Final Report for the project
Ideology, Oppression and Democracy

Project Leaders
Docent Gustaf Arrhenius, Torgny Segerstedt Pro Futura Fellow, Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, Dept. of Philosophy, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden
Dr. Tony Fluxman, Senior Lecturer, Rhodes University Political & International Studies, 6140 Grahamstown, South Africa

Project Co-workers
Professor Torbjörn Tännsjö, Dept. of Philosophy, Stockholm University, Sweden
Dr. Chandra Kumar, Rhodes University, South Africa

Affiliated Researchers
Dr. Magnus Jiborn, Lunds University, Sweden
PhD-Candidate Niklas Olsson-Yaouzis

Total amount of Project Research Grants received
From the Swedish Research Council (VR/SIDA): 220 000 SEK
From other funding providers: NRF, 140 000 ZAR

Objectives of the collaborative project
As stated in the proposal accepted
The goal of the project was firstly to investigate theories concerning the role of ideology in the maintenance of oppressive social systems. We planned to investigate structural functionalist accounts of society in terms of which the social structures of oppressive societies generate individual preferences amongst the oppressed which are functional for their continued oppression. Secondly, we intended to analyse a normative ideal of democracy in terms of equality of influence over political decisions, rational preference formation and fair aggregation of preferences. Thirdly, we wanted to combine our account of ideology and oppression with our account of democracy.

Any changes to the objectives
There were no changes in the objectives.

Scientific progress and output
In general, the project has followed the plan set out in the original application when it comes to project meetings, workshops, symposiums, conference presentations and publications. The project has been unusually productive and cooperative. So far, there have been 46 papers presented at conferences and as invited speakers to universities and other institutions of higher learning; 1 book and 16 papers published or forthcoming in journals and books; and 6 workshops held (for a list of the papers and presentations, see the last section, “Publications”). We have also been quite successful with presenting our project for a broader audience with a full length article in Sweden’s largest broadsheet paper (Dagens Nyheter), popular presentations, interviews, and a high traffic on our webpage. We also had an opportunity to present our project at the Linnaeus week in Cape Town.

Very briefly and quite simplified, our main results can be summarised as follows. The ideology and coordination theory (see popular description below) have traditionally been considered as rival theories for
explaining oppression. We have shown that these theories can be combined and that the best theory of oppression is a combination of both. For example, ideology can increase or decrease coordination problems. For example, ideology which makes some people willing to sacrifice themselves strongly increases the possibility of a revolution by diminishing the cost of others joining the revolution. On the other hand, ideology which makes people willing to support the regime increases the cost and risks of coordination for revolutionaries.

**Collaborative experience and output**

An important aspect of our cooperation has been the development of fruitful relationships between the members of the group and the academic communities in both countries, Sweden and South Africa. We believe that the South African academic community in particular has benefited from the activities of the group: numerous papers based on up to date research have been presented by Swedish visitors at conferences in South Africa (some of which have appeared in South African academic journals), and multiple contacts have been made between Swedish researchers and a number of individuals at various South African universities, and between the South African researchers and researchers at various Swedish universities.

The mode of cooperation was arranged as follows. We had symposia and workshops twice a year, during January in South Africa and during June in Sweden. Each time we met we had one open symposium and one workshop for the project members. At the symposia, which most of the times took part in connection with a major philosophy conference in Sweden or South Africa, where we presented out own papers. At the 3-4 day workshops we discussed relevant literature which we had read in advance.

The Swedish researchers, Arrhenius & Tännösjö, attended every Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) conference between 2004 - 2007 as well as a bioethics conference at the University of Witwatersrand. They also met various academics at Rhodes University including Pedro Tabensky and Ward Jones as well as the Dean of Humanities, Fred Hendricks, the HoD of Philosophy, Marius Vermaak, and the HoD of Political & International Studies, Peter Vale. They established research contacts with Lawrence Hamilton at Natal University and links with leading members of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa. All these activities led to the deepening of relationships with academics in Sweden, one result of which was that Hamilton, Jones, and Tabensky all subsequently made research trips to Sweden. The contacts also resulted in the publication of articles in South African based international journals such as the South African Journal of Philosophy and Philosophical Papers. Likewise, the South African researchers, Fluxman & Kumar, attended every Swedish Philosophical Association conference during this period, as well as symposia and workshops at Stockholm University. Fluxman also met up with researchers at the Swedish Collegium of Advanced Study (Uppsala).

The researchers in the project are still in regular contact and we still expect papers to come out from the project and we also hope to work on a book manuscript consisting on the classical papers on the subject in conjunction with our own papers. Moreover, Tännösjö has received funding for a Swedish follow up project, “Explanations of Repression by a Minority of the Majority”, funded by the Swedish Research Council. This project funds research for Tännösjö and a full-time employment for a PhD-student, Niklas Olsson-Yaouzis. The topic of the latter thesis is methodological problems in the explanations of oppression.

To sum up, this project and research collaboration have, in our minds, been unusually productive and fruitful and will continue to generate spin-off effects for many years to come.

**Popular-scientific description of the research collaboration**

Why don’t people overthrow their rulers more often when they both could do so and would benefit from it? The goal of this project is to investigate theories that try to explain this perplexing phenomenon. Roughly speaking, there are two alternative theories: Ideology theory and coordination theory.
Ideology theory tries to explain successful oppression by the effect of oppressive social structures on the beliefs and desires amongst the oppressed. The idea is that oppressive social systems generate beliefs and desires among the population which are functional for their continued oppression. Examples are the belief that the king or the present regime is benevolent and fair and that one already lives in the best of all possible worlds, or that it is not possible to change the regime, or that it would be immoral to overthrow the king since he is ordained by God. The theory of ideology is mainly associated with Marxist thinkers, but the roots of it are old. David Hume, for example, famously noted in 1741 that “[n]o man would have any reason to fear the fury of a tyrant, if he had no authority over any but from fear; since, as a single man, his bodily force can reach but a small way, and all the farther power he possesses must be founded either on our own opinion, or on the presumed opinion of others” (Essays Moral, Political and Literary).

Ideology theory has been challenged by the coordination theory which has its roots in rational choice theory. In its simplest version, it says simply that the reason why the oppressed majority doesn’t take action against the oppressing minority is that they cannot coordinate their actions while the minority can. If most of the people revolt against the king and his soldier, they will succeed, but if only a few of them do it, they will be killed or severely punished. An illustrative example can be found already in Alexis De Tocqueville classical report on the Sing-Sing prison in 1833. Tocqueville encountered a scene that deeply impressed him. He saw hundreds of America’s most dangerous criminals, working in a quarry, equipped with spades and pickaxes, with no chains or walls to keep them from escaping, and watched over by a few guards. Why did they not revolt? The answer, according to Tocqueville, was that they were not allowed to communicate. They were kept in isolation from one another by having to observe complete silence twenty-four hours a day. Any transgression of the prohibition to communicate was severely punished. By being deprived of the possibility to communicate, the prisoners were unable to coordinate their behaviour. If one of them attempted to talk to the others he would be shot. The guards, on the other hand, could openly coordinate their actions.

The project is studying methodological and conceptual problems with these two theories and whether they really are at loggerheads or whether they can be combined. Our aim is to develop the best explanation overall of oppression. Secondly, the project investigates the connection between democracy, ideology, and coordination problems. We are focusing on conceptions of democracy based on the ideal of fair influence or power of all citizens over political decisions. Here we look at theories of rational preference formation that focus on the capacity of citizens to equally express their own political preferences in democratic processes in a manner that approximates the above-mentioned ideal of democracy. A theory of fair democratic influence will provide criteria for political participation of individuals who truly govern themselves. A fully worked out theory of ideology will indicate just how oppressive social systems generate distortions of belief and preferences which are barriers to the fulfilment of the ideals of democracy, and coordination theory will shed light on how minorities can stop the majority from obtaining power through the democratic process.

Contact persons (Swedish and international)
Gustaf Arrhenius, gustaf.arrhenius@philosophy.su.se
Tony Fluxman, A.Fluxman@ru.ac.za
Publications and Presentations

Scientific papers and book published or forthcoming:


**Papers published on the website (http://people.su.se/~guarr/Ideologi/Ideologi.htm):**

1. Gustaf Arrhenius, “The Democratic Boundary Problem”
2. Gustaf Arrhenius, “Defining Democratic Decision Making”
5. Tony Fluxman, “Marx and the Theory of Ideology”
7. Tony Fluxman, “Coordination, Ideology, and Oppression”
8. Magnus Jiborn, “The Power of Coordination”
9. Chandra Kumar, “A Pragmatist Spin on Analytical Marxism and Methodological Individualism”
11. Chandra Kumar, “Foucault and Rorty on Truth and Ideology: A Pragmatist View from the Left”
12. Chandra Kumar, “Marxism, Foucault and Two Forms of Methodological Individualism”
13. Chandra Kumar, “Coordination Power and Ideology: Reflections on Jiborn’s ‘The Power of Coordination’”
15. Niklas Olsson-Yaouzis, “Tocqueville’s Sing-Sing: A Rational and Self-Interested Explanation”
16. Torbjörn Tännsjö, “Rational Injustice”
17. Torbjörn Tännsjö, “Cosmopolitan Democracy Revisited”
18. Torbjörn Tännsjö, “Varför gör förtryckta sällan uppror?”
19. Torbjörn Tännsjö, “Future People, the All Affected Principle, and the Limits of the Aggregation Model of Democracy”

**Papers presented at conferences and universities:**


24. Fluxman, Tony, “Marx, rationalism, and the market”, presented to the Department of Philosophy, UNISA, May 4, 2005
35. Kumar, Chandra, ‘Is Meta-Ethics Morally or Politically Relevant?’, Rhodes University, April 2006
38. Kumar, Chandra, ‘Does Critical Theory Need to Appeal to Human Nature?’, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), April 2005
44. Tännås, Torbjörn, “The Explanandum”, 4th Symposium within the Research Project Ideology, Oppression, and Democracy, Stockholm University, 8 June 2006
45. Tännås, Torbjörn, “Future people, the all-affected principle, and the limits of the aggregation model of democracy”, Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) Annual Conference, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 16-18 January 2006

Popular Presentations/Articles