Educating to Challenge Ideology: A Brief Critical Approach

Quentin Wheeler-Bell

Indiana University

First, I want to acknowledge Sally Haslanger's academic humility.[1] Her willingness to travel across academic disciplines is admirable. Second, I also appreciate her intellectual humility. Presenting ideas that she acknowledges as "developing and/or incomplete" is laudable. I say this because I hope my response to Sally is interpreted as a conversation starter rather than an assessment or critique. Overall, I agree with her that social change requires cultural change. I also agree that an education for social change must grapple with the moral implications of teaching students how to challenge ideological formations.

I consider Haslanger a fellow traveler because we both are interested in an education that challenges ideology. However, I do have two key concerns with her conception of ideology. First, I wonder if her normative analysis can effectively address *the paradox of ideology*: the ability to distinguish between non-ideological and ideological beliefs. Second, I am concerned with her ability to outline justifiable educational practices that teach children how to challenge ideological domination. In this brief response, I explain why the paradox of ideology is a problem and why Haslanger's analysis seems unable to address this paradox. Then, I briefly sketch a critical approach to teaching students how to challenge ideology—one that attempts to avoid the paradox of ideology.

THE PARADOX OF IDEOLOGY

The paradox of ideology, as Rahel Jaeggi explains, is an inability to differentiate between an adequate definition of the field of interpretations and possibilities, and definitions that are problematic or inade-

quate—in example, ideological.[2] Addressing the paradox of ideology seems to require the normative ability to distinguish ideological cultural practices from non-ideological practices. Escaping this paradox is even more problematic because, as Haslanger acknowledges, "political and legal theorists are as subject to ideology as anyone else." This being the case, an ideology critique must address at least three questions: (1) how do we determine ideological versus non-ideological beliefs? (2) who is capable of making these judgments? (3) how does an individual or group gain these capabilities?

To address the paradox of ideology, Haslanger turns to the "epistemology of oppositional consciousness" and "conscious raising" in *liberatory movements*. Haslanger focuses on liberatory movements, rather than social movements in general, because she believes such movements are better positioned to expose ideological formations. However, this focus does not overcome the paradox of ideology. For instance, oppositional consciousness even within liberatory movements are constructed and contested, and in ways that can be ideological. For example, within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement there are debates over the role of capitalism in black liberation.[3] Some within BLM believe black liberation is realized by expanding black businesses, while others claim capitalism, even black capitalism, is antithetical to black liberation. My point is deep disagreements exist even within liberatory movements; thus, we cannot assume such movements automatically cultivate non-ideological perspectives.

In fact, all movements must learn how to define what constitutes justice and injustice, how to frame these issues, and how to make their political demands heard.[4] This learning process can also be shaped by ideological beliefs. For this reason, we need to distinguish between *needs* and *needs based discourse*. As Nancy Fraser explains, a

difference exists between *needs*, or "whining or displeasure"—to quote Haslanger—and *the discourse* available for turning whining and displeasure into political complaints.[5] This distinction is essential because supposedly liberatory movements can have their needs shaped by ideological discourses. For example, Tom Pedroni explains how black social movements around school choice transformed African-Americans' general need for equitable schools into support for neoliberal school choice policies.[6] Pedroni explains how blacks' support for school vouchers was built by "raising the consciousness" of black people and responding to their "gut refusal," to use Haslanger's language, to accept the racist public educational system within Milwaukee, Wisconsin.[7] However, the consciousness raising activities around the framing of educational injustices were also contested. Debates occurring within the black public sphere in Milwaukee were disputed, with no unified oppositional movement emerging. Instead, the black public sphere was (and is) composed of different actors drawing upon different ideas, rituals, and long-standing patterns of interactions within the black intellectual tradition.[8] These different groups were all engaged in "raising consciousness" to help others see how to frame the educational injustices blacks were facing in Milwaukee. Nonetheless, the dominant demand that emerged was in support of neoliberal school choice.

I note this example for three reasons. First, oppositional movements are diverse, and disagreements exist even within these movements. Second, oppositional movements can draw upon different and conflicting strains of oppositional cultural ideas (i.e., needs based discourses) to frame their political demands. Third, ideology can shape how oppositional movements learn how to form and frame their political demands. One may disagree with my claim that the African-American groups supporting school vouchers *were* liberatory. While this disagreement has merit, it merely highlights the larger point I am making:

we cannot presuppose that consciousness raising activities within liberatory movements inherently lead to non-ideological political demands. This being the case, I believe, any ideological critique must normatively explain how to distinguish between ideological and non-ideological beliefs. For Haslanger's approach, specifically, at least two questions must be addressed. First, how does she *normatively* describe what constitutes a liberatory movement'? Second, how are individuals and movements capable of identifying and employing non-ideological discourses?

SKETCHES FOR A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

I am not saying Haslanger lacks the conceptual tools for addressing the paradox of ideology. Instead, my argument is she insufficiently foregrounds her normative theory, thus making it unclear how she avoids this paradox. An ideological critique can often assume someone (or group) can tell others they are misperceiving their own reality.[9] This assumption can become belittling when it fails to respect individuals as free and autonomous persons. When this occurs, an ideological critique can become *paternalistic* at best or *authoritarian* at worst.[10] Avoiding these shortcomings requires a clear normative way to distinguish between ideological and non-ideological beliefs. Moreover, addressing this paradox matters for education because it helps to explain the morally justifiable practices teachers can use to assist students in challenging ideological domination.

In moving forward, let me briefly offer a normative approach that aims to cultivate "critical individuals," while avoiding the above noted harms. An ideological critique is incomplete without a normative conception of democracy and the role of autonomy within public deliberation.[11] As Christian Rostboll argues, we should see an "ideological critique a*s part of a process of public deliberatio*n and thereby as part of *the exercise of public autonomy.*"[12] Here, *public autonomy* means the

intersubjective form of self-governance that individuals exercise with others to ensure all social practices affecting an individual's life meet the standards of public justification.[13] In this sense, public autonomy is tethered to public deliberation: public autonomy is exercised when individuals are provided opportunities to participate within the process of public deliberation, express their opinions and perspectives, reflect upon their beliefs, and reasonably consider different perspectives.[14]

Educators should see the task of critiquing ideological forma-tions as intrinsically tied to teaching individuals how to engage in pub-lic deliberation and exercise their public autonomy. More specifically, an ideological critique, as Rostboll argues, aims to "trigger self-reflec-tion."[15] This means an ideological critique "plays the role of provoking such a process of deliberation by initiating processes of self-reflec-tion."[16] An education for public autonomy (i.e., a civic education) aims to teach children the skills, habits, and dispositions to both effectively engage in public deliberation and transform society in a manner that deepens democracy.[17] For educators, this means creating learning spac-es where students can reflect upon how the content of their beliefs are shaped by social and historical circumstances as well as how these beliefs might function to reproduce unjust conditions.

However, a critical educator is not the arbiter of truth. In-stead, they help facilitate the process of self-reflection: they create learning spaces where students can exercise their public autonomy and reasonably engage with the beliefs and perspectives of others. Teachers should cultivate learning environments that aid students in understanding how ideological beliefs operate by closing, limiting, or distorting one's reflective process, and how such beliefs function to close off opportunities to think differently about the social problems facing society.[18] For example, the ideology of natural property rights

within capitalism often operates by closing off the reflective pro-
cess needed for people to envision and listen to perspectives aimed
at providing individuals with material resources, regardless of their
participation within the labor market.[19] This ideology limits the public
debate over welfare policies, because it assumes one's income should
almost solely be tethered to one's participation in the labor market [20].
My point is that teachers (or anyone else) should not assume a policy
or perspective is the non-ideological perspective. Instead, they should
assist students in seeing how ideology operates to limit one's ability to
envision and listen to the kernels of rationality within certain policies,
perspectives, or beliefs.

This also means an education aimed at challenging ideological
domination should not assume oppositional groups (or oppositional
knowledge) are inherently non-ideological. Instead, educators should
view oppositional groups as *one* means for triggering self-reflection
and expanding public deliberation. Oppositional groups can have such
an effect because it can embody kernels of rationality that could open
new perspectives. However, oppositional groups also embody ker-
nels of irrationality that must be interrogated. Overall, the normative
goal should be expanding public autonomy. This would mean helping
students overcome blockages or restrictions in the deliberative process
and opening opportunities for them to see issues in new ways. It also
entails aiding students in understanding counter public discourses and
how to form new publics.

Before concluding, I want to make one cautionary note. A
critical education must be wary of using traditional forms of education
to engage in an ideology critique.[21]As Michael Apple explains, ideology
can reside in both the *content* and the *form* of the curriculum.[22] For in-
stance, the traditional structure of school can reinforce the paradox of

ideology by assuming the teacher is the "bearer of truth." These pedagogical practices can become paternalistic or authoritarian when they treat students as passive recipients of "the truth".[23] Effectively challenging ideology requires democratic schools and classrooms because such spaces treat students as active agents with public autonomy.[24] In addition, democratic schools also ensure that the teacher's viewpoint, and the school structure, can be subjected to an ideological critique. In the end, an education aimed at challenging ideological domination must be grounded in a normative appreciation of democracy and public autonomy.

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16 Rostboll, 147.

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