H-Diplo Article Commentaries

Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Volume 1, Issue 1 (Winter 1999): 90-109.

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Paul Schroeder is generous in his assessment of my article, but forcefully criticizes the concept of ideological agency advanced in the latter part of it. His attack is two-fold: first, he accumulates apparent counter-examples of the claims I make about the characteristic policies of ideological states. Second, he takes issue with the broader distinction I draw between ideology- and security-seeking behavior. Unfortunately, Schroeder seemingly misunderstands my argument and commits a series of category mistakes which invalidate almost all his objections.

Schroeder begins by disputing my definition of twentieth-century ideologies as universalistic commitments to the "reordering of the polities, economies, or racial composition of other states". This definition is part of a larger argument, mentioned on p. 101 (and on which I am completing a manuscript), about the varieties of international thought. Very briefly, in order to clarify the roles of ideas in world politics one must distinguish the various forms they take. Different kinds of ideational systems possess different properties and cause those who hold them to behave in characteristically different ways. Ideologies seek the domestic transformation of adversaries. Identities seek to gather in the members, and assert the interests, of a defined social (usually national or ethnic) group. Moralities prescribe general arrangements for the organization of international relations without reference to the interests of any specific member of the system. Since Schroeder conflates "ideology" with the much broader category of all ideas, it is easy for him to offer examples of beliefs that do not have the characteristics of an ideology according to the narrow definition used here.

This disposes of Schroeder's objection, "Are not many ideologies, including the various varieties of ethnic integral nationalism, particularistic rather than universal?" Nationalism is of course particularistic, but is labelled as an ideology only at the cost of conceptual unclarity. Benedict Anderson, drawing contrasts between nationalism on the one hand and both religion and ideology on the other, puts it well: "No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind. The most messianic nationalists do not dream of the day when all the members of the human race will join their nation"[1]. This particularism is an argument for treating nationalism as something other than an ideology, not an argument for blurring the distinctions between the two by lumping them in a single general category.

This also disposes of Schroeder's invocation of "normative discourse". There has, of course, been much of this, especially (as his examples show) prior to the present century with which my argument was primarily concerned. But again, these are better understood as moralities -arrangements for achieving inter-state order- than as ideologies direct at intra-state order. Hybrid forms have sometimes been proposed, in which a specific kind of political regime is proposed as the best guarantor of a system of international order, but the analytical distinction between them remains clear.

[1] Benedict Anderson, _Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism_ rev. ed. (London: Verso Press, 1991), p. 7. See also pp. 5, 12.

Schroeder asks whether "disputes between Catholics, Protestants, and politiques over the true world order make no difference in the 16th and 17th centuries". Yes, in my opinion they did. I see a profound affinity between the religious conflicts of that period and the ideological ones of our own century, as I suggested on p. 104, where I also mentioned Martin Wight, a scholar of great historical erudition who draws the parallel most compellingly in the work cited (fn. 24).

Schroeder then presents a number of examples to show either that beliefs in earlier ages have not always prompted states to intervene in the domestic affairs of others, or that states have sometimes done so without holding such beliefs. Some of these again concern religion and nationalism rather than ideology. But to address the larger argument: states (and other political actors) have of course frequently professed a belief that they have not fully implemented. But they will nonetheless behave differently than if they were not trying to do so at all. And security-seeking states have sometimes indeed interested themselves in the domestic affairs of others. But the fact that they do so only as an extension of their own security interests, rather than to honor a principle, holds implications for the limits of their efforts and the conditions under which it will be overridden -as Schroeder's own discussion of Britain suggests. In short, the observable behavior of states will tend to vary systematically according to the relative importance to them of ideology and security, even if the distinction can never in the real world be an absolute one.

Schroeder's use of examples here suggests a deeper misconception: that since ideology and security are in practice "inextricably intertwined and mixed up...no useful general rules for distinguishing between the two and deciding which is uppermost are possible". That they are so intertwined I readily acknowledge. (p. 107). My point is that it is not enough to say things are linked: in matters of any complexity, they always are. We can better understand the nature of the relations between them, and reach sounder judgements about their relative importance in particular cases, if we separate them out and examine the logic of their ideal-types. Only when we know what each factor on its own implies can we properly assess the trade-offs between them that Schroeder calls us to consider.

I am an admirer of Professor Schroeder's work and have enjoyed his puncturing of excessive theoretical pretensions elsewhere. But his method in this case -- of peppering large numbers of facts at new concepts -- has its own kind of futility. Historical interpretation requires concepts that abstract, clarify and delineate the forces that work together, the better to grasp their manifold forms of interaction. It would be more fruitful to improve on those I have offered than to reject the attempt altogether.