

THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE¹

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ABSTRACT: Assigning a positive signification to the concept of 'ideology,' the basic hypothesis of this paper is that both what we call social reality and what we understand by the expression social knowledge are the result of an ideological projection. In other words, it is my opinion that ideology accomplishes a double purpose: on the one hand, it actively participates in the construction of social reality; on the other hand, it also plays the role of an instrument of social knowledge. To support this assertion, I advance the idea of ideological conventions that are constituent parts of the social projection of reality and that emerge as 'landmarks' of the process of understanding it. I provide arguments that, as long as that they are found at the level of social institutions and thus being reproduced in discourse, including symbolically – as codes, norms, rules, habits, behaviours, etc., both formal and informal – , ideological conventions are an expression of social identity, being useful in explaining and understanding social reality and its possibilities of evolving. Finally, taking into account the premise that while social knowledge is not entirely ideological, the ideological element is unavoidable in the process of configuring this knowledge (contributing in a decisive manner to the changes emerging at the societal level), I propose an integrated, interdisciplinary model of ideological analysis.

KEYWORDS: ideology, social reality, social knowledge, ideological conventions, ideological analysis, integrated model.

Introduction

The main objective assumed in this paper² is to provide a series of arguments in favour of the existence of an ideological process of constructing reality and,

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implicitly, social knowledge. By conferring a positive meaning to the concept of ideology, my conjecture is that both what we usually call *social reality* and what we understand by the expression *social knowledge* are the products of an *ideological projection*. The grounds of the latter lie at the level of the beliefs produced by the social imaginary that influence some action-oriented strategies depending on a series of prescriptive frameworks, which are also instituted with the help of ideology. In other words, it is my opinion that ideology accomplishes a double purpose: on the one hand, it actively participates in the construction of social reality; on the other hand, it also plays the role of an instrument of social knowledge.

In order to launch a debate on such a hypothesis, in the first section of this study, I am interested in analysing how the ideological projection of social reality develops. Special attention is paid, in this direction, to the social imaginary and to the manner in which ‘reality’ is instituted by the unmediated contribution of the ideological projection. Of course, I do not assume the idea that this type of projection is the only one that contributes to the configuration of the framework wherein what we call “social reality” manifests itself. However, I believe that ideology is the ‘strong figure’ of the social imaginary, compared with its other projections, such as those designated by other concepts that are frequently evoked with reference to knowledge in social theory and in politics – myth and utopia. I shall not detail here the relationships between ideology, myth and utopia but I shall refrain to stressing the presence of ideology-based beliefs in the human manner of relating with the reality that is specific to each society. In this stage, I shall not take into account the political ‘constraints’ of ideology, that is, I am not going to refer to its particular forms, described as “isms.” As long as the purpose of this text is to delineate the general context where the ideological foundations of social knowledge could be highlighted, the manner in which, during their development, the particular ideologies of modernity (such as liberalism, conservatism or socialism) have instituted, in their turn, various types of social reality, does not concern me here. The second section aims to reflect how *social meaning* is ideologically built. I refer here to the function that I consider to be decisive in stressing the importance of ideology at the level of reality and social knowledge, that of integration-identity, in the absence of which human community itself could not be possible.³ To support this argument, I advance the idea of *ideological conventions*, which are constituents of the social projection of reality and emerge as “landmarks” of the process of understanding it. I argue that, since they are found at the level of social institutions and thus being reproduced in

³ Bernard P. Dauenhauer, Paul Ricoeur: *The Promise and Risk of Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 215.

discourse, including in a symbolical manner – as codes, norms, rules, habits, behaviours etc., both formal and informal – , ideological conventions represent an expression of social identity, being useful to the explanation and understanding of societal reality, and of its possibilities of development. Finally, the third section of this study is oriented toward the *ideological analysis* of social knowledge. Here, I put to use the epistemological valences of the concept of ideology and thus I reveal the second role that I assign to it, that of an instrument of social knowledge. As a result, I intend to define, methodologically, the significance of ideological analysis and to stress the type of influence that ideology has on the development of knowledge and, by this, on the process of social change. The basic assumption I have in mind is that social knowledge is not entirely ideological, but the ideological element is inevitable in the process of configuring this knowledge, contributing in a decisive manner to the changes emerging in the societal field.

I believe that three additional specifications should also be made in the end of this introductory part. The first refers to the fact that this paper starts from the attempt to systematise, both from a theoretical-political and epistemological perspective, the issues related to ideology, in a direction that would go beyond the reductionist views found in Romanian specialised literature, be it philosophically, sociologically or politologically oriented. I take on here the ‘central pillar’ of the attempt ‘to reinvent ideology,’ that is, the way it is defined as a *system of beliefs shaped in any society, beliefs that operate at the level of the social imaginary and that, together with myths, legends, habits, behavioural and attitudinal patterns, play the role of marking out a normative and action-oriented framework referring to the operating style of that society*⁴. Aside from being a first step towards the theorisation of a normative approach to ideology, the definition quoted above allows, in my opinion, further openings to the empirical analysis of the manner in which particular ideologies have configured, since the modernity and up to now, various projects of social change. In this respect, I follow an idea specific to contemporary perspectives, according to which “a general concept of ideology not only provides a more solid framework for a critical approach, but also allows comparison among different kinds of ideologies, the changes of ideologies from systems of resistance to systems of domination (or vice versa), and a more coherent and complete study of the embedding of ideologies in social cognition as well as in social structure.”⁵ This study aims to be a propaedeutic approach to the latter subject. Secondly, I mention

⁴ Daniel Şandru, *Reinventarea ideologiei. O abordare teoretico-politică (Reinventing ideology. A theoretical political approach)* (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2009), 157.

⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, *Ideology. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 11.

that the methodology I use in order to accomplish the objective stated before involves compared conceptual analysis, definitional analysis and textual interpretation, with the purpose of ‘extracting’ the issue of the relationship between ideology and knowledge – be it social or scientific – from the strictly delineated framework of the history of political ideas, sociology of knowledge and epistemology. This is where I should make my third specification: supposing, clearly, a reference to all these fields – unavoidable in such a context – my interest is to create interdisciplinary connections with areas of knowledge such as those represented by discourse analysis, social psychology, social anthropology or communication sciences. I consider that, taking into account both the cognitive and epistemological and the theoretical-political, social, symbolic or discursive aspects of ideology, the subsequent development of an *integrated theory of ideology* may transform from an intellectual promise into a possibility.

1. Ideology and the projection of social reality

If we acknowledge that “ideology” is a term that, during its short intellectual history, has gathered a particular semantic ambiguity, we may also accept the idea according to which, paradoxically, the use of the concept has entered, in Marx’s posterity, a ‘routine’ stage, its meaning being usually associated with a ‘distortion’ of reality. Both in epistemological research and in the studies belonging to social and political theory, ‘Marx’s trap’ – the so-called scientific sentence according to which ideology expresses a false view on reality, being a tool by which the social establishment maintains its domination in order to fulfil its interest – seems to attract most theorists, despite the de-structuring of the analysis in terms of the ‘class struggle.’ I shall not insist here upon this manner of placing the various approaches to ideology, but I shall just briefly specify that both from the perspective of epistemology and social-political theory, we can identify a variety of views relating to this term.⁶ What I intend to do is to identify – starting from a positive definition of the concept, with reference to its essentially social function, that of integration-identity – how ideology projects the type of reality wherein it can manifest itself. Epistemologically, we may recognise undoubtedly two types of reality: physical – often seen as ‘objective’, that is, independent from human or social presence, and social – deemed to be, above all, a field of individual and group intersubjectivity. Obviously, I am interested in

⁶ I have attempted to draw up an analytical systematisation of the views belonging to the *epistemological perspective* – objectivist, relativist-relational and pragmatist – and also to the *theoretical-political and social perspective* – negative, neutral and positive – in Şandru, *Reinventarea ideologiei*, 48-116.

the latter form of reality, as at the level of its configuration we may highlight the presence of ideology. However, I stress the idea – that I shall not detail here – that, besides those belonging to social reality, the interpretation of the phenomena belonging to the physical reality may also be ‘loaded’ with ideological significations.

In what regards social reality, the subject of debate in this section, it must be said that its ideological projection is possible due to the existence of an *epistemic contextualism* shared by any human community. In other words, by their essentially social existence – and thus by the inter-individual and inter-group relationships that they develop – human individuals configure a common ground based on which they explain reality – participating as subjects to its construction – and that provides them, at the same time, with the tools needed for social knowledge. In this stage, I shall examine only the first assertion of the abovementioned double series – that is, the members of society build its reality. Why do I think that such a construction is actually an ideological projection? First, let’s discuss the problem of society as a form of organisation of inter-individual and inter-group relationships. Beyond a simple sociological definition that would counterpoise the concept of “society” to that of “state” or that would analyse the former in relation to the latter, my hypothesis is that a given society may be understood as an ideological construction, that is, a framework wherein ideology (or particular ideologies operating in a procedural competition) manifests itself and whose evolution it may influence, decisively or secondarily, depending on certain socio-historical circumstances (understood as contingent, unpredictable and thus non-deterministic). It is not the case, I must add, of a static framework, for the plain reason that, as some contemporary theorists would suggest, “humanity is a project in the making.”⁷ To exemplify, I stress the fact that current Western-based democratic societies may be seen as products of an ideological projection as each of their institutions (the Constitutional framework, political, economic and social contractualism, the separation of powers, the distinction between the public and the private, and so on) represent expressions of an ideological instituting. The functioning of this framework, of the relationships that form it and of the institutions that express it – all these representing, in fact, the *reality* of that society – is nevertheless impossible in the absence of a common discursive universe whose general form is (beyond written norms and as their origin) *the social imaginary*. Or, at its level, the role of ideology is particularly obvious, as a system of beliefs that articulate a series of social practices that are continually evolving, practices that it also legitimates in discourse. Such an image expresses, from my point of view, what authors such as Cornelius Castoriadis

⁷ Steve Fuller, *The New Sociological Imagination* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 22.

named, during the second half of the last century, “the imaginary institution of society,”⁸ even if this position was against the Marxist tradition to which they claimed to belong, wherein

the link between ideology and the imaginary has generally been subsumed, however, to an overall opposition between reality and ideas; ideology and the imaginary stand together on the side of ideas, constituting a sort of ethereal medium which veils the hard reality of material production.⁹

As the sum of the discursive-symbolic elements belonging to a community, the social imaginary ideologically articulates a type of reality that bestows on the member of society the possibility of integration, and thus providing them with a sense of identity and also of ‘ontological security.’ Among these discursive-symbolic elements, developing as a system of beliefs expressed with reference to the social, economic or political present, ideology holds a privileged place. At the level of the social imaginary there are, of course, other discursive-symbolic elements whose nature is systemic, and the most notorious are myth and utopia. I shall not insist in this context on the details regarding the relationships between ideology, myth and utopia, discussed somewhere else,¹⁰ but I shall just say that if myth may be included into the ideological level, utopia is an aspect of the imaginary that motivates the collective mind towards a radical change of the present, without offering, however, possibility guarantees for the projects it advances. By circulating beliefs regarding the current structure of the community, which also have a guiding role for social practices, the imaginary institutes ideologically certain attitudinal and behavioural practices. The reality produced as a result of this process is not a simple sum of particular isolated social practices but an evolving institutional framework wherein the members of society share individual and collective experiences by establishing relationships. Obviously, knowing this reality depends to a considerable extent on the individual’s abilities, on the adaptive character of the knowing and acting subject but all these would result – at his level and in the absence of what I have previously called epistemic contextualism – in cognitive dissonance. The social imaginary and, consequently, ideology, plays a manifest part in the architectural design of the epistemic context wherein the members of society manifest themselves, mainly through language (be it verbal or non-verbal). In its absence,

⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975).

⁹ John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 16.

¹⁰ Şandru, *Reinventarea ideologiei*, 116-56.

not only social knowledge but also the institution of society would be impossible and, in this respect, ideology ensures the transmission of its main articulations from one generation to the other. Being the aspect of the imaginary that is permanently linked with social reality¹¹, ideology is, in its turn, influenced by it. Thus, the relationship between ideology and social reality is not unidirectional, purely causal, with the meaning that the former would be the cause of the latter. There is an ideological projection of society and of reality through which it expresses itself, just as there is, at the ideological level, the possibility to know this reality – a matter that I shall approach in the final section of the paper – but it is equally true that, in its turn, society and its corresponding reality influences the evolution of ideological schemes. Subsequently, we are dealing with a bi-univocal relationship: as a central figure of the social imaginary, ideology institutes a certain society and, corresponding to it, a certain type of reality (I do not discuss here if this happens in the interest of a group or if, having interest as a motivation, ideology also institutes, as a result, the phenomenon of domination, even if it is presumable that, where it manifests itself, interest and domination are, in Durkheim's acceptance, normal social facts) developing, at the same time, into an instrument of knowing this reality, but ideology is influenced, in its turn, by the social evolution that it motivates. And this bi-univocal relationship is visible over the entire road from ideas to social practices and back¹². What emerges from this perspective is the fact that ideology manifests itself, on the one hand, at the level of the social imaginary shared by a society and at the level of its institutionalised practices (formal or informal), and on the other hand, at the level of the individual members of the community, owing to the existence of the epistemic context evoked before. The latter ensures the possibility of an intelligible and coherent discourse at the community level and the conditions necessary for any individual to adapt to social life. Hence, we should understand

¹¹ This aspect is also underlined by John B. Thompson (*Studies*, 26), when he says that “ideology is a type of discourse which no longer sustains legitimacy by referring to a transcendent realm, a realm of gods, spirits or mythical figures. Ideological discourse is inscribed in the social itself (...).”

¹² Even if he does not use the term *ideology*, the image of this bi-univocal relationship is expressively showed, I believe, by Charles Taylor: “What exactly is involved when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary? For the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention” – Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 29.

that, although it is essentially a collective product, ideology may be assumed individually, as with reference to its elements each member of the community is able to access its specific role in the social context. Subsequently, from this point of view,

ideology's main socio-psychological function on an individual level is thus the normative one of endowing human beings with a sense of identity, purpose, and reality, and of enabling them to be convinced of the self-evident justification and normality of their actions, despite considerations apparent to external observers that may show these to be illusory, subjective, or generated by psychological drives, material interests, or supra-individual (historical) factors. As such, ideology is an integral and constitutive aspect of all human culture, and is endowed with the paradoxical quality of being, according to specific contexts, either replicatory and coercive, or innovative and emancipatory.¹³

Thus, we reach an issue that has been approached by the sociology of knowledge since the first stage of its development, under the "guidance" of Karl Mannheim, which was detailed afterwards in the context of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's "constructivism" and was finally reiterated even more vigorously within the studies referring to the 'technology of science,' first by authors like David Bloor, during the first decades of the last century, and now by contemporary theorists such as Steve Fuller – the issue of the individual's positioning in relation to the social reality wherein he is 'encapsulated' and of his involvement in the very process of social cognition. If ideology is a collective product, and not an individual one, does this mean that the particular members of society are not given any possibility to leave their mark on the process of instituting the reality specific to it? So, this question draws our attention to the idea of the social determination of knowledge. In the attempt to answer it, I say once more that, although social knowledge is not entirely ideological, the ideological element is nevertheless present in the process of its configuration. Of course, individuals may have their own beliefs regarding social reality, beliefs that are not necessarily ideological. Beliefs are ideological and, as such, they are expressed in discourse or in the form of social practices when they are shared at the level of the group or at the general level of society. However, even particular beliefs that are not socially shared are not exclusively individual products, since, in the Lockean acceptance, the human mind is originally a *tabula rasa* that registers, through the means of the socialising process, the data necessary in order to integrate into the community. Thus, there

¹³ Roger Griffin, "Ideology and culture," in *The Meaning of Ideology. Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Michael Freeden (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 79.

are also projections that find their resources in the social imaginary and that may become ideological as long as they are shared by others. Hence, the ideological effect is visible at the crossroads between the subjective tendency to make sense of reality and the intersubjective expression of this reality, as it is projected by various discursive-symbolic elements. On the other hand, as a knowing subject who participates in the process of social cognition, the individual manifests his subjectivity in the attempt to explain reality. Of course, this does not mean that reality, be it physical or social, is a projection of the individual mind. If the former type of reality exists independently of the mental projections of the knowing individual – being likely to become, however, an object of interpretation, even theological interpretation – the latter is a collective product that may be subjectively valued by the individual. When such a subjective valuation is penetrated by the system of beliefs shared at the social level, being followed by the adoption of certain attitudinal and behavioural patterns and by the integrative participation in certain social practices, the individual contributes, as a member of the community, to the institution of the social. This results in at least two aspects: first, there cannot be a reality that could be called *social* in the absence of a collective perception related to it; secondly, this reality results from the meeting of the intersubjectivity specific to social relations and individual subjectivity. Social reality is therefore an ideological construction, its foundations being the beliefs that, dwelling in the imaginary and being socially shared, create an epistemic context owing to which the members of society are able to contribute both to the institution of the practices needed for structuring and to the development of social knowledge. The ideological projection of social reality implies the existence of a meaning accessible to all the responsible members of a society. This is the issue discussed in the following section.

2. Ideology and the construction of social meaning

Up to now, I have analysed the relationship between the ‘strong figure’ of the social imaginary, namely ideology, and social reality as an expression resulting from the process of instituting society. Next, I am interested in attempting to offer an explanation regarding how ideology provides the conditions needed for the *comprehension* of this reality by the members of an organised community and in this respect I talk about the construction of social meaning. Bearing in mind that ideology offers “(...) coherent sets of values around which individuals and groups may organize,”¹⁴ I

¹⁴ Raj P. Mohan and Graham C. Kinloch, “Ideology, Myths, and Social Science,” in *Ideology and the Social Sciences*, eds. Graham C. Kinloch and Raj P. Mohan (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 8.

follow the process of instituting *ideological conventions* whose role is to provide a collective sense of the reality that is socially organised through institutions and norms, both formal and informal, that, in their turn, are expressed in various social practices. From this perspective, my assumption is that these ideological conventions, whose position is essentially discursive, play a very important explanatory role, ensuring the semantic coherence between the subjective (individual beliefs) and the intersubjective interpretation (collective beliefs with an ideological nature) of social reality and, through it, the construction of social meaning. Integrated into a system at the level of society as a whole, beliefs appear as ideas that offer guidelines for social inclusion.¹⁵ It becomes obvious that they are unavoidable in the process of social knowledge that will be ideologically analysed in the following section. Returning to the ideological construction of a social meaning accessible to all the responsible members of society, it should be specified that I do not adopt here the idea of “a single thought.” On the contrary, I am aware of the fact that the individuals involved in the social game, being members of society as a whole as well as members of various groups and passing through a process of socialisation that may imply considerable differences from one case to the other, are compelled to put to use their own subjectivity in the attempt to configure the meaning of social reality. In this respect I do not refer to understanding ideology like a “total thought” that imposes on the individuals a single meaning of social reality – even when, as in the case of the particular ideologies of totalitarianism, this was attempted in the history of the 20th century, it led to social, political and human failure. Given the existence of a crossroads between the individual, subjective beliefs and those shared at the social level, intersubjective, I presume that their meeting results in the institution of the *ideological conventions* based on which ideology itself is able to fulfil its integration-identity function. Beyond it, it is clear that at the level of particular ideologies there are different interpretations regarding social reality (for example, the issue of the relations between the state and the economic field is interpreted in a different manner by liberalism, conservatism and socialism), but such a state of affairs does not annul the existence of some ideological conventions whose presence guarantees, within a democratic society, even the likelihood of a relative consensus on public policies among the ideological groups that are

¹⁵ As underlined by an author who has already become a classic, “the production of these ideas, irrespective of their explanatory worth, is a social production. It is an effort undertaken by society as a whole to solve outstanding problems confronting man as a whole” – Irving Louis Horowitz, *Philosophy, Science and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), 86.

procedurally competing. It is just as obvious that, at the individual level, there are various degrees of systematisation of the information acquired during the process of social knowledge. Without reiterating the idea, cherished by Marxism, that referred to class determinism, it should be remembered that the process of knowledge itself, be it social or scientific, is existentially determined and thus directly connected to the social and historical circumstances wherein it is produced.¹⁶ Therefore, different individuals, members of different groups, will have a differentiated access to social meaning, based on the existence of some ideological conventions but this does not annul, nevertheless, the existence of a meaning that they discover during the process of social knowledge.

In this direction, following a Piaget-based approach but also trying to go beyond it, some theorists have talked about a specific form of understanding society, called “political reasoning,”¹⁷ considering that it “(...) is itself a product not only of the individual subject, but also of the larger society. In my view, these two forces, subjective and collective, are dialectically related – each defines and is defined by the other. As a result, both individuals and societies may develop.”¹⁸ Developed in this form, the process of establishing a meaning relating to social reality, an essentially socio-psychological process, is characterised by the existence of three stages – sequential, linear and systematic – each generating corresponding structures of reasoning. Such a developmental approach implies, of course, the dependency of knowledge on the social environment, an environment ideologically ‘impregnated’ that stimulates the individuals to identify solutions of integration into the socio-political field. From this perspective, it becomes obvious that

social life is therefore a collective product. Social organization and cultural definition are not a product of the individuals nor is their true nature understood by them. None the less, the individual does become aware of these collective constructions and is affected by them. They regulate his exchange with others and therefore apply to actions and definitions as he understands them. Consequently, they pertain to experience as he construes it and are recognized by him. Through his recognition, these collective constructions enter the individual’s meaning-making activity.¹⁹

¹⁶ Howard Williams, *Concepts of Ideology* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 23-41.

¹⁷ Shawn W. Rosenberg, *Reason, Ideology and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 85.

¹⁹ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 90.

Being connected to social reality – an ideological projection at the collective level – the individual who is a member of the community passes successively from the stage of subjective construction to that of denying his own projections and then to that of meditating about the elements implied by the epistemic context and finally reaching the stage of reconstructing the social meaning. These stages are present, Rosenberg assures us, during all the three stages of development of political reasoning, whose comparative assessment is summarised in the table on the next page.

From this ‘comparative table’ of the three ideal-types of ideological thought or of “political reasoning” it clearly results that within the same type of society or – why not? – within the same ideological group there can be various degrees of social knowledge and, implicitly, differentiated ways of constructing a meaning related to social reality. As it is easily seen, the approach is one that pays special attention to the socio-psychological factors undoubtedly important in the context of a discussion referring to the ideological foundations of the social. Likewise, such elements may be heuristically valued within a debate focussing on the problem of the ideological foundations of social knowledge since we can identify, at the level of the “features of political thinking” described by Rosenberg, some elements of the epistemic context shared by the members of a society, elements that are institutionally expressed by what we have previously called *ideological conventions*.

Table 1

TYPES OF POLITICAL REASONING	FEATURES OF POLITICAL REASONING
SEQUENTIAL POLITICAL REASONING	<p>“The questions which guide the intellectual activity of the sequential thinker are: What does this look like? What happens next?”²⁰</p> <p>“The political reasoning of the sequential thinker is grounded in the concreteness and temporality of his observations of the social and political activity. It involves identifying phenomena by matching current observations with memories of earlier ones and understanding their use by observing how they are articulated in a sequential order of events.”²¹</p>
LINEAR POLITICAL REASONING	<p>“The basic questions here are what was the cause of an observed effect or what future effect will an observed cause produce?”²²</p> <p>“The political reasoning of the linear thinker does not simply involve a</p>

²⁰ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 102.

²¹ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 105.

²² Rosenberg, *Reason*, 116.

TYPES OF POLITICAL REASONING	FEATURES OF POLITICAL REASONING
LINEAR POLITICAL REASONING	<p>“The basic questions here are what was the cause of an observed effect or what future effect will an observed cause produce?”²²</p> <p>“The political reasoning of the linear thinker does not simply involve a recording of what he observes or has reported to him. Rather, he naturally analyzes the component features of an event and constructs relations between them. Thus, he thinks of social and political life in terms of its constituent actions and considers these as they are causally related to one another.”²³</p>
SYSTEMATIC POLITICAL REASONING	<p>“Systematic thinkers juxtapose relationships among actions and beliefs. They recognize that these relationships are either objectively determined or subjectively constructed and therefore consider them relative to one another.”²⁴</p> <p>“The political space constructed by the systematic thinker is an encompassing one. On the one hand, it has an objective dimension and provides a context for interaction and exchange. On the other, it has a subjective dimension and provides a context for propositions and judgements. In both cases, this space extends beyond what is immediate and known to that which may be deduced.”²⁵</p>

However, in order to identify their presence – referring to concrete elements visible in any society at the level of social institutions and that are reproduced in discourse from a generation to the other as codes, norms, rules, habits, behaviours, etc., formal as well as informal – we can resort to an argument coming from the area of the interdisciplinary research concerning ideology carried out by the theorist Teun van Dijk, who believes that defining ideology means referring, among others, to the fact that it is formed by “(...) social representations that define the social identity of a group, that is, its shared beliefs about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproduction.”²⁶ From this point of view, I think we can accept the definition according to which *ideological conventions represent the social-institutionalised expression of the beliefs shared by the members of a society,*

²² Rosenberg, *Reason*, 116.

²³ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 119.

²⁴ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 137.

²⁵ Rosenberg, *Reason*, 144.

²⁶ Teun A. van Dijk, “Ideology and discourse analysis,” in *The Meaning of Ideology. Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Michael Freedon (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 111.

beliefs that serve as “landmarks” of social knowledge and that may modify their meanings in the context of the societal changes produced by this knowledge. What we can extract, first of all, from this definition of ideological conventions is that they are not the same thing as ideology itself, but are socially “grounded” expressions of the system of beliefs configured by ideology based on the constitution of an epistemic context. Secondly, owing to this context, the intersection of individual, subjective beliefs and of socially-shared, intersubjective beliefs becomes possible, and afterwards this allows the construction of the social meaning. Finally, based on this meaning, the individuals-members of a community may access social knowledge, a process whose fundamental product is social change. It should be stressed that, from my point of view, social change may influence in its turn the evolution of a society, implicitly affecting its ideological system of beliefs and all the elements related to it. As such, social change influences not only the beliefs ideologically systematised at the level of the social imaginary, but also the epistemic context formed by them, the ideological conventions instituted based on it, the way social meaning and social knowledge itself are built. The new elements emerging as a result of social changes infiltrate the ideological system of beliefs; they configure new social practices and reproduce themselves, in their turn, through discourse. What remains constant is, if you wish, the ideological architecture of this process. However, beyond this, we are dealing with an evolving model whose applicability in the form of the ideological analysis of society as a whole, of social knowledge in particular, is possible if we opt for an interdisciplinary approach able to make an equation, as van Dijk also suggests, of at least three elements, namely cognition, society and discourse.²⁷ Such a model – whose development could also be supported by the epistemological instruments of some fields such as empirical political theory (by its application in the analysis of particular ideologies), social anthropology (by illustrating ritualised ideological conventions) or communication sciences (by configuring an analysis framework of the manner in which ideological conventions are instituted with the help of communication channels) – may become a starting point for the development of an *integrated theory of ideology*.²⁸

²⁷ van Dijk, *Ideology*, 5.

²⁸ Contrary to van Dijk, who expressed the possibility of constructing a “general theory of ideology,” I prefer to talk about an *integrated theory* because the term “general” seems to announce a promise that is difficult to keep, hiding a principle similar to “all or nothing.” Or, it is difficult to argue that an admirable approach such as that of the Dutch theorist, based on the threefold formula of cognition, society and discourse, may nevertheless have a “general” extension able to deplete all the perspectives from which ideology has been studied. On the contrary, I believe that an *integrated theory of ideology* gains its conditions of possibility not

The ideas presented up to now have referred to the relationships between ideology and social reality and also between ideology and social meaning as a necessary stage for the access of individuals to social knowledge. I attempt to sketch an ideological analysis of this process in the following section.

3. Ideological analysis of social knowledge

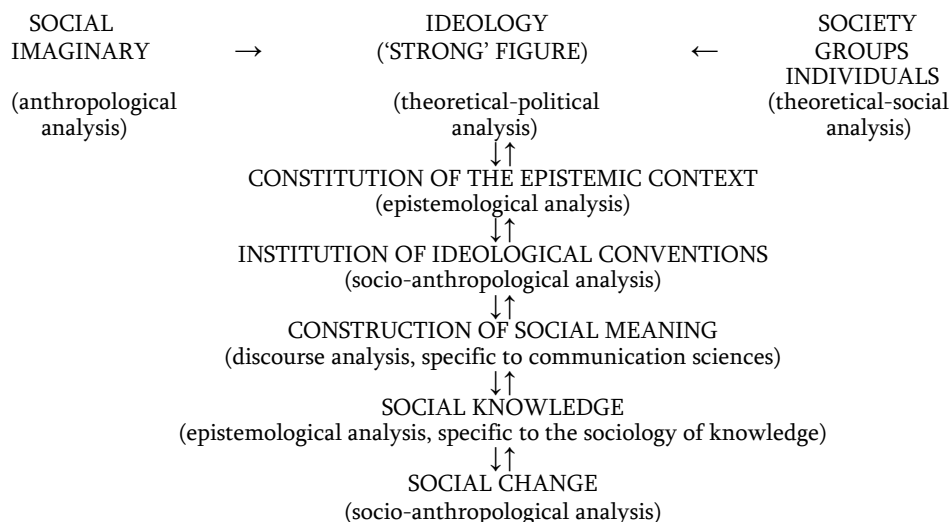
The contemporary approaches of the theme that has already become classic in social and political theory studies, that of the relationship between ideology and knowledge, suggest that “if the concept of an ideology is reserved for *determining* factors of knowledge in the sense of Weber’s “presuppositions,” rather than for the situationally *determined* contents of thought, it may serve an important function.”²⁹ However, the social determination of knowledge itself is, even today, an unavoidable aspect for a perspective that implies the presence of ideology as an epistemological instrument, just as this perspective intends to be. In the previous sections, I have argued in favour of the idea that ideology actively participates in the configuration of social reality, instituting, as a ‘strong figure’ of the social imaginary, certain conventions that allow the construction of the social meaning that makes possible the access to social knowledge. In the lines that follow, my intention is to support the other role allotted to ideology at the beginning of this paper, namely that of epistemological instrument. In this respect, I am interested in identifying a methodology suited for the ideological analysis of social knowledge in order to highlight the influence that the system of beliefs involved in ideology has on it and implicitly on the process of social change. Therefore, I reiterate the idea that, even if social knowledge is not entirely ideological, ideological elements are unavoidable in the process of configuring this knowledge, contributing in a decisive manner to the changes emerging at the societal level and being, in their turn, influenced by them. Coming back to Weber’s term of “presuppositions,” it must be said that, in the process of knowledge, they represent factors that influence both the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. Knowledge itself, as a process, cannot escape this situational determination, even if it is not exclusively ideological. What I want to underline is that, as long as it contributes to the institution of society and the

only by an extensive degree of generalisation – that it rejects, by the way – but also through the “integration” of the most important perspectives of ideology analysis.

²⁹ Wolfgang von Leyden, “The situational ‘determination’ of ideological and utopian concepts. The ‘Frankfurt’ School: Mannheim, Horkheimer, Marcuse,” in *Ideology and Politics. Idéologie et politique*, eds. Maurice Cranston and Peter Mair (Firenze: European University Institute, 1980), 102.

social reality it expresses, ideology may become an instrument serving in construing this reality. Going further, ideology thus contributes to the emergence of social changes. Methodologically, the model of ideological analysis that I advance is an integrated one – therefore, it supposes interdisciplinary views – and can be visualised in the figure presented below:

Figure 1: The integrated model of ideological analysis of social knowledge



Since this model represents, in this stage, only an operational hypothesis, it is understandable that I do not aim to apply it in this context. Therefore, I shall pursue the ideological analysis of social knowledge working with the tools provided by the theories configured by the epistemological debates from the field of the sociology of knowledge. I hope that the later development of the ideas displayed in this paper would allow me to apply the abovementioned model within the larger framework of an integrated theory of ideology.

What does social knowledge mean in our age? Even if it seems to be a question that would usually have a truism as an answer, this interrogative turn of phrase is fully justified if we have in mind, on the one hand, the news announcing “the end of knowledge,” emerged in the end of the last century – one that, in fact, claimed the rejection of the old way of understanding the process of knowledge (even on its declared “scientific” side) as one that would be strictly separated from the social environment³⁰ – and, on the other hand, the fast pace of the development

³⁰ Steve Fuller and James H. Collier, *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and the End of Knowledge: A New Beginning for Science and Technology Studies* (London: Lawrence Elbaum Associates Publishers, 2004).

of knowledge, a pace that results directly in various changes at the societal level. Hence, it is not by chance that we talk about the identification of social knowledge in a society that has been defined in various ways during the last 50 years. For example, as shown by the social theorist David Goldblatt, the society of the last years of the past century and the first years of the new millennium has been characterised in at least three ways, each of them implying various definitions.³¹ First, there was the *knowledge society*, whether it was defined as a “post-industrial society” or a society characterised by “knowledge economy and the communications revolution.” Another manner of characterising the contemporary social space labelled it as “the fragmented society,” insisting upon underlying expressions such as “post-Fordism” or “post-modernism.” Finally, as some social theorists became aware that humanity could face the possibility of a global catastrophe led to the society specific to our age being called “the risk society.” Therefore, what type of social knowledge corresponds to the contemporary society, aside from the labels assigned by the various theories mentioned above? This is an issue that social theorists must address, so, according to Goldblatt, “(...) the first precondition of an effective engagement by the social sciences with the world of knowledge is a recognition of the plurality and diversity of knowledges.”³² Beyond this plurality of forms of knowledge, the contemporary society is one wherein the process of gathering knowledge is not static, but is incessantly transforming, given the social pressure exerted to provide solutions in ever-changing circumstances. As a result, the issue is an acute one for scientific knowledge, whose ‘sanctuary’ has been ‘de-constructed’ since the second part of the last century. The unprecedented communicational democratization of the contemporary society, the winding social trajectories imposed by the globalisation process, the post-functionalist relativisation of truth and showing the profound relationships between the process of producing scientific knowledge and technology development, on the one hand, and the phenomenon of political power, on the other, are as many reasons that ‘ideologise’ even scientific knowledge, up to the point where in the ‘latest’ approaches of social epistemology theorists talk about “the governance of science,” arguing that

(...) the mystery surrounding science as a political concept lies less in its day-to-day business (i.e. ‘research’), than in its capacity to speak on behalf of the whole humanity in a way that transcends national differences as well as other

³¹ David Goldblatt, “Living in the after-life: knowledge and social change,” in *Knowledge and Social Sciences: Theory, Method and Practice*, ed. David Goldblatt (London and New York: Routledge, in association with The Open University, 2000), 121-42.

³² Goldblatt, “Knowledge and social change,” 2.

cultural and economic barriers. In that sense, science is a vehicle of global governance.³³

In what regards social knowledge, the role of ideology is still predominant, despite the cyclic reiteration of the “positivist” expectation that there is a way to separate the knowing subject from the socio-political environment of the existence of human beings and, implicitly, to place it in a privileged position, completely “de-ideologised.” It is not by chance that the research in social epistemology launched when “the Strong Programme in the sociology of knowledge” (SSK) was established in Great Britain, argued that “cognitive and social order cannot be understood in isolation from each other, even when one analyses the contents of the most esoteric forms of scientific and technical knowledge”³⁴, that “(...) scientific knowledge should be studied just like any other kind of belief system”³⁵ and that “(...) knowledge, like any other social institution, is the product of goal-oriented collective action.”³⁶ However, these assertions are not the only one able to explain the ideological orientation of knowledge in our society. Returning to the way I have defined ideology in the beginning of this study, as a system of beliefs shared at the level of society and that configure some action-oriented strategies able to ensure community integration and identity, it is clear that the analysis I advance assigns such a meaning to social knowledge itself. Without being ideological in its profound nature, the latter is nevertheless dependent on the social environment that is ideologically constructed. Therefore, analysed with the help of the epistemological valences of the concept of ideology, social knowledge proves to be, in our age, a true “action generator:” “Knowledge, as a generalized capacity to act, acquires an “active” role in the course of social action only under circumstances where such action does not follow purely stereotypical patterns (Max Weber), or is not strictly regulated in some other fashion. Knowledge assumes significance under conditions where social action is, for whatever reason, based on a certain degree of freedom in the courses of action that can be chosen. The circumstance of action we have in mind may also be described as the capacity of actors to alter or stabilize a specific

³³ Steve Fuller, *The Governance of Science: Ideology and the Future of the Open Society* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000), 8.

³⁴ Massimo Mazzotti, introduction to *Knowledge as Social Order. Rethinking the Sociology of Barry Barnes*, ed. Massimo Mazzotti (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 3.

³⁵ Mazzotti, introduction.

³⁶ Mazzotti, introduction, 8.

reality (*Gestaltungsspielraum*).³⁷ Here, it should be specified that the significations assumed by knowledge when it puts to use its capacity to act is a fact that happens in relation to the epistemic context existing at the social level, as it is connected to the use of some categories and concepts that are previous to the new discoveries. If, as result of the new addition, knowledge produces social change and thus determines the introduction of new significations, the latter manifest their influence not only on social reality but also on ideology, which is a constituting factor of that reality. Due to the changes occurring both at its constituting level and at the level of the knowledge through which its members connect to the reality produced by the intersubjectivity specific to the human factor, contemporary society is no longer a society wherein knowledge belongs exclusively to the elites or to professionals. Being formed by an audience that is better informed and educated, more attentive to the contradictions projected by scientific debates and to the relationship between gathering knowledge and gathering power, society exerts more pressure on the process of knowledge in general and on that of social knowledge in particular. Today, it is obvious that

language, institutions, power, and social change and social problems all drive, shape and influence the content of any one knowledge system, its blind spots and strengths, its trajectory of internal development, its relative standing and legitimacy.³⁸

In this framework, the task of a theory of ideology could be that of identifying – including by applying the integrated model of ideological analysis – how the process of knowledge in the contemporary society could be oriented so as to be in line with the requirement of preserving identity under the circumstances of this genuine postmodern ‘fragmentarium.’

Conclusions and open questions

In this study, my objective has been to support with arguments the idea according to which the positive definition of the concept of ideology – with reference to its essentially social function, that of integration-identity – allows to identify how ideology projects that type of reality wherein it can manifest itself and thus it transforms into an instrument through which this reality can be understood. Our endeavour, based on a methodological approach that used compared conceptual

³⁷ Gotthard Bechmann et al., *The Social Integration of Science. Institutional and Epistemological Aspects of the Transformation of Knowledge in Modern Society* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 2009), 22.

³⁸ Goldblatt, “Knowledge and social change,” 155.

analysis, definitional analysis and textual interpretation (with the purpose of 'extracting' the issue of the relationship between ideology and knowledge – be it social or scientific – from the strictly delineated framework of the history of political ideas, sociology of knowledge and epistemology) has led me to the conclusions summarised below:

1. Being the sum of the discursive-symbolic elements belonging to a community, *the social imaginary* articulates ideologically a type of reality that bestows on the members of a society the possibility of integration, thus providing them with a sense of identity and therefore of 'ontological security'. Among these discursive-symbolic elements, developing as a system of beliefs that are expressed with reference to the social, economic or political present, *ideology* holds a privileged place;
2. The ideological projection of social reality is possible due to the existence of an *epistemic contextualism* shared by any human community. In other words, by their essentially social existence – and therefore by the inter-individual and inter-group relations that they develop – human beings configure a common ground based on which they explain reality – thus participating, as subjects, in its construction – and that provides them, at the same time, with the instruments needed for social knowledge;
3. The relationship between ideology and society is bi-univocal: as a central figure of the social imaginary, ideology institutes a certain society and, corresponding to it, a certain type of reality, while being, at the same time, an instrument of understanding this reality, but ideology is, in its turn, influenced by the social evolution that it motivates. This bi-univocal relationship is visible over the entire road from ideas to social practices and back.
4. Social reality is an ideological construction, its fundamentals being beliefs, which, while being positioned in the imaginary and socially shared, create an *epistemic context* owing to which the members of society can contribute to both the institution of the practices needed for structuring and the development of social knowledge;
5. The existence of the epistemic context makes possible a crossroads between the individual, subjective beliefs of the members of society and the intersubjective ones, shared at the social level, and thus instituting *ideological conventions*. They represent the *social-institutionalised expression of the beliefs shared by the members of a society, beliefs that serve as "landmarks" of social knowledge and that may modify their meanings in the context of the societal changes produced by this knowledge*,

6. Since, being based on new additions, knowledge produces *social change*, it may determine the introduction of new meanings which could infiltrate the epistemic context, influencing ideological conventions and thus not only social reality but also ideology, as a constituting factor of that reality.

Based on this understanding of the relationship between ideology, reality, knowledge and social change, I have advanced an *integrated model of ideological analysis*, stating that its applicability is possible if we opt for an interdisciplinary approach. Such a model, whose development could also be supported by the epistemological instruments of such fields as empirical political theory (by its application in the analysis of particular ideologies), social anthropology (by illustrating ritualised ideological conventions) or communication sciences (by configuring an framework of analysis regarding the manner in which ideological conventions are instituted with the help of communication channels) – may become a starting point for the development of an *integrated theory of ideology*.

I would like to conclude by stressing that I am aware of the difficulties implied by such an intellectual challenge, and thus I consider this paper only a propaedeutic stage. I am also aware that, in this stage, we still need to find argumentative and methodological solutions to problems such as the shift from the normative analysis of ideology to the empirical treatment of particular ideologies, the agreement or disagreement of particular ideologies under the circumstances of the procedural competition implied by the democratic society of our age, the reconfiguration of ideology and knowledge in postmodernism, the construction of an interdisciplinary direction in the analysis of this reconfiguration. All these are issues that subsequent research may just as well confirm or refute. Nevertheless I believe that a proper knowledge of the social cannot ignore the questions related to such issues and that the idea of a *knowledge-based society* itself compels us to answer such challenges.