

Understanding the
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In this essay I make an attempt to differentiate the terms political theory and ideology. I shall also attempt to clarify the meanings used by political theorists. Whilst all theories and ideologies are salient they also possess elements that are contentious or misleading and in turn no matter what political reasoning is developed it in itself can be contested and there are different perspectives and ideologies for any given situation and those perspectives have shaped the modern political landscape and shaped the societies within which we live.

Theory or ideas are the toolbox upon which ideology is created. Theory is moulded from philosophy, it is not about coming to a given conclusion or proving a situation, it is an effort to understand through analysis and investigation. Political theory looks at factors such as communities, freedom, equality, social justice and then attempts to create a model for ideal society by attempting to predict patterns in the future. Empirical political theory is by and large conducted by political science institutions and is intended to describe the 'What is' and from that data try and formulate ideas of 'What works'. Normative political theory is performed mostly by philosophers, legal scholars, and a few political scientists, and attempts to describe how societies ought to be run in essence an opinion of "what ought to be" as opposed to "what is". What can be seen historically is that political theorists seem to be in battle with one another attempting to legitimise their particular view on government, how government should be in their eyes. Some of the modern political theorists include the likes of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who penned Social contract theories,

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels theories of class struggle and Max Weber and Ralf Dahrendorf the main authoritative writings on social conflict theory.

Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau were Social Contract theorists and critics of the politics in their own societies and expressed this opposition in their explanations of government as it should be, model government. Each had a very different perspective of contractarianism. To Hobbes the State is everything, all powerful and citizens voluntarily give restrictions to their liberty and promise to obey central laws. All individuals make a contract between themselves with an assembly of men to protect their liberty thus they promise to obey the sovereign and in turn have no grounds for complaint against the sovereign. Hobbes's view is secular, non-spiritual and thus no allowance of independent political power for religion (Leviathan 1651) Hobbes' theory is one of ' Absolutism', complete obedience to a single will is necessary to maintain order and security. According to Hobbes without the state and political authority life would be " nasty, brutish, and short". In other words an individual's own ego and democracy should be avoided with the monarch being the pinnacle and absolute authority in order for society to survive.

John Locke (1689), in contrast to Hobbes, is the founder of the ' Constitutionalism' theory, this is still a social contract theory. This is the theory that is the basis of modern liberal thinking. To Locke God gave the world to mankind as a whole and he also gave the right to life, liberty and estate. Man should live in a " state of perfect and complete liberty to conduct one's life as one best sees fit, free from the interference of others" (IEP 2011). Each person has personal property rights and the political society is <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-the-relationship-between-political-theory-and-ideology-politics-essay/>

set up to protect those natural rights of life. Each individual consents to be governed by giving some of those rights in return for the state to preserve and protect their rights to life liberty and estate. From this we can deduce that social government has a 'social duty' by way of a 'social contract' to promote and protect the natural rights of its citizens.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) Rousseau judged that liberty was possible only where citizens as a whole had direct and full participation in the law making of the land. To Rousseau popular sovereignty was "indivisible and inalienable". For Rousseau Citizens have to be able to choose fundamental rules by which they live and citizens must be able to revise them when they choose to do so. During the 18th Century British Citizens were viewed to be unable to do either. The most striking phrase from Rousseau's work is that the individual should be "Forced to be free". From this he is saying that if an individual breaks the law then he should be forced to listen to what was decided as a participant of the collective. From the above we can see three perceptions of social political contract theory.

Whereas Theory is the toolbox of political thinking Ideology is the workbench. This is where theories come together and are thrashed out in order to make a workable model of society. Ideology was first coined by Desutt de Tracey in 1796 and translates as the 'science of ideas'. It is a belief or set of beliefs that individuals and political parties base their actions. Ideology contains three major steps. The first is the actual ideas themselves followed by a vision, goals of how society 'ought to be' and finally methodological policy for modification or improvement detailing ways of attaining the goals created from the vision. Ideologies are developed
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because the theory of reality is often too convoluted to be understood and almost always are biased towards a particular group. Ideology has also been criticised for being the tool of ruling classes, allowing dominant sections of society to maintain their status and position in the hierarchy. Perhaps one problem of Ideology is that it can over simplify society and in turn mislead what is reality. Government parties have core ideology values and whilst in power that ideological approach is forced upon those that they govern, they accept a set of ideas and beliefs and those are not to be disputed.

Marxism, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels during the 19th Century is possibly the most read and recited of all ideologies, even though Marx himself did not believe that his ideas were ideological. To Marx Ideology was “ production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness,” all that “ men say, imagine, conceive,” and include such things as “ politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics.” Marx and Engels Marxist ideology evolved around inequality and class division. The Marxist theory clearly defines that there is a struggle in life between a dominant class, the bourgeoisie, and an oppressed class, the proletariat. Thus the ideology, also the basis of the modern Socialist movement, is concerned with economic justice. From this Marx and Engels belief is that if you remove the means of production, thus the power, from the elitist bourgeoisie and transfer it to state control or to the workers, the proletariat, then you achieve economic justice and will be the end of exploitation of the oppressed. Marxist ideology does not embrace the Locke theory of individual right to personal property by actually advocating the abolition of such.

Liberalism draws very much on the work of John Locke's social contract theory. It is concerned with maximum freedom for individuals, within the guidelines of the law. There should also be minimum interference from the state with regards to the divine rights of the individual. Liberalism is often thought of as probably the most dominant ideologies in the modern political landscape. This is probably because they are committed to " build and safeguard free, fair and open societies, in which they seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one is enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity" thus Liberalism actively promotes the dilution of power, encourages diversity and promotes creativity of the individual.

Conservatism values the status-quo and actually rejects change and reform and views such action as dangerous and counterproductive. Unlike liberalism Conservatism argues that political society develops gradually over time out of custom and human experience and that there is no social contract, challenging authority is destabilising and dangerous. Core values for conservative government are to provide for human needs, especially the needs for order, stability and control. Government is not formed to protect rights in fact; the lack of order destroys society.

Where theory is about one element of society ideology is multi-faceted whereby it encompasses a set of idea's/theories. Both theory and Ideology have the views of " what is, what works and what ought to be". Without theory there could be no Ideology. I agree that each is different, to a point, and yet related. The difference is that the theory is written by and for professionals in the social science fields and the ideology is set out to make <https://assignbuster.com/understanding-the-relationship-between-political-theory-and-ideology-politics-essay/>

such theory digestible to the masses and helps the individual to understand their position in the social order. Government policy is affected by the relentless march of political theory, as society adapts to new policy and changes in the distribution of power so new theories emerge that further change the ideological approaches of those who wield the sword of power.

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