

# CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

SECOND EDITION

LIBERALISM

CONSERVATISM

SOCIALISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

MARXISM AND COMMUNISM

ANARCHISM

NATIONALISM

FASCISM

FEMINISM

ECOLOGISM

ISLAM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

EDITED BY

ROGER EATWELL AND

ANTHONY WRIGHT

# **CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES**

**Second Edition**

**Edited by  
Roger Eatwell and  
Anthony Wright**

CONTINUUM  
London and New York

**Continuum**

Wellington House, 125 Strand, London WC2R 0BB  
370 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6550

First published 1993. Reprinted 1994, 1996  
Second edition published 1999. Reprinted 1999, 2000

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 85567 605 2 (Hardback)

0 8264 5173 X (Paperback)

**Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

Contemporary political ideologies/edited by Roger Eatwell and  
Anthony Wright.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-85567-605-2.—ISBN 0-8264-5173-X (pbk.)

1. Political science. 2. Right and Left (Political science).

3. Ideology. I. Eatwell, Roger. II. Wright, Anthony, 1948– .

JA83.C637 1999

320.5—DC21

98-30981

CIP

Typeset by York House Typographic Ltd  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd, [www.biddles.co.uk](http://www.biddles.co.uk)

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## PREFACE

In everyday usage, 'ideology' tends to be a pejorative term, synonymous with deceitful and fanatical. As such, it is often contrasted with pragmatism and truth. This is *not* the primary sense in which the term is used in this book. Nor does this book adopt the instrumental approach to 'ideology' commonly employed by Marxists and social scientists, who seek to trace how 'ideology' is socially determined, especially by dominant groups. Similarly, this book is not primarily concerned with the alleged role 'ideologies' play for individuals and groups in terms of finding their place in a complex world. This is a book about political thought rather than anthropology, sociology, psychology, and so on. It is about political ideologies understood as a relatively coherent set of values – a set of 'isms' which have been, and in most cases remain, central to the language of post-Enlightenment politics. As such they have a variety of more concrete effects, including both inspiring and constraining behaviour and policy.

This is not to deny that there are interesting questions to be asked about the social origins and role of ideologies understood more broadly – problems which the following chapters often touch upon. However, to do these questions full justice would require a separate book – or rather a series, for they raise cosmic issues about individuals, society, history and change. Even then, it is not necessarily clear that we would be much the wiser. All too frequently books on 'ideology' understood in a sweeping sense produce obfuscation more than clear thinking – a tendency encouraged by the pretentious and often obscure language which sometimes characterizes attempts to demystify power relations in society. Indeed, such books on 'ideology' are sometimes themselves ideological in the common pejorative sense: many of their authors have firm political convictions, and write with a strong normative flavour. They seek to exert influence by unmasking allegedly dominant power relationships.

The belief that objective intellectuals can exercise neutral judgement has been frequently criticized. Even with the best will in the world, it is impossible completely to break free from the prejudices of our backgrounds and times. Nevertheless, it is important not to jump from an Enlightenment belief in the power of rationality and science to a 'post-modern' belief that all is relative, that there are no truths or standards against which political ideologies can be judged. The contributors to this book – all leading experts in their fields – come from a variety of political points of view, but they all seek to analyse 'their' ideology as rationally as possible (it is important to underline that whilst some contributors write about bodies of thought which they basically admire, others do not). They also seek to write as clearly as possible, trying to avoid unnecessary jargon. This book is, therefore, suitable for those who seek a balanced introductory text, although the expertise of its contributors and their willingness to make controversial judgements at times, means that it will also be of interest to the more expert reader.

This book's focus on ideologies as thought is not simply an attempt to limit the field of study. It also reflects the belief that ideologies understood in this sense are major motive forces in history. However, the editorial brief to contributors was *not* one which sought to elucidate this point about the power of ideas compared to material, institutional, mythical, symbolic and other forces. Rather, contributors were asked to help the reader to understand political ideologies more in their own terms – analysing their key tenets, tensions and contradictions, and demonstrating how difficult it can be at times to draw neat lines between key 'isms'. 'Liberal-conservatism' or 'feminist-socialism', for instance, are not necessarily contradictions in terms, or a rag bag of ideas. A key task for the analyst of ideologies is to identify the core from the periphery, to tease out meanings and to chart the dynamics of changed conceptions and beliefs. One thing which certainly emerges from this book is the difficulty of pinning the common tags 'left' and 'right' on many ideologies.

The terms 'left' and 'right' in a political context came into common usage in Europe after the French Revolution, especially during the nineteenth century (the terms stemmed from the fact that the defenders of the old order took their place on the right of the National Assembly which met in France in 1789).<sup>1</sup> This was the period when most of the great political 'isms' first began to emerge in clearly articulated forms. Although the main focus of this book is on the twentieth century, contributors were asked to offer overviews of developments before 1900 in order to help underline both the origins of ideologies, and how they have adapted to changing historical contexts. At the end of each chapter, contributors peer forward into the new millennium. However, this is not essentially a work of futurology, especially at the world level. It is primarily a book about Western ideologies, although the inclusion of a chapter on Islam and Fundamentalism underlines the existence of other (often poorly understood in the West) belief systems. At the turn of the 1990s, Francis Fukuyama caught the mood of the hour when he proclaimed

the 'end of history' – the triumph of liberalism and capitalism at the world level over communism and other 'totalitarian' forces.<sup>2</sup> But at the turn of the new millennium, many Western commentators have become much less sanguine.

The first edition of this book was jointly planned at the turn of the 1990s by the two editors whose names appear on the cover, and first appeared in 1993. But the fact that Anthony Wright was elected to parliament in 1992 meant that the editorial work fell largely on Roger Eatwell, who alone has undertaken the work for this revised and expanded edition. Hence whilst two names have been left on the cover to avoid confusion in the marketplace, this new Preface is signed by just one person, whose views it represents.

All that remains is to express the usual caveats and thanks. In particular, I am grateful to the original contributors for once again fulfilling the editorial brief and providing such excellent revised chapters, and to Youssef Choueiri for providing a new chapter on Islam. I would also like to thank Cassell's Commissioning Editor for Social Sciences, Petra Recter, for suggesting a new edition in the belief – reflected in the reviews of the first edition – that this is the most authoritative work of its type available.

Roger Eatwell  
Bath, July 1998

## NOTES

1. This book does not specifically discuss the nature of the terms 'left' and 'right'. On this see N. Bobbio, *Left and Right*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1996, who focuses on equality as the core distinguishing principle. For a discussion of the problems of understanding the left–right spectrum in terms of a specific core principle see R. Eatwell and N. O'Sullivan (eds), *The Nature of the Right*, Pinter, London, 1989. Eatwell identifies five 'rights': the 'reactionary'; the 'moderate'; the 'radical'; the 'extreme'; and the 'new'. Note: some writers distinguish between an old and a new left–right spectrum, with the old focusing on (left) issues such as support for the big state and high taxation, and the new (left) issues centring more on feminism, ecologism, etc.
2. F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992.



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# 1

## **INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES?**

**Roger Eatwell**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The opening chapter of this book is atypical of what follows: it is about approaches and definitions to the elusive concept of 'ideology'. It will probably be the least read section. Many – probably most – readers will pick up this volume in order to study one or more of its ten chapters on a particular political ideology.

A student might seek help to write an essay on questions relating to a particular 'ism'. For instance:

1. Will we all become liberals during the twenty-first century? Certainly the language of 'rights' and 'markets' have become central to the vocabulary of all the mainstream Western ideologies.
2. Or has a new form of socialism, epitomized by Tony Blair's post-1997 government, emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century – a 'Third Way' between the old left and right?
3. What have been the main historic forms of nationalist ideology, and do these doctrines still have a relevance in a world supposedly characterized by 'globalization'?
4. Is feminist ideology losing its force after the early successes of the women's movement? Are differences among the many strands of feminism greater than their similarities?
5. Is Islamic fundamentalism a fanatical creed which poses a danger to world peace?; or have its key ideological tenets been travestied by Western critics?

The more advanced reader might be interested in detailed points of

interpretation, or on the exact focus of the contributions – especially as this book is unique among competing surveys of political ‘isms’ in the sense that the author of each central chapter is a noted expert in his/her field. For instance:

1. Why does the chapter on conservatism hold that since the 1970s conservatism has been too influenced by the technocratic-efficiency oriented themes of the neo-liberal New Right?
2. Why does the Marxism chapter hold that the collapse of communism does not offer the chance for a new start, in which Marxism can divorce itself from dictatorship?
3. Why does the chapter on anarchism hold that so-called contemporary ‘anarcho-capitalism’ is really a form of liberal rather than classic anarchist thought?
4. Why does the chapter on fascism stress the serious nature of its ideology, rather than organization and style, which are typically seen as its main defining characteristic?
5. Why does the chapter on ecologism note the totalitarian dangers of an ideology often associated with the slogan ‘small is beautiful’?

Many students, and even some academics, shy away from the problems of conceptual and methodological analysis – especially when opinions vary notably. And they certainly do over ‘ideology’. Indeed, an introductory text on the subject by David McLellan begins by claiming, ‘Ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social science’.<sup>1</sup> So why bother with this conundrum, especially as it may put someone off studying the following chapters? The main reason lies in the importance of delineating both the strengths and weaknesses of this book’s conception of ‘ideology’.

In everyday usage, ‘ideology’ tends to be a pejorative term, used especially to characterize ideas which seem biased and/or extreme. Thus opponents have ideologies, whereas ‘we’ are characterized by principles, pragmatism or common sense. Even some academic usage echoes this sense, though, in general, academic approaches are more characterized by their remarkable diversity. A recent major monograph on ideology, by the eminent political theorist Michael Freeden, opens by noting:

Over the past half-century the concept of ideology has emerged as one of the most complex and debatable political ideas. It is remarkable for being discussed on levels that seemingly do not intersect, for attempting to organize phenomena that appear unrelated, and for causing confusion among scholars and political commentators. Political theorists, historians, philosophers, linguists, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists have all grappled with the notion of ideology.<sup>2</sup>

At the risk of oversimplifying so broad a set of approaches ('debates' would be a misleading word, as much of the literature is a 'dialogue' of the blind and the deaf), they can be divided into:

1. ideology as political thought
2. ideology as beliefs and norms
3. ideology as language, symbols and myths
4. ideology as élite power.

It is important to stress that these approaches are not entirely exclusive: there is a strong tendency especially among approaches 2 and 3 to be interested in the exercise of power too. However, the above four categories point to different areas of primary study. The first relates especially to the great 'isms', like liberalism and its key thinkers such as John Stuart Mill (1806–73) or F.A. Hayek (1899–1992). It tends to focus on questions such as: what are the limits of freedom – should we tolerate the intolerant? Is there a contradiction between liberalism's emphasis on individual autonomy and rationality and the constraints of the capitalist market? The second relates to the body of views held by ordinary people, thoughts which tend to be much less systematic. For instance, many people in Western societies believe that it is only common sense that we need relatively high income differentials, though they could not articulate a full liberal-capitalist ideology. The third approach looks more at discourse and iconography (semiotics). For instance, in the West we have a 'free' market (a term which diverts attention from constraints such as advertising); our coins often bear the symbols of continuity, like a monarch, or the apparent principles of democracy ('Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'). The fourth approach relates more to the way in which élites seek to ensure conformity and support. In the past this may have focused on physical repression, but now media moguls, or the very state education system, are more typically seen as the basis of conformity.

What follows in this opening chapter is a highly selective introduction to the main approaches to the nature of 'ideology', presented in terms of brief overviews of a wide variety of key individuals or schools of thought. To anticipate the linking theme of this chapter, I will argue that there are dangers in inflating the term 'ideology' to cover what might better be termed 'propaganda', 'socialization' and 'culture'. This book, therefore, treats ideologies as a major branch in the study of political thought, though one which needs to be situated in specific historical contexts, for ideas – and especially their popular resonance – are very much related to other factors. This is not to claim that approaches based on other disciplines, or transdisciplinary studies fail to reveal insights in the workings of society, or the thinking of individuals. The point is more that ideas are important in their own right, and they need studying as such. Understood in this sense, ideologies are combinations of political concepts organized in a particular way. They

acquire specific meaning through discourse and context. However, what Freedman calls their 'morphological' aspects are also crucial – namely, 'what does an ideology look like? How does it behave?'<sup>3</sup>

## THE ORIGINS OF THE TERM 'IDEOLOGY'

The French philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836) coined the term '*idéologie*' in 1796. De Tracy was an aristocrat, sympathetic to the French Revolution (1789), but was imprisoned during the subsequent Jacobin Terror. On release, he turned his attention to what had caused such barbarities, to how a brutal intolerance could have emerged in the name of progress and the people. More generally, he posed the question of the way in which the values of epochs and societies differed significantly.

De Tracy was a rationalistic heir to the eighteenth-century movement known as the Enlightenment – critical of traditional authority and the mystification of religious thought – but also deeply concerned by the fanatical perversion of the Enlightenment by Robespierre and other Jacobins. De Tracy saw 'ideology' as a science of the human mind (like biology and zoology were sciences of species), capable of pointing the true way forward. Like many other members of the Institut National, which replaced the royal academies after the revolution, de Tracy believed that his task was not simply explanatory. He wanted, in true Enlightenment fashion, to further 'progress' by improving people – to show which ideas were false, and to develop a system of secular education which could produce better people (the nineteenth century was to see a great extension of public education in the West).

The association of 'ideology' with science and objective study was short lived. Indeed, the term 'ideology' quickly degenerated into a pejorative term, referring to the object rather than the form of study and often contrasted with scientific approaches. The first major figure to use the term in this pejorative way was Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821). Napoleon had initially been sympathetic to de Tracy's work, not least because he was highly interested in the power of ideas and symbols to mould people, and to reinforce support for regimes which lacked traditional legitimacy. However, after becoming emperor, he caricatured the Enlightenment and de Tracy's group as 'ideologues' (partly influenced by a desire to court favour with traditional groups, especially the Catholic church). Napoleon thus began a long line of critics who were to associate 'ideology' with traits such as an *a priori* desire to overturn old ways and 'improve' people's lives, and/or to advocate beliefs which suited the interests of those proclaiming them (de Tracy was a liberal republican, who envisaged a new world in which intellectuals like himself would have a significant role to play).

## MARX AND HIS FOLLOWERS ON 'IDEOLOGY'

Ideology as a pejorative concept was particularly important in the work of Karl Marx (1818–83). Indeed, a leading political philosopher, John Plamenatz, has written that it was Marx 'more than anyone, who introduced the word into social and political theory, and he used it in all its important senses without troubling to make clear how they differ'.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, Marxist approaches have had a dominant influence on the methodological debates about 'ideology' (see also Chapter 5).

Arguably the best known Marxist statement on ideology appears in *The German Ideology*, which Marx wrote with Friedrich Engels (1820–95) in the 1840s:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.<sup>5</sup>

Marx was critical of those who held that the role of ideas was crucial in history and in social life. He believed that social existence determined consciousness, and not the other way round. He thus adopted a materialist view of history, in which economic forces rather than great leaders or ideas led to 'progress'. Marx made a distinction in capitalist society between a 'base' and 'superstructure'. The former referred to the basic organization of the means of production, and resulting class system. The superstructure referred more to individuals, to ideologies. These ideologies were not simply 'isms', but were reflected in any feature of society which served to defend the ruling class. Thus ideologies were the 'legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic' principles which reinforced capitalist society.<sup>6</sup>

Marx did not believe that his own views were 'ideology', seeing them as based on a scientific understanding of history and the inevitable triumph of the working class and socialism. However, it was Engels who sought to popularize the term 'scientific socialism' for Marx's work. It was also Engels who dismissed 'ideology' as 'false consciousness', a phrase not used by Marx, although it subsequently became central to Marxist work.<sup>7</sup> False consciousness refers to socially or time-bound views, which help support a particular system. A good example of this would be the belief that the liberal democratic state is 'neutral': in other words, holding the view that individuals and groups have equality before the law, that the civil service does not pursue class-interest, and so on. For Marx and Engels, the law was ultimately a defence of capitalism and property, as were other key features of the liberal democratic state.

Marx was not the first to notice that groups tend to have systems of outlooks, which can be implicit more than explicit. Nor was he the first to stress that these views both limit the questions which can be asked, and the answers reached. Marx was especially indebted here to the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831). (Note: in other ways his work was a critique of Hegel.) However, it was Marx who first attributed the term ‘ideology’ to such belief systems, though as with much of Marx, there was some notable variation in his usage. In particular, there was a tension between the pejorative sense of ideology as something which masked the interests of capitalist society, and a more general sense in which ideologies were seen as a necessary part of the belief systems of all societies – something which provided shorthand rules for behaviour, and which helped people perceive their place and role in society.

V.I. Lenin (1870–1924), too, identified Marxism as a science, but he effectively accepted that ‘ideology’ was a term which should not be restricted to capitalist, or pre-capitalist, society (the ‘revisionist’ Marxist Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932) had shortly before also associated socialism with ideology). In *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) Lenin argued for a socialist ideology which could help develop working-class consciousness beyond the ‘economism’ of immediate concerns (though this was secondary to his emphasis on revolutionary organization). Lenin especially believed such an ideology was important to prevent the working class from falling into trade union consciousness. He saw unions as premised on the existence of capitalism, particularly in the sense that their demands for better wages and conditions could, in the short run, best be achieved through a healthy capitalism. Moreover, unions threatened to divide the working class into a relatively well-paid unionized group, and an impoverished proletariat, lacking the leadership of those who had been attracted by unions. In Lenin’s words:

All those who talk about ‘overrating the importance of ideology’, about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself ... But this is a profound mistake ... Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is – either bourgeois or socialist ideology.<sup>8</sup>

This socialist ideology was largely to be developed by an intelligentsia, which clearly must have broken free from the power of capitalist conditioning. Exactly where this left the materialist conception of history, and especially the primacy of base over superstructure, was never made fully clear. However, it reflected a challenge to those Marxists who sought to delineate rigid materialist laws of history.

This development was taken even further in the works of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Gramsci rejected the crudest forms of Marxist materialism which reduced the ‘superstructure’ solely to ‘base’ factors. In his later writings, he also became increasingly critical of Leninism, believing that it did not pay sufficient attention to the strength of ‘civil society’ in liberal democracies – namely, non-governmental institutions and forms of social conditioning, such as education or the mass media. Gramsci believed that the rule of one class over another was not simply an economic one, backed by a coercive state apparatus. It depended on ‘hegemony’ – on cultural and ideological forces as well (the concept of hegemony was drawn in part from the important works of the Hungarian Marxist, Georg Lukács [1885–1971]).<sup>9</sup> In its ultimate form, ideology became a kind of common sense, something which was simply not challenged. To counter this ideological power, Gramsci was especially interested in the role of intellectuals, whom he divided into ‘traditional’ and ‘organic’. The former considered themselves to be free of classes, and rational: people like university academics and ecclesiastics. Gramsci held that in practice such intellectuals were normally imbued with the hegemonic culture, or were incapable of offering any serious challenge to dominant values. Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, were closely connected organizationally with the class structure. They were people like members of the communist party and/or unions. For Gramsci, these were the intellectuals most likely to help create a counter-hegemony, through their writings, or their role in key institutions which could challenge capitalist hegemony.

Gramsci’s ideas became especially important during the 1960s as the prospect of violent revolution in the West seemed to recede. They often meshed closely with work which stemmed from the so-called Frankfurt critical theory school, which attacked the more dogmatic economic determinism of Soviet and much other Marxism. A notable member of this group was the American-resident German social theorist Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979). He wrote, in his 1960s bestseller, *One Dimensional Man*, of a ‘totalitarian’ West in which the powers of social conditioning and the growth of welfare had all but removed dissent.<sup>10</sup> Marcuse looked to blacks, students and others for a revolutionary lead, a call which found an echo among a radical fringe of students, especially in France, Germany and the USA, during the late 1960s. Jurgen Habermas (1929– ) similarly attacked the more crude Marxist positions, arguing that the capitalist ethic had become more technocratic, legitimating itself through science and technology, or consumerism, which in a sense depoliticized society.<sup>11</sup> Habermas’s appeal proved more enduring, especially among left-inclined academics.

Gramsci’s work also had an influence on a cult figure in French thought in the 1960s and 1970s, Louis Althusser (1918–90).<sup>12</sup> Althusser, in keeping with the later Marx, held that there was no rigid relation between base and superstructure, developing the idea of the ‘relative autonomy’ of the superstructure. However, whereas Marx had recognized the importance



of institutions such as the family, or religion, he had not seen them as part of the state. Althusser held that the state, and its influential tentacles, was now much more diverse. Power was now exercised in a more diffuse fashion through a variety of structures (Althusser was also influenced by structuralism, which grew out of both linguistics and anthropology, and which sought to understand society in terms of deep-lying patterns of authority and rules). He included within this 'ideological state apparatus' (to be distinguished from the repressive state apparatus) 'spheres' such as education and trade unions, and argued that ideology worked largely sub-consciously on people.

More generally, these approaches helped spawn schools of media and cultural studies. An early pioneer in this new academic boom industry was the Glasgow University Media Group, which sought to show that trade union activities were presented in a hostile manner, whereas the working of markets was largely unchallenged. Often the bias was subtle, for instance smart and apparently reasonable managers were interviewed at their desks whereas unions were interviewed on the picket line.<sup>13</sup> Mass rather than high culture became the new totem. Goethe and Shakespeare were out, and popular soap operas like *Dallas*, or *Coronation Street* moved centre stage. The glossy lifestyles of the former were seen as a powerful symbolic cultural influence; the working-class life of the latter was seen as a sanitized charade, divorced from major real-life concerns such as class or race.

Some Marxists remained committed to a more rigid analysis of the relationship between base and superstructure. Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, for example, viewed ideology as mainly useful for uniting élites; subordinate groups were seen as divided (an important feature of élite control), and influenced more by the material power of economics than ideology.<sup>14</sup> However, increasingly in recent decades Marxists, and those highly influenced by Marxist work (a much larger group of academics), have used superstructural factors to explain why 'contradictions' in the base had not produced the much heralded downfall of capitalism. Power in capitalist societies – to adopt the terms of a leading social theorist, Steven Lukes – was not seen as one-dimensional, and based on observable conflict. Nor was it two-dimensional, in which the strength of capitalism and its state led people to see dissent as futile. Rather, it was three-dimensional, based on a broad ability to produce hegemony – a society in which most did not perceive the way in which they were controlled.<sup>15</sup> The argument contained many insights, though like Marxism in general it was replete with hidden assumptions about human nature, historical progress and what society would be like but for capitalism. Put another way, the counter-factual question 'What would society x be like but for ideological conditioning?' can only be answered at the level of broad assertion. For instance, the fact that some 'primitive' societies have existed which were not based on private property, or on inequalitarian relations, does not prove that a large contemporary society could be organized in this way.