

# The Use of Ideologies Such as Mercantilism, Liberalism and Marxism in Explaining the Behaviour of State

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## Abstract

This paper seek and attempt to identify and explain the rudiments of the relationship if any that exist between ideologies and the behavior of state and its apparatuses. Though this study is not primarily an exposition of ideas or ideologies or even the substance or structure of the state itself, it attempts a critique of both variables and equally ex-rayed the nature and effect of the relationship as it affect the behavior of state. With a particular attention on how some of these ideologies such as Liberalisms, Mercantilisms and Marxism, developed and affect the behavior of state. The paper reviewed some of the existing but related studies, noting some of the salient features that guided the theoretical evidence that is provided on the link between these highlighted ideologies and some specific behavior of the modern state.

**Keywords:** Liberalism, Mercantilism, Marxism, Ideology, Behaviour of States

## 1.1 Introduction

This paper is preliminarily an analysis of the role of ideological in explaining the behavior of state and not necessarily the study of the nature of ideology, much confusion has arises from the fact that, though obviously related ideology and ideologies are two different things. To examine ideology is to look at a particular variant of political thought, different from, example, political science or political philosophy. To study political ideology is to analyze the nature, functions and the important of this strand of thought, and to reflect on issues such as which set of political ideas and argument should be classified as ideologies. On the other hand to study 'ideologies' is to be concerned with analyzing the content of political thought, paying a particular attention to the ideas, doctoring and things that have been advanced by and with the various ideological traditions, for instance, what can liberalism tell us about freedom? Why have socialists traditionally supported equality? How do anarchists defend the idea of a stateless society? etc,

In order to examine or study such "content" issues, it is however, important to consider the type of political thought we are dealing with.

Before discussing the characteristics ideas and the doctrines of the so-called ideologies, we need to reflect on the nature and substance of state from which the ideologies draw their strength after which we shall deal on the meaning of ideology and why these set of ideas have been classified as ideologies. More importantly what does the classification tell us' example; Marxism, Mercantilism and liberalism in relation to the state that propagate them, since they are categorized as national ideologies of a social-formation.

## 2.1 The State

The actual meaning of the concept of state has always been the subject of academic polemy, as dozens of different definition has been offered by scholars of different ideological orientation. It would not be wrong however, to say that over one hundred definitions of the concept of state has been offered and still the security of the definition has not yet been secured. Little wonder why Harold, J. Lasky in his Magnum opus stated thus:

*That no theory of state is ever intelligible save in the context of its times, what men think about the state are outcome, always of the experience in which they are immersed. The massacre of Saint Bartholomew produces Whiggism in the author of the vindicia, the puritan Rebellion sent Hobbes searching for the formular of social peace; the glorious revolution of 1688 enable Lock to affirm that the power of the crown is built upon the consent of its subjects. Rousseau, Hegel, T. H. Green all sought to give the mental climate of their times the rank of universal validity, and the more critical the epoch in which we live the more profound is the emphasizes upon universality, Men fights grimly for the status of ideologies lest the experience they seek to validate be denied by their opponents (Lasky 2004:1, first published 1925).*

The modern state has been defined as a territorial society divided into government and subjects claiming within its allotted physical area supremacy over all other existing institutions, it is in fact the final legal depository of the social will Lasky (2004). The above definition according to the author implies that the sovereign entity called the state set the framework or perspective of all other organizations within the territory and also brings within its power all forms of human activities the control of which it deem desirable and

appropriate to mankind. It is however the implied logic of this supremacy that whatever remain free of its control does so by its permission (Lasky 2004). The modern state has also been defined as a society of people who are politically organized within a defined territory, having its own Government with coercive power to enforce obedience and which is free from external control and demand (Samond, 2008). Samond by that definition seems to be implying that state is a society of men established by whatever circumstance for the maintenance of what they deemed to be order and justice within a determined territory by way of force, irrespective of what the population in that territory feels or think. Samond definition did not give us a holistic view of the concept of state because its analytical utility is blurred. Asobie (2005) also see the state as an organized public power which seem to stand above the society and which emerges only when the society has been divided into classes and is organized according to the principle of territorialism, note' that classes in this regard are not related to sizes (big and small) or different formats. They are functions of production, they emanates from the contradiction within the relation of production which are association with man's relations to the instrument of labour. More specifically, classes are social categories arising from the distribution of the agents of production according to their relationship to the instrument of labour as owners and non owners (Ake 1979). Asobie, however on this definition did not tell us how aloof is the state in the struggle for capital accumulation within these societies to which it claim supremacy over its territory.

On that note perhaps the most comprehensive definition of the contested concept of state is that of Obasi, Igwe. According to him;

*The modern state is the creature of the bases and the most decisive elements of the superstructure, with class, politics, population, territory as its major attributes, and government, its primary agency, a culmination of man's struggle in a settled life and the most comprehensive political organization of the society, embodying and expressing the common interest of the dominant class within the society and of the derivatives of its ruling class within the government both of which were able to attain and sustain preeminence through various designs including authoritative application of the use of physical force (Igwe, 2000; 416).*

The above analyst however does not in any way imply that the state is an unchanging organization, it has been subject at every point in the historical process to the laws of an unceasing evolution new forms of property, an alteration in character of religious believe, physical conditions at the moment of their coming, beyond the control of men, these and things of these nature have shaped its substance and character. Its forms also cannot be said to have been constant, it has been monarchic, aristocratic, democratic etc, and it has also been in the control of the rich and the poor. Men have ruled it by reason of their birth or by their position in a religious fellowship (Lasky 2004). So much on the chaos of competition definitions we shall now turn to the concepts of ideologies.

### **3.1 Concept of Ideology**

The major problem confronting any scholarly discussion of the nature of ideology is the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of the term but only a collection of rival definitions. The concept of ideology is one of the most elusive concepts in the whole of the social science literature (McClellan 1995). While I have no hope of settling the definition controversy in this very study, i do wish to discuss the origin of the term, explaining its varying definitions and arrive on a definition that would be useful to this paper in the rest of the analyses.

### **3.2 The Origin of Ideology**

It is a common knowledge that the term ideology was first used by the French in the early nineteenth century but what is still obscured is however, who coined it. Available evidence however suggest that the term ideology was coined during the French revolution by a French noble and scholar called Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754-1838) and was first used in public in 1797 (Heywood, 2012). Writing at the turn of the nineteenth century he used the word ideology in his systematic study of the enlightenment epoch. Like other thinkers of his time, de Tracy believed that people could use science to improve social and political condition and to him ideology was a study of the process of forming ideas, a "science of ideas" if you will. Ideas, Tracy believed are stimulated by physical environment. Hence empirical learning is the only source of knowledge, supernatural and spiritual phenomena play no part in the formation of ideas (Baradat, 2008).

The main theme of Tracy's idea is psychological and therefore not of immediate concern to us in this study. However, two major aspects of his theories should be noted. The first one is materialism. Thoughts or ideas according to De Tracy are stimulated by material things only and the formation of idea is a physical rather than a spiritual or mystical process. The scientific and materialistic basis of ideology will be highlighted later but

for now it is enough to note that materialism is a dominant theme in the concept of ideology.

The second important aspect of De Tracy's thought or idea is that social and political improvement was its main goal. De Tracy wanted to apply the knowledge developed from his science of ideas' to the whole society and thereby attempt to improve human life. Therefore, ideology has been closely associated with politics from the beginning. It is on that note, appropriate to give the term a political connotation unless a different context is indicated. Though the career of ideology as a key political term originated from the use made of it in the writing of Karl Marx. Marx's use of the term and the interest shown in it by contemporary generation of Marxist thinkers, largely explain the prominence ideologies enjoy in the modern social and political thought (Heywood 2004). In one of Karl Marx, earlier works titled "The German ideology" he contradicted De Tracy on the subject. He argued that instead of "science of ideas" ideology is nothing more than a fabrication used by a particular group of people to justify themselves. The concepts of ideology they contend are completely subjective and they were used to justify the ruling class of the society. Therefore the dominant political ideas or ideology of any given society would always reflect the interest of the ruling class and according to Marx and Engels were based on incorrect interpretation of the notions of politics.

Another German scholar, Karl Mannheim contributed on the analysis of ideologies from a historical perspective; he compared the ideologies of one historical era to that of another and argued that no ideology can be fully understood unless this historical relationship was clear (Mannheim 2004). No ideology in other word can be understood unless we comprehend the ideas of the previous epoch and investigate the impact of the previous idea or ideology on the current one; it is at this point that we now zero- in on The meaning of ideology.

### 3.3 The Meaning of Ideology

Although the concepts of ideology or ideologies are familiar, or even common placed, scholars don't often use it with any precision or a clear grasp of their meaning. What for example is 'equality' What does it imply when we say that all people are created equal? Are people born equal? Should they be treated as if they are equals? Should people have equal right, opportunities, political influence and wages? Again concepts such as communist or fascist are commonly used, what do we mean when we say that somebody is a fascist? What value does fascist hold and why do they hold them? How is the communist perception differ from those of say; Liberal, mercantile or even socialist. This section intends to present an expository analysis of the subject matter of ideology after which it shall highlight on the selected ideology for this paper, namely: Mercantilism, liberalism and Marxism.

Fredrick Watkins, in his classic study titled "*the age of ideology*" contends that ideology emanate almost completely from the political extremes, ideologies he maintained are always opposed to the status quo. They propose an abrupt change in the existing order; hence, they are always militant revolutionary and violent. He goes on to indicate that most ideologies are stated in a very simple term, utopian in their objectives and usually display great faith in the human kinds capability and propensity for finding success and happiness. Conservatism, because it defends the existing order and resist change, is an anti-ideology according to Watkins. Ideology emerged from the rationalist tradition in which it was assumed that most problems could be solved if people applied reasons appropriately, however, the conservatism rejects this optimism about the capacity of the human reason (Wartkin 2008). According to him conservatism is opposed to the basic assumption of any ideology.

The above positions presents a kind of difficult for us, while we agree that conservatism are quick to argue that reason has its limitations, it's understandable that they do not completely reject reason as means by which political problems can be solved. To contend therefore that conservatism is not an ideology maybe to misinterpret scholastic issues (Baradat 2004). On the other hand David Ingersoll in his book "*the philosophic root of ideology*" suggest that ideology includes an assessment of the status quo and a view of the futures. The future is always represented as something better than the present and the past. This envisioned better future is always expressed in materialistic terms; for example both Karl Marx and General Hitler, envisioned a society of great bounty. Furthermore, Ingersoll submits that each of the ideologies contains a definite plan of action from which this excellent future can be achieved. In deed the plan of action is central in any ideology, (Ingersoll, 1991). Ideologies tend to convey a sense of urgency. They are meant in the final analysis to compel people to achieve some kind of objective even if it is utopian.

In L.T Sergeant "*Contemporary political ideology*" ideology was defined from different perspective. He views ideologies as based on the value system of different societies, still modern societies are complex and often contradictory, therefore individual in a particular society may or may not accept a single ideology; they may appropriate part of several ideologies or they choose to become attached to a single idea system (Sergeant, 1972), in any case Sergeant is implying that ideologies are simplistic in their approach to problem solving. Ideologies he argued provide the believer with a vision of the world both as it is and they are supposed to be and by that gesture organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and comprehensible.

Terrence Ball in his classic work titled "*Ideas and ideologies*" warns that the development of too rigid a definition of the concept of ideology would be to miss the main point in focus. Instead of phenomena composed

of précised information, Terrence views the concept of ideologies in more flexible and more academic way. It is, he contended “an agenda of thing, to discuss”, question to ask, hypothesis to make etc”. He argued that we should be able to use it when considering the interaction between ideas and politics (Ball, 1991). For Ball ideologies exist whenever politics is motivated by intellectual other than random impulse. On that note the definition of the concept should not be construed narrowly or be understood to be dependent on any but the loosest criteria.

It is understandable from the above analysis that authorities do not agree on a single definition of the concept of ideologies, perception are spread widely from the exclusive view of Watkins to the expansive perception of Ball. Though, it is clear that at least for the purpose of this study, some properties of the ideologies discussed can be identified as being significant to all of the definitions of ideologies as presented in this study. It may also be true as Ball, argued that not all of these factors are essential to ideology, but at the same time, they are inexcusably important in the ideologies we intend to study for this exercise, namely the liberal ideology, the mercantile ideology and the Marxist ideology.

These triadic ideologies are fundamentally different in their conceptions of the relationship among states, society and market. And it may not be totally wrong to say unmitigatedly that every disagreement in the field of international political economy is ultimately reducible to this differing conceptions of the relationships. Although many issue that were controversial in the eighteenth and nineteenth century’s are once again being intensely debated by contemporary students of international political economy , we only intend to look at the ideational nuances of the above three ideologies since they are central in this study. The sentence is too long, consider breaking it down

#### **4.1 Liberalism**

There is a set of value from which liberal theories of economics and politics arise, in the modern world these political and economic value have tended to appear together (Lindblom, 1977). The liberal theories are committed to free market and minimal state intervention, although as would be pointed out latter, the relative emphasis in one or the other may differ. The liberal political economy theory is committed to individual equality and liberty, although again the emphasis may still differ.

The liberal theory of political economy is contained in economic science as it is developed in Western Europe, from Adam Smith to its contemporal proponents, liberal thinkers have shared a coherent set of assumptions and believes about the nature of human begins, society and economic activities (Gilpin 1987). Liberalism has assumed different forms, example; it has been known as classical, neo-classical, Keynesian, monetarist, Australia, rationale expectation etc (Gilpin 1987). These variants ranges from those giving priority to equality and tending towards social democracy and state interventionism to achieve this objective to those stressing liberty and non interventionism at the expense of social equality. But note that all forms of liberalism are committed to the market and the price mechanism as the most efficient means for ordering and organizing domestic and international economic relations.

Liberalism can therefore be defined as a doctrine and set of principles for organizing and managing a market economy in order to achieve maximum efficiency, economic growth and individual welfare (Gilpin 1980). Liberalism believes that market arises spontaneously in order to satisfy human want and that once it is in operation, it function in accordance with its own internal logic. Human beings are by nature economic animal and therefore market evolved naturally without any central direction, as Adam Smith put it, “it is inherent in mankind to truck, barter and exchange”. To facilitate exchange and improve their well being people create market and money and economic institution.

In the final analysis the liberals are of the view that trade and economic intercourse are a source of peaceful relations among states because the mutual benefits of trade and expanding interdependence among national economies will tend to foster cooperative relation. Whereas politics tends to divide economics tend to unite people. A liberal international economy will have a moderating influence on international politics as it creates bond of mutual interest and a commitment to the status quo. Therefore, it is needful to reemphasize again that although everyone will or at least can be better off in ‘absolute’ terms under free exchange the relative gain will differ. It is precisely this issue of relative gain and the distribution of the wealth generated by the market system that gave rise to economic nationalism (Mercantilism) and Marxism as rival doctrines (Gilpin, 1987).

#### **5.1 Marxism**

Just like other ideologies such as liberalism, mercantilism, Nazism etc, Marxism has changed in significant ways since its basic ideas were put forward by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Marx’s own perception changes during his life time and his theories have always been subject to conflicting interpretations. Although Marx sees capitalism as a global economy, he did not develop a systematic set of ideas on international relations. This responsibility later fell upon the succeeding generation of Marxist writers. The former Soviet Union and China having adopted Marxism as their official ideology have reorganized it whenever

they see the need to serve their own national interest (Heilbroner, 1980).

Just like liberalism and mercantilism, two distinct ideas can be pinpointed in modern Marxism. The first is the evolutionary Marxism of social democracy associated with Edward Bernstein and Karl Kautsky. In modern world it has drifted off and hardly distinguishable from the egalitarian form of liberalism. At the other extreme is the revolutionary Marxism of Lenin, and in theory at least of the defunct Soviet Union (Gilpin 1987). According to Robert Heilbroner (1980) despite the existence of this difference Marxism, four essential elements can be found in the overall corpus of Marxist writings epic or contemporarily. The first element is the dialectical approach to knowledge and society that defines the nature of realities as dynamic and conflictual, social disequilibria and consequent change are due to the class struggle and the working out of contradictions inherent in political and social phenomena. There is according to the Marxist scholars no inherent social harmonious or return to equilibrium as the liberal scholars would have us believe. The second element is the materialist approach to history; the Marxist scholars believe that the development of productive forces and economic activities is central to historical change and operates through the class struggle over distribution of the social product. The third is the general conception of capitalist development; the capitalist mode of production and its destiny are governed by a set of economic laws of motion of modern society". The fourth is a normative commitment to socialism; all Marxist scholars believe that a socialist society is both the necessary and desirable end of historical development (Heilbroner, 1986). Among the above tenets of Marxism the study paid a particular attention to the fourth strands of Marxist beliefs, namely the normative commitment to socialism" a social system in which the means of production, that is the scarce resources used to produce consumption goods are "nationalized" or "socialized". Accordingly, socialization of the means of production has been advocated by all socialist of both orthodox and contemporary Marxist persuasion ever since the doctrine was made known to mankind.

## 6.1 Mercantilism

Mercantilism just like liberalism has passed through some modification to its present stage, or alternatively, has undergone several metamorphoses for the past centuries. Its label has also changed from mercantilism, statist protectionism, the German historical school, economic nationalism and recently new protectionism. Throughout all these manifestations, the concept also runs a set of themes or attitudes, rather than a coherent and systematic body of economic or political theory. Its central idea is that economic activities are and should be subordinated to the goal of state building and the interest of state. All mercantile is ascribing to the primacy of the state, of national security and of military power in the organization and functioning of the international system.

Within this distinct perception two basic positions can be discerned; some nationalists consider the safeguarding of national economic interest as the minimum essential to the security and survival of the state. For lack of a better term, this generally defensive position may be called "benign" mercantilism; on the other hand there are those nationalists who regard the international economy as an arena for imperialist expansion and national aggrandizement. This aggressive form is also called "Malevolent" mercantilism (Gilpin 1987). The economic policies of Nazi economic minister Hjalmar Schacht toward Eastern Europe in the 1930s were of this type (Hirschman, 1969).

In spite of seeing mercantilism as generously committed to state building, the precise objective pursued and the policies advocated have differed in different times and in different places. Yet as Jacob Vinner, has argued in an often-quoted passage that economic nationalist or what he called "mercantilist" writers share common conviction concerning the relationship of wealth and power. According to him;

*I believe that practically all mercantilist, whatever period, country, or status of the particular individual, would have subscribed to all of the following proposition (1) wealth as an absolutely essential mean to power, whether for security or for aggression (2) wealth and power are each proper ultimate end of national policy (3) power is essential or valuable as a means to the acquisition or retention of wealth (4) there is long run harmony between these ends, although in particular circumstances it may be necessary for a time to make economic sacrifices in the interest of military security and there also of long run prosperity (Vinner, 1958; 286).*

While the liberal scholars see the pursuit of power and wealth as involving trade off, the mercantilist tend to regard the two objectives as being complementary (Knorr, 1984). Economic nationalism (mercantilist) emphasize the role of economic factors in international relation and view the struggle among states (capitalist, socialist, or whatever) for economic resources as pervasive and indeed inherent in the nature of the international system itself. Just like writers has already stated, since economic resources are national power, every conflict is at once both economic and political (Hawtrey, 1958). States at least over the long run simultaneously pursue wealth and national power.

For some reasons the major aim of the mercantilist (or "nationalist" as they were then called) is

industrialization (Sen, 1994). Primarily, the mercantilism believes that industries have spillover effect throughout the economy and would eventually lead to its overall development. Secondly, they associate the possession of industry with economic self sufficiency and political autonomy. Third and the most important, industry is valued because it is the bases of military power and central to national security in the modern world. In virtually every society, including the liberal ones, governments always pursue policies that are in favour of industrial development. As the mercantilist theorist of American economic development Alexander Hamilton, wrote “not only the wealth but the independence and security of a country appear to be materially connected to the prosperity of manufacturers” (quoted in Rostow, 1971: 189).

### **7.1 Ideology and State Behavior**

It would not be entirely wrong to say that the career of ideology as a key political terms arises from the use made of it in the writing of Karl Marx, the way in which it was used by Karl Marx and the attention it draw from the contemporal Marxist thinkers, largely explains the prominence ideologies enjoy in modern social, political and organizational thought.

Political ideas have the capacity to manage and guide political action itself and so can shape material life, and as we have seen in our definitions, political idea do not just emerge from nowhere, they don't just drop from the sky. All political ideas are molded by social and historical circumstance from which they develop and by the political theory and political ambition they serve, quiet simply, political theories and political practice are inseparably linked. In other words the behavior of every state be it liberal state as in United state and United Kingdom or Marxist / socialist states as in former Soviet Union and China are but the manifestation of the ideas of the dominant class in that society. In the first instance they provide a perspective through which the state and indeed the entire society is understood and explained. People do not see the state as it is but only as they expect it to be, in other words they see it through a veil of ingrained beliefs, opinions and assumptions. Whether consciously or unconsciously, everyone subscribes to a set of political beliefs and value that guide their behaviours and influence their conduct.

Ideologies help to shape the nature of political system, contemporarily; most if not all western countries of the world are founded upon a set of ideologies analogous to the liberal democratic principle. In the same vein, traditional communist political system such as China, Cuba, former Soviet Union etc conform to the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

Ideologies play a very important role in either upholding the substance and nature of the prevailing power structures, by portraying it as fair, natural, rightful etc or in weakening it and challenging it, by highlighting iniquity and injustice and drawing attention to the attraction of an alternative power structure. It can also act as social window providing the people, social group and indeed the entire society with a set of unifying beliefs and values vis-à-vis a particular state or socio-economic formation. But we should not forget that in the final analysis the ideas of the dominant class are in every epoch the ruling idea, that is, the class which is the ruling materials force of the society, is at the same time the ruling intellectual force. The class which has monopoly over the instrument of labour has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (Marx, quoted in Marx and Engels selected works 1968).

### **8.1 Conclusion**

In the final analyses, political ideologies can act as a kind of social anglutinator, presenting social groups as well as the whole society a set of unifying beliefs system and values. In the cause of exposition of the concepts in this study, political ideologies have been unmitigatedly discussed and associated with a particular class in a given socio political formation, for instance, liberal is believed to be associated with middle classes, conservatism with the landed aristocracy, socialism with the working class and so forth. These ideas reverberates the life experiences, interest and the aspiration of a social class in a given society and by extension help to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity. However, ideas and ideologies can help in bringing together divergent groups and social class within a society. For example there is unifying bedrock of liberal democratic values in most western state while in the Arab world or rather Muslim countries Islam has established a common set of moral principles and beliefs.

A unifying form of political ideas and norms can also develop naturally within a given society but it can also be enforced from above in an attempt to capture obedience and thereby operates as a form of social control. The ideas of elite group such as the political and military leaders, government officials, land owners or industrialist may diverge significantly from those of the masses. In this situation the ruling elite use the political ideas to contain opposition and restrict debate through a process of ideological manipulation. This would appear clearer in regimes that has official ideologies such as Nazi Germany and the defunct Soviet union, where in both situations, official or political reliable beliefs like those of national socialism and Marxism-Leninism respectively, dominated political life and indeed all social institution, art, culture, education, the media etc,

opposing ideas were simply censored or suppressed.

Some scholar also argued that subtle form of ideological manipulation occur in all society, this line of argument i believe have been resolved in the Marxist belief discussed earlier in this paper which posit that the culture of capitalist society is dominated by ideas that served the interest of economically dominated class within that social formation.

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