

Globalism, Psychoanalysis, and the Integration of Eight Global Ideologies



ROBERT SAMUELS

“Globalism, Psychoanalysis, and the Integration of Eight Global Ideologies is a provocative and ambitious contribution to contemporary debates about politics, ideology, and psychology. At a time when biological and rationalist explanations dominate the field, Robert Samuels makes a sustained case for the continued relevance of classical psychoanalysis—particularly Freudian metapsychology—in understanding political belief, polarization, and identification.

The book is both theoretically rigorous and clearly structured, offering a systematic framework that links eight distinct ideological positions to patterns of thought and relational dynamics rooted in depth psychology. Samuels engages directly with influential contemporary thinkers—from Žižek to Haidt—while situating his work in dialogue with historical figures such as Fromm and Aristotle. This integration of classical and contemporary perspectives makes the work particularly valuable for graduate students and scholars seeking a deeper, more nuanced understanding of ideology and its psychological underpinnings.

Written in a direct and accessible style, the book balances scholarly sophistication with readability, making complex ideas understandable without oversimplification. Whether one ultimately agrees with all of its claims or not, the work challenges prevailing assumptions and provides a timely, thought-provoking lens through which to examine the forces shaping political thought and social polarization today. It is a serious and significant contribution to psychoanalytic and political scholarship that invites reflection, discussion, and further research.”

Karyne E. Messina, *psychoanalyst and a training analyst at the Washington Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis, Washington, DC*



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Globalism, Psychoanalysis, and the Integration of Eight Global Ideologies

Globalism, Psychoanalysis, and the Integration of Eight Global Ideologies argues that psychoanalysis helps us comprehend the different ideologies shaping our world today by examining eight distinct belief systems through their psychological and rhetorical roots, moving beyond simple Left–Right political polarization.

The work uses Freud’s theory of psychology and politics to answer pressing contemporary questions including why people believe in conspiracy theories, why politics has become so polarized, and what drives people to join political cults. Each of the eight global ideologies is connected to specific childhood desires, relationships, and psychopathologies, offering a counter-narrative to evolutionary psychology approaches. The goal is to develop a new form of globalism that recognizes and integrates foundational human desires and different ideological frameworks rather than simply appealing to facts and reason alone.

This book will be a fascinating resource for psychoanalysts, as well as faculty and graduate students interested in psychoanalysis, political theory, and cultural rhetoric.

Robert Samuels holds doctorates in Psychoanalysis and English, and teaches advanced writing at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is the author of twenty-five books, including *Trauma, Pedagogy, and the College Mental Health Crisis: Hysteria, Narcissism, and the Repression of Psychoanalysis* and *The Psychopathology of Political Ideologies*, both published by Routledge.



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Introduction

According to Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, the driving forces behind global progress have been science, democracy, and humanism.¹ Due to the use of reason in the development of medicine and other technological advances, the global average lifespan has doubled in the last 150 years. Moreover, not only are people living longer, but they have more rights, protections, and freedom than ever before. However, the recent response to the COVID pandemic and the continued failure to fight climate change reveals that reason and correct knowledge are not enough: If people do not trust the information coming from scientists, governmental officials, and journalists, then they will not listen to the facts and do the right thing.

In order to help promote global progress, it is therefore necessary to understand what makes people trust science and what makes them mistrust experts. As we learn from the study of rhetoric, the use of logos or reason is not sufficient: People have to have trust (ethos), and they have to care (pathos) about the issue.² Moreover, they also need to feel that there will be a reward (catharsis) for their concern. It is thus necessary to understand these factors of persuasion (rhetoric) by gaining a better comprehension of reason, trust, concern, and reward. It is the argument of this book that psychoanalysis provides the most accurate and effective explanation of these key rhetorical social factors.

Psychoanalysis also helps us to comprehend the different ideologies shaping our world and blocking global progress.³ Through the description of eight distinct ideologies, I hope to reveal the psychological roots of these belief systems. Instead of viewing the political world as a polarized conflict between the Left and the Right or liberal and conservative, I posit that we have to acknowledge the complex relationships among Right-wing, Leftist, conservative, liberal, traditional, center-Left, center-Right, and authoritarian ideologies. Furthermore, I relate each ideology to a specific psychopathology and fundamental human relationship.

In focusing on the psychopathological nature of political ideologies, my intent is not to make a moral judgment; instead, the goal is to show how specific ideologies attract individuals with particular unconscious defense

mechanisms, desires, and fears. The novelty of this approach is that it combines a close attention to political belief systems with a concern for individual subjectivity within a global context. Furthermore, I trace these psychological structures to early childhood mental processes and relationships.

As an aspect of the humanistic foundation of global progress, it is necessary to use psychoanalysis to critique the discourses that distort our understanding of ourselves and the social world around us. Psychoanalysis is key here because of its way of understanding human thought, emotions, motivation, and reason. Unlike the current push to use the theory of evolution to explain social institutions and individual thought, I turn to Freud's model of the human mind to reveal the unnatural and irrational foundations of consciousness and social order.⁴

The Freudian Theory of the Mind and Society

At the foundation of Freud's understanding of human thought and society is the notion that the main function of all societies is to regulate sex and aggression through the use of real and imagined violence, which he calls castration.⁵ However, in order to make sure that people do not act on their impulses in a selfish, destructive way, it is necessary to impose social control when there is no authority present: In other words, people have to internalize morality and experience it as something coming from their own minds. Moreover, this form of internalization and control produces a paranoid mode of subjectivity since it is necessary for social subjects to constantly fear being punished by some invisible force.⁶

In his *Totem and Taboo*, Freud examined the work of anthropologists studying "primitive" societies, and he found that they often believe in animism, which is a belief in spirits.⁷ He also found that these spirits represent the projection of an individual's conscience: In other words, the ghosts and spirits of dead people are seen as judging and punishing the living for their misdeeds.⁸ Here, morality takes on a psychotic structure since thoughts are experienced as being the same as perceptions of the external world, and this process of projection is automatic and irrational since it is unintentional and makes a break with reality and reality-testing.⁹ For instance, Freud found that paranoid psychotics think that they are constantly being observed because they perceive their internal conscience as coming from the outside.¹⁰

This theory of the social conscience is matched by Freud's theory of dreams. While Freud at first thought that all dreams represent a hallucinated fulfilment of an infantile sexual desire, he soon ran into the problem of what he called anxiety or punishment dreams.¹¹ What he discovered was that we often have nightmares that do not bring us pleasure or fulfilment: instead, we can be punished and criticized in our own dreams.¹² In fact, anxiety is often a response to the fear of potential harm caused by negative judgments.

Moreover, dreams show us how we do not completely control our own minds, and the representations in our dreams are scenes that rely on symbolic associations, substitutions, and displacement.¹³ Thus, on the level of the primary process of our minds, our thoughts are unintentional, irrational, and indirect. In fact, the use of indirect representation points to a form of automatic poetry that employs rhetorical figures, like metaphor.¹⁴

It turns out that if we want to truly understand human thought, social order, and ideology, we have to acknowledge the psychotic foundation of both the mind and society. Although this sounds like an absurd argument, we should remember that right before Descartes states his famous “I think therefore, I am,” he posits that we never know if we are awake or dreaming, but what we do know is that in both states, we are thinking.¹⁵ Thus, if we define human consciousness by thought, we must conclude that consciousness is fundamentally unintentional, irrational, and indirect, and it is this conception of consciousness that is repressed by most neuroscientists, evolutionary psychologists, and philosophers.¹⁶

Although Freud calls the initial stage of social organization animistic and primitive, I prefer to use the term traditional to avoid stigmatization and to clarify the relationship between morality and social rituals. From this perspective, a traditional ideology is one that is unintentional, irrational, and indirect and which relies on the processes of projection and introjection.¹⁷ While projection explains how internal thoughts are transformed into the perception of external objects, introjection deals with how external content is experienced as coming from the inner self.¹⁸ Furthermore, what explains the difference between actual psychosis and “normal” thought is the level of certainty: In psychosis, there is no room for doubt or questioning of the reality of one’s consciousness since one’s thoughts are experienced as perceptions of immediate reality.¹⁹ On the other hand, what makes reason possible is the ability to test the reality of our own thoughts.²⁰ I claim that if we do not grasp this psychoanalytic understanding of human consciousness and social organization, then we cannot understand ourselves or the political ideologies around us.

Not only does Freud’s theory of the paranoid super-ego help us to comprehend what makes people submit to social norms and rules when no authority is directly present, but his theory of the primary processes also explains his conception of infantile subjectivity. According to the founder of psychoanalysis, the first way that a person tries to satisfy their own desires is by imagining the repetition of a past scene of satisfaction. Thus, through a process of hallucinating a symbolic scene, one is able to satisfy unmet wishes, and this form of imagination causes a radical break with reality. Furthermore, we can consider human imagination as our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. Since we can imagine things that do not exist, we can create new knowledge and new ways of solving problems, yet this break from reality also makes us prone to destructive delusions and manipulation from others.

The fact that our minds can transcend material reality plays a key role in the internalization of social control: Due to the fact that we can imagine things that are not directly present, we can imagine social punishments and rewards when we are all alone. Thus, the fundamental desire for satisfactions opens us up to social control. From this perspective, traditional ideology takes advantage of our desire for satisfaction as we automatically imagine the fulfilment of our wishes.

Competing Ideologies

The traditional way of thinking is sometimes coupled with the need for salvation, which in its extreme form can lead to the ideology of authoritarianism. While every society needs some level of authority, the unregulated form of this human value results in the total submission of the individual to a particular person or ideal. For Freud, what we find in transference is the transferring of power from the individual to the Other, and this type of relationship is based on a desire to escape freedom, responsibility, guilt, and shame.²¹ After all, if the Other is in control, then the individual cannot be blamed.

While the ideology of authoritarianism requires a loss of individual freedom, libertarian ideology is centered on the fantasy of the total liberty and enjoyment of the isolated individual.²² Thus, by celebrating free markets and free speech, Right-wing ideology concentrates on the freedom of the individual to act on his own desires and drives without restraint. Ironically, in contemporary global politics, the opposing forces of liberty and authority are often united in a coalition, which tends to use a shared fear and hatred of the Left and liberalism to bring together these opposing values: In other words, authoritarians and libertarians bond together through a shared opposition.

Since humans are driven to be free and independent, we cannot simply reject this desire, yet we need to learn how to balance each value in an integrated system. For example, the key conflict in modernity is between individual freedom and collective equality.²³ Due to the fact that equal treatment requires submitting oneself to a universal law, the freedom of the individual is limited within liberal democratic ideology. Yet, we cannot simply remove freedom from our social structures because people are motivated by drives that promote free will and the pursuit of happiness. In fact, modern capitalism can be seen as focused on an ideology of individual liberty—even though it relies on social exchange, a shared currency, and legal guarantees.²⁴

Since modern equality and freedom do not remove all human suffering, it is necessary to have progressive social movements based on recognizing the suffering of the disadvantaged. From this perspective, Left-wing ideologies tend to focus on accommodating oppressed minority groups.²⁵ As we shall see, in its extreme form, this call for special help can result in a victim complex where the innocent self is opposed by an evil Other.²⁶ In this ideological structure, the self escapes any criticism, and all vengeance is justified.

For the person who identifies as being a victim, there is a strong desire to have suffering recognized in a hysterical psychopathology, but in the case of narcissism and center-Left politics, the desire is to have a special self admired by others in order to overcome feelings of shame and insecurity.²⁷ In what is often mistaken as a form of liberalism, Left-leaning centrists want to signal their virtue in order to hide anti-social drives from others and their own self.

For people on the center-Right, we often find an unconscious rationalization of privilege and a naturalizing of the social order. While they desire to be recognized as being neutral, liberal, and democratic, they actually take advantage of social inequality.²⁸ In this ideology, we often see an investment in evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, and a belief in the natural foundations of social inequality and hierarchy. Furthermore, people on the center-Right like to show how they believe in science, reason, open debate, and free speech, yet they often seek to cash in on their fake liberalism as they pursue, individual, anti-social drives.²⁹

These false “liberals” desire to engage in the rewards of capitalism and self-promotion, but they also want to maintain a reputation of being fair and innocent. Thus, one of the things that distinguishes the center-Right from liberalism is that a key principle of modern liberal democracy and science is the need to base one’s judgments on a neutral analysis of empirical evidence.³⁰ Therefore, equality is the central value of liberalism because science and democratic law require taking a universal perspective void of bias. In contrast, for the person performing center-Right politics, the main value is to protect an innocent image of the self while one represses the benefits one gets from social privilege.

Since humans also value self-protection, there is a conservative ideology and politics centered on the call to identify and eliminate potential risks.³¹ Often, this phobic pathology relies on finding scapegoats as substitute causes for social ills.³² As a way of protecting oneself and others against real and imagined threats, conservatism does not call for an idealized savior; rather, the desire for protection results in a call for law and order coupled with strong borders and discriminatory practices in order to prevent change or an encounter with the unknown or foreign.

A central claim of this book is that we cannot simply wish away the fundamental desires shaping these distinct ideologies, and so we need to find a way to moderate and balance these essential human values. Moreover, if we want to pursue global progress through the use of science, reason, and democracy, we have to realize that people will not be persuaded by appeals to facts and truth alone; instead, it is necessary to develop a mode of globalism that recognizes and integrates the foundational human desires with the different ideologies and rhetorical strategies shaping globalism today.

Book Outline

One of the strong claims of this book is that if we do not recognize the need to understand and integrate these different human values, then we will be unable to build a truly just and effective system of global politics. Since, as I document in Chapter 2, we have global problems that need global solutions, we must develop a new form of consciousness around a global mode of solidarity and understanding. However, while Steven Pinker argues that the key to this change is to affirm the importance of modern democratic equality and scientific reason, I show how this liberal ideology is not enough.³³

To help examine the different ideologies and relational desires shaping our world today, I turn in Chapter 3 to Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteousness Mind* where he ties five different ideologies to specific moral taste buds.³⁴ Although I reject his effort to naturalize political belief systems, I do see his work as a starting point to differentiate diverse ideologies. By adding a Freudian perspective, the goal is to connect each ideology to a different social relation and psychopathology.

In Chapter 4, we turn to the *Ideological Brain* by Leor Zmigrod.³⁵ Here we find another attempt to tie ideology to mental processes, but the problem with this work is that it uses a simplistic binary logic to equate the mind with the brain as it reproduces a polarized discourse. In focusing on the difference between rigid and flexible mental functioning, she is able to apply a narcissistic form of virtue signaling as she clearly identifies with the ideal of flexibility against the debased notion of rigidity. What is most revealing about her discourse is that she displays unintentionally the connection between the narcissistic desire for admiration and the center-Left politics of virtue signaling.

Chapter 5 discusses the roots of center-Right ideology by analyzing Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.³⁶ This work is so important because it reveals how obsessionals seek to naturalize and rationalize social hierarchies by basing them on a supposed natural order, which is really a reflection of the subject's own privilege and idealized character traits. Thus, when Aristotle argues that it is natural for men to dominate women and for thought to be favored over emotion, he is simply idealizing his own sense of being a masculine intellectual.

Chapter 6 places the eight main ideologies within a historical context by analyzing Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*.³⁷ One of the benefits of this work is that he combines psychoanalysis with sociology and history as he tries to answer the question of why so many people submit to authoritarian rule. Fromm also examines how modernity acts to generate anxiety as older forms of protection are replaced by a capitalist system of isolated individuals.

In Chapter 7, I focus on Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* in order to provide a psychoanalytic framework for traditional ideology. This work also helps us to understand why people

believe in conspiracy theories and different forms of spirituality. One of the main goals here is to demonstrate the way projection, introjection, and polarization are used to structure the content of most belief systems.

Chapter 8 continues this examination of Freud's contribution to our understanding of ideology through a critical interpretation of *Moses and Monotheism* and *The Ego and the Id*.³⁸ The goal here is to connect each ideology and social relation to a particular mental agency. This effort to recognize all of the different values and mental processes shaping human thought and social beliefs pushes us to call for a balanced and integrated model of globalism both as a form of politics and a mode of consciousness. Finally, the conclusion of the book returns to the main themes in order to outline what the philosophy, psychology, and politics of globalism should look like.

Notes

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Reason and Equality

Steven Pinker's False Path to Globalism

After reading Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*, I became convinced that the key to developing a truly global society is to follow the universal principles of science and democracy.¹ After all, we can think of globalization as the process of spreading the same modern liberal democratic and scientific ideology to the entire planet.² However, this push to make the world more reasonable runs into a problem: Humans tend to have specific desires that are not satisfied by the push for equality and truth. The question then is do we try to simply replace these non-rational and non-universal values, or do we have to find a way to integrate and balance these different factors?

Liberalism and Its Discontents

Since most humans want to be free to make their own choices and pursue their own pleasure, we can say that it would make no sense to insist on a single system of strict authority where everyone was motivated to simply submit to a higher authority or some universal system.³ Furthermore, as Pinker himself notes, any attempt to make society more fair or rational runs into the problem of dealing with other basic human desires: "The ideals of the Enlightenment are products of human reason, but they always struggle with other strands of human nature: loyalty to tribe, deference to authority, magical thinking, the blaming of misfortune on evildoers" (*EN*: 5). As Pinker highlights, the great promoters of modern reason and equality thought that the new ideals of the Enlightenment could simply replace older ideals and values, yet history has shown that this replacement has been impossible to achieve.⁴

One of the main reasons why we have been unable to build a global society based on universal human rights and scientific reason is that other competing ideologies are shaped by core human desires related to specific types of childhood relationships. Thus, as Freud insists, when a baby cries because it is feeling discomfort, it wants someone to make it feel better.⁵ In other words, suffering calls for accommodation. Moreover, once a caregiver helps make the suffering go away, the person who helped the subject is idealized in