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## PROPAGANDA DEFINED

The Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission, published in 1975, was titled (of course) “The Crisis of Democracy.”<sup>1</sup> It was coauthored by Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Joji Watunuki, described as “experts” on the topic. Crozier was a sociology professor and research director at CNRS in Paris, Huntington was a professor of government at Harvard University, and Watunuki was a professor of sociology at Sophia University in Tokyo. In his report on Europe, Crozier writes that teachers, “even more than other intellectuals, [are] directly confronted with the revolution in human relations that perturbs their traditional mode of social control.” Crozier warns that “with its cultural drift society has lost the stimulating moral guidance it requires,” with the consequence that “the transmission of social, political and cultural norms has been very deeply perturbed.”<sup>2</sup>

Samuel Huntington’s contribution to the report contrasted the “vitality of democracy” with “the governability of democracy,” and raised the question of whether the “democratic surge of the 60s” had “swung the pendulum too far in one direction.”<sup>3</sup> Huntington worries about the potential of the “democratic surge” to “weaken authority,” and noted that it had resulted in, for example, university students “who lacked expertise”

becoming involved in decision making in their institutions.<sup>4</sup> Huntington argues that effective leadership in a democracy requires a people who have the proper obedience to authority, and worries about the undermining of such obedience caused by an excess of democratic expression.<sup>5</sup> Huntington worries about the increasing power of the national media and its role in challenging political authority.<sup>6</sup> Huntington argues that the problems of the United States in the 1970s result from “an excess of democracy,” and recommends “claims of expertise, seniority, experience, and special talents” in order to “override the claims of democracy as a way of constituting authority.”<sup>7</sup>

Huntington’s recommendation for the United States was to try to reinstall some measure of obedience to authority by making various central domains in life, ones that should be governed democratically, the domain of experts, who are employed to make the masses feel unqualified to weigh in on central decisions about their lives. Huntington is recommending installing obedience to authority in negatively privileged groups, by making them feel unqualified to make autonomous democratic decisions in the face of self-proclaimed “experts” of various sorts. Huntington is recommending *epistemic authority*, in the form of “experts,” as a means to instill *practical authority* over the masses. Huntington’s suggestion for handling the “excess of democracy” in the 1960s is to employ the vocabulary of scientific expertise in a political way, in effect using epistemic ideals as forms of coercion. Such mixtures of epistemic and practical authority, where epistemic authority is used to gain practical authority over the domain of democratically autonomous decision, tend to undermine the epistemic ideals. It leads to distrust of those who self-present as “scientific experts,” even when they want to warn us about the importance of vaccines or climate change. My purpose in this chapter is to explain what it is for a contribution to be propagandistic in this and similar ways.

In this chapter, I provide my characterization of propaganda. Since political propaganda can occur in all political

systems, my characterization is perfectly general, intended to capture instances of propaganda regardless of political system. The chapter is structured around arguments against two claims about the nature of propaganda, which one might be tempted initially to adopt. The first claim about propaganda is that a propagandistic claim must be false. The second claim about propaganda is that a propagandistic claim must be made insincerely.

I will argue against both of these conditions on propaganda in this book. In fact, I argue that even the species of propaganda I call *demagoguery* can consist in claims that are true and made sincerely. I provide a preliminary argument against the first claim here, that propagandistic claims must be false; the argument is completed in chapter 4. I give a complete argument in this chapter against the second claim, by showing that propaganda can be delivered perfectly sincerely. The reason why propaganda, and even demagoguery, can be delivered sincerely is because of the relation between propaganda and flawed ideological belief. This is a relation that can only be adequately explained by rejecting the condition that propaganda must be insincerely delivered. It will turn out that, given the relation between *ideology* and *propaganda*, it will often not be clear at the time when a particular contribution to public debate is propaganda. Charges of propaganda, and even demagoguery, will therefore invariably be political. I conclude the chapter with a defense of this consequence.

It is useful to distinguish the object of the account that follows from related targets. A certain kind of propaganda is employed characteristically by demagogues; this is demagoguery. A demagogue is the tyrant Plato describes in the last part of book 8 of *The Republic*, one who sows fear among the people and then presents himself as “the people’s protector” (565e), all the while intending to exploit them. Perhaps the concept of a demagogue, as Plato intends it, brings insincerity with it; perhaps, that is, a demagogue is someone who engages in insincere propaganda. I am not here interested in this question.

The threat that a *demagogue* poses to liberal democracy does not require a book-length treatise. The threat I discuss is rather *demagogic propaganda*, which is the *method* characteristically used by demagogues to seize and retain power in a liberal democratic state.

Here are two initially plausible assumptions to make about propaganda. The first is that propaganda is false. I call this *the falsity condition* on propaganda. The second is that propaganda must be delivered *insincerely*. I call this *the insincerity condition* on propaganda. Before presenting and defending my own characterization, I will reject both the falsity condition and the insincerity condition on propaganda. A true claim, uttered with sincerity, can be propaganda, and even demagoguery.

I begin with a sketch of an argument against the falsity condition on propaganda; the necessary details to complete the case against the falsity condition are given in chapter 4. There are obvious cases of demagogic speech that involve the expression of truths. Imagine, for example, a non-Muslim politician in the United States saying, “There are Muslims among us.” The assertion is true; there are many Muslims in the United States. But the claim is clearly some kind of warning. The speaker is raising the presence of Muslims to the attention of his audience to sow fear about Muslims. Therefore, even demagogic claims can be true.

It is natural to think that this argument is too quick. One might reply that “there are Muslims among us” *expresses* a truth. But the reason it is propaganda is that it communicates something false. The claim is propaganda because it communicates that Muslims are inherently dangerous to others, which is false. The falsity condition, properly understood, is the claim that something is propaganda because it *communicates* something false, either by expressing it directly or by communicating it indirectly.

Here are two points to make in reply, which will be developed at length at various points in the book. First, I will give examples of propaganda in which someone is being

*misleading*, rather than stating something false, or even implicating something false. One expresses a truth, and relies on the audience's false beliefs to communicate goals that are worthwhile.<sup>8</sup> Falsity is implicated in such cases, but not by means of the expression or communication of a falsehood. I argue that propaganda depends for its effectiveness on the presence of flawed ideological belief. But it simply does not follow that the flawed ideological belief that makes some claim effective as propaganda is expressed or communicated in that claim.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, as I will explain in subsequent chapters, there is a perfectly natural way of thinking of the effects of propaganda according to which it can involve the *expression* of truths and the *communication* of emotions. If emotions are not true or false, then propaganda need not be false. In fact, the case of "there are Muslims among us," used to elicit a fear of Muslims, is a case of exactly this structure.<sup>10</sup> Fourth, as will also emerge, too many utterances at least indirectly convey something false. So the falsity condition does not really explain what is distinctive about propaganda.

I now move to the argument against the insincerity condition on propaganda. Understanding that propaganda can be sincere is necessary to understand the relation between propaganda and ideology.

Klemperer reports that ordinary Germans often construed Hitler's appeal to the Jewish people as enemy as a *harmless* employment of propaganda. For example, here he writes of a young student who had lived in his home for several years, and whom he had befriended, who became enamored of the National Socialists:

I began to have serious doubts about the extent and strength of his common sense. I tried a different tack in my attempt to make him more skeptical. "You have lived in my house for a number of years, you know the way I think, and you have often said yourself that you have learned something from us and that your moral values accord with ours—how,

in the light of all this, can you possibly support a party which, on account of my origin, denies me any right to be a German or even a human being?—“You’re taking it all much too seriously, Babba. . . . The fuss and bother about the Jews is only there for propaganda purposes. You wait, when Hitler is at the helm he’ll be far too busy to insult the Jews.”<sup>11</sup>

The young student who had lived with Klemperer defended his support of the National Socialists by claiming that Hitler’s various horrific representations of Jews were “only there for propaganda purposes.” Klemperer notes that Hitler only ever speaks of Jews in one of two styles, “scornful derision” or “panic stricken fear.”<sup>12</sup> In the first style, Hitler represents Jews as less than human (for example, when he compares them to “maggots in a rotting corpse”). In the second style, Hitler represents them as being a fundamental threat to safety and stability. By being “only there for propaganda purposes,” Klemperer’s young student acquaintance meant that Hitler’s negative portrayal of the Jews was only intended to rally political support. This may appear to motivate a sense of “propaganda,” or the species of it that interests us here, according to which it means something like “the product of conscious intentions to deceive by interested parties.”<sup>13</sup> In this sense of “propaganda” (and perhaps with propaganda generally), propaganda is by definition insincere. If Hitler’s analogy between Jews and “maggots in a rotting corpse” is propaganda in this sense, then by definition Hitler didn’t believe that the analogy was a good one (since, by definition, he would have been engaged in deceit, that is, making an analogy he believed to be poor).

It is straightforward to show that there are some paradigm instances of propaganda that are inconsistent with the insincerity condition. But it is a matter of no small import to our understanding of propaganda to explain what is wrong with the insincerity condition. Explaining what is wrong with the insincerity condition on propaganda will reveal the important

connection between ideology and propaganda, which any account of propaganda must explain. The superficial connection is that someone in the grip of a flawed ideology will often express it in propaganda. Since many paradigm cases of demagogic speech or imagery are of this sort, any view that endorses the insincerity condition will be inconsistent with many paradigm cases. What this reveals is that the insincerity condition fails to respect the deep connection between ideology and propaganda.

Let's begin by seeing that the insincerity condition does not fit paradigm cases. Klemperer points out that it does not fit Hitler's demagogic use of anti-Semitism:

But whilst Hitler's anti-Semitism is a correspondingly basic feeling, rooted in the man's intellectual primitiveness, the Fuehrer also possesses, seemingly from the outset, a large measure of that calculating guile which doesn't seem to accord with an unsound mind, but so often seems to go hand in hand with it. He knows perfectly well that he can only expect loyalty from those who inhabit a similarly primitive world; and the simplest and most effective means of keeping them there is to nurture, legitimize and as it were glorify the instinctive hatred of the Jews. In the process he plays on what is the weakest spot in the cultural thinking of the nation.<sup>14</sup>

In short, Hitler was in fact an anti-Semite who sincerely believed that everything he said about the Jews was accurate. Of course, Hitler did not literally believe that Jews were "maggots in a rotting corpse." This is a metaphor, meant to convey that Jews are a deadly public health menace. The question of sincerity, given a metaphorical utterance involving an analogy, is whether or not Hitler believed that the analogy was apt. Hitler was utterly sincere in his belief that Jews were a deadly public health menace, and clearly did believe the analogy was apt. Simultaneously, even he knew that his appeal to anti-Semitism was meant strategically. It is one thing if Hitler did not intend

many of his anti-Semitic pronouncements to be strategic political claims. But he clearly did so intend. These are paradigm cases of propaganda. So we should want the account of propaganda to classify them as such. On the reasonable assumption that propaganda is the intended subject of his book, Klemperer rejects the restriction of the notion of propaganda to insincere claims. Hitler's analogies were sincere, and yet also intended to attract political support.

There are paradigm cases of propaganda that are delivered sincerely. There is also a theoretical explanation why many paradigm cases of propaganda are ones in which the claims are made sincerely. The theoretical explanation involves the connection between propaganda and *ideology*. The genuine problem with the insincerity condition is that it fails to respect the connection between propaganda and ideology. Flawed ideologies characteristically lead one to sincerely hold a belief that is false and that, because of its falsity, disrupts the rational evaluation of a policy proposal; as Rosen notes about Hume's notion of irrational belief, a flawed ideological belief leads to "an unwillingness to amend immediate judgment in light of reflection."<sup>15</sup> Many paradigm demagogic claims are statements sincerely asserted by someone in the grip of a false belief caused by a flawed ideology. Presumably, much Nazi propaganda was of this sort. I assume here, as throughout this work, that any account of propaganda must explain the connection between propaganda and ideology.

Many and perhaps most propagandistic claims are made by those in the grip of a flawed ideology. The insincerity condition cannot explain this. So the insincerity condition is false. Any account of propaganda must explain how possession of a flawed ideology can lead to the tendency to engage in propaganda. An account of propaganda that incorporates the insincerity condition cannot do this. So we must reject it.<sup>16</sup>

Klemperer's description of life under the Third Reich reveals the distinctive dangers of propaganda in totalitarian societies. In totalitarian societies, there is an official ministry



of propaganda. Because of that, it is easy in such societies not to take propaganda seriously. But because propaganda can be sincere, the danger propaganda poses in totalitarian societies is that *it is not taken seriously*. The danger propaganda poses in democratic societies is entirely different. Part of the propaganda of states that consider themselves liberal democracies is that they do not allow propaganda. So the distinctive danger propaganda poses in liberal democracies is that it is *not recognized as propaganda*. When effective propaganda is demagogic, it undermines the democratic legitimacy of the goal it is used to motivate.<sup>17</sup>

There is no problem in totalitarian societies recognizing something as propaganda. Claims that are propaganda are those that emerge from the ministry of propaganda. The problem in totalitarian societies lies in figuring out which pieces of propaganda are to be taken seriously.<sup>18</sup> It is only natural in liberal democratic societies to take at least the news media seriously. The problem in democratic societies lies in figuring out which apparently nonpropagandistic claims are in fact propaganda.

I have given some examples of propaganda, together with some impressionistic characterizations. What emerges is the idea that demagogic contributions employ, whether intentionally or unintentionally, flawed ideologies to cut off rational deliberation and discussion. In characteristic cases, they do so by using the flawed ideologies to overwhelm affective states. But more can be said about the properties of a claim in virtue of which it is an instance of propaganda, and more can be said about what makes a particular instance of propaganda an effective instance. And that is my aim in the rest of this chapter.

It is natural to think of representations themselves as propaganda. But my focus is rather on *claims*, or *arguments*, and representations only insofar as they play a role in these claims or arguments. An image showing Saddam Hussein as a little boy who needs to be punished plays a role in a propagandistic argument that America should invade Iraq. The image functions

propagandistically in the argument. My task is to explain when arguments for certain goals or certain theories are propagandistic ones. This will involve talking about representations, but only as they play a propagandistic role in certain arguments.

In his book *The Phantom Public*, Walter Lippmann writes,

Since the general opinions of large numbers of persons are almost certain to be a vague and confusing medley, action cannot be taken until these opinions have been factored down, canalized, compressed and made uniform. The making of one general will out of multitude of general wishes is not an Hegelian mystery, as so many social philosophers have imagined, but an art well known to leaders, politicians and steering committees. It consists essentially in the use of symbols which assemble emotions after they have been detached from their ideas.<sup>19</sup>

Klemperer writes of the Language of the Third Reich (LTI), “Its entire vocabulary is dominated by the will to movement and to action.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, “all the rhetoric of the LTI can be traced back to the principle of movement.”<sup>21</sup> The goal of LTI was encourage citizens to rush over deliberation and into direct action.

Propaganda is not simply closing off rational debate by appeal to emotion; often, emotions are rational and track reasons. It rather involves closing off debate by “emotions detached from their ideas.” According to these classical characterizations of propaganda, formed in reflecting upon the two great wars of the twentieth century, propaganda closes off debate by bypassing the *rational will*. It makes the state move as one, stirred by emotions that far surpass the evidence for their intensity. It is in this way that all propaganda unites citizens as one. Propaganda is *manipulation of the rational will to close off debate*.<sup>22</sup> This is what I will call *the classical sense of propaganda*.

Lying too is a betrayal of the rational will. But it is a different kind of betrayal of the rational will than propaganda. At least with lying, one purports to provide evidence. Propaganda

is worse than that. It attempts to unify opinion without attempting to appeal to our rational will at all. It bypasses any sense of autonomous decision.

There is a more nuanced version of the classical sense of propaganda. It is a notion that animates, for example, Noam Chomsky's work on propaganda.<sup>23</sup> This is propaganda as *biased speech*. Propaganda is speech that irrationally closes off certain options that should be considered. This is related to the classical sense of propaganda, but does not require as a goal immediate action. Action could be reached by several steps of propaganda, in the sense of biased speech. I shall call this *propaganda as biased speech*.

I am not opposed to these models of propaganda. Perhaps the notions I discuss are versions thereof. But these two models of propaganda don't help us explain the attractions of propaganda, nor its relation to ideology. In what follows, I distinguish two types of propaganda. I leave open the nature of their relation both to the classical conception of propaganda and to propaganda as biased speech.

My concern in this book is with liberal democracy, rather than with either the extreme authoritarian state discussed by Klemperer or the still quite undemocratic moment during World War I that motivates Lippmann's characterization. Authoritarian states clearly have propaganda and use it unabashedly, as Klemperer testifies. But liberal democratic cultures seem on the surface free from propaganda: politicians and television hosts shy away from the claim that they are delivering overt propaganda. In liberal democracy, propaganda standardly occurs masked.

Suppose we are in a state that putatively follows liberal democratic ideals. But the reality diverges deeply from those ideals. For example, perhaps the citizens do not treat one another with equal respect, of the sort governing conversation or free market exchange between equals. What will be needed to keep the state stable, to keep the citizens from fomenting dissent, is some way to hide the gap between illiberal reality

and professed liberal ideals. For example, perhaps the liberal democratic ideals are used to refer to a political system that tolerates massive political inequality (as some think when “liberalism” is used to refer to neoliberalism). Propaganda in this context is more complicated. The liberal ideals themselves are propagandistically used.

The German political theorist Carl Schmitt argued in 1927 that “all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning. They are focused on a specific conflict and are bound to a concrete situation; the result (which manifests itself in war or revolution) is a friend-enemy grouping, and they turn into empty and ghostlike abstractions when this situation disappears.” Schmitt thinks that political concepts like “constitutional state” and “economic planning” only have a polemical meaning. In short, Schmitt thinks they are only ever used to motivate people to action, in a characteristically propagandistic way (for example, calling the Iraq War in 2003 “Operation Iraqi Freedom”). On Schmitt’s view, the liberal democratic vocabulary, as with other political vocabulary, works like propaganda.

Schmitt’s view is that the only use of political vocabulary is as propaganda, to bypass the rational will to “war or revolution.” This view does not need to be accepted. We can still recognize that he is right that the liberal democratic vocabulary is *often* used propagandistically, in states whose practices fall too short of its ideals. It is not atypical to redefine “democracy” so that it does not include equal respect, but rather market efficiency. It is not atypical to call something that is not a war for freedom at all a “war for freedom.” This is the kind of propaganda I want to focus on in this book. To say that the democratic concepts can be propagandistically used is not to say that they cannot also be used straightforwardly. But I speculate that it is the propagandistic use of the liberal democratic vocabulary that is responsible for many cases in which we do not notice gaps between ideals and reality.

The classical conception of propaganda and the conception of propaganda as biased speech are too rough to help us

understand the distinctive nature of the propagandistic use of political concepts. We began this chapter with a discussion of Samuel P. Huntington's call for claims of "expertise, seniority, and experience" as a way to override democratic claims. This is not something we can explain with Lippmann's characterization. Huntington is calling for the language of objective science to be strategically used. In particular, he is calling for people to claim expertise over matters of value, with the result that citizens defer their autonomous judgment to these so-called experts. This is to use an attractive and admirable ideal, the ideal of objectivity, in a nonobjective way, a way that tends to undermine trust in objectivity. We need a narrower characterization of propaganda that comes closer to this.

How could one grow up naively into adulthood in a state that professes to follow liberal democratic ideals, but in which there is overwhelmingly illiberal practice? To maintain stability, the propagandistic use of the liberal democratic ideals will be required to cover up the significant gap between ideals and reality. This is the species of propaganda that centrally concerns me in this book, the kind that characteristically masks the gap between the given ideal and reality by the propagandistic use of that very ideal. Failures of democracy could be hidden by the propagandistic use of the very vocabulary of liberalism.

This kind of propaganda is what one may think of as masking propaganda. But there are forms of propaganda that are not masking. Propaganda that extols the virtue of Aryanism is, for example, not of the form that centrally interests me. But we can obtain a general conception of propaganda, of the kind that is most interesting and important and of the more obvious kind, by reflecting on the notion of an ideal. Propaganda in the sense of this book essentially exploits an *ideal*. The ideal can be aesthetic, health-related, economic, or political. *Advertising* is a kind of propaganda that typically exploits an aesthetic ideal or an ideal of health. Given my focus in this book, I will concentrate on political ideals. I will characterize propaganda

using political ideals, bearing in mind that the characterization is meant to be general across different domains.

Different political systems are characterized by distinct political ideals. For example, a monarchy involves a political ideal of obedience to authority, in the typical example, a monarch, such as a king or a queen or a pharaoh. Liberal democracy, as we have seen, centrally involves the political ideals of liberty and equality.

The home of the study of political propaganda generally is in its application to *public political discourse*. The nature of public political discourse depends upon the political system. In a monarchy, public political discourse is, for example, pronouncements by a king, queen, or pharaoh. In a democracy, public political discourse is either in political debate in elections, between representatives in the chambers of government seeking to pass policy (such as Congress and the Senate), and in media discussions of either. Public political discourse is best thought of in contrast to the discourse of private citizens in their homes. It is discourse that is in some sense official, and that takes place in the contexts that are official contexts of public political claims, which depend on the political system in question.

I am now ready to introduce my proposed characterizations of the various species of propaganda. The two basic kinds of propaganda that I initially distinguish are structurally distinct, and together exhaust the category of propaganda as I characterize it. I am interested in this book in political propaganda, so I will restrict my attention to that category.

The essence of political propaganda on my approach is that it is a kind of speech that fundamentally involves political, economic, aesthetic, or rational ideals, mobilized for a political purpose. Propaganda is in the service of either *supporting* or *eroding* ideals. The first distinction between kinds of propaganda has to do with whether or not it erodes or supports the ideals it appears to embody. This is the distinction between *supporting* and *undermining* propaganda.

*Supporting Propaganda:* A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other nonrational means.

*Undermining Propaganda:* A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals.<sup>24</sup>

Undermining propaganda involves a kind of contradiction between ideal and goal. It's an argument that appeals to an ideal to draw support, in the service of a goal that tends to erode the realization of that ideal.

I will restrict attention for the moment to propaganda that supports or undermines a *political* ideal (where this is broadly construed). Supporting propaganda can be used in the service of worthy goals, neutral goals, or unworthy goals. The goal of supporting propaganda is to increase the realization of a political ideal. It does so not by directly providing a reason that increases the probability of the truth or virtue of the political ideal. It does so indirectly by seeking to overload various affective capacities, such as nostalgia, sentiment, or fear. These emotional effects can lead to the discovery of reasons, reasons that in turn will support the political ideal in a characteristically rational way. But supporting propaganda does not support the goal that helps to realize the ideal via beliefs that appeal solely to what Immanuel Kant calls *the rational will*: the faculty rational beings have of acting in accordance with rational law.<sup>25</sup> Supporting propaganda is intended to close off possibilities and move emotion behind a goal that furthers an explicitly provided ideal.

The definition I have given of undermining propaganda is very specific. It requires the call to action to be one that runs counter to the very political ideal it is explicitly represented as embodying. Daniel Putnam (in personal correspondence) suggested to me a more expansive characterization of propaganda, according to which one political ideal is being

deployed to wear down another political ideal held within the same political system. Consider, for example, the political ideal of *liberty*. This is a political ideal of the United States. Another political ideal of the United States is *opportunity*. This is also a political ideal of the United States. One might characterize as an instance of propaganda an appeal to liberty in the service of wearing down the political ideal of opportunity (say, an appeal to cut taxes because of economic liberties, the consequence of which is to reduce opportunity for impoverished citizens). This would not be an instance of supporting propaganda according to the characterization I have given. Here is a more inclusive characterization of undermining propaganda according to which it does count as undermining propaganda:

*Undermining Propaganda<sub>2</sub>*: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain political ideals, but is of a kind that tends to erode a political ideal that belongs in the same family.

My worry with this more inclusive characterization is that it threatens to overgeneralize. Sometimes political ideals simply *do* conflict; in fact, many hold that there is such a conflict between liberty and equality. My concern with Putnam's proposed definition is that it will entail that what are, in fact, examples of genuine conflict between political ideals are misclassified as undermining propaganda.

The characterizations of propaganda I have given are characterizations of what it is for contributions, paradigmatically utterances or images, to be propaganda. But we also speak of newspapers and schools as being *vehicles of propaganda*. It is tempting to define a vehicle of propaganda as follows:

*Vehicle for the Production of Propaganda*: A site or mechanism for the production of propaganda.

A media source or a school can be a vehicle of propaganda, even though it never produces actual instances of propaganda. It can, for example, be a vehicle of propaganda in virtue of



*withholding* crucial information that, by its nature, it is supposed to provide. A news station that represents itself as providing all the relevant news for political decision making is, intuitively, a vehicle of propaganda if it regularly withholds highly relevant news for political decision making. A school is a vehicle for propaganda if it represents itself as providing all the relevant information for being an informed citizen, yet regularly withholds information for being an informed citizen. These are the kinds of vehicles of propaganda we should expect to find in liberal democracies. Characterizing vehicles of propaganda in this sense is therefore of crucial importance to the aims of this book.

Here is the characterization of a sense of a vehicle of propaganda that is perhaps more useful for theorizing about propaganda in liberal democracy:

*Vehicle of Propaganda:* An institution that represents itself as defined by a certain political ideal, yet whose practice tends to undermine the realization of that ideal.

A school in a liberal democracy is intended to make its students into informed citizens who have the information necessary for informed participation in political deliberation. Suppose the school intentionally leaves out certain information, for example, about the country's systematic injustice toward certain groups. The students it produces therefore have incomplete information, but believe the information to be complete. The school therefore undermines the ideal of having fully informed citizens. A school that produces partially informed citizens who believe they are fully informed is a vehicle of propaganda, *even if it never produces any actual propagandistic claims*. Similarly, if a television news station or newspaper presents itself as reporting all relevant news for political decision making in a country, yet withholds crucial information for decision making, it too is a vehicle of propaganda, even if it never produces any actual propagandistic utterances. It is a vehicle of propaganda in virtue of undermining the political

ideal it represents itself as embodying, that of fully informing its audience.<sup>26</sup>

I have now characterized two different types of propaganda, as well as two ways in which institutions can serve as mechanisms for the production of propaganda. My topic in this book is political propaganda, propaganda that exploits political ideals, rather than other kinds of ideals. But many forms of *advertising* are obviously cases of propaganda and count as such according to the characterization I have given. An advertisement that uses, for example, the ideal of good health in the service of selling a product that undermines health is propaganda and counts as such according to my characterization. For example, an advertisement that uses pictures of healthy rock climbers to sell an unhealthy beverage or food item uses the ideal of good health in the service of a goal that can be easily seen to undermine it. So many advertisements simply are instances of propaganda.

However, another class of advertisements seeks to associate a goal with an ideal that is simply *irrelevant* to that ideal. For example, advertisements standardly use aesthetic ideals to promote a product, possession of which is irrelevant to the further realization of that aesthetic ideal. An advertisement that suggests that purchasing a certain kind of car will make one more attractive is an example of this. If we bear in mind that many things we would call “advertisements” are straightforwardly instances of propaganda, it is still useful to isolate a theoretical category of advertising that captures this class of advertisements:

*Advertising:* A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, but in the service of a goal that is irrelevant to those very ideals.

Commercial advertising is an attempt to attach possession of the product advertised to an attractive ideal, when possessing that product is in the normal case irrelevant to achieving that ideal. Effective advertisement exploits flawed ideology that connects, for example, material possessions to aesthetic worth.

Undermining propaganda by its nature undermines a political ideal. It undermines a political ideal by using it to communicate a message that is inconsistent with it. As I will explain below, it is able to achieve the task by exploiting already existing *flawed ideological belief*, and even contributing to the formation of such belief. *It is flawed ideological belief that masks the contradictions of undermining propaganda.*

Flawed ideological belief masks the contradictions of undermining propaganda by erecting difficult epistemic obstacles to recognizing tendencies of goals to misalign with certain ideals: for example, obstructions to understanding liberal democratic concepts and what they entail. In chapters 5 and 6, the chapters on ideology, we will investigate the nature of these epistemic obstacles, and explain why they are so difficult to surmount.

Undermining propaganda is thus *far more complicated* than supporting propaganda. Judging the moral as well as the political acceptability of an instance of undermining propaganda is correspondingly a vexed and complex matter. But there are many other facts at play in evaluating the acceptability of a use of undermining propaganda. We can, after all, evaluate morally and politically the *means* by which someone seeks to achieve a goal. We must not ignore the possibility that undermining propaganda is a democratically unacceptable *means*, even in cases in which the message or goal is worthy (or the political ideal being undermined is unworthy).

Immanuel Kant famously argued that lying was “the greatest violation of man’s duty to himself.”<sup>27</sup> Kant rejected even lying for a noble purpose, categorically rejecting the spread of untruthfulness into relationships between persons. I have argued that propaganda can be both sincere and true. Nevertheless, insofar as propaganda of either variety is a method to bypass the rational will of others in the service of some goal, the Kantian would regard propaganda in either sense as a moral violation. In the Kantian sense, propaganda, regardless of goals, is not morally acceptable. The ethical basis of Kantian

philosophy has an undeniable purchase on our intuitive moral judgments, and this is no doubt the source of the sense that propaganda, regardless of its goal, is morally problematic. For Kant, the rational will is minimally one that operates independently of alien causes and is subject to rational principles. But propaganda runs counter to rational principles. Insofar as a form of propaganda is a kind of manipulation of rational beings toward an end without engaging their rational will, it is a kind of deception.<sup>28</sup>

I do not here presuppose a Kantian theory of morality. But even prescinding from a moral evaluation of propaganda as such, one must worry that most arguments that employ undermining propaganda are democratically suspect.

Let's now look at some examples of supporting and undermining propaganda. Examples of supporting propaganda are simple to provide. One example of supporting propaganda is the use of a country's flag, or the appeal to a romantic vision of the country's history, to strengthen patriotism. A second example is delivering a very frightening public health warning to raise excessive fears about (for example) smoking, with the goal of increasing public health by the use of exaggerated fear. A third example is appealing to past wrongs against a group to strengthen ethnic pride and self-identification. For example, Slobodan Milosevic, the former president of Serbia, regularly appealed to the defeat of Serbians in the Battle of Kosovo to instill a sense of historical grievance in those of Serbian ethnicity, thereby strengthening their ethnic identification.

I have said that propaganda is invariably democratically problematic. As will emerge in the next chapter, there is a kind of unproblematic and indeed necessary form of propaganda. The reason it is necessary is that it is necessary to employ when there are undemocratic features of a state that need to be addressed. So it is not itself part of democratic deliberation, properly conceived. But there are certain examples of supporting propaganda that are perfectly acceptable in a democracy. For example, cigarette packs in many democratic countries

carry stark warnings, such as “cigarettes kill.” These are clearly intended to overwhelm affective capacities to further the realization of ideals, in this case, the ideal of health. But propagandistic warning labels on cigarettes seem democratically acceptable, in a way that Milosevic’s propaganda is not. What is the difference?

We can think of a ministry of health as tasked to look out for the physical health of a democratic nation when its citizens do not have time to do the relevant research. In a sense, therefore, we task the ministry of health with giving us warnings that will convey a message that will have the effect of doing all the work of informing us about the relevant health issue. In the case of warning labels on cigarette packs, presumably the idea is that we have tacitly granted our permission to the ministry of health to take such steps. If we have not tacitly granted our permission in this manner, then such warning labels are democratically problematic.<sup>29</sup>

Let us now turn to some basic examples of undermining propaganda. Here is the first. Carl Hart discusses stumbling across explicit racist ideology surrounding Blacks and cocaine, in the early part of the twentieth century. He cites the following passage from 1914, by a medical doctor in the *New York Times*, expressing the view that Blacks have an exceptional reaction to that drug:

Most of the negroes are poor, illiterate, and shiftless . . . Once the negro has formed the habit he is irreclaimable. The only method to keep him away from the drug is by imprisoning him. And this is merely palliative treatment, for he returns to the drug habit when realized.<sup>30</sup>

Crack cocaine is a degraded form of the drug favored by wealthy elite in cities. Yet during the “drug war” in the 1980s and 1990s, politicians successfully argued for 100–1 sentencing disparities between the degraded form that urban Blacks could afford and the purer version favored by wealthy whites. Hart persuasively argues that it is this flawed ideology, so explicit

in the early part of the twentieth century, which operated tacitly during the worst days of the “drug war,” when politicians convinced citizens that these sentencing disparities were consistent with law and order. The flawed ideology of Black exceptionalism with regard to reactions to drugs masks the contradiction between the attractive ideal of law and order, or justice, and the otherwise obviously unjust sentencing disparities between the degraded version of the substance used by poor Blacks and the purer version favored by wealthy Whites. The goal of establishing the sentencing disparities is not consistent with law and order, but the ideal used in the service of that goal is law and order.

Here is a second example of undermining propaganda. According to James Hoggan, in his book *Climate Cover-Up*, the American Petroleum Institute created a team to assemble a “Global Climate Change Communication Action Plan.” According to Hoggan, “The document plainly states that its purpose is to convince the public, through the media, that climate science is awash in uncertainty.”<sup>31</sup> Stephen Milloy was a founding member of that team. Hoggan reports that Milloy now appears on Fox News as a “junk science expert.” Milloy has “spent his entire career in public relations and lobbying, taking money from companies that include Exxon, Philip Morris, The Edison Electric Institute, the International Food Additives Council, and Monsanto in return for his work declaring environmental concerns to be ‘junk science.’”<sup>32</sup> Milloy’s assertions are presented as embodying the ideals of scientific objectivity. However, anyone not convinced by the ideology of the corporate-funded anti-climate science movement would recognize that they clearly conflict with the ideals of scientific objectivity.<sup>33</sup>

Here is a third example of undermining propaganda. A poster from the Cultural Revolution in China states: “毛主席的无产阶级革命胜利万岁!” Translated literally, it means “Chairman Mao’s proletariat revolution triumphs ten thousand years!” Slightly more loosely, “Let Chairman Mao’s

proletariat revolution triumph forever!” Here are the literal correspondences between the phrases:

毛主席的	Chairman Mao’s
无产阶级	Proletariat
革命	Revolution
胜利	Triumph
万岁	Ten thousand years; metaphorically: forever

The phrase that is problematic is “万岁,” or, literally, “ten thousand years.” For thousands of years it was used mainly in the sentence “皇帝万岁万万岁!,” which citizens would shout toward the emperor. Literally, it says, “Emperor ten thousand years [repetition ignored here],” meaning of course, “Long live the emperor!” The word “万岁” is directly associated with the long rule of an emperor. Here is what is happening. The political ideal of a monarchy is obedience to authority. Revolution is being taken as the embodiment of obedience to authority. But it is effective because of the existence of a flawed ideology connecting revolution to the will of a state that makes decisions on one’s behalf. Those who possess this flawed ideology would not see the clear contradiction between revolution and obedience to authority.

Here is a fourth example. In the US Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, written in 2010, the US Supreme Court decided that the rights in the US Constitution extended to corporations. The Court presented the decision as if extending free speech and other rights to corporations was like the Civil Rights Act, namely, an extension of rights to hitherto unrecognized persons. It was therefore presented as an embodiment of the principles of democracy. Yet the unlimited corporate donations that *Citizens United* gave rise to are themselves an existential threat to democracy, promising to hand over the mechanism of government to corporations that do the bulk of funding for political campaigns.<sup>34</sup>

Here is a fifth example. In the United States, some Christian televangelists have promoted what has come to be known as “the Prosperity Gospel.” According to this doctrine, Jesus shows his favor by dispensing wealth. Accepting Jesus is the way to acquire prosperity. If one wants prosperity, one should accept the Christian faith. Thus, the goal of prosperity is advanced as an embodiment of Christian faith. Yet Jesus is as clear as possible that this could not be correct. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes clear that it is the poor and persecuted who are blessed, not the wealthy. Only by accepting a flawed ideology linking the materialist values of capitalism to the doctrines of Christianity could one fail to see the obvious inconsistency between the doctrines espoused by Jesus and the goal of prosperity.

Here is a sixth example. In the National Socialist press, the Jews were described as a public health threat, as in Hitler’s claim that “Jews are the Black Death.” The claim that “Jews are the Black Death” is clearly a public health alert. It makes an assertion that purports to be true and provides a genuine reason that reasonable people must take into account. People in the grip of a flawed anti-Semitic ideology delivered the claim sincerely. However, many Germans at the time in fact were Jewish. The public health threat was inconsistent with the health of a group of citizens of that country. So the content of the claim was clearly inconsistent with the political ideals it represented itself as embodying.<sup>35</sup>

Here is a seventh example. In 1935, W.E.B. Du Bois published the book *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860–1880*. In it, Du Bois challenges the then prevailing view, exemplified by the “Columbia School” of historians, John Burgess and William Dunning, that the end of Reconstruction was brought about by incapacity of freed Black citizens to govern themselves. Du Bois’s alternative account of the failure of Reconstruction is that white economic elites exploited the racism of poor whites to prevent poor whites and newly freed Blacks from joining together in a labor movement with unified class



interests. Though it took several decades, the accuracy of Du Bois's account of why Reconstruction came to an end has long since been widely acknowledged. At the time, Du Bois's correct reading was disregarded, in favor of a manifestly racist interpretation. In the final chapter of the book, Du Bois argues that Burgess and Dunning's view undermines history, by twisting its ideals of truth and narrative accuracy to the service of dominance and power. The chapter is called in "The Propaganda of History," and in it he writes:

If history is going to be scientific, if the record of human action is going to be set down with that accuracy and faithfulness of detail which will allow its use as a measuring rod and guidepost for the future of nations, there must be set some standards of ethics in research and interpretation.

If, on the other hand, we are going to use history for our pleasure and amusement, for inflating our national ego, and giving us a false but pleasurable sense of accomplishment, then we must give up the idea of history either as a science or as an art using the results of science, and admit frankly that we are using a version of historical fact in order to influence and educate the new generation along the way we wish.<sup>36</sup>

Du Bois here criticizes Burgess and Dunning, and white history of the Reconstruction more generally, as propaganda. It is propaganda, because it appeals to the ideals of history in the service of goals, power, and interest, which undermine the ideals of truth and science.

The seven examples of undermining propaganda I have given are uniformly negative. It is worthwhile to look at examples of undermining propaganda that targets a problematic ideal. In his paper "Criteria of Negro Art" from 1926, Du Bois calls on the Black artist to engage in propaganda to represent the humanity and value of her people. Yet he argues that the Black artist cannot simply present the case for Black humanity directly:

Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine. You might get it published and you might not. And the “might not” is still far bigger than the “might.” The white publishers catering to white folk would say, “It is not interesting”—to white folk, naturally not. They want Uncle Toms, Topsyies, good “darkies” and clowns.<sup>37</sup>

Du Bois recognizes that simply directly appealing to whites by showing them the Black perspective will not work. An indirect method is required to stir white interest, one that appeals “to white folk,” yet will somehow call attention to the Black perspective. Du Bois is calling for a certain kind of undermining propaganda.

According to the musicologist Ingrid Monson’s analysis of John Coltrane’s version of “My Favorite Things,” a popular Christmas song from that iconic cinematic celebration of whiteness, *The Sound of Music*, is a way of taking a white aesthetic ideal and using it to represent the Black American voice and experience.<sup>38</sup> If so, it is an example of Du Bois’s appeal. Monson writes:

[Coltrane’s] transformation of “My Favorite Things,” or what Gates would term signification upon the tune, inverts the piece on nearly every level. It makes the interludes, not the verse, the subject of the performance; it transforms waltz time into a polyrhythmically textured six-feel; and it transforms a sentimental, optimistic lyric into a vehicle for a more brooding improvisational exploration. Since the lyrics would have been on the sheet music the song plugger brought to the quartet, Coltrane would have been well aware of the emphasis on white things in the lyric—girls in white dresses, snowflakes on eyelashes, silver white winters, cream-colored ponies. In 1960—a year of tremendous escalation in the Civil Rights movement and a time of growing politicization of the jazz community—there was certainly the possibility that Coltrane looked upon the lyrics with an ironic eye.<sup>39</sup>

Monson's persuasive analysis of Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" represents it as an exemplar of Du Bois's call. Coltrane takes the song and gives it a powerful subversive twist, presenting a white aesthetic ideal in a fashion that subverts it to reveal Black experience and Black identity.<sup>40</sup>

After the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in the summer of 2014, the singer Lauryn Hill released a song she had been playing live called "Black Rage." The song is also a version of "My Favorite Things." "My Favorite Things" contains lines like "cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudels"; Lauryn Hill's version contains lines like "rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens." Whether or not Coltrane intended his version of "My Favorite Things" to be propaganda in the sense of Du Bois's call in "Criteria of Negro Art," it is undeniable that Lauryn Hill explicitly intended it to be so. A song extolling favorite things that are racially and culturally white but assumed to be universal is used to explain the damaging consequences on Blacks of the racial ideology in which that aesthetic ideal is embedded.

Du Bois does not restrict his call to employ propaganda to impel whites to recognize the perspectives of Black citizens to the aesthetic realm. The rhetorical structure Du Bois describes in "Criteria of Negro Art" has had influence in diverse areas of intellectual production. A good exemplar in the field of philosophy is Tommie Shelby's paper "Justice, Deviance, and the Dark Ghetto," published in 2007. The topic of the paper is the moral criticisms of Black inner-city "ghetto" youth, and it explains what constitutes certain forms of "deviance," namely, "crime, refusing to work in legitimate jobs, and having contempt for authority."<sup>41</sup> In short, the paper concerns the ideal of obedience to authority and the pursuit of legitimate legal work, taken unrestrictedly. The paper focuses on the forms of deviance involved in deviating from these ideals. But in focusing on those forms of deviance, it ends up demonstrating that the unrestricted form of the ideal must be rejected.

The paper is presented as an attempt to justify a white ideology that we are in conditions of justice, and so the ideals of obedience to authority and pursuit of legitimate work can be exceptionless. However, what the paper in fact does is *undermine* the exceptionless ideal, by rejecting the presupposition that we are in a just state; the conditions of the dark ghetto represent a “failure of reciprocity.” So, for example, Black refusal to take menial jobs is not a form of deviant “laziness,” but a rejection of an unjust social order. This is an example of the structure urged by Du Bois. Shelby’s paper targets the exceptionless generalization that one should be obedient to authority and pursue legitimate work. It seems at first to rely on that generalization, and pursue the question of how it is to be applied. Shelby’s discussion however eventually reveals that it is false by rejecting the idealizing presupposition, using the example of the unjust conditions in “the dark ghetto.”

Du Bois’s call for propaganda is designed to deal with situations in which a dominant group is suffering under a flawed ideology that leads them to embrace a problematic ideal, or a problematic conception of an ordinary ideal. It is hard to see how direct challenges to the ideals will be effective. Du Bois’s proposal is to wrap challenges to the ideal in the tempting vocabulary of the ideal itself. It is a novel and powerful rhetorical suggestion.<sup>42</sup>

There are hard cases that may not appear to fit the model I have sketched. Liberalism is a view in political philosophy that places the ideals of autonomy and equality above all others. There are, however, political views that are represented as embodying liberalism yet interpret some of these ideals in a problematically narrow way. For example, what we might call *neoliberalism* treats competitive markets as the way all goods should be allocated (I make no claim to accuracy about the description of any preexisting view here). One might naturally think, in the absence of a theoretical argument, that an argument for neoliberalism that, for example, appeals to the founding fathers’ conception of liberalism to justify the view

that markets are the only legitimate way to divide goods that is consistent with liberty is a deformation or undermining of the ideals of liberalism in a way that is characteristic of undermining propaganda. Yet market exchanges *are* included in the scope of liberal autonomy. Markets are a legitimate means of dividing up some goods, and dividing some goods up in this way is allowed by any version of liberalism. So one might worry that arguments for neoliberalism that are framed as defenses of classical liberalism do not count as propaganda, because markets are not inconsistent with the domain of liberal freedom.

Let's assume that there is no persuasive argument that market exchange is central to liberalism. If so, then representing, for example, the liberalism of the founding fathers of the United States as the view that every division of goods must be a market exchange does count as undermining propaganda. It counts as undermining propaganda because it is no part of the liberalism of James Madison, for example, that markets possess this universal domain. So on the assumption that there is no persuasive argument privileging market exchange in this way, arguments for neoliberalism that frame it as the expression of the liberalism of (for example) the founders of the United States are propagandistic.

There are certain traditional views of liberalism that privilege market exchange. But it is nevertheless undermining propaganda to present even these views as the view that what *now* passes for market exchange in the United States is this kind of liberalism, for example, as the kind of view of liberalism espoused by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith has a very particular conception of market exchange, one connected to *political equality*.<sup>43</sup> But the system of market exchange prevalent in the United States is one that has systematically barred certain minorities from participation in contracts, for example, Blacks from fair mortgages.<sup>44</sup> It also typically involves unfair exchanges between rich and poor. If so, it is undermining propaganda to represent the liberalism of Adam Smith as connected to market exchange as historically practiced in

the United States. Market exchange as historically practiced in the United States does not have the connection to political equality, fair exchange between equals that is at the heart of traditional conceptions of liberalism that emphasize market exchange.

Now that we have drawn the distinction between supporting and undermining propaganda, it is simple to characterize the kind of propaganda that is *most* threatening to liberal democracy. The kind of propaganda that is most threatening to liberal democracy is a species of undermining propaganda we may call *demagoguery*. Demagoguery is propaganda in the service of unworthy political ideals. What counts as demagoguery therefore depends on moral and political facts. Demagoguery can come in the form of strengthening unworthy political ideals. For example, Leni Riefenstahl's depiction of German athletes in her film *Olympia* from 1938 is a glorification of the superiority of the Teutonic race. But a different kind of demagoguery will be of central interest in this book: demagoguery that takes the form of undermining propaganda that is presented as embodying *worthy political ideals*.

Of course, it is a matter of contestation which political ideals are worthy. A fascist does not find the political ideals of liberal democracy worthy. However, our concern in this book is with the problem propaganda raises for liberal democracy. It is therefore safe to assume for the purposes of this book that the liberal democratic ideals of liberty, humanity, equality, and objective reason are worthy ideals. In the case of a liberal democratic state, demagogic speech includes speech that uses liberal democratic ideals in the service of undermining these ideals.

An obvious example of demagoguery in a liberal democratic state is occurring at the present time, during the writing of this book, in the United States. The American Republican Party does not draw votes from Black and Hispanic voters. It has engaged in a multiyear, concerted, and completely successful effort to appeal to the fear of voter impersonation to justify

harsh voter registration laws that effectively disenfranchise Black and Hispanic voters. In 2012, a news organization undertook an “exhaustive public records search,” involving “thousands of requests to elections officers in all fifty states, asking for every case of fraudulent activity including registration fraud, absentee ballot fraud, vote buying, false election counts, campaign fraud, casting an ineligible vote, voting twice, voter impersonation fraud, and intimidation.”<sup>45</sup> The study covered a twelve-year period between 2000 and 2012 and found exactly ten cases of voter impersonation out of 146 million registered voters during that time. (In that twelve-year period, the study uncovered just over two thousand cases of total election fraud.) Yet, thirty-seven states as of 2012 had implemented or were considering implementing tough voter ID laws out of the fear of voter impersonation. In the state of Pennsylvania alone, 758,000 voters lacked proper identification. The clearest possible example of propaganda is therefore the use of ideals like “one man, one vote,” together with the appeal to voter fraud, to motivate restrictive voter ID laws.

Undermining demagoguery is a kind of undermining propaganda. The full characterization is therefore:

*Undermining Demagoguery:* A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of a worthy political, economic, or rational ideal, but is in the service of a goal that tends to undermine that very ideal.<sup>46</sup>

Those in the grip of a flawed ideology often *unknowingly* engage in demagoguery. A flawed ideology will lead someone to fail to recognize tension between the goal that an argument she provides serves and the political ideals it employs in that service. Her problematic ideology may in fact prevent her from seeing that she is engaged in demagoguery, even when she is. An audience who shares the speaker’s flawed ideology would not recognize that the message is demagogic. But this is of course one reason why undermining demagoguery is so insidious.

Of course, the characterization of demagoguery I have provided is obviously consistent, as any characterization of demagoguery must be, with *insincere* attempts at communication being demagogic as well. The insincere demagogue seeks to exploit flawed ideology that prevents the audience from recognizing the tension between the desired goal of the communicative act and the political ideal it is presented as embodying. Someone who hates Muslims may know perfectly well that American Muslims are not dangerous. They may nonetheless insincerely appeal to the rule of law in advancing a proposal to spy on or imprison American Muslims. One way to do so is to elicit irrational fear about fellow Muslim citizens, by invocation of a flawed ideology that includes the belief that Muslims are terrorists and therefore a public safety menace. The resulting fear may blind citizens to the fact that imprisoning and spying on Muslim citizens in fact violates the rule of law. Alternatively, someone may try to elicit love of country as a way of blinding rationality (propaganda does not obviously correlate with what one may think of as negative emotions).

According to my characterization of undermining demagoguery, its effects are to cut off options that rationally should be considered (for example, that generally Muslims aren't terrorists) to motivate an action that is not consistent with the political ideal that it is advanced as furthering. In this sense, it has similar effects to the model of propaganda as biased speech. But undermining propaganda crucially involves appeal to a cherished ideal, usually a political ideal, which it then in fact tends to undermine. Its deviousness is due to the fact that it is masked as the very political ideal its consequences threaten to erode. The masking need not be, and in fact is often not, intentional; when it is not intentional, what does the masking is a *flawed ideology*, in the sense I will explain in chapters 5 and 6.

In many cases of undermining propaganda, the attempt of the contribution will be to make it the case, by the very act of making the contribution, that the political ideal should be reinterpreted to be consistent with the desired goal. If a political



ideal must be reinterpreted to fit the goal that it is being used to advance, what that simply means is that the goal is not consistent with the original meaning of the political ideal. The characterization I have given explains why propaganda of the indirect sort is often in the service of an attempt to *alter* the meaning of the political ideal. That is because the original meaning of the political ideal is rationally inconsistent with the goal it is being invoked to motivate.<sup>47</sup>

Cases in which the producer of undermining propaganda is sincere—that is, does not realize that she is delivering propaganda—will be ones in which the question of whether or not the goal is consistent with the political ideal is itself a contested political issue. Accusations of propaganda will therefore often be sincerely viewed as politically motivated. This has consequences for the *political utility* of a philosophical account of the nature of propaganda of the sort I here provide.

In “Oppressions,” the philosopher Sally Haslanger gives a characterization of oppression, in other words, a metaphysical account of what oppression is.<sup>48</sup> The question she is interested in answering is “not just who is oppressed, but what groups are oppressed *as such*.” Her focus is on giving an account of the conditions under which an institution oppresses Fs as such, meaning as a consequence of their Fness. So, for example, she discusses the example of whether Chicago’s child welfare policy oppresses Blacks *as Blacks*. Her account of the conditions under which an institution oppresses a group as such in a context appeals to the notion of *being F being unjustly disadvantaging in context C*. So we need to know whether being Black in Chicago in the 1990s is unjustly disadvantaging to know whether the child welfare policies in Chicago oppressed Blacks as such. Toward the end of her chapter, Haslanger poses, and then addresses, the following objection to her project in the chapter:

One might object, however, that the account I’ve offered is not helpful, for whether group membership is relevant in

explaining an injustice will always be a matter of controversy. In short, the account does not help us resolve the very disagreements that gave us reason to develop an account of group oppression in the first place.<sup>49</sup>

A precisely analogous objection arises to my project in this chapter, to give an account of the conditions under which a contribution to public reason is propagandistic. There will be many cases in which it is a contested political issue whether or not the goal is of a kind that tends to undermine the political ideal. Consider the expression “job creator,” used in the American political context as a description of persons with great wealth. The goal of the introduction of the expression “job creator” was to defend cutting the taxes of wealthy Americans. The expression appeals to the economic ideal of a thriving economy for all citizens. The reason it is effective is because of the widely held belief that the wealthy use their money to start small businesses. The politicians, or political operatives, who introduced the expression “job creator” were financially supported by wealthy campaign donors. So there is reason to believe that they are either insincere or suffering from flawed ideological beliefs. But it does seem that some politicians do in fact believe that the wealthy use their money in just this way, rather than, say, investing in private equity or the stock market. It is a contested political issue whether the economic ideal of a thriving economy for all is rationally well served, or in fact undermined, by cutting taxes on the very wealthy. In such cases, my account of propaganda will not help us resolve whether or not the relevant claims or expressions are propagandistic.

The straightforward answer to the objection is that it miscasts the project of giving a metaphysical account of a political kind. As Haslanger writes, “[T]he point of this discussion has not been to offer an *epistemic* method or criterion for distinguishing oppression (or group oppression) from other rights and wrongs.”<sup>50</sup> Mutatis mutandis for this chapter’s discussion of propaganda. But surely there remains a lingering concern.

What is then the point of producing a metaphysical account of fundamental political kinds, when such accounts cannot play a central role in resolving the relevant political debates? What is the political utility of a metaphysics of the political?

There is political utility to my account of propaganda, because its subject matter is *arguments* of a certain kind. For example, someone who argues that the current economic system in the United States lives up to Adam Smith's ideals is making a factual claim about Adam Smith's political philosophy. Someone who appeals to the liberalism of James Madison or Thomas Jefferson is making a factual claim about an author's intent. There are multiple ways to construe the intents of these authors. We know these authors took themselves to be addressing only citizenship for white men. But it is legitimate to suspect that they saw the eventuality predicted by Plato, that the concepts they discussed would lead to more general equality. Therefore, we now take them to be making more universal claims. Regardless, it is still the case that there were certain political systems they envisaged when they spoke of democracy, freedom, and the kind of equal respect presupposed by contracts in a free market. We can evaluate whether current realities fit the models of these authors, when arguments appeal to their authority (for example, "the wisdom of the Founding Fathers of the United States"). If the authority of these authors is used, in appeals to the ideals they promoted, for purposes that tend to undermine those ideals, the arguments are propagandistic.

This is not to deny that many cases of propaganda may never in fact be recognized as such. Indeed, there may be cases of demagoguery that we cannot ever know are demagoguery. It might be important for reflection and decision making about our life plans to be clear about such possibilities. But we need a sense of what propaganda is, by its nature, to formulate such possibilities. Here we have a need for a metaphysical account of the sort I have provided.

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that it is unknowable whether the central claims of the Catholic Church are

true. The Church has a ministry of propaganda; indeed, the term “propaganda” derives from it. The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* is tasked with spreading Catholicism, in the name of truth, and its head has come to be known as “the Red Pope.” Suppose that the doctrines of Catholicism are true. Then the productions of The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* are not demagoguery, but rather supporting propaganda. They embody truth and, by appealing to emotion, lead to the spread of true belief. Setting up Catholic schools in colonized countries, together with economic systems that require going to such schools and social practices that essentially preclude followers of native religions from positions of economic power, is not demagoguery, though it may be wrong for other reasons having to do, for example, with permissible deviations from true belief.

Suppose for the sake of argument, however, that the doctrines of Catholicism are false, but we do not and indeed cannot know that they are false. Suppose that religious belief is (as David Hume argued) a kind of flawed ideology that is resistant in various ways to change. If so, then the productions of The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* are demagogic. The massive effort to Christianize conquered colonies was not spreading truth, but was an act, many acts, of brutal cultural suppression of native cultures. Presumably, even Catholics admit that if the doctrines of Catholicism are false, then the productions of The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* are demagoguery. We therefore have, in the example of the productions of The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide*, a clear example of the possibility of sincere claims by well-intentioned people that are nevertheless demagoguery. If the doctrines of Catholicism are false, then even if no one could come to know that they are false, the intuitive view is that the productions of The Sacred Congregation *de Propaganda Fide* are demagoguery, albeit forever to be recognized as such. Suppressing other belief systems in the name of truth, with the goal of instilling false belief systems in their place, is

characteristically demagogic. So it is clearly possible for a sincere, well-intentioned person to engage in demagoguery unwittingly, and with no one ever recognizing it as demagoguery.

It is, as we have just seen, possible for there to be a case in which it is widely believed that a certain goal exemplifies a political ideal but is in fact, unbeknown to everyone, propaganda, because everyone is in the grip of a flawed ideology. If a demagogue is someone who is devoted to demagoguery, this means that many people who sincerely do not identify as demagogues, and even have the best intentions, are demagogues. This may seem problematic. A demagogue seems to be someone who has malicious intent.

There are two readings of “someone who is devoted to demagoguery.” The first is that a demagogue is someone who is devoted to a practice *they think of as demagoguery*. The second is that a demagogue is someone who is devoted to a practice, and as it happens, that practice is a form of demagoguery (though the person may not be aware of it). The ordinary concept of a demagogue is the first, not the second.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is not the case that someone who regularly produces demagoguery, but fails to realize that it is demagoguery, is a demagogue.

Accusations of propaganda will often be contested, because there may be gaps, even excusable ones, between facts and our access to those facts. Structural features of our society might prevent us from accessing the facts that would help us determine whether or not an accusation of propaganda is true. This limits the political usefulness of the characterization of propaganda I provide, but it does not eliminate it. There are facts about what ideals demand, even in cases in which those ideals are not fully determinate.

Insofar as the facts are under dispute, so too will be many claims about what falls under the category of propaganda. Accusations of demagoguery in particular will invariably be political, because many people with flawed ideologies do not accept that their ideologies are flawed. Some charges of demagoguery will be intentionally strategic, and others will be

taken to be intentionally strategic, even when they are not. But this book is about the nature of propaganda and propaganda generally, that is, about the *metaphysics* of propaganda. It is no part of my metaphysical claim about the nature of propaganda that every instance is, or even that most instances are, simple to recognize, or even *possible* to recognize. The example of the Catholic Church, under the hypothetical condition of the unknowable falsity of its central doctrines, makes it clear that this is the right result.

What good is a characterization of demagoguery if it does not allow us access to some kind of neutral stance from which to adjudicate claims of demagoguery? It is a fact about life that there is no neutral stance. We all have background beliefs that we bring to any deliberative engagement. One needs to assume many things simply in order to get on in the world, and even to navigate oneself to any supposed neutral stance. A great deal of what one assumes to be true will derive from one's ideology, in the sense I explain in chapters 5 and 6. One's ideology involves beliefs that are tightly connected to one's self-conception. One's ideological beliefs are correspondingly difficult to evaluate rationally. But this of course does not show that the beliefs are *false*, or not instances of knowledge.

The belief that the theory of evolution is a correct description of reality is connected tightly to my self-conception as a certain kind of thinker: a rational, cosmopolitan intellectual who trusts certain sources of evidence over others. I know this. But I also know that the theory of evolution is a correct description of reality. Knowing that I have a personal investment in evolution does not make me think I lack knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the belief that Christ is the Savior might be closely connected to someone's identity, and they might know this about themselves. But they still believe that Christ is the Savior, and if Christ is the Savior, then their belief is true. I will argue that we all have ideological beliefs, which are simply beliefs with certain properties. It may be, I will argue, essential for creatures limited by time and memory to have beliefs

with these properties. But beliefs with these properties, that is, ideological beliefs, can be true, they can be known, and they can be central to our best theoretical understanding. If a neutral stance means a stance without ideological belief, then the neutral stance is a myth.

It might be thought that my project in this book requires a neutral stance, a nonideological perspective. After all, I am engaged in the theory of ideology. That is, I am engaged in the project of theorizing about ideology, and that theorizing takes place in another theory, the theory of ideology. It might be thought that if ideological belief affects theorizing about ideology, then the theory described cannot be true, or cannot be known. But we have just seen that this thought is incorrect. Ideological beliefs, beliefs that have the properties I discuss in chapter 5, can be true, and they can be instances of knowledge.

It might be thought that the theory of ideology has ideology as its subject matter, and so cannot itself contain its subject matter. But this thought too is incorrect. The logician Alfred Tarski provides a proof of the soundness of the axioms of the calculus of classes in a metatheory.<sup>33</sup> But the reason the soundness proof works is that the meta-theory also has axioms that express those same principles. The meta-theory is not an attempt to provide a justification of the propositions expressed by axioms of the theory to someone who doubts them. Its task is different: it is to deliver important knowledge about the object theory. Similarly, the task of the theory of ideology is to yield important knowledge about ideology. Even if the theory of ideology is ideological, it can issue in knowledge. As in the metatheory for logic or set theory, a neutral stance is neither possible nor required.

The fact that there is no neutral stance cannot lead us to political paralysis, or to skepticism about political and moral reality. It is an error to try to evade the facts of our epistemic limitations by adopting metaphysical antirealism. We must come to terms with the fact of our limited perspective while occupying that very perspective. There is simply no other

option. Some charges of demagoguery will be obviously correct: for example, a European anti-Semitic political party's charge that Jews are corrupting the social fabric of the nation, or misplaced appeals to the authority of the work of various political philosophers. Many charges of demagoguery will not obviously be correct. The fact that many of the most interesting charges of demagoguery will be contested is due to a variety of factors, from structural features of our society that prevent us from acquiring the resources to resolve dispute, to epistemic limitations that arise in the normal course of even well-ordered societies. And even if the utility of resolving debates at the moment is maximally limited, we still require an account of propaganda to understand what did happen or what could happen politically.

The characterization of demagoguery I have given yields a rough sense of how it operates. Demagoguery operates by tending to erode a worthy political ideal it appears to exploit in the service of a goal. We have explored one way in which it erodes the political ideal that it appears to embody, namely, by exploiting false beliefs derived from a flawed ideology. In chapter 4, I will argue that demagoguery can also contribute to the formation of the very flawed ideological beliefs that mask its demagogic nature. We can now also see the clear possibility of various kinds of nondemagogic propaganda. Supporting propaganda in the service of a worthy political ideal is one species of nondemagogic propaganda. It helps to achieve the political ideal it appears to embody, either by appeal to emotion or via the kind of false beliefs derived from a flawed ideology.

An example of nondemagogic propaganda of this latter sort is explicitly nationalist rhetoric in the service of helping the physical environment of the country. A representation of the United States as the most physically beautiful country in the world is an expression of nationalist political ideals. A representation that elicits feelings of nostalgia for the land, with the goal of motivating an audience to protect its natural resources, is propaganda.



Nondemagogic propaganda can also appeal to flawed ideology. Suppose for the sake of argument that the central doctrines of Christianity are false (if you are a devout Christian, replace “Christian” with “Muslim” in what follows). An argument about social welfare spending that appeals to, for example, the ideal of political equality, but relies on the religious teachings of Christianity to bring about the effect of furthering the ideal of equality, is a case of supporting propaganda that is not demagogic, yet relies on a flawed ideology.

The aim of the explicit demagogue is to disrupt rational evaluation in such a way as to prevent her audience from reflecting about whether the goal of the demagogic claim is consistent with the political ideals it represents itself as embodying. But insincerity is not necessary to engage in propaganda. Someone in the grip of a flawed ideology can nevertheless engage in demagoguery, since the effect of their flawed ideology can be to prevent them from reconsidering the relation between their goal and the political ideals they incorrectly think their goal serves. I may firmly believe the doctrines of my religious cult, which maintain that everyone not in the cult will burn in the lake of fire forever. On this basis, I may kidnap your children, on the grounds that it is the most reasonable thing to do for their overall welfare. But kidnapping your children is not consistent with the ideal of the welfare of children. Only the flawed ideology of my religious cult leads me to believe that it is.

I now turn to the topic of propaganda in a liberal democratic society. A liberal democracy is governed by particular political ideals that have, since Aristotle, made it special among the political systems: the political ideals of liberty and equality. Aristotle furthermore argues that since democracy is likely to lead to a great deal of economic equality, it is also the most stable of the various systems. So democracy has a special role in political philosophy, and its political ideals—*the democratic ideals*—are my focus in the next chapter.

Every political system has stability as an ideal, as well as law and order. Democracy adds to that the ideals of liberty

and equality. If all citizens participate equally in deliberation about the policies that will hold for all of them, then any policy that applies to all will be at least one that, during the process of deliberation, will be forced to reckon with the perspectives and interests of all citizens. Because of one's own political participation in the formation of the policy, abiding by that policy is not a genuine sacrifice of liberty. So in a democratic state, it is very important that all citizens can politically participate, and that the resulting political discussion is reasonable and rational, in the senses I will define. In a democracy, *the norms governing political speech*, that is, speech between citizens or representatives about policies and laws, are also political ideals. In fact, they are, together with liberty and freedom, the most important political ideals. In the next chapter, we turn to the nature of propaganda in a political system governed by democratic ideals.