

Ideology, Political Philosophy, and the Interpretive Enterprise: A View from the Other Side

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I MICHAEL FREEDEN AND THE TRADITIONAL STUDY OF IDEOLOGY

The study of ideology has had a complex relation to the activity of political philosophy. As John Plamenatz long ago pointed out, the *philosophes* such as Voltaire hoped that a 'science of ideas' could take us beyond (mere) philosophic speculations: as Newtonian science advanced beyond Cartesian speculation, so too might we become scientific in our thinking about society.ⁱ And just as Newton showed the errors of Descartes, so too would a scientific study of social ideas show how traditional political doctrines were confused and mistaken; by correcting these mistakes we could be led to a better society. Right from the beginning, the study of ideology was seen not simply as an alternative — but also as a corrective — to philosophical speculation.

Much of the subsequent development of the ideological approach to political ideas stressed its scientific credentials; under the influence of Karl Mannheim the study of ideology became a general sociology of knowledge.ⁱⁱ Increasingly, it came to stress causal or functional explanations over reasoned internal analysis. Theorists of ideology such as Marx postulated the causes of political ideas and their consequences, or explained them in terms of the roles they play in social systems.

The conviction that all this constituted an unmasking of political philosophy's claims to be revealing the truth about the proper structure of political life not only persisted but was re-emphasized: philosophy itself became just another form of distorted consciousness with its assigned historical role to play. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* became *The German Ideology*.

Michael Freeden's magisterial work, *Ideologies and Political Theories*, is a key contribution to contemporary political theory, leading the study of political ideology back in an interpretive and analytic direction. Freeden developed the systematic study of political ideologies in terms of their conceptual 'morphology'. His path-breaking three-tiered analysis examined the components of a political concept, a political concept, and a system of concepts.ⁱⁱⁱ Ideologies 'decontest' the meaning of political concepts: at the third level — that of conceptual systems — political ideologies are systematic relations of such concepts, with some concepts accorded core status, with others pushed to the periphery. The morphological approach is immensely useful: it leads us away from the supposition that the study of ideological thinking is causal and functional, seeing it as an interpretative and analytic. I have learned an immense amount from Freeden's work, and I welcome the opportunity to express my gratitude and deep appreciation.

While Freeden's interpretive turn distinguishes him from the earlier great students of ideology, and although he certainly rejects the extreme debunking claims of Marx or Mannheim, he seems to share a core conviction of the other great theorists of ideology — that the universalistic and rationalistic pretensions of

philosophy should be called into question and (although I am not sure about this) in the end rejected. As a student of political ideology, he conceives of political philosophies — like all ideologies — as engaged in ‘the inevitable act of decontesting the essentially contestable’.^{iv} But to see a reflective activity as devoted to decontesting what is essentially contestable must be to call into question its universalistic and rationalistic self-image, for it sees itself as rationally clarifying what at first seems murky and confused and, because of this, contested. Nowhere, I think, is this clearer than in Freedman’s treatment of ‘American philosophical liberalism’. ‘Despite initial attempts to present itself as non-ideological, through claims both to universalism and to non-bias,’ he tells us, ‘contemporary philosophical liberalism is an ideological phenomenon like any other liberal doctrine’.^v Here Freedman is not merely saying that one can view American philosophical liberalism as a political doctrine to be studied as one does conservatism or socialism; he disputes its claims to universalism and non-bias. Like previous students of ideology, he claims to see *through* the Rawlsian self-image to the *real* picture. Indeed, on my reading this seems to be the main thrust of his extended treatment of American philosophical liberalism in *Ideologies and Political Theory*. We are told, for example, that ‘the non-specificity claimed by Rawls for his political liberalism is chimerical’ and ‘the range of compatibility between political liberalism and “comprehensive” moral doctrines...is much narrower than Rawls would have us believe’.^{vi} Rawls is simply *wrong* that political values can be stated in a way that is free-standing in relation to ‘moral, religious and philosophical viewpoints’.^{vii}

Ronald Dworkin's claims are criticized in a similar way. Dworkin is said to make distinctions that are not 'sufficiently watertight' and which are 'contestable';^{viii} he 'marginalizes' crucial problems by 'perfunctory remarks' that are 'designed to acknowledge a difficulty without meeting it'.^{ix} As I read this, Freedman is not simply viewing the project of American philosophical liberalism from a different perspective — focusing, say, on the way in which American philosophical liberalism can be understood as a social and cultural system of meanings held together by its emotional attractions and used to justify claims of power — it is to see *through* its distorting self-image to *what it really is*. For all his important innovations, in this respect Freedman strikes me a descendant of Voltaire.

This chapter considers — or I should say 'reconsiders' insofar as it constitutes a rethinking of the account I gave in *Political Theories and Political Concepts*^x — the relation of political philosophy, ideologies, and the study of political ideologies. I focus on two sets of questions. (i) Can we adequately distinguish, say, liberalism as an ideology from philosophical theories of liberalism? Although Freedman often stresses that American philosophical liberalism is within the domain of ideology, at other times he explicitly refers to a 'the line between liberal philosophy and ideology'.^{xi} Is there a line, and if so how might we draw it? (ii) Turning from the first-level activity of constructing ideological and philosophical doctrines to the study of such doctrines, we need to inquire whether an analytic (as opposed to a causal or functionalist) approach to the study of political ideologies and philosophies can itself be a critical enterprise. Does taking a stand on the normative

and argumentative adequacy of American philosophical liberalism mean that Freeden is, in the end, offering his own normative alternative to the Rawlsian view, and so cannot be seen as offering an interpretive study of Rawlsian political doctrine? Can we say of Freeden's analysis of Rawls something very similar to what *he* says of Rawls: 'Despite initial attempts to present itself as non-ideological, through claims ... to non-bias,' Freeden's normative and conceptual analysis is an ideological phenomenon like any other critique of a substantive liberal doctrine? In short: can (what I shall call) a second-level study of political doctrines normatively criticize a first-level theory as resting on false claims without itself becoming just another first-level theory?

II FIRST-LEVEL NORMATIVE STRUCTURES: THE POPULAR AND THE REFINED

A Line between Activities in the Same Domain?

Our first question, then, is the relation between philosophy and ideology as first-level enterprises. Freeden refers to the line between them, yet he is also clear that 'political philosophy itself occupies a domain of ideological contestation'.^{xii} The view of their relation presented in *Ideologies and Political Theory* is complex and subtle. On the one hand, Freeden seeks to show that both ideology and political philosophy are genuine forms of political thought.^{xiii} Yet, while showing how both are modes of political theorizing, he also provides an extensive list of criteria by which to distinguish the method and aims of the political philosopher from that of the ideologist while, in the end, giving an ideological analysis of American

philosophical liberalism. The chapter analyzing Rawls's philosophical system appears in the midst of chapters analyzing other, more familiar, ideologies. We can, Freeden tells us, give an ideological as well as a philosophical reading of Rawls's work.^{xiv}

Although we may initially be perplexed by this combination of distinguishing the philosophical from the ideological while also treating them as both subject to ideological analysis, the appearance of contradiction disappears when we keep firmly in mind the crucial distinction between first- and second-level analyses, between 'ideologizing' and 'the analysis of ideology'.^{xv} At the first-level — that of theory construction — the philosopher and the ideologist are said to engage in different activities with different aims. The philosopher, say, seeks to construct an impartial, objective, system of thought aiming at the truth about political life while the ideologist aims at a practical doctrine that has wide appeal and will energize and mobilize. And certainly we do make some such distinction in specific contexts. We may, for example, call someone an ideologue rather than a philosopher if it is clear that, despite her construction of an elaborate doctrine, it is the conclusions (say, advocacy of a certain account of distributive justice) rather than the doctrine's arguments and analyses, to which she is truly committed.^{xvi} Certainly it is part of the self-image of the philosopher to get things right, and to reason well. Although at the first-level the self-image of these activities may be quite different, at the second-level, that of the study of theories of ideology (rather than the production of such theories), we can see that both the ideologist and the philosopher are

performing an ideological function. It is here than the student of ideology appears to *see through* the philosopher's activity in a way that she does not see through the ideologist's. For the ideologist seems to be more self-aware of what he is doing: he is constructing a practical doctrine with certain political ends in mind. The student of ideology can analyze this doctrine, point out its functions, and also evaluate it on various counts (more on evaluation anon). Contrast this to the philosopher: supposedly she *thinks* she is engaging in the pursuit of universalistic and timeless truth but she is *really* constructing another ideological system. The philosopher, say Freeden 'assumes that the mask reflects the face'.^{xvii} Thus the second-level activity of the study of philosophy-as-ideology appears to unmask political reality as well as the pretensions of the philosopher in a way that does not apply to the pretensions of the straightforward ideologist.

Although in certain contexts we certainly do distinguish the activity of political philosophy from that of ideology, I believe that Freeden sometimes tends to overdraw the contrast. The philosopher's self-image, I believe, is often considerably more complex than Freeden suggests. That is, even at the level of theory construction, the line between philosophy and ideology is much more contextual than it may first appear.

The Philosopher and the Sophists

One way that Freeden distinguishes political ideologies from political philosophies is in respect to their normative commitments. The study of the morphology of

ideologies, he holds, has *fewer* normative commitments than does first-level political philosophy. Philosophical systems, he says, purport to stand or fall on standards of good arguments,^{xviii} while the connections between ideas in ideological systems are less concerned with logical and coherent connections and admit emotional and non-rational elements.^{xix} 'Logic and consistency must remain important [in ideological thinking], but not overwhelming'.^{xx} 'Ideologies do not dispense with reason. All major ideologies, bar the extreme right and even then not entirely, require some degree of reflectiveness and internal coherence'.^{xxi}

It seems that the picture is, roughly, this: the creator of ideology does not especially care if he makes some suspicious logical moves — his aim is to motivate political activity according to some political program or plan. If we imagine the philosopher in her study, and the political scribbler pounding out a newspaper article, the philosopher is deeply concerned that her arguments be good ones, while the scribbler wishes to mobilize political action. It is hard not to think here of the difference between Socrates and the Sophists: both are engaging in persuasive discourse, but one has the primary aim of uncovering the truth, the other of moving the audience. The student of ideology, it seems, is at least as interested in the Sophist's rhetoric as in the philosopher's argument.

Justificatory Structures

Is this, though, really a distinction between two types of reflective-practical activity, or between informal and formal modes of essentially the same activity?

There is much to say for the idea that it is more a matter of degree of self-consciousness and care than difference in kind. After all, if we accept Freedman's analysis of Rawls's philosophical liberalism, it is chock-full of pretty manifestly bad arguments; and even the scribbler does not wish to commit logical and argumentative howlers. And that leads to the crucial question: *why* does the political scribbler wish to avoid howlers? Why is the 'ideologist' concerned a good deal, but not totally, with coherence and reason? In the end, I believe that the answer is that, albeit in a modest way, he is proposing a justificatory structure. He is seeking not simply to motivate political action, but to justify it to his audience: to show them that their cause is right, fair, just, good, or Godly. Of course he may not care if he is really justifying the cause; the intentions of the creator are not always expressed in his creations. Some philosophers have advanced arguments to embarrass opponents or to win prizes. Why one does what one does is always open to dispute, but both the political philosopher and the scribbler are creating justificatory structures that seek to show their followers the righteousness of their cause and the advisability of certain lines of action. That is why a creator of a political ideology is different than a rabble rouser: a rabble rouser may be very effective in generating political action ('Let's teach them a lesson they will not forget!'), but we do not get a conceptual structure that can be interpreted as rational because there is no claim to have advanced any sort of justificatory structure.

Of course the standards of justification vary in different contexts. It is certainly true that the justificatory standards of a pamphleteer will be different than those in a philosophical treatise, but within philosophy itself we also find disagreements about justificatory standards. Rawls advances an accessibility condition of acceptable arguments in political philosophy.^{xxiii} As far as possible we should rely on 'plain truths, now widely accepted, or available to citizens generally'.^{xxiii} He explicitly maintains that 'convincing philosophical argument' is not sufficient for political justification.^{xxiv} Rawls aims to apply the ideal of toleration to philosophy itself. He thus is searching for a conception of justification between the pamphleteer and the constructor of a refined philosophical system. This alone should warn us against any simple dichotomy between the philosopher's pursuit of truth-in-itself and the ideologist's articulation of a popular justificatory structure.

Justification, Bounded Rationality, and Biases

It is, then, of the first importance not to fall into the erroneous identification of philosophy with justification in terms of truth, full rationality, or the absence of biases. A fundamental dispute *among* philosophical theories is whether justification should address agents as boundedly rational, or whether justificatory discourse should be addressed only to those with full rationality and full information. Amos Tversky, Daniel Kahneman and other cognitive psychologists have uncovered a variety of cognitive shortcuts and biases that humans employ when making

judgments. We appeal to stereotypes, our judgments on the same matter markedly differ depending in the way the issue is ‘framed’ (we are much more likely to approve of a policy if we are informed of the number of lives it saves rather than the deaths that will occur), we are bad at probabilistic reasoning, we ignore abstract evidence in favor of vivid stories, and so on.^{xxv} Philosophers disagree whether these are non-rational biases that should be discounted in justification or whether what counts as good reasoning is determined by the actual ways of thinking that people employ, and which generally do a good job in helping them live their lives.^{xxvi} So within philosophy there is deep dispute about the extent to which folk reasoning counts as good reasoning. But clearly, if that is so, the line between philosophy, which focuses on ‘good reasoning’ and ideologies, which build on people’s actual reasoning, with all its flaws, blurs and perhaps even disappears.

Reason and the Emotions

Nor should we think that, while the philosopher constructs his system simply on the basis of logic and reason, the ideologist appeals to emotion.^{xxvii} Since at least Hume, modern philosophy has been well aware of the importance of emotion for normative thought, and recent investigations of moral thinking have led to a renewed appreciation of the fundamental role of our sentiments in morality^{xxviii} and, we might say, in ‘socio-political interaction.’^{xxix} As I argued (quite a long time ago, now)^{xxx} the best account of the very idea of value ‘assigns emotional import’ to value^{xxxi} — indeed, more than that, it sees value as primarily an emotional

response. So philosophy, no less than more popular justificatory structures, can — and should — put the emotions at the very heart of the analysis.

The One and the Many

Sometimes Freeden suggests that a core difference between ideology and philosophy is that philosophy is the creation of an individual thinker, while ideology is the construction of groups.^{xxxii} There is certainly something to this: popular justificatory structures tend to reflect widespread popular understandings, while philosophies tend to be individual constructions of creative thinkers. But again, the question is whether this really marks off a difference in kind. One of the disputes within normative philosophy is the extent to which philosophic systems should be simply a refinement of ordinary understandings, or whether, based on claims to superior insight, they can constitute a sharp break with popular justificatory structures. The relation between commonsense moral practice and moral philosophy offers a useful analogy. One view would see their relation as akin to Freeden's distinction between ideology and political philosophy: moral practice is the creation of the everyman (or at least the articulate everyman) whose eye is set firmly on practice and results, while moral theory is the product of a philosopher in her study. Think, though, about Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics*. On his view the philosophical method of commonsense morality appeals to the '*consensus of mankind — or at least that portion of mankind that combines adequate intellectual enlightenment with a serious concern for morality*'.^{xxxiii} The philosopher

of commonsense sees moral truth as generally revealed through the actual practices and judgments of (more or less) ordinary individuals as they live their lives, though the philosopher certainly may see herself as qualified to point out contradictions and errors in this morality of everyman. Here we see a complex dynamic between the popular justificatory structure and philosophical articulation of it — one does not collapse into the other, but neither can we say that one is the creation of a collective and the other an individual mind.

Rawls's understanding of political philosophy approximates such a view. The philosopher's construction begins with concepts generally accessible in the political culture, though the ultimate way these are brought together may well lead to new insights into justified political structures. (Compare Bosanquet's claim that the dominant system of social ideas is never quite harmonious and so stands in need of rationalization: 'the general will is a process continuously emerging from the relatively unconscious into reflective consciousness'.)^{xxxiv} To be sure, Freedman rejects Rawls's claim to have rationally articulated common concepts; he approvingly cites Bernard Yack's assertion that Rawls 'merely superimposes his philosophically designed conception upon something he calls our popular culture'.^{xxxv} The point here, though, is that a longstanding self-image of many philosophical projects has been that popular justificatory structures constitute the starting place and supplies the materials from which philosophy builds, while also providing a check on how far philosophy can depart from its popular basis.

III THE SECOND-LEVEL INTERPRETATIVE ENTERPRISE

Conceptual Analysis and the Pull of the Normative

Thus far I have been questioning the idea that we can distinguish the study of ideology from political philosophy by sharply distinguishing two different first-level enterprises — the ideological and the philosophical. The relation between the popular and the refined is itself a matter of internal controversy within philosophy: there is no Archimedean point from which to depict their true relation that remains outside the fray. Any proposal for a dividing line takes place *within* the realm of philosophical dispute.

Let us, then, turn to the key question: the relation of the first-level activity of the ideologist/philosopher to the second-level activity of the student of ideology/political theory. Now the earlier generation of theorists of ideology had no doubt that their second-level activity was entirely distinct from the activity they studied. Whatever else one says about Marx's theory of ideology, his materialism provided a clear basis for unmasking the self-image of philosophy and other ideologies. Philosophy insists that it is regulated by truth and reason: Marx replies that, like all other practical activities it is ultimately a servant of the mode of production and its dominant interests.

The production of ideas, of conceptions of consciousness, is ... directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.... Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., — real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse responding to these....

...The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force.^{xxxvi}

Marx had a secure perspective outside of the normative realm, which philosophy claims to rule, and from this outside perspective he unmasked its self-understanding by showing the extent to which the normative realm is an expression of material forces. Political philosophers are simply 'ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood.'^{xxxvii} Marx can reveal the truth about philosophy without being philosophical.

But Freedman, quite rightly in my view, has abandoned the sociology of knowledge in favor of interpretation and analysis. Given this, what resources does he have to criticize Rawls's and Dworkin's normative views except to claim a superior normative understanding? His extensive critique of Rawls must amount to a claim to superior insight about the limits of Rawls's normative claims in Rawls's own theory. Every claim of Freedman's cited in section I (above) was a claim that Rawls's or Dworkin's view was normatively inadequate: Rawls or Dworkin purported to provide decisive reasons for accepting a view but, Freedman claims,

there are no such decisive reasons. But this appears to assert a *privileged normative perspective*, where one has a more comprehensive view of the justifiability of a philosopher's claims and the reasons to accept them than the philosopher himself has obtained. And there seems no escape from doing this once one forsakes the sociology of knowledge for an analytic and interpretive approach to the study of ideology. There is no non-normative perspective from which one can dispute the normative soundness of American philosophical liberalism.

Consider, for example, Freeden's key notion that concepts are logically indeterminate, and so 'decontesting' them in one way or another is a manner of 'selection' or choice, not simply logic.^{xxxviii} This is itself a controversial philosophical doctrine. To maintain it is to advance a philosophical position backed by arguments, claiming that one's arguments and analyses are superior to those of others. When Freeden claims that political philosophers act ideologically in asserting that their preferred exposition of a concept is rationally superior to competitors, he is himself taking on the mantle of linguistic philosopher, criticizing the claims of philosophers who base their political analysis on a faulty account of concepts. After all, if Plato is right, and concepts are real universals that can be partly grasped by reason, then the under-determination thesis is simply false. Or if Wittgenstein's view in the *Tractatus* is correct, Freeden's appeal to the *Investigations* is normatively objectionable.^{xxxix} All of these are disputes between those broad justificatory structures that are properly understood as philosophical.

The focus on the morphology of political concepts pulls the study of ideology back to first-level normative positions as to what counts as a good argument and an adequate account of concepts, and so the student of ideology must make judgments about when arguments and conceptual analyses fail. When Rawls asserts that the best analysis of our shared concept of political liberty derives from the idea that free and equal citizens possess political autonomy, Freeden objects that this disregards important ties between heteronomy and freedom.^{x1} The analysis of what counts as an acceptable interpretation of freedom commits Freeden to his own controversial normative claims about significant uses of freedom and what constitutes the best reasons for excluding some uses as unimportant or peripheral; if Rawls has a powerful reason for excluding some use of 'freedom' then we would hardly think it significant if his theory does not take account of it.

So Freeden must be committed to a certain normative analysis. However we can see that this does not mean, after all, that he is simply engaging in first-level normative political philosophy. The study of political ideologies can be a different task than constructing first-level normative theories in political philosophy, and it can lead to taking some normative positions on first-level philosophical disputes. To understand the distinction between first-level normative justification and the normative study of ideology we need to know *how it can be that an interpretive activity is distinct from first-level normative theorizing yet inevitably takes positions on such theorizing, and when so doing engages in that very first-level normative activity that*

it is studying. When we understand how this is not only possible, but necessary, we will better see the relation of the study of ideologies to political philosophy.

The Interpretive Activity

To see how we can usefully distinguish first-level justificatory structures from 'second-level' interpretation and analysis of such structures, consider a case with which every reader of this chapter will be familiar: the distinction between Hobbes's and Locke's political theories, and our teaching of these political theories to our students. Seldom is teaching Hobbes and Locke anything like simple advocacy of Hobbesian or Lockean theory. We do not simply repeat their arguments, but we explore their assumptions, investigate the moves they make, the way they define their concepts and so on: we interpret and analyze their justificatory structures. But note that when we do that, we cannot help but evaluate them as well. We do not simply describe Hobbes's model of humans and his claim that they will be in a state of war unless ruled by a sovereign; we chart out the arguments, but we question them too. Our second-level activity of interpreting the canon pulls us into first-level normative analysis: we cannot help but evaluate as we interpret. Teaching can go very wrong in two ways: it may either lapse into simply first-level advocacy in which what should be an interpretation of a text becomes either a battle for it or against it, or it can become no more than an exegesis, in which the claims are clarified, but still essentially merely repeated. Neither is an adequate interpretative stance.

The second-order interpretation of those justificatory structures we call ideologies and political philosophies is broadly similar. It is neither itself a first-level argument nor simply a description of another's first-level argument. As Freeden's work exemplifies so well, it feels the pull of the normative without entirely giving into it and so becoming yet another first-level justificatory endeavor. Why must good interpretation be like this, being pulled toward the normative, but always able to draw back?

IV INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS AND THE RATIONAL

Making the Natives Intelligible

To interpret a theory via analysis is to make it intelligible. When we approach a political theory, we are usually confronted by a diagnosis of some political or social problem, some basic claims about the way the world operates and the nature of humans, and a plan or prescription about how to deal with the problem. Now the preferred first step in making all this intelligible — to make sense of it — is to see it as rational. If the problems Hobbes points to are real, if his analyses of their causes are well-grounded, and if his prescriptions would indeed solve the problem, Hobbes's political theory immediately becomes intelligible to us. Because, despite all of our shortcomings in this regard, we are still rational creatures who can grasp other's thoughts best when we see those thoughts as rational and sensible, our first task as interpreters is to render our objects of study as rational as we can. We are generally intelligible to each other because we are rational, and can understand the

actions and beliefs of others as rational. To make a system of thought intelligible is, likewise, to see it as rational and sensible.

This leads to the importance of the principle of charity in our second-level interpretations. An anthropologist studying a native culture seeks to render their culture intelligible, and to do that she must see what they are up to as sensible and rational. And a first step in doing that is to interpret what they think in such a way as to render it true. As Donald Davidson stressed, the first step of the anthropologist is

Assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right. What justifies this procedure is the facts of disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreements. Applied to language, this principle reads: the more sentences we conspire to accept (whether or not through a medium of interpretation), the better we understand the rest, whether or not we agree with them.^{xli}

The student of ideology and political theory is like an anthropologist confronting a native culture that she does not share, but is trying to make sense of. How is she to interpret Hobbes's statements that 'nothing can be unjust' in the state of nature and that under some conditions one has an obligation to keep covenants in the state of nature?^{xlii} Like an anthropologist who seems to confront natives who are uttering contradictory sentences, the student of political theory sees her 'native' as appearing to contradict himself. But this makes it all puzzling and unintelligible to

us. To make sense of Hobbes is, at least in the first instance, to show that what he says is consistent and, if possible, well-grounded.

Levels of Intelligibility

There are, of course, different ways in which we can make another intelligible. Although Davidson maintained that the principle of charity supposes that our aim is to render true the statements that are the object of our interpretation, often we can render them intelligible and yet stop far short of rendering them true. Sometimes we can simply see how they are rational or reasonable; we can see why someone in a certain situation would rationally come to believe something, even if we can now see that what they believed is not true. We might, for example, think that Hobbes's claim that the state of nature is a state of war is rational if we think of human interactions in the state of nature as something like one-shot Prisoner's Dilemmas, but we still might think he is quite wrong to see human interactions under anarchy in those terms. However, even in this case we would have to think it is at least reasonable for him to have understood human interactions as something akin to one-shot Prisoner's Dilemmas. If it was really unintelligible how he could come to see human interactions as akin to one-shot Prisoner's Dilemmas, it will not make Hobbes fully intelligible to say that *if* one sees them in that way, *then* we can understand how the state of nature will be a state of war. That would simply push the ultimate unintelligibility of the project back one step.

And yet, pushing the unintelligibility back a step does help the project of interpretation. One of the reasons why — at least in my view — Freud's work is of continuing interest is that he shows how we can make an action that is totally unintelligible more intelligible but still not reasonable. Consider one of his cases — a nineteen-year-old girl with obsessional sleep ceremonies:

The pillow at the top end of the bed must not touch the wooden back of the bedstead.... The eiderdown...had to be shaken before being laid on the bed so that its bottom became very thick; afterwards, however, she never failed to even out this accumulation of feathers by pressing them apart.^{xliii}

At this point the behavior is simply incomprehensible. Freud appeals to reasoning — albeit still odd reasoning — to make some sense of it. In the course of her therapy:

[s]he found out the central meaning of her ceremonial one day when she suddenly understood the meaning of the rule that the pillow must not touch the back of the bedstead. The pillow, she said, had always been a woman to her and the upright wooden back a man. Thus she wanted — by magic, we must interpolate — to keep man and woman apart — that is, to separate her parents from each other, and not allow them to have sexual intercourse....

If a pillow was a woman, then the shaking of the eiderdown till all the feathers were at the bottom and caused a swelling there had a sense as well. It meant making the woman pregnant; but she never failed to smooth away the

pregnancy again, for she had been for years afraid that her parents' intercourse would result in another child....^{xliv}

As Freud notes, these are 'wild thoughts'. Admittedly, if 'wooden bedstead = father', and 'pillow = mother', then we can see a sort of reasoning in keeping bedstead and pillow apart. If she was correct in thinking that what she does to the bedstead and pillow affects what her parents do at night, then keeping the bedstead and pillow apart has a certain sort of rationality to it. But, still, we have made progress: what was simply incomprehensible now is becoming intelligible as it is becoming a bit more rational — but we still need to know why she believes these things.

In interpreting political doctrines, though, we aim at deeper intelligibility: we seek not only to make doctrines less crazy, but reasonable pretty far down. Here, Freedman is surely correct that we will treat refined and popular justificatory structures differently. We expect a refined political doctrine to be intelligible pretty 'far down', though even there may be limits, as when we see that a conclusion ultimately rests on a doctrine that is wildly implausible — think of Bosanquet's claim that reality is ultimately composed, in some sense, of ideas. However, we are apt to come to the conclusion of implausibility quicker when interpreting more popular doctrines, which may well rest on widespread convictions that we find not only hard to credit, but sometimes 'wild'. The study of fascism, especially Nazism, is a case in point: beliefs about the identity of the 'Aryan race' and its relation to

modern Germans was mythical, and about as sensible as Freud's patient's belief in the efficacy of keeping the bedstead from touching the pillow.

By the Interpreter's Lights

As Davidson says, though, to make a view sensible is to make it true (or reasonable) *by our own lights*. The student of political ideologies, no more than the anthropologist, can stand outside of her own normative commitments about what is sensible and rational in her efforts at interpretation. Here is the pull of the normative in one's interpretation: to make Hobbes's conceptual scheme sensible is to make it sensible by one's own lights, and so the process of interpretation is inherently normative. Every interpretative move is normative: we are trying to see how a conceptual structure is rational and sensible. If we see it as normatively sound, then we immediately see it as an intelligible creation: we understand the conceptual structure that confronts us, and we begin to know our way around in it. The more we can plausibly see a conceptual structure as rational and well-thought out, the more intelligible it is to us.

Thus the complexity of second-level analysis of systems of thought. Our aim is to understand classical liberalism, the new liberalism, American philosophical liberalism, or socialism, not to engage in first-level normative disputes with them. We do not wish to enter the fray. But to understand a justificatory structure requires applying our normative criteria of what constitutes good reasoning, plausible premises, and reasonable views about the world. We endeavor to make it

intelligible against a background of standards of intelligibility that appeal to our own first-level normative commitments. In my own *Political Concepts and Political Theories* I sought to investigate the normative and conceptual structures of versions of liberalism, conservatism and socialism; my aim was to understand and make intelligible. But any reader will see that liberalism comes out better, because given what I see as the plausible normative criteria, it makes more sense, and is more easily intelligible, than the others. Similarly (although on a much more impressive scale), it is manifest that in *Ideologies and Political Theory* Freedman finds it easy to make the new liberalism intelligible, and finds it quite a hard job to make Rawls really sensible, or to see how libertarianism can be intelligibly seen as an important part of the liberal tradition.

My own advisor, John Chapman, spelled this out wonderfully in his essay on “Political Theory: Logical Structure and Enduring Types” — a paper that has shaped my own thinking about political theory throughout my career.^{xlv} The range of intelligible political theories is set by one’s understanding of possible logical structures, and how — and whether — various metaphysical, moral, psychological, and political views can be coherently combined. The student of political theory comes to his work with commitments about possible logical structures and this will deeply inform his analysis and his ability to render some justificatory structures intelligible. And it will lead him to be critical of others as normatively flawed. So even if he tries as hard as he might not to appeal to his own specific normative

commitments in his analysis of political doctrines, his deeper understanding of what is logically or conceptually coherent must inform his study.

VI. INTERPRETATION, UNMASKING, AND THE APPEAL TO ERROR

Walking a Tightrope

The student of political thought, then, has to walk a tightrope. She cannot but help draw on her own normative commitments throughout her analysis. However, because her aim is to make a first-level justificatory structure intelligible, as an interpreter her first response cannot be to unmask the pretensions of first-level justificatory discourse. There is always the temptation to “see through” first-level discourse as deeply flawed and implausible. To quickly draw on one’s normative commitments and views to see through the pretensions of first-level political doctrines may make for good first-level disputation, but it is to fail in the interpretive task. For unmasking often tends to make our subject *unintelligible* to us. How could the creators have been so unaware of their faults? Did they really fail to see that they sought the impossible? How could they have made such ridiculous claims to objectivity when all along it is so clear they were grinding their own axes? So far from making our subject intelligible we now need an *additional* explanation: one that makes sense of the failure to construct a rationally intelligible view of the world. Unveiling the reality behind a justificatory structure can render our subject less intelligible in much the same way that translating a native language as chock-full of falsehoods renders their form of life unintelligible to us.

We can press the anthropological analogy further. One of the dangers of fieldwork — to which early anthropology succumbed — is to assume an easy superiority over one's subjects, so that *of course* the anthropologist sees things so much clearer than does the native. If the anthropologist takes this attitude, then her default supposition will be that her subjects are wrong because they fail to see nearly as far as she does. And so her field journal will be a study in obvious errors. This is exactly the attitude that encourages lack of understanding of one's subjects; to assume that one sees much further than do they undermines the supposition that one's aim is to see how their views are true or reasonable. Much the same holds true for the study of political theories and doctrines. Interpretation requires a hefty dose of allegiance to the principle of charity, *and so using one's basic normative commitments to help make sense of what others think, rather than to reveal their errors and follies*. The deep flaw of the unmasking approach to political ideologies is its too-easy assumption of a superior perspective, from which sees so much further, and so much deeper, than first-level political doctrines. Confidence that one sees much deeper is always a barrier to good interpretation, for it tempts us to assume that others are blinkered and wrong.

The Intelligibility of Error

As always, there is a complication: sometimes the best way to make others intelligible is to see them as making a common error.^{xlvi} Think back to the use of heuristics (section II), and suppose we hold that relying on them is not rational.

Once we have good evidence that people tend to make these mistakes, we can appeal to them in our interpretations of why people believe and act as they do, but when we do so we make their beliefs and actions explicable by showing they are *not* rational.

Consider an example from some of my other work. Based on empirical evidence as well as theoretical work concerning complex social systems, I have argued that it is extremely difficult to make accurate and precise social predictions, and that this undermines a great deal of what goes on under the name of public policy.^{xlvi} Yet, I have argued, audiences are extraordinarily resistant to this analysis: in the face of a great deal of evidence, they continue to believe that they can accurately predict the future of social systems. In explaining this I appeal again to the work of Kahneman and Tversky, which indicates that people consistently ascribe high levels of probability to very faulty predictions. Indeed, they report that ‘subjects are most confident in predictions that are most likely to be off the mark’. ‘[P]eople are prone to experience much confidence in highly fallible judgments, a phenomenon that might be called the illusion of validity’.^{xlviii} So we can understand people’s insistence that *they* can make accurate predictions not by seeing how they are rational to think this, but by showing that it is the result of a common human bias.

We can extend the idea to the study of political doctrines. Explicability may be better furthered by supposing a doctrine rests on an error than by supposing that its claims are true, or justifiable, or at least reasonable. This leads us right back to

our starting point: the Marxian causal/functionalist view of ideology. We can think of Marx as proposing that all of philosophy is explained by one grand 'cognitive bias' — philosophers produce doctrines that serve the interests of the ruling class. *That* is what renders their content intelligible. But notice how this tack moves us away from intelligibility through analysis back to the original causal/functional perspective of the study of ideology. The more we make a doctrine explicable by citing common human error the less we see it as an object to be made intelligible through analyzing its structure and the reasoning behind it. It is also a risky move; it supposes the superior perspective and insight of the unmasking approach, and so always runs the risk of failing to appreciate the reasonableness of its subject by a too-easy assumption that it is riddled with errors of which one is free. Although we cannot say that intelligibility can never be furthered through pointing to common error, it is a temptation to a biased claim to superiority unless very solidly grounded in compelling evidence.

VII CONCLUSION: A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

The subtlety and difficulty of the interpretive enterprise is all too clear. Our aim is to understand the subjects of our study as at least reasonable articulations of the political world, and to do that we must exercise considerable charity in interpreting their content. Even if we do not interpret their claims as true we at least aim to make them rational or reasonable. But our project of making a political doctrine intelligible may fail: we may be confronted by some seemingly 'wild' thoughts at

the basis of the doctrine, and to that extent we may be puzzled why people would believe it. But, then again, sometimes we can employ psychological or economic theory to show why the 'wild' error is explicable, and then we can further advance the interpretive project, even past the bounds of rational intelligibility. However, to appeal to common error when interpreting a doctrine is to run the risk of forsaking interpretation for unmasking, for again we are claiming to see through our subjects and their false consciousness. And yet the background of all our interpretive efforts is our own normative commitments, and these will enter into our interpretive analysis.

Freedden is correct in suggesting that 'wild' thoughts, and making them explicable by pointing to common error, are more common when analyzing popular justificatory structures. I remain unconvinced, however, that there is a distinction in kind between the tasks of interpreting refined and popular justificatory structures. Writing from the philosophy side of the philosophy/ideology divide, I see as much the same the work of the interpreter of philosophical doctrines and that of the interpreter of the popular justificatory structures that are called 'ideologies'. In both, a fine touch is needed to know when we have exhausted intelligibility through rationality and must resort to explicability through common error. In neither is the unmasking approach helpful as a mode of interpretation, though it is a tried-and-true method of first-level normative disputation.

I began by pointing out (section I) that Freedman engages in extensive criticisms of Rawls's and Dworkin's normative claims and I asked: is such criticism consistent with the interpretive enterprise, or does it show merely first-level engagement? It should now be clear that normative criticism is part and parcel of interpretation; to interpret is to draw on one's own standards, but this will inevitably lead to disagreement as well as rationalization. There is no incoherence at the root of the critical interpretation: indeed, criticism and interpretation go hand in hand.

Of course, we are still confronted with the more difficult question of whether an interpretation resorts too quickly to criticism, and so lapses into unmasking or simple first-level dispute. From my view of the divide over 'American philosophical liberalism' — a version of liberalism that, in its basics, I believe is sound — I tend to think that Freedman's treatment comes close to being a first-level disputation rather than a second-level interpretive enterprise. I certainly can understand how this happens. There is, let us say, considerable resistance to Rawls's general approach: those trained in political science from both sides of the Atlantic see it as overly abstract and unworldly;^{xlix} on the European side of the Atlantic philosophers are perhaps apt to agree with the political theorists (on the western side, they are certainly split). However, while it is understandable to be tempted into a first-level argument with Rawls, and while that is the bread and butter of first-level normative dispute, I am not, in the end, convinced that the treatment in *Ideologies and Political Theory* has a sufficient dose of the principle of charity. When a reader confronts an interpretation that describes a theory as

characterized by 'superficial allusions',¹ 'artificial dichotomies',^{li} and 'false antitheses' of which it is 'unduly fond',^{lii} claims that are 'chimerical'^{liii} and 'startling',^{liv} and which exemplify an 'artificiality'^{lv} that leads to 'a serious indictment of its viability'^{lvi} and is based on a 'peculiar American notion'^{lvii} — in such a case one has a hard time accepting that one is encountering a charitable interpretive enterprise. As I have stressed, one cannot be sure, for all interpreters have limits as to what they can see as plausible. In the end, cannot help but see Freeden as, in this instance, taking off his gloves and entering the normative fray, criticizing Rawlsian liberalism as normatively inferior and empirically inadequate. He may be right or wrong, but I suspect that here he occupies the position of a participant in the first-level philosophical dispute, not a student of political doctrines.

NOTES

ⁱ [Francois Marie Arouet] Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, translated by Ernest Dilworth (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), pp. 60-78. See John Plamenatz, *Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1970).

ⁱⁱ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936), pp. 68-69).

ⁱⁱⁱ Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 75.

^{iv} Michael Freeden, 'Ideology, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy' in *The Handbook of Political Theory*, edited by Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (London: Sage, 2004), pp. 3-17 at p. 16.

^v Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 226. Emphasis added. See also Freeden's essay, 'Ideology: Balances and Projections' in *Reassessing Political Ideologies: the Durability of Dissent*, edited by Michael Freeden (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 193-208 at p. 198.

^{vi} Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 233.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 234.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 235.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), pp. 33-42. In that book I drew a great deal on Freedman's way of distinguishing the study of political theory from political ideology, as I did in 'Ideological Dominance through Philosophical Confusion: Liberalism in the Twentieth Century' in *Reassessing Political Ideologies: the Durability of Dissent*, chap. 2.

^{xi} He remarks that this line is 'more blurred' in France and Germany than in the Anglo-American world. 'Ideology: Balances and Projections', p. 199.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 198.

^{xiii} Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 27.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, p. 27.

^{xvi} Thus one might say, as I have done, that most contemporary political philosophy is really the advocacy of ideology (a certain conviction about distributive justice), rather than an attempt to understand and analyze the nature of the proper nature of the political realm. See my essay, 'The Property Equilibrium in Our Liberal Social Order (Or How to Correct Our Moral Vision)', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, forthcoming.

^{xvii} Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 31.

^{xviii} Freedman, 'Ideology, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy', p. 4.

^{xix} Freedman, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 29.

^{xx} *Ibid.*, p. 37.

^{xxi} Ibid., p. 29.

^{xxii} Gerald F. Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 132ff.

^{xxiii} John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, paperback edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 225.

^{xxiv} Ibid., pp. 338ff.

^{xxv} See, e.g. Richard E. Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgments* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); *Judgments Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, edited by Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic and Amos Tversky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); *Choices, Values and Frames*, edited by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

^{xxvi} For different views see Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism*, pp. 54-62; Stephen Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990). See also Gerd Gigerenzer, *Adaptive Thinking: Rationality in the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Vernon L. Smith, *Rationality in Economics: Constructivist and Ecological Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

^{xxvii} See Freeden, 'Ideology, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy', pp. 11-12.

^{xxviii} See Shaun Nichols, *Sentimental Rules: On the Natural Foundations of Moral Judgment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

^{xxix} Freeden, 'Ideology, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy', p. 11.

- xxx Gerald Gaus, *Value and Justification: the Foundations of Liberal Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Part One.
- xxxi Freeden, 'Ideology, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy', p. 11.
- xxxii Ibid.
- xxxiii Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, seventh edn. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 215.
- xxxiv Bernard Bosanquet, *Science and Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1927), p. 267.
- xxxv Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 233n.
- xxxvi Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited by C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), pp. 47, 64.
- xxxvii Ibid., p. 65.
- xxxviii Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 45.
- xxxix Ibid., p. 53. On these points, see my *Political Concepts and Political Theories*, chap. 1.
- xl Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 238.
- xli Donald Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation' in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 125-139 at p. 137.
- xlii Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 78 (Chap. 13, ¶13), chap. 14.
- xliii Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, translated by James Strachey (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1973), Lecture 17.

^{xliv} *Ibid.*

^{xlv} John W. Chapman, 'Political Theory: Logical Structure and Enduring Types' in *L'Idée de Philosophie Politique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), pp. 57-96.

^{xlvi} See David Henderson, 'The Principle of Charity and the Problem of Irrationality (Translation and the Problem of Irrationality)', *Synthese*, vol. 73 (1987): 225-252.

^{xlvii} 'Social Complexity and Evolved Moral Principles' in *Liberalism, Conservatism, and Hayek's Idea of Spontaneous Order*, edited by Peter McNamara (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 149-176.

^{xlviii} Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "On the Psychology of Prediction" in their *Judgments Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, pp. 47-68 at p. 66.

^{xlix} For which Rawls refuses to apologize. *Political Liberalism*, p. lxii.

^l Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, p. 227.

^{li} *Ibid.*, p. 259.

^{lii} *Ibid.*, p. 254.

^{liii} *Ibid.*, p. 233.

^{liv} *Ibid.*, p. 259.

^{lv} *Ibid.*, p. 253.

^{lvi} *Ibid.*

^{lvii} *Ibid.*, p. 270.