The end of ideology and the end of an ideology? Ecology, Liberalism and Ideological Analysis

“Liberal democracies seem to be able to pacify and integrate many diverse interests and claims in an astonishing way” – Jan W. van Deth

This paper comes about as a result of a challenge from one of my graduate students to my preferred way of thinking about ideologies. Discussing the ‘pacification’ of green political thought, and how this might be understood conceptually, he suggested that the morphological approach to ideology that I was calling on was itself a pacified form of ideology analysis, that set the study of ideology within a liberal problematic. This raises the question of how ideologies, especially dominant ones, might themselves feed back into the analysis of ideologies. I was sufficiently intrigued to write this paper, attempting to sketch out the line of attack and a possible defence, although in all too brief a time. So this is very much a workshop paper, a ‘first go’ at a problem that requires a great deal more work.

Introduction

This paper will look at three conceptions of ideology and two stages in the development of green political thought. It will argue that the ‘first wave’ of green political thought, which sought to present a radical challenge to liberalism, was amenable to understanding on all three conceptions of ideology. Each conception of ideology, that is, ‘captured’ something about this form of green theory. Much of the more recent work in green political theory seeks to reconcile green demands with the core values and practices of contemporary Anglo-American liberalism. This is arguably a deradicalised and passified (Wissenburg & Levy, 2004) form of ecological thought that has become submissive to the dominant ideology of our age. Rather than challenge liberalism, this form of green thought becomes a supplicant to join the liberal family. In that process I believe it becomes less amenable to being understood though the lens of my first two conceptions of ideology, but remains amenable to the third.

Why does that matter? Well, it is at least arguable that there is an important connection between the challenge that first wave green thought set to the liberal-democratic order and the conceptions of ideology that offer an insight into that challenge. This version of political ecology can be seen as a challenge to liberal political theory, to existing liberal democratic institutions, and/or to the liberal market economy. As these elements are purposively discarded in the ‘new’ wave of green political theory, the relationship with these conceptions of ideology changes also, leaving us with one conception of ideology that offers an analytical framework for understanding green liberalism. It is then also arguable, that the first two conceptions of ideology also maintain a critical stance with respect to the dominant ideology (in very different ways) that the third conception lacks. If the dominant ideology has pacified ecologism, has it also pacified the study of ideology itself. As we will see, this question oversimplifies matters, but asking it raises some interesting issues with respect to how we study ideology.
I will then assess the ‘liberal pacification thesis’, in relation to the study of ideological thought. Finally, I argue that the critique of the morphological view of ideologies rests upon two contentious claims. Firstly, that in order to think about ideologies in this way one has to adopt a number of the presuppositions of liberal political philosophy, and secondly, that the political theorist has a necessary emancipatory role to play in society. The student of ideological morphology has adequate counter-arguments to both of these claims.

The End of Ideology

There are of course many ways of conceptualising both green political thought and ideology, and a ‘post-ideological’ world could be a world where there is or are no longer:

a) the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life
b) forms of thought motivated by social interests
c) socially necessary illusion
d) semiotic closure
e) action-oriented sets of beliefs

Clearly, a world in which there are no longer any action-oriented beliefs would be rather different from a world with no socially necessary illusions. I want to pick up three accounts of ideology which have been historically important, and which have relevance to how we might think about ideology in a ‘post-ideological age’. The first is the concept of ideology as employed in the Marxist tradition. This is itself a complex enough topic, and Marx employs the term to cover phenomena which are quite distinct, even if overlapping. Idealism as a philosophical system is not the same as an idea whose origins are socially determined but masked, whether or not that idea is also taken to have some degree of autonomy from material conditions. Nonetheless, Engels’ term ‘false consciousness’ is quite felicitous as shorthand for the Marxian theory, as both idealism and class-based beliefs can be considered as categories of the more general concept. That is, the Marxist account embraces a truth/falsity problematic in which ideology critique is used to undermine illusory beliefs, be they regarding the motor of history or the justification of ‘bourgeois’ rights.

The second account of ideology is that as offered by the ‘end of ideology’ theorists of the 1950s, in particular Daniel Bell in his book of that name (2000). This account of ideology is relatively straightforward though definitionally biased; as chiliastic, revolutionary dogma, carrying the secularised aspirations previously channelled into religious thought. For all their philosophical differences and variations in focus, Bells’ end of ideology thesis is broadly resurrected in Fukuyama’s work on the ‘end of history’ (1989, 1992). The ‘critical’ relationship between ideology and the established order is of course here diametrically opposed to the Marxist one. ‘Ideology’ is now what is opposed to the dominant order, and is also in some sense ‘false’, rather than what serves its defence.

1 The central focus of analysis concerns how we think about ideology, the example of green political thought provides an illustrative parallel but is not essential for the argument.
2 These examples are taken randomly from Eagleton’s list, 1991, p1-2. See also Hamilton, 1987
The third account of ideology sees ideologies as systems of political thought, often taking as a necessary condition the trilogy of critique, transition, utopia as elements of that thought (for such an account with respect to green thought see Dobson, 2000). This is not, however, always taken to be the case. This conception of ideology is often under-theorised, as represented in many student texts with a long list of ‘isms’ to which people may, or may not, happen to attach themselves. The most sophisticated theoretical treatment by far of this contemporary way of looking at ideologies is the ‘morphological approach’ offered by Michael Freeden (1994, 1996). Freeden strips away much unnecessary baggage such as the functional criteria of critique, transition, utopia noted above, and breaks down the artificial conventions that seek to divide ideological thinking into clearly bounded ideological families. Once this work is done we arguably have a different conception of ideology altogether, a conception that ‘normalises’ ideology and brings it back into the purview of serious political theory (Freeden, 1996). However, the morphological approach is still capable, for heuristic purposes, of dividing the universe of political thought into various ideological families. It is the morphological approach specifically, which has dispensed even with the critique, transition, utopia as necessary elements of ideology, that I will seek to defend against the charge of liberal complicity. This approach to ideology offers an interpretative and analytical toolkit for the study of ideological thought, and is broadly empirical in approach. That is, it seeks to understand political thought as it has existed and been articulated, rather than trying to impose an essentialist understanding of definitive ideological traditions. What this approach expressly eschews is the critical truth-falsity problematic of the Marxist tradition or the ‘ideology as dogma’ definitional bias of endism.

Along with these conceptions of ideology I want to look at an ideological ‘case-study’ in terms of its ‘fit’ with each of these conceptions, ideology as false consciousness, as revolutionary dogma, and as a structured arrangement of political concepts. There is, unsurprisingly, a reading of ecological political thought that will allow it to ‘fit’ it into any of these categories of ideology. What is more interesting is that it allows us to trace a process whereby the most recent versions of green political thought take a form which is, arguably, fundamentally deradicalised in comparison with earlier versions. Has liberalism managed to ‘capture’ both green political thought and the practice of ideological analysis?

The Fate of Ecologism in a Post-ideological Age

Political concern with environmental problems has been with us for a very long time (Wall, 1994), ecologism, however, as a distinctive set of political ideas grounded in a conception of the good life rooted in an interpretation of ecological science, appeared on the political scene in the 1960s-70s. Very early on distinctions were being made between reformist and transformist versions of this doctrine, between ecologism and environmentalism (Dobson, 2000) or famously between deep and shallow versions of ecology (Naess, 1973). The environmental/shallow ecology version remaining in the

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3 This mode of expression is of course shorthand, I recognise the ‘liberalism’ per se is not an agent that could ‘capture’ anything. The actual contest over the meaning of political language takes place between the proponents and critics of the various ideological traditions.

4 Many look to Carson’s Silent Spring (1962) as a founding document, others to the original Club of Rome report (1972)
reformist mode, the inheritor of the long-standing concerns that the worst
environmental excesses of (now) liberal-capitalism should be ameliorated. The truly
‘green’ (Porritt 1984)' ecological/deep ecology version offering us instead a new
transformist political vision. Above all, this account rests (and here I concur with
Goodin’s (1992) analysis), upon a conception of the good rooted in natural value.
That principle is itself open to a variety of interpretations of course, but this is a
teleological rather than deontological form of politics. Ecologism forms what Rawls
would call a comprehensive doctrine, and it seeks to articulate that conception into
political life \textit{without residue}. Ecologism does not recognise a public/private divide,
indeed insists upon the politicisation of the private sphere as part of its claim that
‘private’ decisions have enormous impacts in terms of ecological sustainability.
Above all, the first wave of ecologism sought to reconfigure social, economic, and
political relationships around a conception of ecology. As a set of political
arguments, if not in terms of political activity, ecologism represented a fundamental
challenge to the existing liberal-capitalist order, with a radical decentralising, de-
industrialising, and participatory agenda. Ecological sustainability combined with a
vision of social justice and direct, participatory democracy in small-scale autarkik
communities was the dominant ecological political vision, along with (in deep
ecological versions) a demand for the psychological regeneration of the individual in
a transpersonal transformation.

\textbf{Ecology and Ideology}

How is this to be understood as ideology? The ‘false consciousness’ critique rubs, of
course, both ways. The Marxist/socialist critique of ecologism is that it is, to
paraphrase Joe Weston (1986) ‘more interested in hedgerows and bunny rabbits than
human emancipation’. Greens focused on the symptom(s) (Pollution, habitat
destruction, resource depletion) rather than the cause (capitalism). The green response
was that conservatives, liberals and socialists laboured under the delusion that they
were offering fundamentally distinct political and economic alternatives, whereas in
fact they were all offering variations on the ‘super-ideology’ of industrialism.
Industrialism is the master-negative in this early green discourse. It is the assumption
of economic growth and ‘progress’ as unalloyed goods that represents the ‘false
consciousness’ of the industrial age.

The other important illusions of the modern age are individualism and the liberal ideal
of autonomy, both of which are taken to suggest that people have an existence which
is independent of the world around them rather than interdependent with it. This claim
is particularly pertinent to deep ecology, which has been seen as much as a
psychological theory as an ecological or political one. Again the Marxist critique of
deep ecology is that attempts to change human behaviour by appeals to people to
restructure their psyche represent a classic example of an ineffectual idealism that
lacks any political potential.\footnote{For this sort of critique see Pepper, 1993}

Underlying both the criticism of industrialism and calls for a switch to a relational
conception of the self is an embracing, by this first wave of ecological thought, of a
truth/falsity problematic. The worldview on offer here is informed by an interpretation

\footnote{On the continuing relevance of this book to UK Greens see Stavrakakis, 1997}
\footnote{For this sort of critique see Pepper, 1993}
of the science of ecology, which is taken to reveal truths about the world which have
to be factored into any conception of how we should live our lives. Although
Goldsmith is taken as an extreme representative of this view, his (1996) claim that
‘Gaian’ laws should become our moral laws is, in one version or another, the
foundation of the ecological position. There are ‘lessons’ to be drawn from ecology
and the existence of symbiotic and co-operative relationships in nature, as well as the
‘everything-is-connected-to-everything-else’ metaphysic that is taken to be derived
from the findings of ecological science. From these descriptions of the world come
accounts of the good and how we should live. The ‘is-ought’ problem, that human
ways to live cannot be ‘read off’ from nature, is either embraced as a counter to a
fallacious liberal argument (Goldsmith) or dealt with in some other way7. Even if we
cannot ‘read off’ from nature directly ways to live and behave, it does at least form a
‘matrix’ for an ethical system based on ecological principles.

Thus in exactly the same way that Marxist social science is intended to strip away the
layers of bourgeois ideology and present a true picture of the social world to us, so
ecology strips away the illusions of infinite growth with finite resources, and
humanist myth of autonomy from nature. Once we see the world though the correct
(green) lens, we understand what is wrong with the world and have an idea of the
direction in which we need to travel.

First-wave ecological thought also saw itself as revolutionary in seeking to
fundamentally restructure existing social, political, and economic forms and replace
them with ecologically inspired alternatives. The emphasis is on de-industrialisation,
decentralisation, small-scale direct democracy and economic self-sufficiency. There is
some truth in Miller’s assertion that green political thought did something to revive
the political fortunes of anarchism as a political force, with many forms of green
thought being both anti-state and anti-capitalist.

Moreover this literature was classically millenarian in a way that authors such as Bell
would immediately recognise as fitting their account of ideological thought. All of
these calls for upheaval were premised upon the looming environmental catastrophe.
The eschatology of green political thought fits well with Bell’s contention that this
form of ideological thought is a transfer from the religious passions of earlier
centuries. Although that should not be taken to imply a direct religious genesis, there
is a strong spiritual element to much popular green thought, much of it unsurprisingly
invested with notions of the sacred in nature and pantheism (Bramwell, 1989). The
urgency of the appeals for change comes from the immediate danger of being sucked
into an environmental maelstrom. Rather in the spirit of Malthus in this regard at
least, we can either choose to change our behaviour for ourselves, or we can allow
nature to do it for us, but the latter path will be brutal and unforgiving. These thoughts
also triggered the so-called eco-authoritarian statist solution, which also called for an
end to liberal capitalism, but in a rather different manner. Heilbroner, Ophuls and
their ilk (Westra, 1998, offers a much more recent contribution in this tradition) did
not trust individuals to take decisions that would curtail their own freedoms and
involve the surrender of material goods, thus the environmentalist state would have to

7 E.g. Rolston’s claim that values, not just facts, exist in nature, or Bookchin’s argument that nature is
not an ethics but does offer a matrix for an ethics.
force them to be green. Liberal freedoms would have to at least be suspended, if not curtailed permanently, in order to avoid the looming environmental catastrophe.

The passion with which ecological beliefs can be held can hardly be doubted either, given the history of direct activism, and the willingness of activists to risk fines and imprisonment in order to achieve their goals (Wall, 1999; Seel et al 2000). How well this activism relates to the academic literature on ecological politics is a moot point – some have suggested that there is little connection (de-Shalit, 2001), although this argument seems to apply particularly to work in the field of environmental ethics.

So, political ecology has here in this first-wave literature an account of ideology in the first sense, in that it embraces a truth/falsity distinction and believes we suffer social illusions. It is also ‘ideology’ in Bell’s sense in that it is passionate and seeks to revolutionise social and economic relations. Away from Bell’s definitional bias, we can just say that this form of politics is, pace socialist disavowals, radical, in that it seeks root and branch change in the existing social order. It is also, of course, amenable to analysis under a morphological understanding of ideology (see Freeden, 1996, Ch.14; Talshir, 1998); greens employ political concepts, decontest them in their own way, and relate these concepts to each other in an overarching manner which has some degree of internal consistency.

**Ecology Deradicalised**

This first wave of ecological literature elicited a response from a sceptical audience of political thinkers and, in particular, economists. On this view ecological writers and activists were unduly pessimistic in their forecasts, massively overestimating the immediacy and scale of any burgeoning environmental problems, and massively underestimating the capacity of humanity to substitute goods for each other and develop technological solutions. Furthermore their prescriptions were either absurdly utopian in their anarchist or value-based orientations or frighteningly quasi-fascist in their authoritarian versions. Ecologism certainly joins Bell’s list of ideological bogeymen on this reading.

Some of these criticisms, at least, hit their targets, and many of the early forecasts of resource depletion and pollution saturation we can now say with the benefit of hindsight were well wide of the mark. A new wave of environmental literature in recent years has been produced which seeks a more sober assessment of ecological problems and a more cautious approach to possible solutions (see Humphrey (ed.), 2001). Environmental problems are recognised as multifaceted and complex, and the science behind them as contentious, provisional and uncertain. Furthermore finding acceptable solutions to these problems is seen as a far more uncertain and difficult exercise. This reflexive turn within green political thought reflects a deeper appreciation of the complexities of both the causes and consequences of environmental problems and the appropriate institutional and policy responses to it. Contemporary green thinkers are as apt to be critical of their forebears as any external commentator.

One of these turns in the new wave of environmentalism has been the move towards a reconciliation of green thought and liberal thought. There has been a plethora of books and articles recently seeking to link up or test the relationship between liberal
and ecological thinking. Wissenburg’s excellent, though-provoking book on this seeks to offer criteria of acceptability of green theory ‘from a liberal point of view’ (1998, 3) and asks whether the rules of a democratic polity can themselves in any way accommodate preferences for a greener world without regard to the preferences of the individuals who happen to be around at a historical moment (ibid., 17). Hailwood argues for a ‘green form of liberal political philosophy’ and seeks to show how a ‘green perspective can and should be developed within liberal political theory’ (2004, 1). Stephens proposes that the ‘liberal baby’ should not be thrown out with the ‘extraneous Enlightenment bathwater’, but worries that Wissenburg’s neutralist and formalist conception of liberalism lacks the resources to promote green civic virtues, preferring instead a explicitly Millian form of green liberalism (2001, 2). Wissenburg’s response to Stephens is telling in terms of the motivations behind this tendency:

If green convictions are to hold any water, if green political thought is to be something more than postmodern preaching to the converted, then those ideas should be defensible in other contexts as well – for instance in the dominant ideology and philosophy of our time. Bell, for his part, wants to suggest, contra Stephen’s critique of Wissenburg, that neutralism and environmentalism ‘may not be incompatible’ (2002, 704). De-Shalit (1997) has a rather different agenda, suggesting not that liberal and green theories need to be formally reconciled, but suggesting that liberal societies are fertile grounds for the development of ecological attitudes and politics, and this may give greens reasons to care about liberal institutions. Nonetheless, de-Shalit sees neutralist forms of liberalism as unable to accommodate green concerns, on the grounds that ecology implies state intervention justified by consideration of the common good. Other versions of the compatibility thesis focus on the democratic side of liberal-democracy, seeking to combine green elements into democratic principles and preconditions. Most of these texts begin by pointing out the apparent incompatibility between green politics and liberalism, but suggest that these can be overcome through a more sophisticated understanding of the demands of both doctrines.

First wave green political thought was unashamedly constructed upon a comprehensive theory of the good. This might be a philosophical psychology, as with deep ecology’s injunction for transpersonal identification, or social ecology’s dialectic of nature, or a more general conception of the good life as the green life, ‘treading lightly upon the earth. It is from this that most green-liberal manifestos draw their initial incompatibility hypothesis, ‘liberalism excludes being green – allegedly’, as Hailwood puts it. This incompatibility was remarked upon by de-Shalit with respect to neutralist forms of liberalism. Hailwood suggests that ‘Valuing the outside world for its own sake seems excluded from the scene when autonomous individuals are intent specifically on agreeing to principles by which they may live together and preserve their own defining and valued characteristics’ (2004, 10). Bell quotes Dobson’s list of prima facie incompatibilities between liberalism and the ‘environmentalist agenda’, which includes liberalism’s individualism, private

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9 2001, p23.
10 Dobson, 1996; Eckerlsey, 1996a, 1996b; Goodin, 1996
property rights, market economics, limited government and opposition to state support for conceptions of the good life (2002, 703).

Whilst some, (such as Vincent, 1998) suggest that such incompatibilities create insuperable tensions between green and liberal political thought, for most of these thinkers such ‘on the face of it’ objections to compatibility are there merely to be squashed flat in the loving embrace that develops between these two political philosophies. Happily, the resources exist within liberalism for us to be green, and the resources are there in ecologism for us to retain our liberal freedoms. Contemporary Anglo-American liberalism demands justice, and what lies outside of the domain of justice is left to individual or collective-democratic forms of decision making, depending on both the variant of liberalism in question and the object of decision making. This leaves two alternative resources for green-liberals to be green-liberals and not just liberals. Green demands can be part of justice, or green demands can be voted democratically\(^\text{11}\), few seriously contend that individual decision making within market institutions is going to lead to green outcomes through an ecological invisible hand. The putative advantage of the former route is that the demands of justice are non-negotiable within the contemporary liberal framework. The advantage of the second route is that elements of ecological politics, such as species preservation, that may not obviously be includable as demands of justice, are not excluded completely. The two approaches are not of course incompatible, some green demands may well be matters of justice, whilst others can be part of a democratic settlement. What does have to be shown is that green demands are not in contravention of liberal principles of justice, including, if necessary, the principle of state neutrality.

Both approaches are taken in the literature, Wissenburg’s ‘restraint principle’ is a principle of justice, a “special condition on the distribution of rights which demands that rights to (in a physical sense) scarce goods be distributed in such a way that they remain, within the limits of necessity, available for further use” (1998, 116). In contrast, Bell’s argument for compatibility between fundamental neutrality and green ends lies in the possibility that green ends can be fairly imposed by majority vote, on the grounds that democratic liberalism (which would allow such a vote) is fundamentally neutral in a way that something he calls ‘restricted market liberalism’ is not. This does not entail of course that such ecological policies will be chosen, merely that green outcomes would be permissible under a Rawlsian regime, as interpreted by Bell. In comparison with the interpretation of Rawlsian liberalism given by Miller (1998), according to which nothing short of unanimity would justify a policy such as species preservation being undertaken by the state, one might not wonder that this is seen by Bell as a step forward along the green path.

This is not a paper on the rights and wrongs of green political thought and I do not intend here to offer a critique of the specific arguments by which the green-liberal hybrid is stitched together. What I do want to note is what is lost in this version of green thought in comparison to the first wave discussed above.

Firstly, the assertion of the truth of the ecological conception of the good disappears or is heavily qualified. Wissenburg is explicit about this: “If there are grounds for

\(^{11}\) For a critique of the view that ecological outcomes can be seen as a necessary principle of democracy see Humphrey 2004.
believing a green life to be the right life, then these grounds are by definition insufficient to justify forcing people to believe in them” (2001, 37). The most that can be demanded is that people consider arguments for green policies and respect those who choose to live by them. Other grounds exist for other forms of life, and there is nothing inherent to the pillars of green ideology to privilege it over other forms. This also seems to entail losing the green critique of industrialism as false consciousness, as that view rests upon controversial metaphysical assumptions regarding the correctness of the ecological worldview. If there are grounds for thinking industrialism constitutes the wrong form of life, these also are presumably insufficient to justify forcing other people to believe it is wrong. More generally, the vision of green politics as Goodin’s conception of the good has either to (a) transfer to the realm of the right in order to be admitted to the sphere of justice, or (b) exclude itself into the wilderness of comprehensive doctrines, the sphere of non-political values that can (perhaps) be voted but not more than contingently applied.

In short, this is a deradicalised green politics that is ‘post-ideological’ in both of the historical senses discussed above. It no longer has the capacity to offer an ideological critique of industrialism as it has to renounce the truth/falsity problematic, or at least exclude it from the political realm, in order to enter the liberal sphere. In terms of the language of contemporary liberalism, ecologism has to become a ‘reasonable’ doctrine in order to gain entry to the ‘overlapping consensus’. In so doing its proponents have to be willing to accept that the discourse of public reason and the burdens of judgement must both be accepted in the political realm. Arguments must be framed in such as way that others can reasonably be expected to understand, and must not encompass any controversial metaphysical assumptions. Furthermore, one must accept that the complexities and uncertainties that abound in questions of how to live are such that, insofar as is practicable, people must be left to judge for themselves. It is not hard to see how both of these criteria count against ‘first wave’ environmentalism, which frequently justified its proposals in a discourse open only to the ecological initiate, and which was dependent upon the ecological worldview being true. Furthermore, ecological interpretations of the world were taken to be sufficiently likely to be true to justify imposing ecological constraints on those who might beg to differ. This claim for the truth of ecological doctrines is something that has now to be relegated to the sphere of our non-political values, they cannot be part of the ‘basic structure’ of constitutional arrangements, except insofar as they contribute to the existence of ‘primary goods’.

The version of green doctrine is also clearly moving away from the passionate challenge to the ‘liberal framework’ that Daniel Bell took to be a necessary condition of ideological thought. Far from seeking to offer a radical challenge to liberal values and institutions, this green variant seeks to assimilate green thought, and offer a theory that fits within, rather than challenges, Bell’s liberal framework.

Green liberalism is still, however, ideology in the third sense. Indeed it seems particularly amenable to morphological analysis. This is because this approach dispenses with the requirement that ideologies contain within themselves a transformative utopian vision, and stresses the modular nature of ideological thought,

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12 It also has to adopt the foundational assumptions of liberalism. The idea that contemporary Anglo-American liberalism eschews controversial metaphysics is one of the myths of our day.
whereby concepts (or rather their decontestations) can be transferred across from one ideology to another, and hybrid ideologies combining elements from different ideological groupings are not in the least seen as abnormal. The divisions between various ‘isms’ are heuristically useful, but mask the actual complexity of political thought. There are many variants within any ‘ism’, and different variants shade off towards other systems of thought depending on the interpretations given to political concepts and the importance attached to them for the system of political thought in general. Thus liberal forms of ecology might for example seek to retain the Millian harm principle but flesh it out in a new green direction (as per the manifesto of the German Green Party), or, as with Wissenburg, adopt the notion of distributive justice central to contemporary liberal theory but extend it to cover certain environmental goods. There is nothing exceptional in this form of political thought-activity, even if it is notable as an interesting development in political theory.

Liberalism and the Analysis of Ideology

This amenability of analysis raises a question: if the ‘liberal’ version of green ideology, which has arguably been pacified and defused as a potential threat to the dominant ideology, is particularly amenable to a morphological analysis, does this entail that morphological analysis is itself constrained within a liberal framework of analysis? Does a theory intended to ‘capture’ liberalism within its analytical purview actually become an extension of it? Are we left with a way of thinking about and assessing ideology that is itself pacified and deradicalised? And if we are, is this a problem for the student of ideology? The claim that this is the case would parallel arguments that, for example, jurisprudence constitutes an example of liberal ideology (Goldsworthy 1993). The discipline or method of analysis itself is seen as dependent upon quite specific ideological underpinnings.

The argument that ideology analysis in its current form is an example of liberal ideology might have any or all of the following elements.

1) The morphological analysis of ideology lacks any perspective from which current political values and institutions might be criticised.
2) Relatedly, this mode of analysis eschews any truth/falsity problematic and so falls into line with liberal notions of being ‘neutral’ between competing conceptions of the good.
3) It also posits the fiction of a Mannheimian, neutral, dispassionate analyst, somehow rising above the fray of political argument. Again the comparison might be drawn with the liberal state adjudicating between different conceptions of the good in terms of their reasonableness, supposedly arbitrating in a neutral manner between their competing claims.
4) Fourthly, the anti-essentialist nature of the morphological approach and reliance upon empirical studies of political thought suggests that no ideology presents us with unconditional claims. Even if liberty is taken as a core principle of liberalism and social order for conservatism these are core on account of their historical centrality, not on the grounds of an essential, unconditional attachment to core values on the part of the ideological tradition and (thus) the individuals who cleave to it. Unconditional attachments are also problematic for contemporary liberals, as they are difficult to mediate through the mechanism of distributive justice, and are generally dismissed as representing unreasonable demands upon
the political community. This an unmitigated demand for (say) biodiversity protection from ecologists is unconscionable to liberalism unless it can be framed in the language of liberal distributive justice.

5) The morphological analysis of ideology employs an empiricist liberal epistemology, and mirrors the methodological reductionism of liberalism in seeking to understand political thought in terms of the smallest possible unit (the components of political concepts) rather than understanding political thought in holistic terms.

6) The morphological analysis of ideology refuses to grant epistemological or moral privilege to any ideological formulation. But studying political thought is not equivalent to studying botany, for example. Whilst it may be acceptable to ‘merely’ engage in taxonomies of botanical families, this is because plants are not involved in exploitative and oppressive ethical and economic relationships. The social scientist has social responsibilities.

This critique is as yet underdeveloped, so we need to consider each of these claims carefully. The argument that the morphological analysis lacks a critical dimension is obviously true in one sense, and the question then becomes one of whether this matters. It is true if the notion of a critical dimension is taken to entail the problematic of unmasking falsehood. But given that the morphological conception of ideology seeks to rescue the concept from ‘some of the dead ends of Marxist analysis’ (Freeden, approvingly citing Mannheim, 1996, p26) and remove the ‘scholarly blinkers’ (ibid., 15) of that tradition, this cannot be treated as an unwitting consequence. The problem here is one of the epistemological assumptions that one has to adopt in order to employ ideology as an ‘unmasking’ concept. In order to adopt the Marxist version of the concept the answer here is clearly a great deal, in that one has to take Marx’s account of the origins of social ideas as broadly true, which is one of the reasons why Bell et al take this mode of thought as itself ideology par excellence. There are post-Marxist traditions which maintain this critical function in their use of ideology, as when Zizek approves of Peter Hitchen’s account of ideology as a ‘mass delusion’ that functions in order to maintain ‘sanity’. Effectively functioning ideologies allow individuals to ‘transpose their belief onto the big Other’ (Zizek, Repeating Lenin). However, the metaphysical baggage that accompanies Zizek’s Lacanian analysis, involving notions of constitutive lack and the irrepressible return of the ‘Real’, is itself fairly weighty. Does the morphological approach to ideology travel epistemologically lighter, or is it equally heavily freighted with liberal assumptions? It is best to come back to this question after the other points on offer have been considered.

That the conception of ideology is not ‘critical’ in the sense of critical of ideological thought in the spirit of the end of ideology thesis I take to be less interesting. The end of ideology thesis employs, as stated above, a narrow and dogmatic understanding of ideology. Even if ideology in this sense is over, it has never to my knowledge been claimed that ideology as reasonably systematic structures of political concepts articulating a value orientation has come to an end. There is no obvious reason why the notion of ‘ideology’ has to be reserved for narrow, passionately held, anti-liberal dogmatic belief. The counter-argument is that this conception of ideology has a specificity that gives it some analytical bite, rather than being used as something like a synonym for ‘political thought’. On Bell’s own account ideology has come to signify any passionately held belief with relevance to political life, “almost any creed
held with the will to believe, held with dogmatism or stridency – the ideologies of black power, the New Right, feminism. The historicity of the term has lost its context, and only the pejorative and insidious penumbra, but no conceptual clarity, remains. Ideology has become an irretrievably fallen word” (2000, p447).

The following claim was that the morphological analysis of ideology follows the liberal path in resembling, to some degree, the justification and practice of state neutrality. Whilst the liberal state acknowledges differing conceptions of the good in a pluralist society, it does not choose between them in terms of policy justification. Furthermore the state is portrayed as somehow ‘above the fray’ of politics, dispensing the goods falling under the rubric of distributive justice according to abstract philosophical principles, and not getting involved in the grubby business of competing for a share of political resources itself. Whilst individuals are portrayed as rational as well as reasonable, state servants are trusted to express only their reasonable aspects when and insofar as they are employed on behalf of the liberal state.

Similarly, the student of ideology somehow sits outside of the world of political thought that s/he analyses, viewing the world of political thought as if from a distance, adjudicating upon the conceptual structures of ideological constellations. From the perspective of this critique there is no ‘outside’ of political thought just as there is no ‘above’ the political fray for the liberal state. Both conceptions hide an assumption that an external perspective on political life, whereas we are necessarily always operating within politics and not outside of it. The consequence of this is that we can only ever make judgements about ideology from within our own ideological framework. A framework that makes no value judgements between different ideological schools, and which sees ideologies in a methodologically reductionist manner, as assemblages of political concepts which are themselves structured from intensional components, which furthermore employs an empiricist epistemology and sees all political claims as conditional, is itself ineluctably liberal. What we have here, on his view, is a liberal framework of analysis conducive to a liberal age. The analysis of ideologies is placed within a liberal problematic, that of understanding the competing conceptions of the good life that are on offer under conditions of liberal pluralism.

That account of the critique is schematic, but it does seem to me that there is an idea there worthy of development. It is at least an interesting question whether, at a time of widely acknowledged dominance, the ideology of liberalism feeds back into the analysis of ideologies. I think, however, that in the form in which the critique is expressed here, the student of ideology in its morphological aspect has adequate responses available. Together, these arguments represent a claim that the morphological analyst has to accept as underlying premises many of the assumptions of liberal political philosophy. These include the possibility of neutrality, the distancing of the analyst from the political world s/he assesses, the rejection of metaphysical truth claims from the public realm, thus relativising political discourse, and the conditionality of the political claims made in ideological discourse.

What is interesting here is what has not changed in Bell’s account – ‘ideology’ is still a pejoratively held term for a dogmatic and passionately held political belief. This still, clearly, demarcates Bells’ understanding from a morphological account.
I’m not convinced that analysing ideology as a field of political thought implies setting oneself outside of political thought, any more than in studying biology the student sets themselves up as ‘outside’ biology. One can exist within a field and yet seek to step back from that existence, at least as a mental exercise, in order to adopt or approximate the ‘view from nowhere’. Even if we are bound to be unsuccessful and always carry with us certain political prejudices, the attempt may yet be worthwhile. This is not being ‘neutral’ in the sense that the liberal state is asked to be ‘neutral’, as the analyst is not seeking justification for his or her actions in that sense. Furthermore the relativisation of political discourse only exists to the extent that morphological analysis analyses what all forms of political discourse have in common. On this view all ideologies, from fascism and Stalinism to libertarianism, consist in decontested political concepts that have a central or peripheral role within a broader ideological structure. This does not entail any assertion of moral equivalence, although the eschewal of moral judgements in morphological analysis brings us onto a more troubling question discussed below.

Furthermore, the morphological form of ideological analysis contains elements that seem to cut against liberal assumptions. In particular, the individualism of contemporary Anglo-American liberalism stresses the beliefs, conceptions of the good, and resources available to individual human agents. Morphological analysis stresses the emergence of political beliefs as group products, containing elements that may be affirmed by some individuals but not others, and which develop as a result of a group dynamic, involving multiple contributions, both intentional and unintentional, from a variety of actors. This is not to deny the importance of particular texts within certain traditions, but liberal ideology, to take one example, cannot be tracked back to the thought of Locke, Mill, or Kant alone.

The ‘more troubling’ implication is that the student of ideology who does not engage in the unmasking activity is somehow, however unwittingly, complicit in sustaining a liberal hegemony (which is, for the critic at least, an unjust order). For this to be true it would have to be the case that this mode of thinking about ideologies was somehow supportive of that order. And the suggestion, I assume, would be that just as green political thought stands deradicalised and rendered non-threatening to liberalism in its current form, so the analysis of ideology is now rendered deradicalised and non-threatening to liberalism. Ideological analysis has moved from an activity that sought to expose and undermine the dominance of the liberal-capitalist order, to one that is a purely interpretative and analytical scholarly activity, which represents no threat whatsoever to the dominant elite. Whilst it may also be true that a historian of political thought (for example) is also engaged in such scholarly activity, the problem with this in regard to ideology is that a radical political tool has been blunted. We had (to take the examples from this paper) two weapons with which to challenge the liberal order, green politics and ideology critique, and now we have neither. This way of thinking about ideologies also feeds into the liberal framework by putting all ideologies on an equal footing, if Marxism is a much an ideology as liberalism or conservatism, then the Marxist ideology critique becomes just another belief, rather than an emancipatory weapon.

This raises interesting questions about the proper role of the political theorist, and one is inevitably reminded of Marx’s thesis eleven. If we seek to understand the world without also changing it are we failing in a role as critic of society that we have some
normative obligation to adopt, if we believe that there is oppression and injustice in the world?

On this it may just be that my intuitions are different to my student’s (this is something that de-Shalit (n.d.) deals with in recent work as well, suggesting that we should not confuse objectivity with neutrality). The point of studying politics can legitimately be to understand that world as much as change it, and that is as true of political ideas as voting behaviour or the causes of war. The two activities are not mutually exclusive of course. It may be, that to understand or believe that one has recognised injustice entails an obligation to act to relieve it (Singer) but again that would appear to be a separate question. Perhaps there is something inherent to morphological ideology analysis that masks such things as injustice? If the focus is on interpretation and description and ideological families, we perhaps have no way of engaging normatively with political thought. I agree that this might be a problem if this was the only form of political analysis on offer, but in a field where normative thinking is flourishing, there is surely a role for this approach as well.

**Conclusion**

This paper has sought to identify possible trends of pacification in green political thought and the study of ideologies, and explore the similarities and differences between them. As with any identification of general ‘trends’ the presentation involves a level of abstraction and generalisation. There continue to be radical versions of green political theory, both at academic (e.g. Carter, 1999, or the pages of *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*) and popular levels. Furthermore, a story presented as the ‘liberalisation’ of green thought, could also be told as the ‘greening’ of liberal thought, a trend to which environmentalists should be more amenable. Similarly, there are political theorists, particularly those whose background is in the tradition of critical theory, employing ideology as an account of thought that is, in some sense, illusory. My analysis involves a version of green political thought and specific conceptions of ideology, but ones I take to be significant. The question, only schematically and on doubtless inadequately dealt with here, of the relationship between ideology (particularly in its dominant form) and the study of ideologies, and the extent to which the former can ‘feed back’ into the latter seems to me both important and interesting. It is not clear, however, that as cogent an argument can be made that the morphological study of ideology represent the liberal pacification of ideological analysis, as can be made in the case of green theory. Recent trends in green theory clearly embrace fundamental liberal assumptions, morphological analysis offers an analytical framework with some superficial similarities to liberalism. The analysis also raises the question of the role of the political theorist, or perhaps more widely the social scientist, with respect to the wider social and political order. If you are in a privileged position to diagnose injustice, are you also obliged to diagnose it, publicise it, and act against it? It is not clear that a scholarly commitment to discover the truth, should necessarily involve this. Injustice is not the only political phenomenon in which we might be interested, and there is no obvious reason why the interpretation of political thought in terms of ideological classification is less valid than unmasking social illusions.
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