers consider consciousness to be the hallmark of ideological thinking, many more consider unconsciousness to be its distinguishing characteristic (see Barnes 1966: 514). Engels is emphatic on this point: “The real driving force which moves [ideology] remains unconscious, otherwise it would not be an ideological process” (quoted in Roucek 1944: 482). Ideologists are persons making history, yet blindly—without a complete awareness of their actual roles (Lichtheim 1967: 31). Others have described the unconsciousness of ideology in a more Freudian sense. Feuer, for example, claims that ideologies typically “project wish-fulfillments” (1975). For Kardiner et al. ideologies are, likewise, “compounds of projective systems” (quoted in Lane 1962: 14; see also Adorno et al. 1950; Erikson 1968; Nelson 1977: 580). Some political scientists have decided that, although the mass public is relatively devoid of *articulable* ideology, it is not devoid of ideology (e.g., Levitin and Miller 1979: 752). Ideology, in this sense, must be considered a proto-conscious phenomenon. Nelson (1977: 580) takes a psychoanalytic approach to this question. “An individual may evince a pattern of behavior from which an observer can reasonably infer beliefs informing the acts of the individual. And yet those beliefs need not inform the acts consciously. Repression of awareness of these beliefs can, according to psychoanalytic theory, serve important psychic needs of the individual.”

**Conclusions**

I have argued that the troubles social scientists encounter with the concept of ideology are largely “definitional” in character—rather than empirical, theoretical (explanatory), or operational. Of course, this proposition might be applied to many social science terms. However, the problem of defining ideology seems particularly severe. Arguably, the term has become so overladen with meaning that it is no longer stable enough to be of much use. Having been appropriated for all manner of academic and political purposes over the past several centuries, ideology has become a victim of its own popularity. It now means too much.

What, then, are we to do with this over-supply of meanings? I shall suggest the following set of procedures: (1) the construction of a minimal (or “core” definition; (2) the achievement of the greatest possible differentiation vis-à-vis neighboring terms; and (3) context specificity.

1. *A Core Definition*

A common strategy when attempting to cope with semantic plenitude in a concept is to identify a core (or “minimal”) definition—a single attribute or small
set of related attributes that is universally agreed-upon and which might therefore lend some coherence to other, less central, definitional attributes. In order to arrive at a core definition one must jettison conceptual attributes that conflict with other, well-established attributes, as well as those which exclude important ideational phenomena from consideration (ones, that is, for which we have no alternate label).

If all the senses of the term ideology are attended to, I would argue that only one trait meets this criterion. The importance of coherence (7a)—aka “consistency” or “constraint”—is virtually unchallenged in the social science literature. Ideology, at the very least, refers to a set of idea-elements that are bound together, that belong to one another in a non-random fashion. On what principles they intercorrelate, and to what degree, remain matters of dispute (as discussed), but the notion of coherence is difficult to gainsay. One might add, as corollaries, contrast (7b) and stability (7f)—the one implying coherence vis-à-vis competing ideologies and the other implying coherence through time.

All other possible core attributes are simply not universal in usage (even within the restricted parameter of social science), or involve arbitrary classificatory decisions about what constitutes “ideological” behavior. For example, many writers propose that all ideologies imply a sense of conviction on the part of the holders of that set of beliefs (71). But we have also observed the sense in which ideologies may be “mere ideologies,” hollow ideational shells in which few truly believe. The ideology of communism in Eastern Europe prior to the fall of the Soviet Union seems to have approximated this sense of ideology as insincerity (7m). Similarly, the attribute dominant (4a) conflicts with subordinate (4b). Consciousness (7o), evidently, contradicts unconsciousness (7p).

To those who would define ideology as referring to explicitly political subject matter (2a), it is important to point out that this would exclude many uses of the term in non-political contexts—e.g., as pertaining to relationships mediated by power (2b), or relationships within the world at-large (2c).

To those who would claim that ideology is an example of abstract (7c), hierarchically ordered (7e), knowledgeable (7g), and/or sophisticated (7h) cogni-

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27 See Sartori (1976: 61). Hamilton purports to follow this strategy; but is evidently influenced by other principles of definition as well. “Idiosyncratic criteria should normally be rejected unless it can be demonstrated that despite their idiosyncrasy there are good reasons for including them.” By this procedure, the core features of the majority of definitions will be retained. The selection of other elements on the basis of reasoned argument will then fix the limits or boundaries of the concept” (Hamilton 1987: 19; emphasis added). I should note that not all terms contain core properties; some may be defined by “family characteristics,” none of which are invariably present (Colher and Mahon 1993).

28 By “arbitrary” I refer to a classificatory decision that would be appropriate only within the purview of a single study or subfield.
tion, one must observe that ideological thought has also been defined by its *simplicity* (7j) and *distortion* (7k). More importantly, perhaps, defining the concept of ideology as sophisticated political cognition may deprive us of a way to talk about the political beliefs and values of many members of the public. Let us assume, for a moment, that most people have thoughts about political objects, that these thoughts motivate them to action (perhaps not continually, but at least every once in a while), and that these actions have political consequences. Assume, moreover, that these thoughts are not entirely random—i.e., contain some elements of internal coherence. If all these observations are correct, social scientists evidently need a term referring to such cognitive behavior. (One may, of course, resort to *mentalite* or *culture*, but these terms lose the explicitly political connotation of ideology.) It would be hard, George Rude (1980/1995) points out, to make sense of popular movements, like the Levelers and Diggers of the English Revolution, the Sons of Liberty during the American Revolution, and the *sans-culottes* during the French Revolution without resort to the concept of ideology. The same argument, of course, can be applied to the "mass public" in contemporary America.29

The most troubling internal definitional conflict besetting ideology is to be found on the *motivation* dimension. Here, *interest-based* (6a) and *non-interest based* (6b) definitions collide. Indeed, this would seem to be the source of a good deal of ideology's semantic strife; for some evidently wish to define ideological activity as instrumental and others as noninstrumental. I think Campbell et al. (1960: 203–204) offer the most sensible way out of this dilemma in proposing that ideology be understood as *nonexpedient* ideas and behavior. To repeat: "[I]t matters whether self-interest proceeds in a simple and naked sense, or has indeed become imbedded in some broader ideological structure." What the writers wish to distinguish is "self-interest in a primitive and short-sighted sense, and the operation of self-interest within a structure of attitudes that might reasonably be labeled an 'ideology'."

**Differentiation**

In his brilliant, though tortuous, work on concept formation Sartori (1984: 63) advises that "no word should be used as a synonym for another word."30 This line of inquiry is quite useful in narrowing the range of possible attributes connected with ideology. On grounds of achieving maximum clarity, one ought

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30 Ironically, he appears to violate this tenet in his earlier definition of ideology as dogmatism (Sartori 1969). Why define ideology as dogma when we already have a term for this semantic purpose, one might well inquire. For further commentary on Sartori (1969), see Diggins (1970).
to seek out attributes that effectively differentiate ideology from neighboring terms. From this perspective it is indeed useful to limit the purview of ideology to explicitly political subject matter (2a), for only in this way can its definition be distinguished from worldview, belief-system, cultural system, value-system, and other like terms.

By the same logic, we ought to avoid adding attributes to the core defining attribute (coherence) if they repeat attributes already defining neighboring terms. We have little use for a concept of ideology defined largely in terms of cognitive sophistication (7h), when we already possess the perfectly serviceable term, sophistication. This is the laudable trend of current research (Cassel 1984; Luskin 1987, 1993; Smith 1980, 1989).

Perhaps the toughest borderline case is posed by the concept of political culture. Even here, however, conceptual differentiation can be achieved, and scholars are well-advised to consider carefully their choice of terms. Political culture is generally considered to be less programmatic, less action-oriented, referring as much to political procedures as to the substance of politics, and is much more likely to be defined as a set of (unconscious) practices. One can point to a good many cases of writers who chose “ideology” when they might have been more precise and accurate in choosing political culture.31

Many, generally on the left of the political spectrum, protest that to “sanitize” ideology of any hint of its sense as domination (4a), as suggested above, is to deprive the concept of its capacity for social critique (e.g., Lichtheim 1967). This may be true, although one may reasonably counter that social critique is more effective insofar as it is clear. In any case, the dual status of the term—as a structure of domination and an ideational form structuring opposition to the status quo—means that any pejorative use of ideology ends up calling into question the very “ideologies of liberation” that those on the left would champion. A more sensible rhetorical strategy, I suggest, would use terms that refer more directly and clearly to the phenomena now referred to (by these authors) as “ideological.” What is lost, one wonders, in calling domination domination, repression repression, and hegemony hegemony? What is the special status of ideology that it must be imported to serve as the universal signifier of injustice?

My general argument, lest it be misconstrued, is that the richness of this semantic field need not be looked upon as a detriment. In trespassing on the meanings of other related words, many previous definitions of ideology have weakened the clarity—and hence the utility—of this concept (as well as of

those terms whose meanings are appropriated). We do not need to stretch the
meaning of ideology to perform so many semantic functions precisely be-
cause we already possess other terms which cover adjacent areas. In respect-
ing the differentness of these related terms we can carve out clearer definitions
of this concept. This also means that we may have to reconcile ourselves to
smaller definitions.

3. Context-Specificity

Beyond these, relatively general, strategies—minimal definition, jettison-
ing contradictory attributes, and differentiation—we cannot avoid context-spe-
cific definitions. In other words, it is not reasonable to try to construct a single,
all-purpose definition of ideology, usable for all times, places, and purposes.
Doing so would deprive the concept of its utility precisely because its utility is
(usually) context-specific. It may be that ideology is more context-dependent
than most other social science terms—that it travels with less ease across geo-
graphic and theoretical boundaries. But all terms face this difficulty, and must
generally accept a restricted ambit of applicability in exchange for a wide
range of attributes (Sartori 1970).

The task of definition we must leave to the writer, situated in a particular
problem, region, time-period, and methodology. It is important to state the
obvious: different definitions of ideology will be useful for different purposes.
It is hoped that the task of definition will be made easier by this seven-part
framework of the concept of ideology, which establishes a uniform grid upon
which one can identify, and hence compare, definitional choices. This will not
resolve the question of what constitutes a “best definition” in the specific case,
but it will at least give us grounds upon which to arbitrate disputes. Only by
accounting for all possible definitional choices, in a reasonably concise fash-
ion, can we move forward the practical task of term definition.

To this might be appended one final note. It is essential that context-
specific definitions—all definitions, that is, that move beyond mere “cohe-
rence” (the core attribute)—recognize their situatedness in a more selfconscious
manner than has hitherto been the fashion. Those studying political behavior
at the individual level may have need of a slightly different concept than those
studying political organizations. Political parties may call forth a different set
of accompanying attributes than revolutionary cells. Ideology may be a fun-
damentally different phenomenon in modern and pre-modern societies, west-
ern and non-western societies, religious and secular societies, at mass and
elite levels, and so forth. These are necessarily matters of empirical investiga-
tion, but they are not merely of empirical import. If it is determined that the
mass publics experience and process political phenomena differently in dif-
ferent contexts it is entirely appropriate to define the concept differently in

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these contexts—and, in doing so, to acknowledge the limited terrain to which the concept (so defined) applies.

4. Employing Strategies of Redefinition: Ideology in the Field of Political "Behavior"

As a way of summarizing the points made in the foregoing discussion, and as an example of how these strategies of definition might be employed in a specific context, it may be useful to take a brief look at one particular area of endeavor. I choose the field of "political behavior" because it is probably of greatest interest to the readers of this journal, but I assume that the general strategies of definition outlined in this study would work with equal facility in other social science domains (even, I think, within the domain of political theory).

The good news for behavioralists is that the thrust of most empirical investigation—into matters of coherence (or "constraint," "consistency")—coincides with the core meaning of the concept of ideology. It is, therefore, perfectly justifiable to call an individual with highly coherent views on political matters an "ideologue." Indeed, there does not seem to be any other available term for such an individual (or group). This does not, of course, resolve the problem of how to judge coherence, or measure it. Here lies the source of a good deal of the debate: namely, what things are to be compared and how coherent must they be in order to qualify that group or individual as ideological? Coherence may refer to the degree of fit among different issue-positions, between issue-positions and core values, or between either of the foregoing and larger ideological rubrics (e.g., "liberalism," "conservatism"). One may gauge the degree of coherence of these items along a single dimension (e.g., the left-right spectrum) or along several dimensions, and according to logical relationships (often referred to as "deductive consistency"), self-defined relationships (aka "psychological consistency"), or empirical regularities (among a group of individuals under study). 32

Of relevance for present purposes are the following general points. First, these arguments all revolve around the single attribute of coherence. Second, arguments between these various ways of operationalizing coherence are endemic for the simple reason that none can claim any semantic (or "definitional") priority. A writer finding coherence using one set of operationalizations has just as much definitional ground to stand upon as a writer armed with another set of operationalizations. It would be healthy for the field to

32 The distinction between "deductive" and "psychological" consistency is explored in Nelson (1977). The best recent reviews of the debate over how to measure coherence (or "constraint") are Knight (1985), Luskin (1987) and Smith (1989). The dimensionality debate is discussed in Green (1988), Knight (1984; 1990), and Wilcox and Clausen (1991).
acknowledge that the tit-for-tat nature of the debate is, in this sense, rooted in
the ambiguities of "coherence." Needless to say, I do not think that replacing
coherence with, "consistency," "constraint," or "hierarchy" is likely to solve
this problem because, again, one is simply asserting—by definitional fiat, as it
were—that one particular understanding of togetherness should be privileged
above others.

One way out of this empirical and conceptual dilemma lies in finding
appropriate comparative reference points. One may never resolve whether
the members of the general public are, or are not, ideological. The question,
phrased in such dichotomous term, hardly admits of a sensible answer. Surely,
as Nelson (1977: 576) suggests, ideological-ness is more usefully thought of
as a matter of degrees—which brings us to the question of comparative refer-
ence points. The standard reference for studies of the mass public has been
the political elite, and this seems an eminently useful, and answerable, ques-
tion. If we cannot determine whether members of the American public qualify
as ideologues (since such a conclusion would be dependent upon arbitrary
choices about how to define ideology), we should at least be able to compare
their ideological-ness with the ideological-ness of national party delegates,
activists, politicians, and so forth. (It may even be that mass publics and elites
are not more or less, but instead, differently ideological.) Crossnational com-
parisons (e.g., Fuchs and Klingemann 1990) would also seem eminently use-
ful, allowing one to judge the ideological-ness of mass publics vis-à-vis each
other.

Other disputes within the behavioral field involve definitional attributes
that are more ambiguously situated in the concept of ideology. Neither ab-
straction (7c) nor hierarchy (7e), for example, are always mentioned in work
on ideology. Even within behavioral work there is considerable disagreement
on the extent to which ideologues must be organized around concepts "of a
high order of abstraction" (Campbell et al. 1960: 193) or whether ideological
idea-elements must be hierarchically ordered (from most specific to most ab-
stract) (ibid: 190; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985). Not only are these definitional
attributes less often found in the literature, they are also contradicted by those
who view ideology as a largely unconscious, or preconscious affair (7p). The
use of high-order concepts like liberalism and conservatism presume a self-
awareness that, many would argue, is not inherently ideological. One can be
ideological, from this perspective, without being able to explain one's ideol-
ogy—at least not in so many words. The question "Why are you doing that?"
may have little meaning to ideologues.

It may seem that I am arguing at cross-purposes with myself here, since I
attempted to distinguish between ideology and political culture according to
ideology's more selfconscious expression. However, I am not arguing against
the use of either abstraction or hierarchy in definitions of ideology; I am merely pointing out that they rest on shakier semantic ground than the core attribute (coherence) and that they are likely, for this reason, to remain shaky. Definitions of ideology which impute sophistication (7h), as I have suggested, are on even more tenuous ground, for this attribute runs headlong into well-established notions of ideology as simplicity (7j), distortion (7k), and dogmatism (7n)—not to mention unconsciousness (7p). The movement underway to disentangle sophistication from ideology (noted above) is auspicious.

REFERENCES


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