Chapter Seven

POLITICAL HINGE EPISTEMOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Political epistemology is the intersection of political philosophy and epistemology. It is where the political and the epistemological meet. Broadly speaking, political epistemology takes many of our contemporary political problems to be intimately intertwined with social epistemological problems. Political epistemologists are interested in questions like:

- How does ignorance, ideology, or propaganda undermine political belief and action?
- How should we respond to political disagreement?
- Do the epistemic qualities of political agents or their decision procedures play a role in their authority?
- What is the role of truth in political decision making?

These questions are inextricably political and epistemic. How should we approach them? By far the dominant approach is veritistic epistemology, which takes truth to be the fundamental epistemic good and evaluates belief-forming processes and evidence by way of their relation to truth. In political epistemology, then, the emphasis is placed on just how well political agents track the truth. Another important approach is virtue epistemology, which in this context looks at the way political agents might become more intellectually virtuous or how group inquiry and deliberation can be epistemically improved in order to facilitate an intellectually flourishing society.

By way of introduction, *hinge epistemology* is an orientation in epistemology that approaches theoretical and social epistemological problems with the guiding idea that there are certain fundamental presuppositions of worldviews or belief systems that legitimate the reason-giving relations in those systems, but which are themselves immune to rational evaluation of the kind recognized by mainstream epistemology.[1]

For example, we routinely rely on our experiences to form beliefs or to evaluate the attitudes of other people. Hinge epistemology says that if we did not presuppose that experience is reliable, our experiences could not intelligibly be presented as *reasons* for belief or other sorts of doxastic attitudes.[2] Since our commitment to the reliability of experience plays such an essential reason-giving role in our belief systems, it is a *hinge proposition*.

1. See Coliva (2015) and Pritchard (2016) as representative statements of hinge epistemology.
2. See Coliva (2015), Pritchard (2016), and Wright (2014).

Hinge propositions, in turn, are those background presuppositions that frame our worldviews, limit our inquiries and constrain what we take to be good reasons for belief. 'That is to say, the questions that we raise and our doubts depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn', as Wittgenstein put it (OC 341). In turn, hinge epistemology tells us that hinge propositions must be in place for rational evaluation to take place at all. For without hinges – without some commitments that we do not doubt – we would not be able to understand reasons for belief or doubt in the first place (cf. OC 105; 150; 152; 231; 342).

For this reason, hinge epistemology is in tension with mainstream veritistic and virtue epistemology, because hinge epistemology entails that not every doxastic commitment we have is irrational just because it is not supported by evidence, is a manifestation of intellectual virtue, or is the product of a reliable belief-forming process. Instead, some doxastic commitments lie outside the scope of rational evaluation and are thereby neither epistemically rational nor irrational. Some commitments are rather 'beyond being justified or unjustified' (OC 359). So, although hinge epistemology is not necessarily against the spirit of mainstream veritistic epistemology – hinge epistemology does not entail that truth, evidence, or virtue are epistemically irrelevant – it will nevertheless often recommend approaching epistemological problems in a way not endorsed by either of them.[3]

This approach to epistemology intuitively has ramifications for political epistemology. After all, if any system of thinking has to encode assumptions or presuppositions in order for there to be rational evaluation and reason-giving relations, we might intuitively expect this to hold of political ways of thinking as well. For, intuitively, we find that socialism, liberalism, conservativism and other twentieth-century political worldviews have certain fundamental fixed points. It would be unusual if these fixed points had no normative or epistemic role in their proponent's political evaluations. At the very least, there is an interesting question here about whether hinge epistemology can shed light on these roles. In this chapter, I want to explore the prospects of a *political hinge epistemology*, an epistemology that applies the insights from hinge epistemology to political-epistemological challenges. In particular, I shall be focusing on an epistemic challenge that ideology poses. However, I think that political hinge epistemology can also be brought to bear on other political-epistemic problems, which I explore at the end of the chapter.

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3. For example, mainstream veritistic epistemology is often foundationalist or coherentist about the structure of epistemic justification. Traditional foundationalism and coherentism are incompatible with hinge epistemology. The former says that every inference-based belief owes its justification to some non-inference-based belief that is non-inferentially justified, whereas the latter says that every justified belief is justified by virtue of standing in certain coherence relations to other beliefs. Hinge epistemology contrasts with them by saying that some beliefs or commitments are outside the scope of epistemic justification altogether, but not thereby unjustified as a result. Turning our attention to evidentialism and reliabilism – two veritistic theories – hinge epistemology would disagree with them by saying that a belief is not unjustified just because it is not supported by evidence or not produced by a reliable-belief forming process. For the hinge epistemologist, some beliefs or commitments are essentially arational; although, see Neta (forthcoming) for an evidentialist hinge epistemology.

In what follows, I want to first address two *prima facie* challenges facing the development of political hinge epistemology. In Section 2, I describe and answer these challenges. In Section 3, I introduce ideology and ideology critique as well as some of their key epistemic challenges. I then explain how political hinge epistemology can address these challenges; although it raises many other questions that I cannot address satisfactorily here. It suffices that we can see how a fully developed political hinge epistemology might address those questions. Finally, in Section 4, I outline how political hinge epistemology can be developed to address other challenges in political epistemology and then conclude with the hope to promote future work on political hinge epistemology.[4]

2. Developing Political Hinge Epistemology

2.1. Two Prima Facie Challenges

Hinge epistemology is an approach to epistemological challenges, but it also takes on substantive epistemological commitments. The thrust of the view is that there are basic presuppositions – hinge propositions – that must be believed, or at least assumed, in order for there to be reason-giving relations and rational evaluation at all. While most of traditional epistemology accepts that rational evaluation is universal – that there is no in-principle limit on what one can rationally evaluate – hinge epistemology takes it that rational evaluation is essentially local (cf. Pritchard 2016, 4). What this means is that not every doxastic attitude is in the market for rational evaluation; some such attitudes set the boundaries of rational evaluation. As a first pass, *political hinge epistemology* says that just as 'our senses are reliable' or 'there are physical objects' have hinge proposition status for us when it comes to providing reasons for empirical belief – they are presuppositions we need to assume in order to make sense of our experiences as providing reasons for empirical beliefs – so too political propositions such as that 'everyone has a right to liberty' or 'there are rights', say – can have hinge proposition status for us when it comes to providing reasons for political beliefs or reasons which motivate political action. When I say that a proposition has a 'hinge proposition status', I only mean that it plays the normative role that hinge propositions are designated with: that it is necessary to believe them or to be positively committed to them in some way in order for there to be reason-giving relations between the relevant states or attitudes and other attitudes or actions. We can then use political hinge epistemology to make sense of our epistemic evaluations of political beliefs and answer certain political-epistemic challenges in a way that mirrors how we use hinge epistemology to make sense of empirical discourse and answer certain theoretical and social-epistemic challenges which arise therein, such as the problem of radical scepticism, the problem of other minds, the justification of induction and testimony and so forth.

4. Some philosophers have already taken the step of developing a political hinge epistemology to tackle particular topics, such as feminist epistemology and the epistemology disagreement. See Ashton (2019), Coliva (2015), Coliva (2019) and Ranalli (2018).

The development of political hinge epistemology runs up against initial challenges. The first one is that it is not completely clear what makes a political presupposition a hinge proposition. For hinge epistemology tends to take it that propositions about our reliance on sensory perception, testimony and certain forms of reasoning (e.g., deduction, induction) as belief-forming policies are hinges, because they seem to be necessary for *any* rational inquiry at all. Likewise, highly general propositions, such as that there are physical objects, that there is a distant past, that you are not radically and systematically deceived, and so forth, are typically counted as hinge propositions as well. This suggests that what makes something a hinge proposition is whether it performs the *basic-feature-of-inquiry* role: that it is a general feature of rational inquiry – of any belief system – that it is assumed to be true.

Extending the analogy, we might think that a properly developed political hinge epistemology will be one that successfully identifies those propositions that are necessary for *any* political inquiry or political thinking (or rational political inquiry or thinking) as well. The trouble is that it is extremely hard to identify any interesting propositions which do this. If one looks to the mainstay political worldviews of the twentieth century – liberalism and neoliberalism, conservatism, social democracy, socialism and anarchism – one rarely finds sufficiently general unifying propositions that could act as plausible candidates for any rational political inquiry or belief at all. Even something as mundane as *society should be organized by government* is notoriously disputed (e.g., by some classical liberals, libertarians and anarchists). Perhaps the closest to unity, we do find is that there should be political and economic organization; namely, that there should be something that manages economy and law. So we might say that the best candidate we find for a political hinge proposition in this sense is something like this: *there must be some social management*. This, however, is simply too broad to make political hinge epistemology useful or explanatorily powerful when it comes to tackling the pressing challenges that political epistemology seeks to address.

The second challenge is connected to the first one. Let us suppose that political hinge epistemology solves the problem of identifying explanatorily useful political hinge propositions. The problem is that even highly general propositions that might make for good hinge proposition candidates, such as that:

1. The state is just / unjust;
2. Liberty is / is not an inviolable right;
3. There are human rights;

are subject to substantial dispute among political thinkers.[5] But hinge epistemology takes hinges to regulate inquiry and reasoning-giving generally, which makes it hard to see how they could be subject to rational evaluation. Wittgenstein himself puts the point succinctly as follows: 'I want to conceive it [the hinge propositions] as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified', because the hinges are essentially 'fundamental principles of human enquiry' (OC 359; 670). This suggests that insofar as *there are*

5. See Nozick (1974), Rawls (1993), Husak (1984), and Huemer (2013).

human rights or *liberty is a right* (etc.) are hinge propositions, they are not really rationally evaluable at all, *contra* what political theorists or pundits would lead us to believe. They are at least 'exempt from doubt' (OC 341). So, the problem is that the possibility of rational evaluation or even reasonable disagreement over the best candidates for political hinge propositions suggests that they could not be hinge propositions after all. This is deeply puzzling.

2.2. *Answering These Challenges*

Key to answering the first challenge is to distinguish between assumptions that ground reason-giving relations locally (within a certain belief system), and assumptions that ground reason-giving relations in general (for any belief system).

We can get a handle on this distinction by considering examples. Consider various religious frameworks. By 'frameworks', I mean not only a belief system but also a system of evaluation and practice: a system for making sense of the world relative to certain background presuppositions. For example, the assumption that God exists seems necessary to make sense of the evaluative and epistemic practices of Christian religious frameworks. That one might read the Bible and take the testimony of a disciple to convey information about God's will, for example, relies crucially on being committed to the existence of God.[6]

This phenomenon can be seen in non-Abrahamic religious frameworks as well. It would not make sense for one to take the Buddha's sermons on the Noble Eightfold Path to count in favour of how one can escape the cycle of perpetual unsatisfactoriness, unless one assumed not only that it is desirable to exit that cycle but also that the Noble Eightfold Path as espoused by the Buddha can yield that outcome. In this way, we might count 'the Buddha is trustworthy' or 'following the Noble Eightfold path can yield Enlightenment' as playing the hinge role in certain Buddhist frameworks.

What we need to appreciate here about these cases is the normative role these assumptions play in their respective frameworks. Christianity and Buddhism are different: they are different systems for interpreting the world, beliefs and religious practice. They predict and recommend different evaluations. A Buddhist does not need to believe in the existence of God. It is not required by their religious framework. But it is required by Christianity. The Christian is likely to regard the Noble Eightfold Path as nothing more than a therapeutic insight; or even a dangerous heresy. The Buddhist, of course, is likely to regard it as a deep spiritual insight: nothing less than the recipe for Enlightenment. The key point here for the hinge epistemologist is that they both make use of assumptions, doubt about which would 'throw into confusion' their evaluations of certain beliefs and practices (Wright 2014). What makes each of their respective evaluations – Paul's testimony about the ascension of Jesus as being informative about the divine, or the Buddha's sermon on attachment and the self as obstacles to

6. For an exploration of religious hinge epistemology, see Pritchard 2000, Pritchard 2011, and De Ridder 2019.

Enlightenment – intelligible for the practitioners of these religions is that they are committed to certain background presuppositions (whether metaphysical, normative, or epistemic). Assumptions that play this role have *framework status* for the relevant belief system. It is what must be assumed by adherents of the belief system – those people who actively employ and adhere to the norms of the belief system – in order to make sense of the reason-giving relationships internal to their belief system.

A different way of thinking about hinge propositions is that hinges are not framework-specific, but specific propositions that are necessary for any framework to have reason-giving relations at all. On this account, 'the Buddha is trustworthy' or 'God exists' are not hinge propositions, because intuitively they are not necessary to make sense of reason-giving relations in general. One can make sense of how 'I see that it is raining outside' favours believing 'It is raining outside' without assuming anything at all about the Bible or the Buddha. That the senses are reliable, however, seems ineliminable: the Buddhist and the Christian – indeed, any human being – would need to assume that at least some sensory perception is reliable in order for them to make sense of reasons for their beliefs or doubts. This is the transcendental notion of a hinge proposition. These propositions would have *transcendental status*, because they are what must be assumed for any rational evaluation to take place at all.

It is easy to see that the transcendental account of hinge propositions is what grounds the first *prima facie* challenge for political hinge epistemology, not the framework account. So we might think that it is the framework account of hinge propositions that the political hinge epistemologist ought to be working with in order to bypass that challenge.

However, the project of identifying political propositions which have a transcendental status for any political belief system seems like a worthwhile project for political hinge epistemology in its own right, even granting the initial suspicion presented by the first challenge. The reason is that it would reveal, if successful, the essential common ground between various political belief systems. Trying to discover whether there are any such propositions held in common is an intuitively worthwhile ontological project in itself, but also in that it will help with the second challenge. After all, if certain sociopolitical commitments must be taken on board in order for there to be any rational political evaluation at all, this suggests that they are constitutive of rationality in the political domain. And this, intuitively at least, would provide a basis from which to, *in principle*, rationally resolve deep political disagreements, since agents would, *in fact*, have common sociopolitical ground after all.

So, are there political propositions with transcendental status? The trouble is that it is hard to see how there might be any interesting political propositions that have this status. But we can imagine that the answer to this question will be nontrivial and that candidate propositions will strike some thinkers as deeply controversial. For example, even propositions like

External world:	There is an external physical world.
The past:	The past is real.
Other minds:	You can know that other people exist.

are philosophically controversial. An argument for why they are hinge propositions (so understood) is bound to recover that controversy. So, too, for political propositions that we might put forward as candidates for being hinge propositions. Their obscurity and controversy should not lead us to think prematurely that there simply *could not be* political hinge propositions in the intended sense.

Approximating an answer to the question of whether there are political propositions with transcendental status, Robert Talisse (2013) has argued that the norms of epistemic rationality demand that we arrange ourselves democratically, because those norms are best served in democratic social conditions. As a result, democracy is the necessary outgrowth of epistemic rationality. If Talisse is right, there is a necessary connection between epistemic rationality and democracy. Other political philosophers have proposed that there are truths about the human condition that ought to be taken into account when considering sociopolitical organization. For example, Peter Kropotkin held that mutual aid is a natural phenomenon, observed in all societies past and present; that anarcho-communist organization is nothing less than a universal human tendency (Kropotkin 1902). Roger Scruton said that conservatism 'calls upon aspects of the human condition that can be witnessed in every civilization and at every period of history' (Scruton 2018, 13). Natural rights theorists hold that the moral and legal foundations of society derive from the natural rights of all people; rights that ought to constrain political organization. Although some of these propositions are empirical, this does not bar them from being hinge propositions (cf. Wittgenstein's example of 'The earth exists'). What these examples are supposed to help support is the idea that there could be political propositions with transcendental status, grounded in our general human tendencies or social practices, or even partly constitutive elements of an epistemically rational, social agent. It would be an interesting project to attempt to identify propositions that have that status.

Nevertheless, the framework account still seems intuitively better situated to identify explanatorily powerful political hinge propositions. Thus, our question now is this: how can the political hinge epistemologist employ the framework account to overcome our first *prima facie* challenge? The political hinge epistemologist can begin by identifying political frameworks and attempt to uncover which propositions plausibly have framework status within those frameworks. Examples might include:

Liberal hinge:	Liberty is an inviolable right.
Socialist hinge:	Social ownership of the means of production is just; private ownership of the means of production is not just.
Capitalist hinge:	Private ownership of the means of production is just.
Democrat hinge:	Democratic decision making is just.

This makes it seem like a trivial project, because we have only identified those propositions which seem to be obviously constitutive of the various political positions themselves. But there is a nontrivial project here too: identifying those propositions which have framework status for individual political belief systems, but which are

not at all obvious to proponents of those political belief systems. Put differently, these propositions will not be what proponents of the belief system assert or take themselves to be committed to. It would strike them as unobvious. They might even be constitutive of their positions without being recognisable as such by simply introspecting on what their view means or entails. For example, some theorists have argued that capitalism and democracy are incompatible. If they are right, we might think that a presupposition for any rational agent who accepts the democratic belief system is the rejection of capitalism. Likewise, although some democrats reject certain libertarian political freedoms, it has been argued that democracy without the recognition of certain liberties and rights is incoherent: that the whole point of democratic decision making is that it shows respect for and gives a political role to everyone for whom coercive laws would apply.

The second *prima facie* challenge might be thought to rest on an equivocation between the transcendental and framework conceptions of hinge propositions. Recall that the problem was that political thinkers disagree over propositions like 'equality is a right' or even 'there are human rights'. If any of these propositions are candidates for hinges, the existence of rational disagreement over them makes this puzzling: how could thinkers rationally deliberate over these propositions if they are hinge propositions, since they are supposed to enable agents to understand reasons for political positions generally? Put differently: would rational disagreement over them not be sufficient evidence that they are *not* hinge propositions?

If we think of hinge propositions as propositions that have framework status within a belief system, however, then this phenomenon is not as problematic as the second challenge makes it out to be. That is because different propositions can have framework status for different political belief systems. In an egalitarian political belief system, 'equality is a right' might have framework status, whereas it lacks this status in an anti-egalitarian political belief system.

Indeed, the framework conception of hinge propositions helps us to make sense of how there could be deep political disagreements in the first place. On this way of thinking about deep political disagreement, they are disagreements, which arise out of conflicts over framework propositions (cf. Ranalli 2018), whether they are disagreements over hinge propositions or disagreements over non-hinge propositions, but which arise out of commitment to contrary hinge propositions. Indeed, this helps to explain why we are, in principle, suspicious of people who espouse radically different political belief systems – say between the social democrat and the fascist – as being able to rationally resolve their disagreement. It is because each participant would not be able to recognize the reasons against their positions, because those reasons would be born out of contrary political commitments. When the social democrat says that forced submission to top–down undemocratic authority violates fundamental human rights, the fascist is likely to be unmoved by their claim in part, because the fact that some feature of their sociopolitical organization violates human rights will not be recognized by them *as a reason* not to endorse that kind of sociopolitical organization. There is a conflict here, not simply because they have different visions of what would be best for humanity, but because their frameworks have different fixed points.

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Finally, it is important to appreciate that there is a stronger reading of the second challenge that political hinge epistemology will need to grapple with. Importantly, this challenge is not specific to political hinge epistemology, but it is really a challenge for any development of hinge epistemology. The challenge is that many of the best candidates for hinge propositions are intuitively subject to rational evaluation. Realists and anti-realists offer reasons for and against the existence of an external world. Sceptics and anti-sceptics dispute whether external world knowledge is possible; and so forth. If there are hinge propositions, certainly 'there is an external world' and 'we are not systematically deceived' are among them. But if we thought of hinge propositions as immune to rational evaluation, these perennial debates quickly begin to look as if they underlie a deep error; one that attributes gross misunderstanding to many philosophers past and present. How hinge epistemology should deal with this problem is controversial (Coliva & Palmira 2020; Ranalli 2018). It would take us too far afield in this chapter to try to address it. Fortunately, the existence of this problem is not specific to political hinge epistemology, but one that applies to hinge epistemology generally. For that reason, it should not make us suspicious of the development of political hinge epistemology as such – at least, no more than it should make us suspicious of the development of hinge epistemology in general.

3. Ideology

The political theorist Gilles Dauvé made an important observation about contemporary liberal democracy. He said: 'democracy triumphs by telling us *where* to think'.[7] The insight here is that democratic institutions frame our political debates. They frame which discussions we think are worth having or even considering. Consider, for example, that most Americans tend to get their political information from private news media, such as Fox News, MSNBC, or CNN; or that educated Americans are expected to read *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or *The Economist* for reliable in-depth coverage of current events. When they learn that other countries have in the past gotten their news primarily from state-owned media, it immediately raises concerns about bias and self-promotion. Unfortunately, this concern is rarely inverted. The basic insight we can extract from Dauvé, here, is that our political conversations occur against the backdrop of our go-to sources of information; the topics depicted therein frame what we take, collectively, to be the topics that will form our considered political opinions.

This is ideology at work. Ideology tells us *where*, *how* and often *what* to think. It frames and thereby guides our thinking: it encourages a kind of cognitive conformity. But what exactly is ideology? Ideology has been called 'the most elusive concept in the whole of the social sciences' (McLellan 1986, 1; Fine & Sandstrom 1993, 22).

7. See Dauvé (2008), *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy*, which is a transcript of a lecture he gave in Malmö, Sweden, 1–2 November 2008. Interpreting this idea optimistically requires some assumptions. A Millian might think that democracy triumphs by telling us where to think, because democratic deliberators are better situated to correctly identify the right questions as well as the right answers.

This is because its use and definition are subject to widespread controversy. Different kinds of theorists use the term in different ways.[8]

On a *descriptive* understanding of ideology, ideology is a 'system of shared ideas linked to social action' (Marlin 2018, 115). Anarchism, socialism, liberalism, conservatism, fascism and various -isms of the twentieth century all count as ideologies in the descriptive sense. It is perhaps interchangeable with 'worldview' or 'belief system' insofar as they motivate sociopolitical action such as protest, strikes, voting, revolution, political debate, social planning, unionising, reform and so on.

There is also the *pejorative* understanding of ideology, whereby ideology is used to mark an alleged epistemic defect in the person who holds the ideology (Eagleton 1994, 1; Marlin 2018, 116). According to Eagleton (1994), to say that someone is ideological in the pejorative sense is to 'suggest that their view of things is skewed by a set of rigid preconceptions' (op cit. 1). Thus, it signals close-mindedness or intellectual rigidity: the person either clings rigidly to a political doctrine or else the doctrine itself demands such intellectual rigidity. In our politically polarized societies, this is by now an all-too-common way of condemning one's political opponents.

Next is the *epistemic* understanding of ideology. This is the understanding of ideology I shall employ in this chapter, because it is the one that raises an interesting challenge that – as I shall argue – political hinge epistemology has the resources to accommodate. The epistemic understanding of ideology comes from Marxist and critical theory, especially the work of Marx and Engels, Gramsci, Lukács, Althusser and others.[9] The epistemic understanding starts with the idea that there are oppressive social arrangements and that ideology is what conceals or even distorts how we understand these arrangements, so that people who are adversely affected by them can be led to consent to or even endorse those arrangements under a different guise. Marx and Engels wrote that under the influence of ideology, our social reality appears 'upside-down as in a camera obscura'. What Marx and Engels meant is that although certain features of our social reality are unfair or unjust, the ideology functions to make it seem to everyone as fair or even natural. For this reason, ideology serves an essential political function: it legitimizes the unjust social relations in the minds of both the oppressors and oppressed (cf. Mills 2017). In turn, *ideology critique* is the name for the liberatory project of uncovering oppressive social arrangements masked by ideology with the aim of raising the consciousness of oppressed and oppressive people alike.[10]

It will be helpful here to consider an example. The example I shall use is controversial, because it is born out of the Marxist critique of capitalism under liberal democracy.

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8. Eagleton (1991) lists 16 definitions.
9. See Zizek (ed.) for a collection featuring the canonical works of these critical theorists. See Leopold (2013) for an overview of Marxism and ideology.
10. Consider Eagleton, who writes that ideology critique 'claims to show how ideas are related to real material conditions by masking or dissembling them, displacing them into other terms, speciously resolving their conflicts and contradictions, converting these situations into apparently natural, immutable, universal ones' (Eagleton 1991, 6). See also Sankaran (2019, 1442). For an exploration of ideology critique in analytical philosophy, see Srinivasan (2018).

This analysis suggests that capitalism is unjust and that various liberal-democratic institutions in effect promote the unjust social relations alleged to be necessary or inevitable under capitalism.[11] Now, one might think that the epistemic conception of ideology does not apply to our social arrangements in contemporary liberal democracies. The point here is not to defend Marxist or other left critiques of capitalism and liberal democracy, but to explore how the concept of ideology can be employed to critique our contemporary social arrangements.

Let us start with something familiar to everyone: *work*. Consider the fact that most Americans work on average 44 hours per week – with many working upwards of 50 hours per week – until they reach their mid-1960s. The 40-hour work week has been the norm for about 80 years, while productivity continuously rises every year. We spend considerable time at work. The basic Marxist thought is that the exchange between employer and employee is not a fair exchange, because the latter is compelled to provide their labour to the former in order to live. The problem is not only that this kind of structural relationship is unjust, but that this relationship – work for wages in order to avoid poverty – is conceived through liberal-capitalist ideology as a manifestation of freedom. That one is free not to work; that no one forces one to work (or 'where to work').[12] It is seen as a kind of freedom, because the alternative is to be an entrepreneur; an employer rather than an employee. One is free to choose between these options. Left critiques of capitalism within liberal democracy say that this is the role of liberal ideology under capitalism. What this ideology conceals, on this view, is the fact that it compels those people who reject those options or otherwise are misaligned with their options regarding work to either work anyway or to be impoverished. This is the so-called 'dull compulsion of economic relations' under capitalism (Marx 1977 [1867]). Unlike earlier socioeconomic systems, like feudalism, the compulsion to labour is implicit rather than explicit.

A second important Marxist idea is that liberal ideology under capitalism also misrepresents how much freedom and liberty citizens enjoy, given the authoritarian structure of the workplace. Recall the figures mentioned earlier about work: that on average people work 40 hours per week until they reach their 60s. From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week, most people in liberal democracies live in a virtual dictatorship. This is what Elizabeth Anderson (2017) calls 'private government': the third-way reality in liberal democracies, where the reality is neither free markets nor state-control for most people in most of their waking hours. Bosses decide who to hire and fire, who to promote or demote, how to structure the workplace, who performs which activities, when, where and even why, with employees, regularly tasked with learning mission statements, company ideals, or even forbidden from so much as exchanging non–work-related remarks, which is conceived as 'time-theft'. Most of this time is, of course, lost time where a person does what they would otherwise regard as boring or worthless. Freedom is suspended 40 or more hours per week, for 40 or more years,

11. See Marx (1875) 1970, *Critique of the Gotha Program*.
12. Compare with Eagleton: '[...] the wage contract for Marx involves exploitation, but it presents itself spontaneously as an equal exchange. Competition operates to obscure the ways in which value under capitalism is determined by labour-time' (Eagleton 1991, 12).

arguably not even in the service of society at large, but in the service of an influential minority of society, supporting their socioeconomic advantages in turn. The freedom that liberal democracy affords in effect occurs in those short windows before and after work.

In short, liberal capitalist ideology presents our social arrangements as free in a number of senses – speech, religion, press and, of course, *markets* – and, importantly, who to work for or not at all. This is a background presupposition of the framework for evaluating socioeconomic and political relations as just or unjust, or rational or irrational within a liberal democracy. What it conceals for proponents of left-wing politics, especially Marxists and traditional anarchists and socialists, is the unfreedom contained within such relations: the totalitarian nature of the workplace; the limited enjoyment of liberal freedoms due to the limited time outside work, and the loss of personal time and well-being in order to secure even basic necessities in a highly competitive environment.

This is an example of ideology in the epistemic sense and how it can be employed in standard Marxist and other left-wing ideology critiques. But how might political hinge epistemology be brought to bear on it? The answer is that political hinge epistemology can enhance this kind of ideology critique. A guiding idea from political hinge epistemology is that political belief systems contain fundamental presuppositions about social reality; that political propositions or commitments can figure in our evaluations as part of the 'scaffolding of our thoughts' (OC 211). We saw that, according to the Marxist ideology critique, a fundamental presupposition of liberal democratic thinking is that *freedom is a right* and, further still, *that there are rights*. How people conceive of the first right within a liberal democracy is part of what left-wing critiques take to be liberal *ideology* in a capitalist society. Liberal capitalist ideology tells us that freedom is promoted under a system of private property rights protected by laws – indeed, that private property rights might even be necessary for securing freedom. It repackages the often banal unfreedom common to the workplace as a manifestation of your basic freedom. It looks at the billions gained by CEOs of multinational corporations during a worldwide pandemic as property and even earnings. It suggests that this property is the result of 'hard work' or even 'genius': something that anyone with the right motivational profile could accomplish. It transforms the reality of abstract financial gains by ownership, automatic investment and interest to fit with the liberal value-structure of meritocracy. Here, we see that ideology essentially performs a deformative epistemic function (cf. Mills 2017). It conceals or misrepresents the reality of systematic oppression and deprivation. This is part and parcel of the fact that certain propositions are fundamental presuppositions of the dominant political belief system – the liberal capitalist belief system. As a result, these presuppositions are treated as having framework status. In turn, they guide people's social and political evaluations. Since many of these propositions can be used to serve an ideological function – to help obscure or distort oppressive social arrangements – one is not at all apt to see the employer–employee relationship as unjust if certain other conditions obtain (e.g., when there is a contract between people protected by law in a liberal democracy). This is because the framework – and thereby the presuppositions which have framework status – of such a society helps conceal the domination of

that relationship: it presents it as an act of freedom for both the employer and employee. In this way, political hinge epistemology helps the proponent of ideology critique to understand why rational evaluation escapes the ideologue. This is no longer explained entirely in terms of maleficent intentions, powerful institutional structures blindly acting out historical necessity, or sociopsychological biases, but in terms of the normative role of the framework-status political presuppositions of the dominant belief system.

Here is another case to clarify the role of political hinge epistemology in understanding ideology critique. Inequality was a presupposition of the dominant system of thinking in feudal society: that some people are inferior to others because of their lack of nobility. So, too, in a patriarchal society: women are seen as inferior to men, because of their alleged lack of certain abilities, with these abilities seen as 'natural' in men and more valuable than the alleged 'natural' abilities of women. For this reason, inequality in a feudal society was seen as a 'natural' part of social reality, something one would no more doubt than the existence of mountains or oceans. The aforementioned views about the alleged natural abilities of men and women are used to justify repugnant gender inequalities to this day, just as the repugnant views of colonialists were used to justify European domination over certain non-European people. In these examples about feudal ideology, patriarchal ideology and racist ideology, 'some people are naturally inferior to others' is treated with framework status. It was *in fact* not doubted. But beyond that, it is what enabled the feudal relationships to seem legitimate to both lord and peasant, just as some women and slaves would not seriously question their social roles in patriarchal and racist societies.

Although the epistemic conception of ideology is useful for understanding ideology, ideology critique carries with it two epistemological challenges that I want to address. The first is that the adherents of dominant political belief systems are bound to not simply misunderstand but miss completely the ways in which their fundamental normative political commitments are used to obscure and distort the reality of oppressive social relations. Why is this? How could it be that even so much as thinking reasonably about these commitments seems to escape the ideologue? Call this the *masking challenge*. The second is that it is hard to see how ideology critique can change the minds of people who adhere to the dominant political belief system if, at best, the critic can only appeal to her own political belief system in order to criticize the dominant political belief system. It is unlikely to persuade them or inspire the recommended changes. Call this the *normativity challenge* (Haslanger 2017). I shall now turn to these two challenges.

3.1. The Masking Challenge

The masking challenge asks why adherents of dominant political belief systems are bound to miss the ways in which the basic normative presuppositions of their belief systems can be used to conceal certain facts about social reality; namely, its unjust social arrangements. Put more generally, how can ideology exercise such persistent suasive force over rational political agents? (cf. Stanley 2016, 232; Haslanger 2017).

It is important to understand that this challenge does not simply ask the causal question of why members of oppressed groups will often accept propositions that are

used ideologically to obscure the truth about their oppression. That question might be answerable by socialization and the epistemic effects of social reinforcement, conformity and authority. As Stanley explains:

> The positively privileged group will control the dominant narrative. If the positively privileged group controls the dominant narrative, then the testimonial evidence of authorities will be the ideology of the positively privileged group. That is the mechanism by which the flawed ideology of the positively privileged group comes to be held by the negatively privileged groups. The negatively privileged groups are not exposed to an alternative ideology. (Stanley 2017, 237)

The challenge rather concerns why the oppressors and oppressed alike run out of epistemic resources for effectively challenging the way the commitments of their political belief systems might be used or interpreted ideologically. Thus, it asks why there generally are such blind spots.

I want to consider a stronger and weaker answer to this question from political hinge epistemology. The stronger answer says that various propositions that also play an ideological role can have framework status for their adherents. This is why those propositions resist critical evaluation by the oppressors and oppressed alike: for they are the adherent's mutual 'frame of reference'. They form part of the 'inherited background against which' – oppressed and oppressors alike – 'distinguish between true and false' (OC 94). Fundamental political blind spots are a predictable result of this phenomenon. Indeed, many hinge epistemologists accept the so-called *nonepistemic thesis* that hinge commitments or framework commitments are not in the market for rational evaluation at all (see Pritchard 2011). For example, Moyal-Sharrock (2004, 2016) argues that evidence cannot be brought to bear on hinge commitments, because of their role in giving sense to rational evaluation. Hinge commitments are not propositions, but instead akin to instinctive unreflective dispositions to act (see Moyal-Sharrock 2016). We are apt to confuse them with propositions, of course, because we can express them using declarative sentences. But the thought is that we should not let this mislead us about their nature.

The weaker answer is that the propositions which play an ideological role in the belief system do not themselves have framework status, but act as limits on rational inquiry vis-à-vis limiting how one encumbered by ideology is apt to interpret their social arrangements as a result. An Amazon warehouse worker, for example, might be apt to interpret the unjust social arrangement they enter into so that it could not easily appear to them *as* unjust. Consider the propositions about property as human rights as laid by the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 17:

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

These propositions – or at least something similar – might play a framework role in a liberal political belief system, but what is ideological about them within a liberal capitalist society

is how they are uncritically made to be applicable to the employer–employee relationship generally. When the liberal capitalist looks at the socioeconomic relationship that Amazon warehouse workers bear to Amazon, they are apt not to see any fundamental moral problem, but *at best* a moral problem in the particular manner it is realized. Structurally, they will see a relationship that coheres with Article 17. A system of law or moral norms, which forbids private ownership of Amazon, or the employer–employee system renting labour for wages in a market would be seen as essentially unjust. Political hinge epistemology can explain how this is possible epistemologically – to augment the psychological and sociological reasons – by emphasising the fact that with propositions of the kind expressed by Article 17 as the mutual frame of reference for normative evaluation, one is not so much deprived of the conceptual resources to criticize the employer–employee relationship, but encouraged to see it in a way that fits with Article 17. One is apt to see the relationship as just; for it would be interpreted as a manifestation of a human right.

Here, we see again that hinge propositions can have a double life within a belief system. Just as they bring reasons for belief and doubt into view, they also resist reason-based justification or criticism. The employee has the resources within their liberal capitalist belief system to challenge their employer's spying behaviour, for example – which arguably would violate a human right – but *not* to challenge the employer–employee relationship itself. This is because that relationship is conceived in their belief system as a fundamental expression of liberty, which would have framework status in that belief system. The reason this facilitates ideological distortion is that, as a proposition with framework status, it resists rational evaluation of a certain kind. As Moyal-Sharrock puts the point: '[…] doubting them would be tantamount to having lost the bounds of sense' (Moyal-Sharrock 2016, 109). It is not a proposition that a citizen born and raised within a liberal capitalist society could criticize *internal* to their belief system; that is, by drawing on liberal principles and concepts.[13] The employer can no more marshal reasons to support the character of the employer–employee relationship when it is conceived as fitting with human rights any more than the employee can challenge it from within, because any proposition with mutual framework status for them will be immune to such rational evaluations. This makes it easier to see how the pervasive disparity in bargaining power and high exit costs for the employee can be easily overlooked by both parties and even consented to wholeheartedly. It is a relationship that is simply assumed as per the political belief system to be a fundamental expression of liberty, so *of course* the epistemic resources to challenge it will seem alien to people who share that belief system.

3.2. The Normativity Challenge

In this section, I want to concentrate on how political hinge epistemology can aid critical theorists in their understanding of the so-called normativity challenge presented by ideology critique (Haslanger 2017).

13. Which, as Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1976) have argued extensively, will inevitably be the belief system of the oppressed as well because of socialization and state apparatuses, like education.

The normativity challenge is that it is hard to see how ideology critique is bound to serve its desired function – to change society by making explicit the unjust social relations that the dominant ideology disguises or distorts – if at best the critic can only appeal to their own political belief system in order to criticize the dominant political belief system. It is unlikely to persuade them or inspire the recommended changes (Haslanger 2017).[14]

This is reminiscent of the rational disagreement problem discussed earlier (§2). In putting the problem so that it directly links with political hinge epistemology, note that a crucial assumption, here, is that the proponent of ideology critique will rely on propositions that have framework status for them in order to criticize the target ideology. If what they are critiquing is a different set of normative principles – or how those principles are used in concert with other ideas as ideology – then it is hard to see how their critique could rationally move the person who accepts that framework to abandon or even revise it. As Eagleton surmises the challenge:

> [...] [the] case against the 'ideologist' is that to do what she aims to do, she would have to be standing at some Archimedean point outside the culture she hopes to criticise. Not only does no such point exist, but even if it did it would be far too remote from our form of life to gain any effective hold upon it. (Eagleton 1991, 4)

However, as critical theorists point out, the normativity challenge is premature. The assumption is that ideology critique will rely only on principles or propositions that lie outside the criticized framework, but ideology critique can be 'immanent' in the sense that it relies on principles internal to the criticized framework, exposing its 'internal fissures or fault-lines which betray its underlying contradictions'. (Eagleton 1991, 4)

As an example, immanent critiques of twentieth-century liberal capitalism have been mounted by libertarian socialists, whereby 'liberty is an inviable right' is a proposition with framework status in their political belief system too but, unlike liberal capitalists, they see capitalism fundamentally as a deprivation of liberty and perversion of property rights; that liberal-capitalist ideology confuses capitalist social relations with free-market society and democracy.[15] This is just one example. The point is that immanent critiques essentially appeal to common norms or principles shared by the critic and the target political belief system or else to norms internal to the target political system. Immanent critique thereby overcomes the normativity challenge.

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14. Indeed, as Haslanger (2017) and others have highlighted, the view that ideology critique can successfully subvert the dominant ideology is itself ideological. Cassam (ms.) also makes a similar point about vice explanations of political behaviour: that the explanations tend to target right- and left-wing populism as coming from liberal technocrats, whose ideology of liberal technocracy shields them from rational criticism.
15. Classically, this is advocated for by Proudhon (1840) and Rocker (1938). Contemporary advocates include Chomsky (2014). For a closely related view, socialist workplace democracy, see Anderson (2017).

However, I think that, even without relying on immanent critique, political hinge epistemology can still work around the normativity challenge. This is because the 'rational resolvability' of disagreement is multiply ambiguous. Consider, for example, the difference between rational persuasion and rational invitation:

> ***Rational Persuasion:*** A rationally persuades B to adopt A's doxastic attitude D to *p* if and only if there is a set of premises accepted by A that A can appeal to in an argument that rationally ought to persuade B into adopting D towards *p* (and vice versa).
>
> ***Rational Invitation:*** A invites B to rationally respond to their disagreement over *p* if and only if there is some doxastic attitude DA that A takes to *p*, which is the (uniquely) rational attitude for A to take to *p*, but there is some doxastic attitude DB for which B rationally ought to take towards *p*, which is the (uniquely) rational attitude for B to have to *p*, and A and B ought to consider seriously each other's belief.[16]

With this distinction in play, we can see that the normativity challenge to ideology critique depends for the *in-principle* rational inefficacy of ideology critique on the idea that the goal of ideology critique is to *rationally persuade* the ideologue; for A, the critic of ideology, to rationally persuade B that their political belief system contains commitments which function ideologically to conceal certain facts about social reality. If this were the goal, the critic of ideology critique might be right that the liberatory ambitions of ideology critique are bound to fail. But the epistemic goals of ideology critique can be weaker than this. It can instead aim at securing an opportunity for the ideologue to *rationally respond* to the ideology critique – to have a 'radically new experience'; a transformative moment (Haslanger 2017, 11). The ideology critique is essentially a rational invitation when it is presented to the ideologue. In this way, the modest epistemic goal of an ideology critique can be to create a space for such an experience; a break from the ideologue's ordinary course of experience and interpretation.[17] This can then facilitate belief revision and inspire change in political interpretation and behaviour. For this reason, the normativity challenge does not pose an insurmountable challenge to political hinge epistemology.

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16. Importantly, this relies on the crucial assumption that there is a uniquely rational attitude to take to the disagreement, which embodies the uniqueness thesis in the epistemology of disagreement. See Feldman (2006). A hinge epistemologist might be concerned that this undercuts hinge epistemology, because they might think that it is committed to epistemic relativism. Whether hinge epistemology is committed to epistemic relativism is a controversial issue I do not have the space to satisfactorily comment on here. It is important to emphasize that many hinge epistemologists do not endorse epistemic relativism. See Coliva (2015) and Pritchard (2009). Moreover, one might be concerned that ideology critique is committed to the appearance-reality distinction – that there is some social reality that stands behind the mere social appearances afforded by ideology and social-cognitive bias. Traditional Marxist ideology critique indeed is committed to this distinction.
17. For example, Haslanger says that 'What's often needed are new experiences, experiences that highlight aspects of reality that were previously masked or obscured' (Haslanger 2017, 10).

4. Extending Political Hinge Epistemology

How might political hinge epistemology be extended to address other issues in contemporary political epistemology? In this closing section, I want to briefly consider a related topic in contemporary political epistemology and psychology in order to outline how it might be leveraged for future work in political epistemology.

4.1. Hinges and Polarization

Political disagreements in places like the United States are not simply more widespread and persistent than they were 40 years ago but also increasingly polarized. Indeed, people not only disagree but dislike, or even despise, their political opponents. They are more polarized now than ever before (Pew Research Center 2017, 2016). This has led to increased research on political identity and cognitive bias and their role in partisanship and polarization. In what follows, I want to briefly outline how political hinge epistemology can be developed to augment our understanding of attitude perseverance and polarization.

Why do people become polarized at all? Psychologists tend to argue that it is rooted in biased evaluation, like myside bias (prior-belief bias) – the tendency to judge arguments, reasons, or evidence favouring one's beliefs as better than the arguments, reasons, or evidence which are interpreted as being at odds with one's beliefs (Taber et al. 2009; Stanovich et al. 2013). In turn, myside bias is anchored in the preservation of identity (Stanley et al. 2019). Political identity is taken to be a major driver of political attitudes and decisions (Van Bavel & Pereira 2018; Green 2004). We can think of political identity partly as a commitment to propositions with framework status within one's political belief systems, such as that local tradition should be protected, for conservatives; or that present-day socioeconomic arrangements are unjust, for progressives. A partisan's identity involves certain framework political commitments not shared by other political partisans. This is where political hinge epistemology is apt, because it can enhance our understanding of the role of political identity in polarization. The commitments which are constitutive of one's partisan identity will be rationally unchallengeable for partisans. This is because of their constitutive role in the partisan's political belief system. When the partisan is apprised of their political opponents' reasons, they will interpret the reasons for their own position as stronger than their opponent's, in part, because those reasons align with their framework commitments but not their opponent's. Becoming more conciliatory in such cases would be a political identity threat: a threat to their 'form of life' (OC 358). It would lead one to doubt one's framework commitments. It would thereby entail *more* than overcoming an interpretative obstacle. It would mean changing who the person *is*.

Belief polarization looks much easier to understand once we appreciate the role of framework commitments in identity-protective cognition. For framework commitments make reasons, arguments and evidence intelligible to people who hold such commitments *as reasons*. So, appreciating certain types of countervailing reasons will be difficult, if not impossible, because of the role of such commitments in constituting one's belief

system and so one's political identity. The central overarching idea here is that while social psychologists utilize cognitive biases like myside bias and partisan political identity to account for polarization, political hinge epistemology can augment these explanations by revealing that the underlying epistemology behind partisan political identity makes one rationally resistant to countervailing evidence.

5. Conclusion

Political hinge epistemology is a promising resource for tackling contemporary challenges in political epistemology, including political disagreement and polarization; online information gathering and trust in political contexts; propaganda and political rhetoric; conspiracy theorising and belief; and epistemic injustice. In this chapter, I explored how political hinge epistemology could be developed and surveyed how it could be used to augment existing theories of ideology and ideology critique, as well as how it could further our understanding of polarization. By drawing on Wittgenstein's (1969) fragmentary notes on knowledge, reasons and beliefs, political epistemologists can enlarge their stock of tools for addressing questions in contemporary political epistemology.

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