THE STUDY OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY



Kristian Riis-Søndergaard, BA in the History of Ideas and Social Science

Fredericia, 13/05/2022

Words: 2564

Index

Author's note on ideological classification … 3

Against neutrality – Normative versus empiricist approach … 4

Metapolitics: a new idealism? Positivist versus constructivist methodology … 5

Idealism in political theory … 6

Political ideology … 7

Philosophical schools: Idealism versus realism … 8

Ontological foundations and epistemological leaning … 9

Epistemic front … 9

For a new phenomenological reading … 10

Abstract

We now present an introduction to the study of political ideology, with an emphasis on methodological approach and the debate between idealism and realism, positivism and constructivism. The paper illustrates how to classify the 4 main ideologies of modernity: liberalism, conservatism, national socialism and communism via two diagrams, the one representing the classical ideological spectrum and the other representing the competing philosophical schools of ontology and epistemology.

The diagrams will help classification, while rendering epistemic conflict visible according to the threefold level of analysis in the *stratagem* of metapolitics, where we note the epistemic front – ongoing epistemic strife and controversy.

We propose a normative, idealist, semi-constructivist reading of political ideology, existentiale and world politics.

Author's note on ideological classification

All ideological classifications and references in this essay are presented purely for the purpose of theoretical and academic analysis. They are not intended as endorsements or rejections of any historical political regimes, actions, or policies. This work concerns the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological study of political ideologies as intellectual structures — not their historical or political implementations.

Against neutrality – Normative versus empiricist approach

In a recent article Jeffrey Friedman proposes that moral philosophy only should have a minimal influence on political epistemology and that political epistemology should stay as an empirical science (Friedman, 2021b).

Similarly, we can read from the homepage of the Centre for the Study of Political Ideologies at University of Nottingham, led by Michael Freeden, who also started the Journal of Political Ideologies back in 1996, that ideology is ”mundane” and that ”the relationship of any ideology to either truth, or subtlety of understanding, should be an empirical rather than de facto matter[1].”

Against this view of political epistemology and, as we shall explain, the study of political ideology, we propose that the political science study, in the field of political theory and ideology, must be affected, and should be, by the normative ideals of the scientists involved.

We define politics as having to do with the unveiling of truth of being (Heidegger, 1927). This is an existential, phenomenological and hermeneutic view of life that first off seeks to bring the question of being to the forefront. Politics are therefore far from mundane, but having to do with the human existentiale and the possibility for transcendence of the political body. This existentiale of the political body is translated into ideology in regards to concepts such as sovereignty, freedom and righteousness – will and progress. This phenomenology of spirit (Hegel, 1807) and existentiale of man is the root cause of ideology and via ideology man seeks to explicate the truth of being and the transcendental potential of the political body.

To this end we enlist political science. Political science should not be a neutral by-stander in politics – can't be and isn't, by the way. The future states of the 21. st. ct. and beyond are led by philosopher-poets of the art of governing, who combine political philosophy, political science, politics and poetry to lead mankind forward towards ever greater futures.

The effect this has on political science is that normative values should be debated across theories, theoretical dialogue among different schools of philosophy of science and epistemic communities of methodology – an exchange of ideas. The perspective is an idealism or ideationalism[2], that is simultaneously related to the unveiling of the truth of being, an expression of the political body according to existentiale and transcendental potential. This is the task of the philosopher-poet.

Therefore the study of political ideology becomes ideological critique.

Political philosophy has a duty to theorize and conceptualize, from a phenomenological and hermeneutic perspective, the truth of being of the political body and its transcendental potential.

The task of a political science is to explicate this truth of the political body, rather than sit back as cold empiricist observers, uninterested and therefore without qualifications to participate in politics.

---

1 https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cspi/research/theories-ideology/index.aspx

2 Here we find accord with Friedman, who argues that the study of ideas, the ideational stream of studies should be prioritized contrasted the epistemic studies of knowledge among political actors (Friedman, 2021a). It is our argument that the normative evaluation of political theories is a subject of political philosophy and should be carried out at the macro-level of study.

Metapolitics: a new idealism? Positivist versus constructivist methodology

Methodology we define as a philosophy of science – an epistemology that guides your science and choice of methods to apply in your study. It is where we decide the relationship of our theory and our methods.

The methodology informs of the *weltanschauung* of the philosopher-scientist and gives an idea of what we can expect to find in our studies – it grants epistemic visibility. What we propose is new idealism[3].

The positivist, empiricist methodology has been criticized for being reductionist[4]. Comte describes the social evolution of mankind as one away from religion and metaphysics towards 'positivism' (Comte, 1842), but where does that leave mankind in regards to existential hope and transcendental potential?

The times are ripe for renewed metaphysical thinking. We have to describe the existentiale and the transcendental potential of politics.

The constructivist methodology is useful in regards to power-studies an in its appreciation of the historicity of man. Useful methods such as discourse analysis are related to the theory of deconstruction.

What we do propose is an increased focus on phenomenology, the existentiale and hermeneutics combined with critical discourse analysis inspired by constructivism, a post-structuralist methodology.

When we study political ideology, we study different levels of engagement with ideology. Macro-, meso- and microlevel. The discourse of philosophers and political theorists is our prime focus. Next is the philosophical an political milieu, the epistemic communities that is informed by the higher level conceptualization. Now the task is to combine this ideational approach with power studies and discourse analysis to frame the overall episteme of a given ideological conflict – a given scenario.

To combine the ideational approach with constructivist power-studies, we have developed a strategy of analysis, where we operate with a description of the scenario of study as *the stratagem*.

As we have explained (Riis-Søndergaard, 2022), the strategy of analysis of metapolitics involves studying three levels of the reality of the political. 1) the discourse, 2) the epistemic front, 3) the confrontation. All three levels are important as engaged philosopher-politicians.

This methodology, we propose, will be authentic according to the political community, while giving epistemic visibility to the battle of ideas, theoretical and conceptual conflict and methodological controversy.

It is idealism, for we debate the ideational plane from a normative, authentic standpoint and we are engaged with the phenomenology of spirit – the unveiling of the truth of being.

It is critical, since we perform ideological critique based on normative values and the study of power relations.

---

3 The debate is often framed as one between idealism, positivism (empiricism) and constructivism.

4 It would be nice to liberate the term 'positivism' from its empiricist chains, to more generally imply 'certain truth'. That way we could rehabilitate phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutics in regards to claim on truth as a positive.

Idealism in political theory

Nowadays, in political science, idealism is almost exclusively reserved for liberalism, whereas we hardly find any mention of an idealism of the right. Political philosophy seems to have almost forgotten German idealism. What we propose is an idealism of the right – metapolitics.

We claim it is a philosophy of the right, since we value concepts such as the nation, the volk and spirit.

What we do find is an epistemic front – a symptomatic conflict – metapolitics is on the rise.

A least in regular politics with the win of Donald Trump in the USA and the continuing challenge of Marine Le Pen in France.

We strive to formulate a new vision for political science and political epistemology informed by the theory and methodology of metapolitics.

To this end, we have to revive and rehabilitate German idealism, phenomenology of spirit, existentialism and hermeneutics as viable readings of politics.

Conservatives have kept much of the tradition intact in academia in Germany and in the North, though the failure of the Neo-conservatives under the Bush-clan led to a general unease with and among the right. This unease was to find its expression in the protest-election of 2016, where an outsider-conservative was elected as president.

Since then, there has been much debate, but what the election really signifies is the arrival of a metapolitics for the 21. ct. – a new idealism. The same holds true for France, Poland, Hungary and Russia and in the future for Germany, we predict.

It is the battle of ideas. Ideas are the current.

All this is is a revolt against the liberal hegemony of post Second World War.

The liberal fantasy of individual freedom has shown itself to be a hollow and empty void – there is no revelation. There is no grand story or red thread – there is no mystery, Well, the mystery of life remains, but liberalism fails to ask and thereby to answer the fundamental question of the truth of being – the phenomenology.

Instead liberalism has shown itself to be utilitarian, empiricist, behaviorist and reductionist, without higher purpose than the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of very few people (Vitali et al, 2011).

The so-called liberating potential of liberalism has shown itself to only benefit the few.

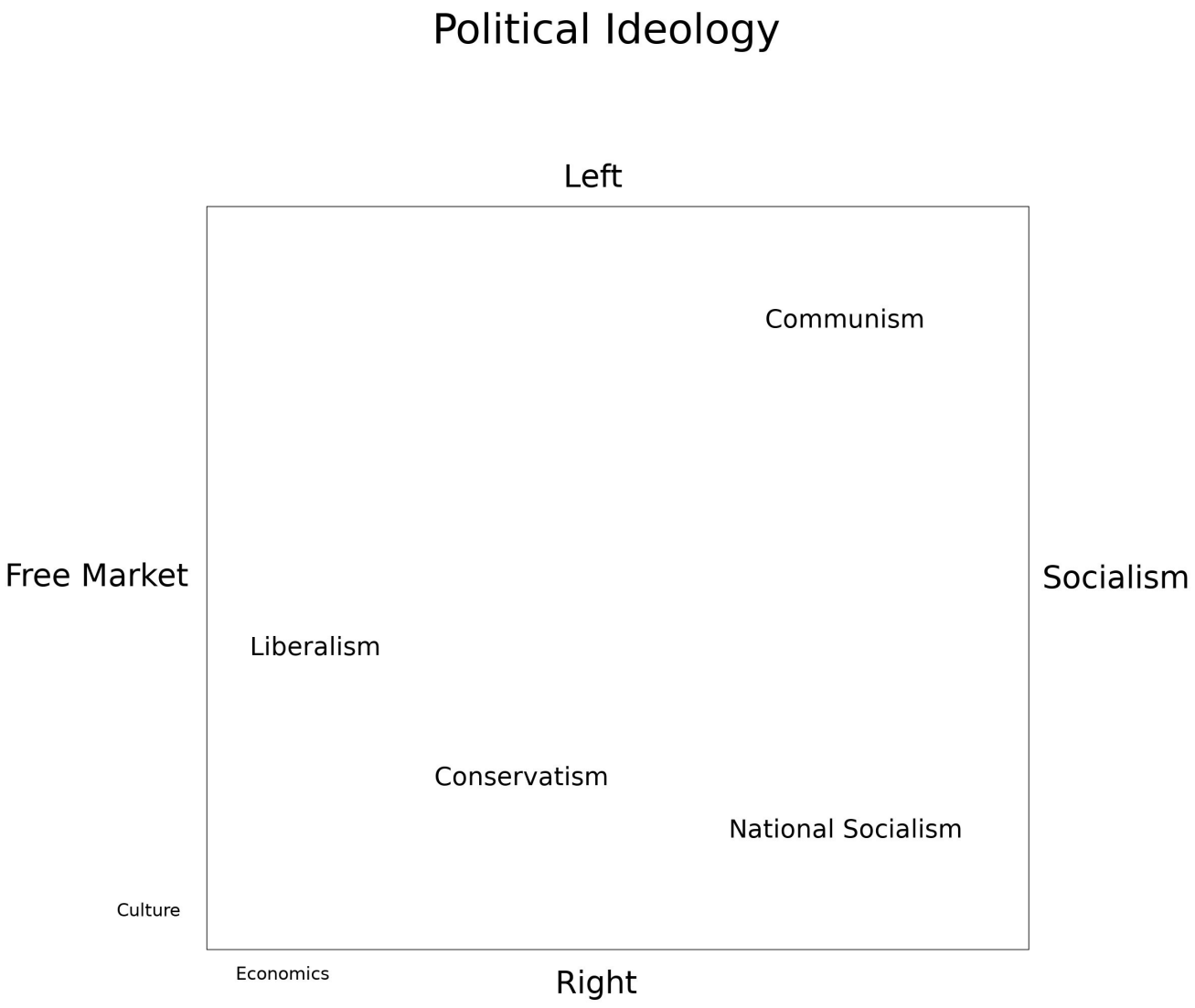
What we need is a new idealism, that can offer a vision for the 21. ct. nation-states on the continent and worldwide.

This is the task of metapolitics and to this end we enlist political epistemology and ideological critique, as two fundamental methodological considerations to metapolitics in political science.

Political ideology

We now present a diagram that plots the main 4 modern ideologies according to two axes of culture and economics.

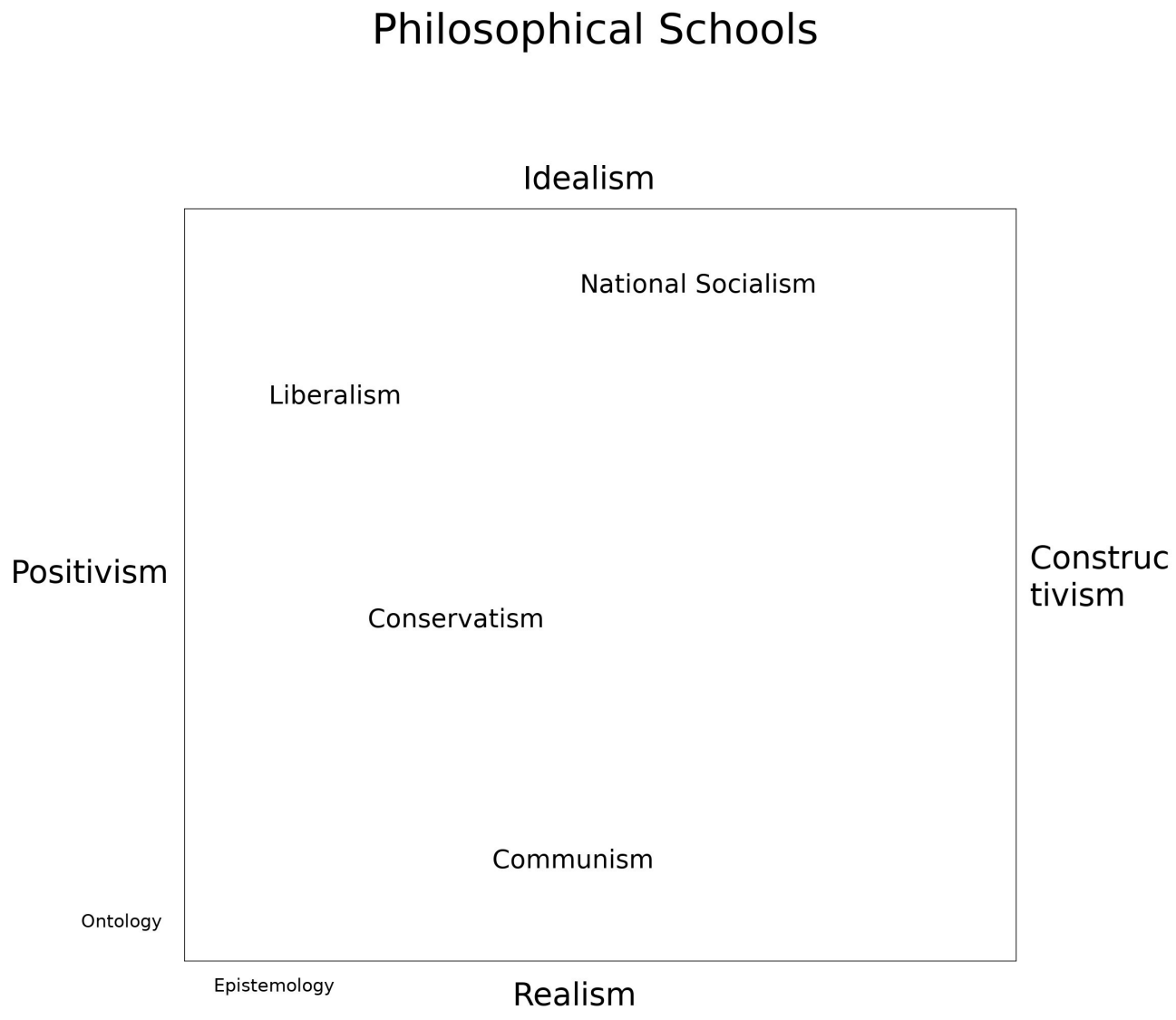
This is the classical way of plotting the ideologies.



As we can see, ideologies are rather right-wing. Furthermore, we could have anarchism represented as an uppermost left-wing ideology, free-market.

Philosophical schools: Idealism versus realism

We will here present a further development of the ideological classification. This classification is arranged to two axes of ontology and epistemology – the philosophical school of the ideology.



This diagram is experimental, as we try to extract the truth of each ideology via ideological critique.

We can see from the diagram that conservatism leans to the realist side on the ontological axis.

We can also see, that while none of the ideologies are outright constructivist in their epistemology, national socialism and communism have the most constructivist epistemologies.

Ontological foundations and epistemological leaning

From studying the two diagrams, we can learn a lot about the competing ideologies.

Ontological idealism has metaphysics and the transcendental as its starting point, whereas ontological realism abandons metaphysics for the advancement of an immanent worldview.

There is a debate in epistemology, whether positivism should describe only an empiricist epistemology or whether the term could be used to describe a general proposition for 'certain truth' or the believe in axiomatic, analytical or otherwise empirically verifiable truth (rationalist and empiricist). The opposite of positivism would then be a constructivism, that finds only power-relations as instances of truth.

It is in the sense of a general proposition of the nature of truth that we use the term in this article. Is truth to be found objectively, independent of the perspective of man, or does a constructivism in the pursuit of truth play in in our epistemologies? In that way positivism could be used of either an idealist, rationalist or romanticist school of philosophy, as well as a realist school of thought[5].

This definition of positivist versus constructivist is similar to the hard/soft-dichotomy on methodology of Gabriel Almond in *Separate Tables* (Almond, 1988). In this way we can describe the hard versus soft methodologies of Marxist hard capital logic versus post-modern, soft, social-constructivist critical theories.

The same holds true for right-wing ideologies in regards to epistemology, where liberalism is more positivist in an empiricist fashion, than German idealism with its value of man, spirit and the existentiale, which could then be described as more constructivist. Both are idealistic in their ontology of man.

At this second spectrum, anarchism could be said to lay at the most realist and constructivist end.

Epistemic front

These two diagrams will help in our understanding of political ideology.

The first level of analysis is the general discourse – the general outline of the *zeitgeist*. The classification of ideologies is improved by scanning the map for epistemic conflict on the second level of analysis, where we study the conflict of epistemic communities, power-studies, where ideas and praxis interact, again represented in the third level of analysis: the confrontation of real-politics.

A macro-, meso- and micro-level of study.

The confrontation is the event, where politics is enacted, the political event, But this is never separate from the level of the general discourse, the level of ideas or the mid-level of policy-making.

We must study all three levels of politics to grasp the full picture of political ideology in theory and praxis.

5 For now we will consider idealism as Kant (1781) more positivist than romanticism.

For a new phenomenological reading

We will propose a new phenomenological reading of political ideology inspired by Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger.

Politics has to do with the unveiling of the truth of being and the transcendental potential of the political body – it is a metapolitics.

Metapolitics is a poetic. The philosopher-poet-sovereign leads the volk in its spiritual awakening and progress towards a golden age. In that sense it is an aristocratic reading of politics, but it is also a unitary movement of the nation.

The interrelation of poetics, political philosophy, political science and politics is the genre of metapolitics.

It is a hermeneutics. We are engaged in interpreting and understanding ourselves and the world, existence and as such politics is existential.

The new phenomenological reading is as metapolitics moderated by constructivist elements in its readings of power-relations.

We integrate political science and political epistemology to accommodate for epistemic conflict and controversy, ideological strife – where ideas are contested.

In this way, we are able to more easily navigate the general discourse, the epistemic outline of the zeitgeist, while leading the epistemic front in regards to our normative ethical and political interests.

It is an idealist reading and it is normative. It is also semi-constructivist in the epistemology.

With these aspects in mind, and as engaged scientists, the study of political ideology and political epistemology becomes authentic and representative.

Bibliography

Almond, Gabriel A., “Separate Tables." PS. Vol. 21. No. 4., 1988

Comte, Auguste, *Cours de Philosophie Positive,* 1842

Friedman, Jeffrey, “Editorial”, *Political Epistemology,* No. 1, APSA, 2021a

Friedman, Jeffrey, “False Beliefs, the Myth of “Post-Truth,” and the Need for a Capacious Political Epistemology”, *Political Epistemology,* No. 1, APSA, 2021b

Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807

Heidegger, M., *Being and Time*, 1927

Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*; 1781

Riis-Søndergaard, Kristian, “Political Epistemology – For a Normative Political Science”, 2022

Vitali et al., “The Network of Global Corporate Control”, PLoS ONE 6(10), 2011