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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ideology

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Abstract

What is the difference between a philosophy and an ideology? Would simply observing some aspect of human experience count as ideology? No. But suppose we try to explain and interpret what we have seen. Now, we enter the neighborhood of what gets called ideology. What else does it take to sort out what should be called ideological? And why would a worldview sometimes turn into an echo chamber, a cocoon of confirmation bias that fosters false consciousness?

Keywords: ideology; philosophy of science; false consciousness; disagreement; bias; evidence; realism; Martin Luther King; Nelson Mandela; Truth and Reconciliation

Having a philosophy versus having an ideology

Friedrich Nietzsche once said, only that which "has no history can be defined."[1] The word 'ideology' has a history—a history of being a fighting word, a weaponized word. Yet, there remains a question about how the term is used.

What is the difference between a philosophy and an ideology? Here is one way of working toward an operational understanding of ideology. First, suppose we observe some aspect of human experience. Then we describe what we have observed. Is that sufficient grounds for calling us ideological? No. But suppose we try to explain and interpret what we have seen. We have begun to work toward a worldview and are entering the neighborhood of what gets called ideology. What else needs to be added for the word 'ideological' to be a *useful* description? What does it take to sort out what should be called ideological from what should not?

An ideology is a worldview. Not all worldviews are ideological, but all ideologies are worldviews. The word can be used in a pejorative sense. An ideology becomes a problem when it becomes an echo chamber, a cocoon of confirmation bias that fosters a "false consciousness." When we *accuse* a worldview of being ideological, that is what we have in mind.

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Genealogy of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 55.

In this volume of *Social Philosophy & Policy*, some—but only some—authors equate ideology with this just-mentioned "echo chamber" problem. While this introduction aims to speak for all of them, only some will regard the effort as a success.

This is how the term 'ideology' often is used, but how the term is used is one thing; how it is defined is another. In their lead essay, Allen Buchanan and Elizabeth Levinson reflect on disagreement about defining the term. Is the term's definition itself controversial? Is the very definition of 'ideology' itself ideologically loaded? It must depend on details of the definition (or on something along those lines) lest the accusation be altogether vacuous.

Virgil Henry Storr, Michael Romero, and Nona Martin Storr likewise canvas ways in which the term has been used, referring to a group's culture, to its shared beliefs, and to "groupthink" ideas. If the ideas are patently distorted, that is an asset in a way, because it serves as a way of identifying who is willing to go that far to remain members in good standing; they believe what team members believe because that's what team members believe. And they are willing to demand satisfaction, even violently, if it comes to that.

Molly McGrath considers it ideological (in a bad sense) to treat ideology as if being ideological (in a bad sense) were inevitable. She rejects the idea that a worldview is inherently a perspectival bias, with everyone having dirty hands and every worldview being equally dubious. Such a sweeping claim lets those who truly are biased off the hook. Saying that we are all ideologues is a zealot's way of saying that no one has any standing to question them. Accusing zealots of having biased ideas is the same as accusing them of simply having ... ideas. If all ideas are ideologically loaded, then the phrase "biased idea" is redundant.

To be sure, there is an obvious grain of truth in the ideas that

(a) we all have our own point of view and
(b) what we see depends on the perspective from which we are seeing it.

However, it does not follow that we have a duty or a right to let bigots off the hook. Resolving, no matter what, to see what others are saying as ideological is—McGrath warns us—itself paradigmatically ideological. It is a way of protecting oneself from opportunities to learn, specifically, protecting oneself from learning that one feels threatened by opportunities to learn and embarrassed by voices that seem above the fray. (My focus on ideology as compromising objectivity does not spotlight, but neither is it meant to ignore, ideology as calculated promotion of false consciousness in service of a political agenda.) We can ask what it would be like to achieve a *measure* of objectivity, acknowledging that bias as we observe it comes in degrees and that some worldviews are more fact-responsive than others.

To people whose bias is extreme, the assumption that to express an opinion is to express a bias is more comforting than it should be. The fact that we are all prone to self-deception is no excuse for ignoring that some of us indulge in self-deception more than others. On any concrete, substantive conception of ideology, *trying* to rise above ideology is observably something we can do more or less

honestly and more or less successfully. Total success may be an unattainable ideal, but that we are only human should not blind us to the value and honor in the trying. People can rise to the occasion. People sometimes see that someone with whom they disagree has seen something they were missing. Having seen that, people can and sometimes do embrace a responsibility to adjust their view in the direction of being less biased.

Ideology as a team sport

Suppose I think I see a pattern. Then, feeling superior for having observed a pattern, it becomes important to me to see that pattern. That tempts me to start seeing everything as fitting that pattern. If people cling to a belief in the teeth of contrary evidence (or a bit more innocuously, in the teeth of a dearth of supporting evidence), it often turns out that embracing that belief gave them a sense of community, purpose, or refuge from an otherwise humiliating or terrifying reality. That is not itself an article of faith. It's a digest of experience. It's seeing a pattern. It is not an ideology to say "patterns are real" so long as we keep in mind as a matter of observation that patterns sometimes are just patterns. Observing a pattern is not an ideology until I start *needing*, until I feel threatened by the idea that not everything fits the pattern. Correlations are evidence, not proof, of causation. The world never promises that everything will continue to fit the pattern of what we have seen so far. Understanding how much to read into a pattern takes a measure of wisdom gleaned from experience.

In a way, therein lies the value of having a theory and of having learned what to expect. When we know what to expect, that can tell us what to regard as a surprise, and that can be excellent. If I think I have seen this before, I will embrace that thought as the fallible but possibly useful construct that it is. The world has a way of being predictable, but it also has a way of surprising us—if we are paying attention. I can resolve never to fool myself into thinking I have learned enough that I no longer need to be alert.

Knowing from experience what to expect is not an ideology. However, we should know that what we have reason to expect is not guaranteed to be what actually happens, and that failing to accept this truism is crossing a line into ideology that we should not cross. Once I *resolve* to see everything as fitting a particular pattern and my resolve becomes what gives me a sense of identity, I have crossed a line.

Is there any upside to being an ideologue? Is there any upside to embracing an ideology? There might be. Observing my own thought process, I find myself thinking that there must be a benefit or else it would not happen. What does that say about me? Am I yearning to see that as a pattern? Does my thinking reveal itself to be ideological to that extent? But then perhaps there is an upside to being ideological to that extent, at least in some contexts. Namely, to embrace a *framework* could amount to embracing a kind of alertness. It could be a way of learning to be alert to what might underlie a world of appearances. If I say, "I don't care what I actually see. No matter what I see, there must be a benefit to

ideological thinking or it wouldn't occur," then my own thinking is crossing a line that should not be crossed. Crossing that line is not helping me learn so much as protecting me from acknowledging that I have a lot to learn. By contrast, if my ideology primes me to decline to take for granted what the people around me are taking for granted, then I might see things that they are not seeing, and what I am seeing might, after all, be useful.

To be ideological (in a bad sense) can involve learning to treat ideas as a team sport. We can wear ideas like uniforms, so that our ideology becomes our identity. As Jonathan Bendor notes, we can grow up being taught to treat some ideas as a home team that we must root for (as the price of joining the crowd) regardless of merit, while learning to treat seemingly opposed ideas as visiting teams to be booed. Whether the opposed ideas are good is beside the point. *Indeed, the more superior the opposing ideas are, the more threatening they are, and the more we hate them.* Of course, ideologues cannot perceive their own ideology in these terms. That would be disloyal. Rather, they conceive *other* ideologies in these terms and treat their own ideology as truth even as it becomes their identity.

Bendor notes that there is a sense in which ideologies are like maps. They are stories we tell about a terrain that inevitably leave out the details and end up being much simpler than the terrain itself.[2] Success in avoiding being ideological in a bad way is not a matter of avoiding having ideas and beliefs; neither is it a matter of avoiding mapping information simply enough for the mapping to be useful. Success is more along the lines of not letting what one believes become one's identity. Success in avoiding being ideological involves learning to be wary of *winning.* It involves learning to beware of representing clashes of ideas in (what Bendor calls) friend-foe terms, as *battles* where the way to win is to make an enemy lose.

Suppose I go on to insist that my interpretation is *the* interpretation that cannot be reasonably rejected. No matter what the precise nature of future observations, I will interpret them as fitting the pattern and will admire my cleverness in being able to interpret everything that way. More aggressively, when other people do not see it my way, because they are wedded to seeing *their* pattern, I insist that they are victims of false consciousness at best or liars at worst. In effect, as a die-hard ideologue, I boo the "other" simply because the other is the visiting team. I do not treat the other as a source of information from which I might learn. I do not say, "May the best team win."

Ed Hall, channeling Judith Shklar, supposes that a belief is ideological when held for reasons other than how well it tracks observation. Specifically, a belief is part of an ideology when held as a condition of tribal membership or when it is part of our sense of identity, that is, held as a matter of faith and with a nagging sense that honestly examining our grounds for belief might be shattering, for it might disrupt a wider, identity-defining belief system.

[2] Bendor characterizes ideology as simplified representation. I characterize theory in similar terms in David Schmidtz, *Elements of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Part 1, and again in David Schmidtz, *Living Together* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 84.

In summary, being an observer of human nature is not ideology, but when a speaker says, "As a liberal, I have to say … ," that is ideology. Contrast this with what is happening when a critic responds to a speaker by saying, "That sounds liberal," but the speaker replies, "I'm trying to report on what I've seen. If you think you are seeing something I missed, fill me in." In this case, liberalism is the critic's, not the original speaker's, ideological framework. It is the *critic* who is trying to make what she just heard fit into her little boxes.

Even here, though, the critic need not have hostile intent. The critic may be casting about for an interpretive framework, a pigeonhole that will make it easier to process (even while distorting) what people are saying. As with any interpretive framework, something can be gained and something can be lost. Something has of course been lost when a critic says, "I see! You resemble Karl Marx! That is a relief because it licenses me to jump to conclusions rather than listen hard. You see, I once spotted a fallacy in Marx, so if I can peg you as a Marxist, that entitles me to see you as the kind of person who commits that fallacy."

Marketplaces of ideas

When the word 'ideological' is being tossed around, the conversation can feel zero-sum at best. Still, we can at least aspire to treat such conversations as situations to which we might usefully contribute. We want credit for having brought something of value to a marketplace of ideas. Like any other marketplace, the point of bringing something of value is to find a customer who is better off for buying it. Customers are not enemies. The point is not to defeat them in battle, but to engage them in exchange and, ultimately, to have their company on a voyage of discovery. If that is liberal ideology, then surely that goes to show that there can be ideology in a good sense.

A willingness to persecute sometimes seems ubiquitous, even if most people most of the time have no intention of persecuting anyone else and, indeed, have as one of their aims to live and let live. More common than the will to persecute—albeit seldom mentioned—is the abject terror of being persecuted. No one wants to be tortured or imprisoned for their beliefs. While few readers of this journal live in places where there is any real prospect of being tortured or imprisoned, many readers unfortunately *act as if* they live in such places. They are terrified by the prospect of a delayed promotion or even an upraised eyebrow, to a point where their terror occasions a cognitive dissonance that leaves them wanting to interpret their terror as something other than embarrassingly irrational. People talk about what they need to do to protect family or career and latch onto that as an excuse to avoid saying anything that could not have been said by a parrot. Aaron James reflects on ideational structure, noting how the story of the "emperor's new clothes" has worked its way into our popular consciousness as a metaphor for the cowardice that can underlie the phenomenon of going along with what appears to be a consensus for no better reason than that everyone else is acting as if they are on board with it.

Science and speaking truth to power

We live with twin legacies of Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon. Somehow, our history may have overlooked the radical inconsistency of these legacies. Bacon's ideal is an idea of science pretty much as we were raised to understand it today. That is:

(1) A scientific method begins with observation. It aspires to produce evidence, not proof.
(2) It aims for understanding by generating hypotheses that, if true, would explain observation.
(3) However, it acknowledges that evidence is not proof. For example, as David Hume understood, we are wired to treat correlation as *evidence* of causation, and rightly so. But it would be dangerously fallacious (and unscientific) to treat it as *proof* of causation.
(4) It treats conclusions suggested by evidence as provisional and subject to further evidence. It speculates about what sort of experiments would put a hypothesis to the test and helps us see when we need a hypothesis that better fits emerging evidence.

In Descartes's mind, by contrast, the paradigmatically foundational science was geometry, leading him to seek to identify indubitable axioms from which necessary truths could be deduced.

Baconian science is a way of trying to cleanse one's reasoning of ideological bias. One way in which ideological bias tries to ward off scrutiny is to dismiss the scientific method as itself just another ideology. But 'ideology' is a meaningful term only insofar as there is something with which ideology can be contrasted. Arguably, the most time-honored way of using the term is meaningful; that is, ideological reasoning, by contrast with scientific reasoning, is reasoning that works to insulate itself from testability. An ideology represents itself as *proof* and rails against anything, including science, that casts doubt on its proof.

How would you (on your best day, believing in the power of science to further progress) test whether your own work is ideological as opposed to being an open scientific inquiry? When you read about the ubiquity of confirmation bias, do you say, "Yes! That's what I was looking for!" or do you wryly say to yourself, "Of course it makes me happy to believe that people with whom I disagree are in the grip of confirmation bias. It makes comforting sense of the world I experience. But what would it be like to rise above confirmation bias? What would it be like for me to *observe* myself rising above it, even if only for a day?"

Some of our authors contrast ideology with a more scientific attitude. Part of what distinguishes an attitude as scientific is its essential humility. A scientific attitude is a skeptic's awareness that we could be wrong about almost anything. If a scientific attitude is not optimistic about getting to a land of certainty, though, it *is* optimistic about getting to a land of evidence and information, warranted *belief* if not warranted *certainty*.

You could have overwhelming evidence that an unsigned painting must have come out of the studio of Jackson Pollock: evidence stemming from forensic

examination of the paint or the canvas or perhaps a fingerprint or a hair found in one of the painting's layers. Then you might ask who is known to have been in Pollock's studio at the relevant time. Then a scientist might suppose that while the painter conceivably *could* have been anyone, the only plausible candidate is Pollock himself. After painstaking analysis, collectors guess that Pollock created the painting, then discarded it or gave it away. Subsequently, someone either picked it out of the trash or received it as a gift. After this analysis and reconstruction of the painting's provenance, in the case as it actually happened, a collector felt secure enough, given the evidence, to bid ten million dollars for the painting. The figure was in the ballpark, although at the low end, of successful bids for authenticated Pollock works. Ultimately, the possessor to whom the offer was made likewise felt secure enough about the forensic evidence to reject the bid.[3]

Matt Sleat discusses realist ideology critique, whether it is a remedy for false consciousness, and when it can plausibly claim to be nonmoralized. More generally, what is the attraction of claiming that one's analysis is value-free? Adrian Blau thinks that this move was much more common during the "naïve logical positivism of the 1930s" and that treating science as aspiring to be value-free today is more caricature than reality. That seems plausible, but if Blau is right, the development he observes raises questions. What enabled scientists—those who fancied themselves as philosophers of science—to get past that caricature? With what effect?

Serving the interests of the powerful is a further idea, one that itself has an ideological flavor. Believing in the efficacy of vaccines or in the long-term wealth effects of compound interest could serve the interests of the powerful without suggesting any reason to regard such beliefs as ideological. If it turned out that the powerful wanted the rest of us to believe in the efficacy of vaccines, that likewise would be neither necessary nor sufficient to make such beliefs ideological. Rather, what seems necessary and sufficient is that there be a kind of disconnection or a kind of insulation between (1) what one's reasons for belief would be if one had no vested interest in believing one thing rather than another and (2) the fact that one's existing corpus of belief makes it more comfortable to believe one thing rather than another.

Ideologues talk about ideology. They feel that their ideas are not getting as much traction as they deserve. Should I infer that my would-be converts already have ideas of their own and that their own ideas are at least as good? Should I infer that my would-be converts are in the grip of a false consciousness? Should I invent the vocabulary of 'ideology' as a device for canceling rivals? It is rare for anyone to see or try to explain their own ideas that way.

Colin Bird documents ideologies of oppression, capturing a time-honored use of ideological worldviews as "opiates" that reconcile subjugated classes to their condition, blinding them to the injustice of rigid class structure. Responding to Sleat, Bird also reflects on the sense in which political realism's way of putting

[3] Patricia Cohen, "A Real Pollock? On This, Art and Science Collide," *New York Times*, November 24, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/25/arts/design/a-real-pollock-on-this-art-and-science-collide.html.

politics first can become not an alternative to ideology so much as a particular form of it. (Is Sleat's critique of "realist ideology critique" self-consciously motivated by a similar concern?) Yet, Bird avoids leaving himself open to a criticism such as McGrath's. He avoids characterizing ideology in a way that obscures distinctions that matter. His reflection is a worry, not a broadside.

Bird also picks up on a theme common in the realist literature. Many realists aspire to rise above ideology, but Bird has a friendly warning for them, namely, however revealing it can seem to characterize politics as contestation, there is a potentially dangerous ideological blinder involved in seeing politics as *essentially* contestation. Bird has a point that we all do well to heed. At least casually, I have endorsed the more-or-less Machiavellian view that Bird warns us against, despite the fact that my favorite example of "realism in practice" belies the view. My favorite example of realism is President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O'Neill meeting frequently to articulate their disagreements face to face and identify opportunities to compromise for the good of the country. They had rival visions, yet they trusted each other to put country before party. They would vent, then get down to the business of figuring out what each could concede without betraying his own fundamental vision. Importantly, each of them *positively wanted* to make whatever concessions had to be made so that the other could live with the result. They hammered out political compromises that were not *moral* compromises but instead were serving a moral ideal of peaceful coexistence that a realist of either party could live with. Crucially, each could embrace as an achievement and an honor that their agreement would be stable insofar as the other party could live with it, too. Those who see politics as essentially about winning or losing a zero-sum game end up missing what makes politics at its best a life-affirming alternative to war.

Brian Kogelmann critically evaluates the idea that the oppressed embrace a dominant class's ideology because they are not exposed to alternatives. To Kogelmann, it is not so much that the oppressed are failing to connect the dots as that they have never seen the dots and are not aware of dots being there to be connected. As Kogelmann notes, Raymond Geuss observes that the point of ideology critique is to free agents from a kind of coercion that is partly self-imposed.

People embrace a religion because they are raised to avoid exposure to alternatives or they are raised to be afraid that they will be bad people if they do not believe what good people seem to believe. Kogelmann suggests a straightforward analysis of an incentive for people to embrace dominant ideologies, namely, they go along with whatever everyone else is saying about the emperor's new clothes because it is straightforwardly good to avoid bucking the tide, thereby minimizing the risk of being canceled. Brian Leiter likewise patiently excavates the sense in which ideological forms of consciousness can be analyzed as a particular kind of false consciousness in which falsity is skewed in service of a dominant class's interests. To my thought above that observing a pattern is not an ideology until I start *needing*, we might add that a kind of ideology against which Leiter warns us can also be found in needing to avoid seeing a pattern that plainly is there yet is contrary to what our ideology tells us to see. Some people want to see patterns there to be seen in income inequality, regardless of what

their ideology is telling them to see. We might say the same about changes in life expectancy since Karl Marx's time. Those whose ideology tells them to see progress only for a dominant class will be aggressively uninterested in seeing patterns of widespread progress. Some Marxists look at morality and see what is there to be literally seen, but see it in anthropological terms. Marx himself found it problematic to consistently see it this way, though, as Leiter thoughtfully explains.

Conservatism and liberalism as benign ideology

Most readers would suppose that this disconnection or insulation is what we call ideology, but of course, the term has more than one history, more than one time-honored use. Not all uses of the term are meant to be pejorative. A framework for interpreting the human condition can lack some of these features while still being described by some authors as ideology. Not all authors treat the "othering" aspects and "team sport" aspects of ideology as essential to the basic concept. In particular, some authors treat conservatism and liberalism as classic examples of ideology without intending to be speaking pejoratively when they label a worldview "conservative" or "liberal." This is not to deny that those terms frequently are used with pejorative intent. The point is merely that they are not necessarily used with pejorative intent.

Allen Buchanan, in a second contribution to this volume, uses that as a point of departure for reflecting on ideologies designed for the express purpose of liberating the oppressed, perhaps by making particular responses to oppression salient in a game-theoretic sense or, in any case, giving people the courage to revolt (as per Storr, Romero, and Storr). Kit Wellman ponders ideologies of hate and offers a dispassionate appraisal of hate-crime legislation as a response.

The term 'ideology' was coined around the time of the French Revolution by Antoine Destutt de Tracy (as noted by Buchanan and Levinson; McGrath; and Storr, Romero, and Storr). Adam Smith witnessed liberal and conservative ideologies rising as twin reactions to monarchy's twilight. To Smith and Edmund Burke, it was plain that democracy might be better than monarchy, but mob rule might be worse. Simplifying, with a bow to Shklar's reflections on a "liberalism of fear," we can see liberalism and conservatism ascending in the late 1700s as complementary responses to a "populism of fear" wherein tyrants weaponize fear of the "other" to muster support for dictatorial power. Against a populist yearning for authoritarian governance, conservatism was a word to the wise about respecting traditions that often endure for a reason, while liberalism was a vision of free choice in a society without hereditary class. At the time, someone speaking of liberty, equality, and fraternity would not have been heard as speaking about a trade-off. Seeing liberty versus equality as a trade-off is a twentieth-century idea. In the nineteenth century, if you saw women fighting for a right to have bank accounts, patents, or property deeds in their own name and wondered whether they were fighting for liberty or equality, they might have been baffled by the implication that there is a trade-off. For them, equality was about *status*, not *slices.* Fighting for equal status was fighting for freedom.

Likewise, in the eighteenth century, declaring, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ..." prefaced a pledge of life, fortune, and sacred honor to a fight *for* freedom, not against it. It was only around the turn of the twentieth century that the two words became rallying cries for (arguably misguided) variations on themes of liberal and conservative ideology that self-consciously defined themselves in antagonistic terms.

Diversity as ideology

Was Martin Luther King's "Dream" an ideology? Presumably not. It was an appeal to our common humanity, an invitation to us all to understand each other. It was not in any obvious way a framework for "othering" or an exhortation to see a class of people as the enemy. Somehow, there is no equivalence; as per Wellman's reflections on ideologies of hate, standing for racism is ideological in a way that standing *against* racism need not be.

I say "need not be" advisedly. Enzo Rossi's discussion of "epistemic ideology critique" warns against taking at face value reasons to endorse a hierarchical power structure when such reasons emerge from that same structure. For example, Rossi notes, however much truth there is in "father knows best," it will not sound right when we hear it being said by a father. The concern, Rossi notes, may not be about fairness so much as epistemic justification. That is, it would be reckless to assume that when people serve as judges in their own affairs, the rest of us will see their verdicts as unbiased.

London's Wellcome Collection recently shuttered a fifteen-year-old exhibit called "Medicine Man" displaying Sir Henry Wellcome's collection of medical artifacts. The museum released a public statement saying that by focusing on the collector rather than on where the collected objects came from, the museum had excluded female, nonwhite, indigenous, and disabled perspectives. So, if the collector is a white male, does that license us to conclude that the exhibit is racist? If not, what else would we need?[4] If we wondered whether the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1974) was sexist, what sort of person would respond to the question by checking whether the judges were men?

Paradigmatically, denigrating someone's race is racist. However, it is not racist to observe (1) that some people have been privileged with outsized opportunities to achieve. Neither is it racist to observe (2) that some people have in fact achieved a lot with such opportunities as they had. On its face, the bare fact of celebrating achievement is neither racist nor sexist. Presumably, it *would* be racist to ask about an achiever's skin color before deciding whether an achievement should be celebrated or denigrated. Did the Wellcome Collection do that? Did its critics?

Should we celebrate what people achieve despite having had to swim against a tide of racism or sexism? Of course. Should we denounce excellence when excellence is achieved *without* having to swim against a tide?

[4] On ways of understanding what it means to discriminate, see John Hasnas, "The Terrible Irony of Teaching Business Ethics," *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy* (forthcoming).

I suppose it is only human to imagine that the struggle around which one's own existence revolves is *the* struggle, and only people who had to endure *that* could ever know what it feels like to struggle. More generally, though, it seems like a paradigm of self-absorbed childishness to assume that the "other" never had to struggle.[5] Some people have easier lives than others, but no one looks back on their life as anything but a struggle, and we would have to be in the grip of an ideology to fail to see that everyone has some reason to see their past as they predictably do.

As I write this, the terms of engagement within the academy seem to be shifting again under pressure from outside political forces. A few years ago, what *New York Times* calls the 1619 project[6] began calling slavery *the* founding American ideal. Many universities inaugurated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. Some DEI offices combat marginalization, but others aim more to democratize it by making sure everyone knows how being marginalized feels—and feels scarred by it. Many schools now require applicants for faculty positions to submit statements describing their commitment to promoting diversity on campus. Numerous websites coach applicants on crafting a winning diversity statement, specifying in detail allegiances that a successful applicant will profess and making helpful suggestions about traumas (or guilt feelings about being privileged) that a successful applicant will report having suffered.[7] Ironically, DEI programs are now being de-platformed, but in an uncompromising defense of requiring diversity statements, Stacy Hawkins refers to fostering a more open and welcoming environment. She says, "measuring faculty commitment to that aim is not a political litmus test. It is a performance evaluation."[8]

Hawkins presumably is perfectly aware that *performance evaluations* formally set out grounds for termination in the event of unsatisfactory performance. She thus calls for campuses to become less open, not more open, to diverse perspectives. Hawkins is not open and welcoming even to those such as Randall Kennedy (whose liberalism Hawkins disparages) who refuse to conflate welcoming diversity with creating offices that consolidate the power to oppress.

By contrast, Truth and Reconciliation commissions as they arose in Chile and South Africa were aptly named, implicitly reflecting a profound insight: truth

[5] On October 7, 2023, an attack on Israel by Hamas killed around 1,200 Israelis. Spontaneous celebrations broke out on many campuses, with students burning the flag of Israel and chanting "from the river to the sea." Several pundits speculated that hating Israel is a symbolic way of hating white male oppression. Perhaps, but that makes limited sense. Another partial explanation of the student backlash against Israel is that it is infuriating to acknowledge what Jews have endured because it entails that one's own struggle is not *the* struggle.

[6] "The 1619 Project," *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.

[7] Searching for "diversity statement" yields numerous examples. From what I have seen, none counsels applicants to express openness to diverse views about the 1619 project.

[8] Stacy Hawkins, "DEI Statements Are Not About Ideology. They're About Accountability," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 19, 2024, https://www.chronicle.com/article/dei-statements-are-not-about-ideology-theyre-about-accountability?utm_source=Iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=campaign_9632831_nl_Academe-Today_date_20240422&cid=at.

comes first.[9] When I first visited South Africa in 1999, Nelson Mandela's message to Black South Africans was that we can have prosperity or we can have revenge, but we need to choose because we can't have both. The relevance of Mandela's insight was not specific to the legacy of apartheid. His was a general insight into the human condition. Some DEI offices choose prosperity. Some choose revenge. Which should be shut down? Which would do well to heed Nelson Mandela?

It is not ideological to observe that people have ways of protecting their sense of identity that are not healthy, not peaceful, not conducive to rudimentary alertness, and not conducive to such progress as is within reach. It is not (or not obviously) ideological to observe that constructing pictures of our world is bound to be like taking photographs of moving traffic. If we understand what we are doing, the picture will help. But if we *need* to interpret the cars in the photo (and seeing some cars stopped by red lights) as frozen class structure rather than as a picture of something essentially fluid, it is our need (our anger), not the photo per se, that drives us to believe a falsehood.

Even simply reporting what one has observed—that is, *choosing* to report one thing rather than another—is risky. The illusion of having a license to jump to conclusions and denounce the "other" is the true cost and the false comfort of embracing an ideology.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

[9] Leslie Harris, "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me," *Politico*, March 6, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248.

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