

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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Nigel Gould-Davies’s reply to my critique of his argument (H-DIPLO Sept. 28) was temperate, clear, and to the point; I shall try to keep mine the same, and also short, since the point at issue, how to distinguish ideology and its role in international politics from other “ideational systems” and their impact on it, seems to be one that only concerns him and me. I also promise that this will be my last contribution on this subject.

First, to remove some misunderstandings on his part: I never said or suggested that the existence of a long tradition of normative discourse on the nature of the international system (and the persistence and growth of that tradition throughout the twentieth century, incidentally) constituted an ideology or implied one. I was merely responding to his assertion that there was no such normative discourse, a point which he now seems to have abandoned. Nor did I say or suggest that nationalism per se constituted an ideology. However one understands and defines nationalism, it is plainly far too broad, diverse, contested, and internally contradictory a phenomenon for that. What I did say is that there have been and still are many nationalist ideologies, (and others) that are particularistic rather than universal, and that contrary to Gould-Davies’ insistence, they do not generally seek primarily to reorder their adversaries’ polities, economies, and racial composition, but to achieve goals common to everyday international competition--seize their rivals’ territories or expand their own, gain dominant control or influence, reorder the international system, etc.

The central issue is clearly one of the definition of “ideology.” Gould-Davies’ is admittedly narrow: “Ideologies seek the domestic transformation of adversaries.” This is admirably clear, and also, it seems to me, a good example of a circular, self-validating, and therefore irrefutable but otiose definition. How do we know ideologies have the particular characteristics he assigns them and no others? Because if ideas and belief systems do other things, they are not ideologies but something else--identities or moralities.

I prefer, and try to follow, a definition more standard for both normal and scholarly discourse, found in Webster’s Third: “The integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program.” Professor Gould-Davies is of course free to try to establish his narrower definition and to show that it makes better sense of history, especially in the twentieth century. I gravely doubt that he can succeed. Success would mean showing, for example, that Wolf-Dietrich Behschnitt’s exhaustive analysis of the roots and development of Serbian and Croatian nationalism, with their tremendous effects throughout the 20th century (*Nationalismus bei Serben und Kroaten, 1830-1914: Analyse und Typologie der nationalen Ideologie* [Munich, 1980]) all rests on a category error. Ditto with Alan Cassels’ book on ideology in international politics since the French Revolution, and a vast mass of other literature. Above all, it would make much of the international history of the whole modern era, including especially the 19th and 20th centuries, in my view simply inexplicable.

H-Diplo Article Commentary: Schroeder responds

I apologize for once again seeming to pepper Gould-Davies with facts, as he puts it. If he can accomplish this Copernican Revolution, more power to him.

Paul Schroeder

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