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PROPAGANDA IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Political propaganda presents itself as an embodiment of cherished political ideals. Therefore, in a democracy, propaganda of the demagogic variety will characteristically be presented as an embodiment of democratic ideals. In a democracy, propaganda of a nondemagogic variety, specifically of the positive kind, is contributions that strengthen democratic ideals. A chapter on propaganda in liberal democracy therefore of necessity must be devoted to identifying various candidate democratic ideals of normative political theory. The ideals will be guides in identifying instances of propaganda, and its most nefarious species, demagoguery.

In a democracy, for reasons I will explain, normative political philosophy has it that among the central ideals are normative ideals governing public political speech. I will discuss different candidate ideals, which are typically in the literature presented as rivals. As will emerge, along with many others, I conclude that one is central: the ideal that John Rawls has called “reasonableness.” However, I do not have to decide between them for the purposes of identifying cases of propaganda. We should expect propaganda in a liberal democracy to come packaged as

a plausible and intuitively attractive democratic political ideal. It does not have to be packaged as the one true ultimately correct political ideal governing democratic deliberation. Nevertheless, we can learn a great deal about what politicians and their handlers think of as the intuitively correct normative political ideals of democracy by inspecting in particular their propaganda.¹ We can use cases of propaganda in this way to shed light on which of the normative ideals governing public political speech tend to guide ordinary politics.

I begin the chapter explaining why propaganda is a special problem for democracy. At the end of the chapter I conclude by trying to characterize in somewhat precise structural terms the distinction between propaganda that is required to mend tears in the fabric of liberal democratic states, on the one hand, and democratically unacceptable undermining propaganda, on the other: the distinction between *civic rhetoric*, on the one hand, and demagoguery, on the other.

According to the economic theory of democracy, if citizens are voting on the basis of rational self-interest, then voting has occurred. This allows voting by “acclamation,” if voters’ self-interest is in the pleasures of servitude. Nevertheless, even the economic theory of democracy requires an open media and honest politicians; that is, it requires voters to have reliable access to the information that will enable rational decision making on the basis of self-interest. At least some of the norms of richer deliberative conceptions of democratic theory will apply in the economic theory of democracy. So it should not be thought that I am restricting my focus to the deliberative tradition in democracy. The economic theory of democracy requires ideals governing formal public speech as well, though perhaps different ideals than deliberative democracy requires.

In the introduction, we saw that propaganda poses a *special* problem for democratic states. Reflecting on the fact that democratic ideals centrally include ideals governing political speech, we can explain this. Propaganda that is presented as embodying an ideal governing political speech, but in fact

runs counter to it, is antidemocratic. It is antidemocratic because it wears down the possibility of democratic deliberation. Such propaganda is demagoguery. In a democracy, even if one's goal is laudable, it is still impermissible to engage in demagoguery. It is impermissible because it is illiberal; though it may serve a goal beneficial in some way to society, it threatens the democratic status of that society. The danger, as we saw in the first chapter, is that deliberation will then be replaced by "acclamation," in which case, as Rousseau warned, citizens should not be considered as voting at all.

Let's take a recent example of propaganda in a liberal democracy that was delivered for a beneficial goal.² The example comes from a recent *New York Times* piece I wrote with my brother, the economist Marcus Stanley. US fiscal policy involves the ways in which the US government funds its own debt. The expression "the fiscal cliff" was introduced to the broader public by Ben Bernanke, the chairman of the Federal Reserve of the United States, in February 2012 to describe the threat to the recovering economy posed by the confluence of two events. First, Congress was again facing their repeated promise to restore income taxes to their levels during the Clinton presidency in order to reduce the deficit. Secondly, Congress was simultaneously facing large self-imposed spending cuts (the so-called sequester). Curiously, however, a poll found that 47 percent of the public thought that it was going *over* the "cliff" that would result in higher deficits. Only 14 percent understood that it would reduce deficits. In fact, it would have reduced them drastically, effectively eliminating the deficit problem.

The poll suggests that the public was quite misled. If so, it is not unreasonable to pin the blame on the expression "fiscal cliff." Going over cliffs is clearly a bad thing, possibly resulting in death. Also, the major parties seem to agree that deficits are a terrible thing. The Democrats invoke the awfulness of deficits when discussing additional tax cuts for the wealthy, and the Republicans invoke deficits when confronted with additional entitlement programs or additional spending on existing ones.

A widening government deficit also seems similar to personal borrowing, an excess of which leads to reduced credit scores, calls from bill collectors, and possibly foreclosure. So it was natural to assume that a “fiscal cliff” is simply a metaphorical warning of an especially threatening increase in the deficit.

Let’s assume (speculatively but not unreasonably) that Bernanke’s introduction of this expression was meant to intentionally steer the debate about this issue. That is, let’s assume that Bernanke was well aware that his warning would be misunderstood, and that the misunderstanding would lead to its effectiveness. One reason speaking clearly about deficits is hard is because of the entrenched language that is used to speak about the process by which a government funds its activities, a process that is described as “borrowing.” A second reason is that both major parties are invested in using deficit fear strategically.

Describing the process by which the US government funds its activities as involving “borrowing” suggests a false analogy between government borrowing and the borrowing an individual or a family does. The analogy makes some sense for a public entity that does not print its own currency—for example, the state of California or the (Euro-employing) country of Greece. And the analogy also made much more sense during the true gold standard era in this country. For these reasons, and because the government does issue bonds that look like corporate bonds, the vocabulary is entrenched. But a government borrowing in a currency it controls (and can print) has little in common with the borrowing we experience as ordinary citizens. Its benefits—creating jobs and income that prevent a self-perpetuating downward spiral in a slack economy—are not benefits associated with private borrowing. Likewise, its risks—the possibility of inflation, “crowding out” private investment in capital markets, and changing exchange rates—are not factors any individual has experience with through their private borrowing.

Sadly, even many experts do not precisely understand the benefits and risks of government financing through deficits.

The short-term benefits in terms of jobs and income are clear (just ask any lobbyist who wants to maintain spending on their priorities or avoid taxation of their clients). But while there are certainly risks to excessive government debt, controversy continues to rage about when and how these risks occur and what level of debt will create them.

Politicians understand this well, and that's why for decades both parties have subordinated deficit reduction to short-term policy goals. Republicans are willing to put deficit reduction second to tax reduction, and Democrats are willing to prioritize preserving key entitlements and reducing unemployment. Behind the scenes, we have Dick Cheney's famous comment that "Reagan proved deficits don't matter." But in front of the camera, both parties cooperate in generating periodic deficit "crises" to cudgel their opponents and get them to give way on their more central priorities. A great deal of maneuvering on domestic policy can be understood as the strategic deployment of the "deficit" charge against your opponent while working behind the scenes to keep the debt machine going for your own purposes.³

Bernanke was correct to worry about the consequences of so much liquidity evaporating from the US markets in one go. He chose to handle the situation by relying on the false beliefs of the public to communicate alarm. It was demagoguery because it was a message that reinforced the public's false beliefs about economics, wrapped in the mantle of the sage advice of the Fed chief. As such, it eroded democratic ideals. The consequence of Bernanke's failure to explain economic reality was that the public remained confused. This allowed politicians to continue to employ the fear of a rising deficit for political purposes, leading to a fiscal crisis surrounding the debt ceiling in October 2013, which was later shown to take nearly 1 percent of US GDP (nearly 150 billion dollars) and resulted in the loss of an estimated 750,000 jobs.⁴ This can be regarded as some empirical confirmation of the view evident from democratic political theory that propaganda that

exploits democratic ideals, even if wielded for a good purpose, occludes democratic deliberation.

Bernanke's goal in using the phrase "fiscal cliff" was laudable: to move public opinion to avoid a devastating loss of jobs. But in so doing, he relied on false ideological beliefs about the economy, rather than lucid explanation. Bernanke thus set the stage for the subsequent irrational public deliberation that preceded the debt ceiling crisis in 2013. This is a specific illustration of the risks of demagoguery in a democracy, even when wielded for a praiseworthy goal. Flawed ideological beliefs corrode rational debate. In a healthy democracy, the goal of a public official should be to dissolve them, rather than rely on them. Relying upon them only strengthens them and makes them much more problematic barriers in subsequent debate.

I have given one specific example of the dangers of propaganda in a liberal democracy. The example I gave is one in which false beliefs were supported for a good cause. We have seen how this leads inexorably to later problems with democratic deliberation. The political scientist Sarah Sobieraj has devoted a book to documenting problems propaganda raises in liberal democracy, even when wielded in support of worthy causes. For example, Sobieraj persuasively argues that propagandizing by activists tends to "sabotage discourse" in ways that ultimately hinder the kind of social change that that very activism seeks to engender.

I now turn to the overview of democratic political ideals in normative political philosophy. I begin with an explanation of why, in a liberal democracy, the normative ideals governing public political speech are *political* ideals. We then turn to some of the candidate normative ideals governing public political speech. Once we have a good sense of the different candidate normative ideals governing public political speech in a democracy, we will be in a much better position to recognize cases of propaganda in liberal democracies such as the United States. So my goal is to explain some basic details of democratic political theory, which will allow us to see both

why the ideals governing political speech are so important in a democracy and which ideals are the most plausible. This will take some work. But it is essential to identifying the structure propaganda takes in a liberal democracy, since propaganda is presented as embodying one or another normative ideal of political speech.

The idea of a “regular assembly” in which citizens gather to deliberate about just policy is a core element of the Western philosophical tradition.⁵ In *The Politics* Aristotle also makes it clear that the concept of a state involves the idea of “courts . . . who enforce engagements of contracting parties.”⁶ On Aristotle’s view in *The Politics*, man’s role as a citizen of the state is to have as chief concerns “the safety of navigation” and “the salvation of a community.” According to Aristotle, “[M]an is by nature a political animal.”⁷ The purpose of speech “is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust.” Political philosophy since its inception has contained within it the notion that states have certain forums for speech that have a politically central role, arenas for public political discourse. Public political discourse occurs in informal gatherings of citizens, as well as in the houses of Congress and in presidential debates. The role of the media is somewhat more complex, but given its role, discourse about politics in the news media too should count as belonging to public political discourse.

In a liberal democracy, public political discourse occurs in political debate in elections, between representatives seeking to pass policy in the chambers of government (such as Congress and the Senate), and in media discussions of either. In his late essay “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” John Rawls attempts to characterize this realm by defining the notion of a *public political forum*:

the discourse of judges in their decisions, and especially of the judges of a supreme court; the discourse of government officials, especially chief executives and legislators;

and finally, the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms, and political statements.⁸

Rawls's essay concerns in part *the ideal of public reason*, by which he means the standard that ought to guide debate in public political forums in a liberal democracy. But the ideals of public reason should not just guide formal forums of the sort Rawls discusses. Citizens gather to speak about politics in all sorts of *informal* settings. These informal settings guide us in our political choices. The ideals of public reason therefore should apply equally to these informal settings.

In Senate debate in September 2013, Senator John McCain called on his Republican colleagues to abandon their strategy of trying to shut down the US government to halt the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. McCain said: "We fought as hard as we could in a fair and honest manner and we lost. One of the reasons was because we were in the minority, and in democracies, almost always the majority governs and passes legislation." McCain's point was that democratic citizenship requires taking yourself to be subject to the laws that emerge from a "fair and honest" process of deliberating among one's fellow politicians and the public, even when those laws are not the ones that you yourself support. The ideals of public reason are central to democratic political philosophy, because it is through debate that is "fair and honest" that the democratic legitimacy of a policy emerges.

Democracy is a system of government that, minimally, preserves the liberty of its citizens by ensuring that they are not subject to arbitrary restrictions. If a polity agrees to laws governing all of its citizens, the rules must be fairly decided upon by the entire public, with the full participation of all the citizens, for the rules to not illegitimately restrict the liberty of some of the citizens.

Suppose you are part of a group jointly deliberating about a policy the group intends to adopt. Perhaps it is a town hall

meeting about whether to allow fracking in exchange for the building of a school or some jobs. Suppose you are in the group, and the policy runs counter to your own self-interest. For example, perhaps your house has a well fed by a spring that is likely to be poisoned by the fracking. You are initially therefore opposed. However, the main advocate of the policy produces an argument that the policy is best for all, and convinces the majority to adopt the policy. Suppose that you later find out that the main advocate was lying, or otherwise employing deceit. Furthermore, the reason that the main advocate pushed for that policy is that she was paid to do so. In such a situation, you would feel tricked. You would feel that the decision to adopt that policy was not legitimate. You would feel that the group's demand that you adhere to the policy was also not a legitimate demand. If they forced you to adhere to the policy, you have legitimate grounds to feel coerced.

In contrast, suppose that you are part of a group deliberating about a policy that the group is contemplating adopting. The main advocate of the policy gives persuasive arguments that it is in the overall best interest of the community to adopt the policy. The policy runs counter to your own self-interest, but you see that the arguments are correct, and that the policy is in fact best for the community as a whole. The advocate is honest, and her arguments are good. You vote against it, but you lose. In this case, you don't really feel that you have a complaint. The policy was arrived at via fair deliberation. If the group demands that you adhere to the policy, you don't have legitimate grounds to feel coerced.

The first case we discussed, decision to allow fracking, was one in which an unfair process led to a policy that was bad for the community at large. The second case we discussed involved a fair process that led to a policy that was good for the community at large. These are what one might think of as *pure* cases. The deliberation and policy were both unfair and bad, or fair and good, respectively. What about the *impure* cases? That is, what about a fair deliberative process that leads, because of

false beliefs due to a flawed ideology, for example, to a policy that is bad for the community? Or what about an unfair deliberative process that bypasses some of the community's unreasonable and irrational members to arrive at a policy that is good for the community? Democratic political theory divides over these impure cases.

According to *pure proceduralists* about democracy, such as John Rawls and Joshua Cohen, all that matters is that the *procedure* that leads to the policy is fair. The process of fair democratic deliberation itself leads to the formation of new preferences; democratic deliberation is an expression of one kind of autonomy, the autonomy that is found in rationally choosing one's duties. According to the main version of epistemic theories of democracy, of the sort defended by David Estlund and H el ene Landemore, both procedure and outcome matter.⁹ The procedure matters insofar as it leads to outcomes that are better for the citizenry at large. Both the older, pure proceduralist view of democracy and the newer, epistemic version defend fair democratic deliberation. But according to advocates of the epistemic theory of democracy, fair deliberative procedures only have an instrumental value in leading to better overall policy. For pure procedural conceptions of democratic legitimacy, fair deliberation is valuable in and of itself. Both conceptions agree on the value of fair deliberation. One locates democratic legitimacy itself in such deliberation, connecting it to autonomy, while the other tries to explain the value of fair deliberation in terms of its correct outcomes. We will not need to decide between pure proceduralist conceptions of democracy and epistemic theories of democracy, since both rightly presuppose the value of fair joint deliberation. And it is fair joint deliberation that is placed in peril by propaganda.

The policies that result from discussion involving deception and trickery are not democratically legitimate. The person who loses out in a discussion subject to devious machinations is analogous to someone who has lost her freedom in an

unjust war. Governance by the rules that emerge from such a process results in domination, rather than preservation of autonomy. In order for the principles decided upon by a group of autonomous agents to have binding force on each of them, without loss of autonomy, the procedure by which the joint decision is made must lend legitimacy to the result. As we have seen, if there is no constraint that the people who are party to the deliberation not simply mislead and lie and evade in order to further their own interests, the results of the deliberation will not be democratically legitimate.

Democracy requires that the policies that apply to everyone must be the result of fair deliberation and equal participation. The reason to impose this constraint is to ensure that the results of the agreement are something that can be the desires of the entire community, by virtue of being the results of such an agreement. The question of the ideals of public reason is the question of *what guiding ideals should be the norms of deliberation about laws*. It is clear that deliberation that allows deceit does not lead to democratic laws. One of the central questions of democratic political theory concerns the nature of the ideals governing the kind of deliberation that leads to genuinely democratic laws.

The difficulty of justifying a democratic state is that its citizens must live in a society and be governed by laws to which they must adhere while simultaneously preserving their liberty. In order to preserve the liberty of action of its citizens, the laws of a democratic country must be laws to which those citizens in *some sense* agree, via a process of joint deliberation. A central question, or perhaps *the* central question, of democratic political theory is what makes a joint deliberative process fair. The question is complicated by the fact that citizens of a democratic state are typically born into a state with already existing laws. Because of this, the deliberative process must take into account the fact that the laws will apply to people who did not have the opportunity to participate in their formation. The laws therefore must be crafted via normative ideals that

take into account the views of those not yet born, as well as of children who, while not at that point capable of deliberation, one day will be among the people whose viewpoints need to be taken into account. What normative ideals should govern a deliberative process that results in laws of this sort, laws that can legitimately be taken as binding on individuals not yet born or too young to participate in their formation? This is the question of *the nature of the norms of public reason*. Any comprehensive list of the democratic ideals centrally includes the normative ideals of public reason.

Public reason is so important to the nature of democracy that on certain views of democracy, its chief virtue is most fully realized in deliberating about policy with one's fellow citizens. This is not Plato's view of the nature of democracy. In book 8 of *The Republic*, Plato describes liberty in terms of an unfettered unleashing of actions guided by random desires, motivated often by appetite. For example, Plato describes "the Democratic man" (561c, d), who is supposed to embody liberty, as living "his life day by day, indulging each appetite as it makes itself felt. One day he is drinking heavily and listening to the flute; on the next he is dieting and drinks only water." The fact that democracy is connected to this conception of liberty as fully unfettered action is at the basis of his critiques of the system of democracy.

Like Plato, Aristotle connects democracy with some conception of liberty. But the conception of liberty is very different. On Aristotle's view, one's true desires are the ones one arrives at via a process of deliberation with one's fellow citizens in the public square. On this conception, it is in following policies mutually agreed upon by a deliberating body of citizens that one is actually following the path of liberty. The classic modern discussion of these two distinct conceptions of liberty is in Benjamin Constant's famous lecture to Athénée Royal in Paris in 1819, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with That of the Moderns." The liberty of the moderns is what Plato is mocking as the chief virtue of democracy. The liberty

of the ancients is what Aristotle argues is the chief virtue of democracy.¹⁰ It is because of their different conceptions of democracy that Plato concluded that it was the least stable political system and Aristotle concluded that it was the most stable political system.

Many contemporary and modern American democratic theorists give a special role to political participation, suggesting that they have a conception of democracy that reflects the Aristotelian conception. In the great ode to democracy from 1903, *The Souls of Black Folk*, the American philosopher W.E.B. Du Bois repeatedly emphasizes that the nation owes its Black citizens three things: “the free right to vote, [the right] to enjoy civic rights, and [the right] to be educated.”¹¹ Du Bois demands that “[n]egroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood . . . and that black boys need education as well as white boys.” Du Bois focuses on these three rights—voting rights, civic equality, and education—because he thinks of political participation as special among the liberties; education is important because only the educated citizen can participate well in civic life.¹²

I have emphasized throughout that there is no need for my purposes to choose between the different conceptions of liberty that democracy is supposed to embody. Whatever the conception of liberty underlying democracy is to be, the norms of public reason have a special role. Indeed, that role is so special that on perhaps the most compelling vision of the nature of democracy, the one championed by Du Bois, their role stands above all others.

Given that democratic ideals centrally include the normative ideals of public reason, an important form of propaganda in a democracy is speech that presents itself as embodying the normative ideals of public reason but that in fact contributes content that can be expected by a rational person in the situation to erode those very ideals. Propaganda in a democracy in fact often takes this form: speech that inhibits, rather than furthers, the ideals of public reason. To gain more clarity on the

structure of propaganda in a liberal democracy, we must have a better sense of plausible normative ideals of public reason. Only then will we be able to assess various examples.

I will discuss three suggestions of standards for debate in public political forums. Any normative ideal of public reason should be *impartial* in the following sense: public political speech should not be of the sort that, in James Madison's words, "[divides] mankind into parties, [inflames] them with mutual animosity, and [renders] them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good." A norm of impartiality demands that the force of the reasons offered, and policies proposed, is not perspective-dependent. If someone is offering impartial reasons, their reasons "must be grounded in something that is independent of their stance, namely what is the case believer-neutrally."¹³ This is the standpoint of the *impartial observer*. According to the ideal of impartiality, the claims politicians make in political debate must be from the standpoint of the impartial observer. All three different views of the normative public reason are impartial in this general sense.

The first is that debates in public political forums are guided by a norm of *theoretical rationality*. The second is that they are guided by a normative ideal of *practical* rationality plus ignorance in a sense I will characterize. The third normative ideal for public reason is that it is guided by equal respect for the perspective of everyone subject to the policy under debate. Following the recent political philosophy tradition, we shall call this the norm of *reasonableness*.

The first plausible normative ideal of public reason is to hold contributions up to a standard of *theoretical rationality*, what Jürgen Habermas famously calls "the unforced force of the better argument." A contribution to a political debate must be justified, and be assessed solely by its impact on the truth of the issue at hand. Let's say that *rational contributions to a debate* are legitimately justified claims (ones "backed up by evidence") that contribute to a rational resolution of the debate.

A claim contributes to a rational resolution of a debate only if it bears significantly on the likelihood of the issue under debate. For example, a claim would be a rational contribution to a debate about whether or not invading Iraq is the right thing to do if the claim was justified and provided evidence for or against the wisdom of invading Iraq.¹⁴

A claim may be a rational contribution to a debate, but have a nonrational effect on the debate as a whole. Take an example that was recently the subject of a *New York Times* Retro Report, from which the information to follow comes.¹⁵ The example involves the expression “super-predator,” introduced and popularized by academics—specifically James A. Fox at Northeastern University and John J. DiIulio Jr., then of Princeton University—in the mid-1990s as a description of the perpetrators of youth crime in the United States. In a television interview, DiIulio defined a super-predator as a “young juvenile criminal who is so impulsive, so remorseless, that he can kill, rape, maim, without giving it a second thought.” In another television interview, DiIulio said, “We are talking about a group of kids that are growing up essentially fatherless, godless, and jobless.” In an article from 1996, “My Black Crime Problem, and Yours,” DiIulio wrote, “[A]s many as half of these super-predators could be young, black males.”

The notorious “Central Park jogger” case in 1989, in which a group of Black children in New York City were arrested and convicted for the brutal rape of a jogger in Central Park, was used by Dan Rather to introduce the topic in a CBS news special on “super-predator theory” (the children later turned out to be innocent). During the presidential campaign in 1996, the Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole called for harsh new legislation for youth crime, saying (clearly of Black male children) that “experts call them super-predators.” It is clear that the demagogic language of “super-predator” had an immediate, nonrational effect on the subsequent debate about the legislation of child crime. Over forty states swiftly enacted draconian new legislation cracking down on violent

child crime. One can imagine, in this context, a politician using the phrase “inner-city youth” in favor of such legislation. But the debate had been polluted by the introduction of the language of “super-predator,” which was inexorably linked to Black children. By being linked to the iconography evoked by the language of “super-predator,” even rational contributions to the debate had a clearly nonrational effect. In fact, this was the very purpose of introducing the term “super-predator.” As Fox acknowledges, his use of the “strong language” was intentional, since he meant to “sound an alarm about what might happen if we didn’t act quickly.”

In the context of the debate in the 1990s about child crime, terms like “super-predator” and “wilding” (introduced to describe the alleged actions of the youth accused in the Central Park jogger case) polluted subsequent debate by evoking negative stereotypes that impeded the subsequent employment of rational faculties. Even apparently fully rational contributions to the debate subsequently evoked such stereotypes. Such contributions thus ran counter to the normative ideal of theoretical rationality, because even speaking of Black youth crime evoked nonrational faculties, specifically fear, to end rational debate.¹⁶

If theoretical rationality is the normative ideal of public reason, then one paradigm class of cases of propaganda in a democracy will be uses of language that are masked as objective but that have a polemical effect. They have the effect of appeals to passions to cut off rational debate, in many cases without making a rational contribution to it. This unquestionably captures one kind of propaganda. Any account of the form of propaganda in a democracy must explain these cases as well.

Theoretical rationality as a normative ideal of public reason also explains the ubiquity of propaganda masked as embodying scientific ideals but conveying a content that runs counter to them. The propaganda involved in climate-science denial is typically of this sort.

If theoretical reason is the norm of public reason, then reasons advanced in public political forums are legitimate insofar

as they play a role in a rational resolution of the issue. The issue under debate might be, for example, “Is it in the public interest to raise taxes on the wealthy?” Considerations for or against must weigh in on the resolution of this question (allowing compromises as a kind of resolution) in the sense of raising or lowering the likelihood of the truth of one of the options. So, for example, an opponent of raising taxes on the rich might provide empirical evidence that so doing will lead to an increase in unemployment.

According to the norm of theoretical reason, public political debate in a democracy is guided by reasons that bear on whether or not a particular policy is *for the common good*, or *in the public interest*. However, one might worry that a policy proposal might be in the public interest, yet run roughshod over the allowable personal liberties of a minority. This concern motivates a distinct normative ideal governing political debate. To introduce it, I will employ the thought experiment of the original position, from John Rawls’s book *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971.¹⁷

Practical rationality is “means-ends” reasoning: given a goal, what is the most rational way to achieve that goal, given one’s beliefs? A norm of practical rationality on public reason is clearly not a version of impartialism. However, one can model the demands of impartiality by marrying practical rationality with the suspension of one’s beliefs about *one’s own position* in society, and hence one’s particular perspective. One sees this model in the thought experiment involving “the original position” in *A Theory of Justice*. There, Rawls argues that the correct way to establish the principles of justice for a society is by imagining oneself into an “original position,” where one does not know one’s place in society, one’s race or religion, or even one’s intellectual and physical capacities. The laws governing the society will be the laws agreed upon by agents who are fully practically rational and have imagined themselves into “the original position.” That is, in adjudicating the principles of justice, one must suspend belief about one’s location in

society, where society is conceived of as humanity, and employ one's practical rationality to decide what principles should govern a society in which one does not know where one is located. This is another possible view of the norms of public reason: a statement in a political forum is only acceptable if it is practically rational from the stance of someone ignorant of their place in the society. This is a version of impartialism; let us call it *practical rationality impartialism*.

Practical rationality impartialism may appear to rule out expressions of self-interest in public political forums. But it does not. Expressions of self-interest might even be evidentially *necessary* as a means of information that bears on reasons that are impartial.¹⁸ A legitimate step in democratic deliberation on this picture is a reason that makes sense from the perspective of the impartial observer, who does not know her place in society. But this does not preclude expressions of self-interest, as they may contribute evidentially to the weight of one legitimate reason over another. For example, suppose we are debating about whether to build a bridge connecting an island to the mainland. The self-interest of those who live in the construction zone is relevant to the question of whether we ought to build the bridge. We need expressions of self-interest to provide that information, even though they themselves are not public reasons.

Practical rationality impartialism does not preclude expressions of self-interest in public debate. But such expressions are only relevant insofar as they bear on reasons that are compelling to all. The impartialist conception of public reason forces the elimination of any claim that has its source in self-interest that does not contribute to impartial reasons. And that is the right result, because claims that have their source in self-interest and are not useful from an impartial standpoint are paradigmatically the kinds of claims made in illegitimate attempts to gain power for a particular interest group.

For example, a senator wishing to do a favor for an oil company or a private prison company for the sake of a campaign

donation might deliver a speech in favor of a piece of legislation that favors the source of the potential campaign contributor. From the perspective of people not benefiting from those campaign donations, the reasons the senator gives that come from his self-interest run counter to the impartialist norm of public reason. And that is the correct result.

Information about the self-interest of various parties is often indirectly relevant to debates about policy. So expressions of self-interest can be legitimate in political discussion, even if impartiality is the norm of public reason. But it is also the case that there are claims that do not bear on settling the debate, or do not provide relevant evidence in any way, but can still, according to the advocate of impartialism about public reason, be legitimate. These are claims that aid in satisfying the *preconditions* for public reason.

Practical rationality impartialism involves reasons that would make sense from the position of anyone in the society, if they did not know their place in the society. But it is not clear that one can argue, via impartial reasons, in such a way that would lead one to a more expansive conception of the inclusion conditions for the society. This kind of impartialist can allow claims that help facilitate the adoption of such a background. That is, the impartialist can allow for speech that helps to establish the background required to enable democratic deliberation. It may be that considerations that are not impartial are part of that background (such as reasonableness as a character trait, in the sense soon to be defined). So this kind of impartialist can grant the legitimacy of contributions that are not impartial, as long as they help foster the *preconditions* for the exchange of reasons that are impartial in this sense. The practical rationality impartialist is not so easily refuted.

Despite the appeal of practical rationality impartialism, it is not the most central ideal of public reason in democratic political theory, either historically or currently. Democratic political theory has long favored another ideal, according to which a democratic community is one that fosters certain kinds of

attitudes toward one's fellow citizens. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois brings our attention to this normative ideal of public reason by describing the consequences of its complete failure in his description of the political state in the American South after the Civil War:

Can we establish a mass of black laborers and artisans and landholders in the South who, by law and public opinion, have absolutely no voice in shaping the laws under which they live and work? Can the modern organization of industry, assuming as it does free democratic government and the power and ability of the laboring classes to compel respect for their welfare,—can this system be carried out in the South when half its laboring force is voiceless in the public councils and powerless in its own defence? . . . It is pitiable that frantic efforts must be made at critical times to get law-makers in some States even to listen to the respectful presentation of the black man's side of a current controversy. . . . The laws are made by men who have little interest in [the Negro]; they are executed by men who have absolutely no motive for treating the black people with courtesy or consideration; and, finally, the accused law-breaker is tried, not by his peers, but too often by men who would rather punish ten innocent Negroes than let one guilty one escape.¹⁹

Du Bois's critique of the political system of the South during the several decades following the Civil War is that its laws are not democratically legitimate; they apply to some citizens, the Black ones, not as "laws and justice," but as "sources of humiliation and oppression." One obvious reason the laws lack democratically legitimacy is because Blacks were not allowed to participate in their formation. As Martin Luther King Jr. writes in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," "A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law." But Du Bois is not merely making King's point. He is rather

bringing our attention to what he seems to regard as a more central reason the laws are not democratically legitimate. It is because those who created the laws did not have *empathy* for some of those subject to them, namely, their Black fellow citizens. The lack of empathy meant that the laws were crafted in such a way that did not reflect *respect* for the viewpoints of Black citizens; lawmakers will not listen to the “respectful presentation of the black man’s side of a current controversy.”

Du Bois is arguing that the laws in the South are illegitimate, and they are illegitimate because (a) Black citizens do not participate in their formation, (b) lawmakers will not take into account the reasonable perspectives of Black citizens, and (c) there is no empathy on the side of the lawmakers for the situation of Blacks subject to those laws. Du Bois is suggesting that underlying the kind of equal respect involved in taking into account reasonable perspectives of Black citizens is empathy.

A benevolently paternalistic society is one in which the policymakers have empathy with those who are subject to the policies, but do not treat them with equal respect. The difference between benevolent paternalism and a democratic culture is indicated by Du Bois’s comments about the need in a free democratic society to take into account the “respectful presentation” of the perspective of alternative views.

Chapter 4 of the British philosopher Susan Stebbing’s book *Thinking to Some Purpose*, published in 1939, is called “You and I: I and You.” Stebbing calls attention to a failure common in public discourse, the “failure to see the point from the other man’s position.”²⁰ She recommends, in making assertions that apply to everyone, the “safeguard” of changing “you” into “I.” That way, one can more easily see that the policy one is prescribing to others is a reasonable one. Stebbing is thereby suggesting that there is a norm of equality to public discourse. It is this that distinguishes mere paternalism from democracy.

The sociologist Manfred Stanley articulates the need in a democratic society for this kind of capacity to take the perspective of the other:

When a society evolves into a condition that is so complex and fragmented by social class and occupational specialization that great sociopsychic distance between population groups becomes a normal state of affairs, then insufficient compassion emerges as a distinct collective problem. . . . Mutual estrangement and stereotypical fantasy exist between the extremes of our class structure, between several ethnic and racial groups, and between considerable numbers of males and females. . . . The challenge is . . . one of bringing people to the point of understanding the objective historical and existing conditions of groups with whom they have had no personal life experience. Compassion presupposes the ability to “take the role of the other” in some particularly subtle and informed way.

But what is it to “take the role of the other” in the relevant respect? Stephen Darwall appeals to Adam Smith’s notion of an “impartial spectator” to explain the notion of “being *someone* in the other’s situation” and deliberating about what to feel from that perspective.²¹ Stebbing is asking us, when proposing policy, to imagine being *someone* subject to that policy, with as many of the properties as those subject to the policies have, without losing the impartial stance suggested by the indefinite “someone.” It is this ability, to imagine being someone in the situation of another, that underlies the capacity to give the perspectives of our fellow citizens equal weight. The difference between benevolent paternalism and a democratic attitude is that the latter presupposes the regular employment of this sort of imaginative capacity.²²

I have sketched a democratic ideal that involves a certain cognitive capacity, that of imagining oneself as *someone* in the situation of another. Following Darwall, let’s call this capacity *cognitive empathy*. It is not completely clear how to characterize cognitive empathy, since it is not completely clear what it is to imagine oneself as *someone* in the situation of another. The philosopher Laurie Paul has argued recently that it is

not possible to imaginatively place oneself in the situation of others who have had dramatically different life experiences. It may be, if Paul is correct, that even cognitive empathy is excessively idealized as an affective base for a democratic ideal.

Paul argues that a certain class of experience makes it impossible to imagine being in that position.²³ One example Paul gives is the experience of having a child. She argues that having a child is a *transformative experience*, and that this entails that it is not possible to make a rational decision about choosing to be in that position. More needs to be said about Smith's impartial spectator before one can conclude that Paul's arguments show that a childless person cannot be an impartial spectator of a person with a child. But let's suppose, as it appears, that it is incompatible with Paul's arguments, that childless persons cannot imagine, in the relevant sense, what it is like to have a child. If so, then, on the conception of a democratic culture I have sketched, it is hard to see how any policies could be legitimate. Childless persons could not make policy that applies to those with children, in a democratically acceptable way. This is a not unfamiliar antiliberal position.

There are several options to the difficulties posed by Paul's arguments. One is to seek a norm of public reason that does not require cognitive empathy with the situation of others. For example, Sharon Krause has a suggestive discussion of perspective taking as "an exercise in moral sentiment," which involves taking into account the sentiments of those in different situations who would be affected by the policy.²⁴ Krause is suggesting that in order to gain an appreciation of the fact that others would be negatively affected by a policy I support, I do not need to be able to occupy their perspective, even in an impartial manner. One strategy in the face of the difficulties of perspective taking raised by Paul's work is therefore to seek a norm of public reason that captures a sense of impartiality, without requiring such a strong cognitive capacity as perspective sharing.

A different strategy is to take cognitive empathy as an *affective ideal*, which may function to regulate mutual policymaking,

without ever being actually embodied, or capable of being embodied, in practice. According to this strategy, the norms of public reason are ideals. But ideals can perform a regulative function while still being realistic. As we shall see at the end of chapter 4, this strategy requires some account of what it is for an ideal to regulate a practice.

When a political ideal is unrealistic in practice, one can either seek a weaker, more realistic ideal. Alternatively, one could explore the thought that an unrealizable ideal can nevertheless have regulative force. But for my purposes, these debates are not relevant; this is not a project in ideal theory. My goal is rather to use putative ideals to identify cases of propaganda. Propaganda exploits all potential norms of public debate, whether they are realizable or not.

A democratic culture is one in which citizens assume that their fellow citizens have good reasons for acting as they do. It involves, for example, questioning one's own perspective, if one cannot make rational sense out of the actions of one's fellow citizens. It involves, as Du Bois argues, being open to the "respectful presentation" of other perspectives.

Rawls usefully characterizes this conception of the ideals governing democratic deliberation in a characterization of what he calls "reasonableness":²⁵

Persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals say, they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. Those norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore as justifiable to them; and they are ready to discuss the fair terms that others propose.²⁶

Reasonableness requires any contribution to political discussion, for example, in the form of a proposed policy, to be "justifiable" to all of those under whose purview it falls. Regarding a reason one gives as justifiable to another presupposes "taking the role of the other" in some relevant sense.

Let us set aside theoretical rationality and focus instead on the contrast between reasonableness and practical rationality, the kind of rationality exemplified in selecting the most effective means to further various ends (that are not truth or goodness). In contrast, a reasonable contribution is one that “we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept.”²⁷ An example from a *New York Times* column by the philosopher Amia Srinivasan provides a nice illustration of the distinction between practical rationality and reasonableness:

Suppose that I inherited from my rich parents a large plot of vacant land, and that you are my poor, landless neighbor. I offer you the following deal. You can work the land, doing all the hard labor of tilling, sowing, irrigating and harvesting. I’ll pay you \$1 a day for a year. After that, I’ll sell the crop for \$50,000. You decide this is your best available option, and so take the deal.²⁸

If I think of our bargain in terms of rational self-interest, then it is rational to offer you \$1 a day, knowing that you have no other prospects. But I am clearly not being *reasonable*. I am not imagining someone in your situation, and then asking what would seem fair from that perspective. Rawls argues in *Political Liberalism* that the central norm of public speech is one that demands that contributions to public debate are *reasonable*.²⁹

The importance of reasonableness as a norm for public discourse, and empathy as its foundation, is clear from the advice of successful propagandists. The state of Israel is in a constant asymmetrical battle with Palestinians, over whom they have the military upper hand. The constant stream of photos of dead Palestinian civilians poses a severe image problem for the country. The photos of the results of massively asymmetrical battle make Israel seem like it is an unreasonable partner in the peace process.

The Israel Project is an organization that promotes Israel’s image abroad, particularly in the United States. During the war with Gaza in 2009, they commissioned the American

propagandist Frank Luntz to create a pamphlet to aid in image repair. The 2009 Global Language Dictionary is an aid to Israel's public relations during a highly asymmetrical war with an enemy that involves the infliction of large civilian casualties. The document is titled "The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary," and though intended to be secret, it was leaked to the public. Chapter 1 is "The 25 Rules for Effective Communication." The very first rule, indeed the beginning of the entire document, is "[p]ersuadables won't care how much you know until they know how much you care. Show Empathy for BOTH sides!"

Previously, in April 2003, The Luntz Research Companies, in collaboration with The Israel Project, created a similar document, titled "Wexner Analysis: Israeli Communication Priorities 2003." The report is an effort to find a way to communicate the message to American "opinion elites" that Israel is genuinely interested in peace and Palestinian well-being, while simultaneously undermining support for the Palestinian leadership. In polling, Luntz discovered that the sound bite "[w]e are hoping to find a Palestinian leadership that really does reflect the best interest for the Palestinian people" was an effective way to communicate the message that Israel is a reasonable negotiating partner, but the Palestinian leadership is not.

A good deal of the document from 2003 is spent trying to find a way to communicate reasonableness, while suggesting, without asserting, that the then unknown leader Mahmoud Abbas is untrustworthy. Luntz urges avoiding directly attacking Abbas, while simultaneously trying to communicate his untrustworthiness. He suggests finding a way to communicate that Abbas "was appointed to his current position by Arafat, which is suspect," and that he "has denied the Holocaust." Luntz's advice for Israel reflects the understanding that reasonableness in negotiations, undergirded by empathy for one's negotiating partners, is the expected norm of public discourse. His documents attempt to explain how to feign reasonableness while communicating a message that

undermines the reasonableness of one's interlocutors in the eyes of third parties.

Rawls has a novel argument for reasonableness, what he calls "the fact of reasonable pluralism." A democratic society is one that allows *diverse reasonable perspectives* to be pursued by its citizens. The way to live an autonomous life is to "carve your way through the world," having your path governed by your decisions. If the decisions are autonomous, one's path will be one that is self-formed. The goal of a democracy should be to allow maximum freedom to develop along an individual path consistently with being reasonable toward one's fellow citizens. Thus, there must emerge, in a democracy, multiple reasonable full moral conceptions. You may decide to become Christian; I may decide to become a Scientologist; and a third friend may finally settle on atheism. These are all reasonable albeit incompatible paths. By imposing an ideal of reasonableness, Rawls is requiring reasons to not be drawn from the differing doctrines fellow citizens hold as a consequence of the decisions they made that formed a legitimate life path. On this view, it is not permissible for you to draw on your Christian beliefs in public debate, because, if you are reasonable, you are aware that Christian doctrine is not reasonable from my perspective.

In contrast, a normative ideal of theoretical reason for public deliberation allows any reason to be offered that potentially bears on settling the issue at hand. If one believes in the doctrines of Christianity, and their truth would settle the issue at hand, one could advance those doctrines in public debate and take oneself to be in accord with the normative ideal of theoretical reason.

If the central normative ideal governing public debate is theoretical reason, then one kind of paradigm case of propaganda in a democracy is an apparently rational contribution to a debate that makes it subsequently more difficult to follow the dictates of theoretical reason (and this consequence is not made up for by its positive contribution to the settling of the

debate). If the central ideal governing public debate is reasonableness, a very different picture of the analogous paradigm case of propaganda emerges. If reasonableness is the central norm governing public debate, paradigm cases of propaganda will be ones that are presented as reasonable, but that subsequently *make it more difficult for the participants in the debate to be reasonable*. That is, paradigm cases of propaganda will be ones that represent it to be reasonable not to take certain perspectives into account.

To understand how a claim presented as reasonable could erode reasonableness, we need to look more at the notion of reasonableness and its emotional basis in humans. What is it to be reasonable? To be reasonable is to take one's proposals to be accountable to everyone in the community. A reasonable person only acts in ways that would be acceptable from every perspective; the reasonable person takes herself to be accountable to all her fellow citizens. Stephen Darwall argues that the emotional basis of accountability is guilt. Guilt is the emotion that we feel when we fail to live up to the demands of reasonableness.³⁰ But guilt is not the emotion that leads us to consider the perspectives of others. A community is reasonable if it is governed by norms of mutual respect and mutual accountability. A community governed by the normative ideal of reasonableness is one in which citizens have mutual respect for everyone else in the community and take their actions to be accountable to everyone else in the community. Possessing such an attitude requires, at least among humans, *empathy or the capacity to put oneself in another's shoes*.³¹ One can therefore expect a characteristic form of propaganda in a liberal democracy to be a claim that is presented as reasonable, but that has the effect of eroding empathy for a targeted group.

Suppose that reasonableness is the normative ideal governing public reason. Those who contribute policy proposals to public reason that apply to everyone, or arguments for such policy proposals, must hold themselves accountable to everyone who may be subject to them. It is not reasonable to

propose a policy that, from the perspective of another, is unreasonable. The normative ideal of reasonableness is the demand “to live politically with others in the light of reasons all might reasonably be expected to endorse.”³²

The normative ideal of reasonableness also explains why it is legitimate to take laws formed in a deliberation governed by reasonableness to be binding on those who did not participate in their formation. The demand of reasonableness requires those deliberating about policy to take into account the perspective of anyone who may be subject to those laws, including, for example, very young children. By taking into account the perspective of those not capable of participating in deliberation about policy, one ensures that the policies thereby formed are sensitive to their interests.

Adopting a second-personal attitude presupposes being accountable to others, and taking them in turn to be accountable to you. To take Darwall’s favored example, when I ask you to step off my foot, I am adopting a second-personal standpoint to you, expecting that you will treat my request by treating me with *dignity*, which means considering my perspective. Second-personal attitudes thus centrally involve the notions of *dignity* and *respect*. If the adoption of second-personal attitudes is a precondition governing public deliberation in public political forums, then speech that is an affront to the dignity of other members of society runs counter to these ideals, and hence is the kind of speech that one expects to find masked paradigmatically by propaganda.

It is uncontroversial that propaganda, in the broad sense I have characterized, is bad. There is however a tradition in political philosophy dating back to Aristotle that advertises itself as *defending rhetoric*.³³ It is important to distinguish the aims of this tradition from an enterprise that would license propaganda, in the senses I have defined. In the rest of the chapter, I will demonstrate, just with the points I have developed up to this point, that there is a kind of propaganda that is politically necessary to use to overcome fundamental obstacles to

the realization of democratic ideals. This kind of propaganda stands in a specific structural relation to demagoguery in liberal democracy.

We have seen Du Bois develop the point that overcoming barriers to democracy requires something like rhetoric or propaganda. W.E.B. Du Bois is plausibly taken to be appealing to the need for undermining propaganda, as works that directly address the distorted conception of Black fellow citizens will not sell. But it is also possible to take Du Bois as calling for particularly effective supporting propaganda that reveals Black humanity. This is a part of a classic debate he had during the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s with the philosopher Alain Locke.

In "Criteria of Negro Art," Du Bois writes, "[I]t is not the positive propaganda of people who believe white blood divine, infallible and holy to which I object. It is the denial of a similar right of propaganda to those who believe Black blood human, lovable and inspired with new ideals for the world." Later in the essay, Du Bois expands on the desired effect of art used as propaganda: "[U]ntil the art of the black folk compells recognition they will not be rated as human. And when through art they compell recognition then let the world discover if it will that their art is as new as it is old and as old as new." Here, Du Bois uses "propaganda" to denote appeals to emotion, of the sort evoked by art, in the service of the message that Blacks deserve equal respect as humans and citizens.

In his response to Du Bois in 1928, the philosopher Alain Locke rejects this apparent call for supporting propaganda, while simultaneously providing a useful characterization of this nonpejorative sense of the term:

My chief objection to propaganda, apart from its besetting sin of monotony and disproportion, is that it perpetuates the position of group inferiority even in crying out against it. For it leaves and speaks under the shadow of a dominant majority whom it harangues, cajoles, threatens or supplicates.

By “propaganda,” both Du Bois and Locke mean a kind of speech that uses “haranguing, cajoling, threatening, or supplicating” as a method to force a dominant majority to expand the domain of respect and empathy to include a persecuted and ignored minority. In this sense, “propaganda” refers to a method of appealing to emotions to *increase* reasonableness. Locke’s criticism of Du Bois’s call for Black artists to engage in propaganda in this sense is that it places an undue burden on Black artists to advocate for themselves with the dominant white population, which is yet another burden stifling their freedom of expression.

Using the example of Du Bois, the political philosopher Melvin Rogers defends certain uses of rhetoric by appealing to its effect on the “cognitive-affective dimension of judgment.”³⁴ Rogers does not here appeal to what I have characterized as undermining propaganda; in general, Rogers speaks less about the mechanisms. Rogers instead intends to illuminate the connection between the positive rhetoric tradition and a deliberative democratic ideal like reasonableness.³⁵ Rogers argues that Du Bois used rhetoric, of whatever kind, to force his audience to be accountable to Black citizens. It induced its audience to recognize their moral obligation to grant equal political participation to a group that had been invisible. The function of the discourse is therefore not to contribute to the rational resolution of a debate, in the sense of deciding the truth or falsity of the claim at issue. Its function is instead to force a reimagination of the presumed boundaries of that concept.³⁶

As we have seen, reasonableness requires a framework of “relations of mutual respect and mutual accountability” between all citizens.³⁷ Du Bois clearly regards propaganda to be a method of increasing these “relations of mutual respect and mutual accountability” between all citizens, regardless of color. Public debate in Du Bois’s time obviously fell well short of the ideals of reasonableness, since it did not include America’s Black population within the framework of mutual respect and mutual accountability. Du Bois calls for Black artists to

use their art to increase the reasonableness of public discourse, by forcing the recognition that the framework of mutual respect was too narrowly drawn.

Du Bois defends the necessity of rhetoric that *improves* the ideals of public reason. Du Bois is certainly not in the business of giving a defense of rhetoric based on its motivational powers to circumvent rational debate. Instead, he is, as Melvin Rogers rightly points out, defending the “aspirational” powers of rhetoric. A contribution to a debate can improve the subsequent reasonableness of the debate, even though the contribution itself is not a rational contribution, in the sense that its informational content contributes to the debate’s resolution.

Assuming reasonableness as an ideal governing public speech, aspirational speech in Rogers’s sense is, structurally, precisely the opposite of demagoguery. The person making a proposal in the public political sphere is reasonable if she can take herself to be accountable to everyone who is subject to that proposal. In most actual societies that regard themselves as liberal democracies, the laws are not reasonable from the perspective of certain groups. As Du Bois points out, the laws in the post-Reconstruction South were not reasonable, because they applied unreasonably to the Black citizens. An aspirational contribution is one whose effect is to yield an overall *improvement* of the reasonableness of a debate. A characteristic example of improving the reasonableness of a debate is to appeal to empathy and understanding to lead people to include the perspectives of some citizens whose perspectives had previously been ignored.³⁸ Here are some examples of civic rhetoric from American history; they will help us gain an understanding of the mechanisms by which civic rhetoric can be effective.

The Black American intellectual Fannie Barrier Williams published, in November 1904, an essay in *The Voice of the Negro* that is a classic example of aspirational speech, in Rogers’s sense. It is a call for attention to the perspectives of Black women that elicits empathy for the situation in which they find themselves, the situation of having an unrecognized

perspective. In a justly famous passage, she writes, of “the American Negro woman,”

She is the only woman in America who is almost unknown; the only woman for whom nothing is done; the only woman without sufficient defenders when assailed; the only woman who is still outside of that world of chivalry that in all the ages has apotheosized women kind. Wars have been declared and fought for women; governments have been established and developed in the name of woman; art, literature and song have all conspired to make woman little less than angels, but they have all been white women.³⁹

Fannie Barrier Williams used such passages to make the reader aware of the consequences to dignity and self-image of invisibility.

Another example comes from the more recent past. Dr. Martin Luther King organized the Selma to Montgomery March of 1965 during the fight for voting rights in the American South. He insisted on nonviolence, knowing full well that the marchers would be met with extreme violence. Television viewers across the country saw nonviolent marchers who were asking only for political equality beaten and brutalized. It led to the increased visibility of American Blacks by eliciting empathy for their situation. The Selma to Montgomery March is a paradigm case of democratically acceptable propaganda: manipulation of the media to draw attention and empathy to the predicament of an otherwise invisible group.

What about the Kantian criticism of propaganda, discussed in the previous chapter? Is the form of propaganda that Du Bois urges still problematic on Kantian grounds? Is it a kind of manipulation of the rational will? Let’s return to the example from chapter 2, John Coltrane’s version of “My Favorite Things,” as analyzed by Ingrid Monson. According to Monson, Coltrane lures the white listener into the song by appealing to white aesthetic ideals. Once the listener has been tempted into attention, Coltrane uses the song to reveal the previously

invisible Black perspective. In some sense, this is misleading. But is it manipulation of the sort that would concern the Kantian?

In the case of Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things" and the Selma to Montgomery March, some kind of manipulation is involved. In the first case, the listener expects to hear an example of a beloved tune that embodies certain aesthetic ideals, but instead discovers something else. In the second case, King manipulated white Southerners into revealing their hatred on national media, thereby turning the opinion of the country against them. But it is hard to see how *deception* is involved in these cases. No *lying*, for example, was involved in either case.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant takes the sense of freedom attaching to the rational will to involve freedom via recognition of the moral law. There are, of course, many ways to understand Kant's view here. But it seems that propaganda used to awaken others to their moral responsibilities is in fact addressing their rational will, even if it does not appeal to their rationality, in some narrow sense of that notion. Such examples of propaganda are direct appeals to the practical freedom of one's fellow citizens.⁴⁰ The Kantian objection to propaganda would arise if one manipulated the rational will in the form of a lie; and so too, as I have argued with the case of Bernanke's use of "fiscal cliff," would the democratic objection to propaganda. Misleading people by expressing or implicating a lie has negative ramifications that lead well beyond the case at hand.

Du Bois and Alain Locke describe a species of propaganda that is speech that uses "haranguing, cajoling, threatening, or supplicating" as a method to force a dominant majority to expand the domain of respect and empathy to include a persecuted and ignored minority. There is a *structural* reason why this species of propaganda is a necessity in treating failures of liberal democracy. There are many times in which the perspectives of a group are invisible from the rest of the citizens.

This is so, for example, when there is excessive and irrational fear of that group, or excessive and irrational commitment to their inferiority. As we have seen, a result is that lawmakers do not hold themselves accountable to that group when proposing and passing laws. In such a situation, there is no obvious deliberative way to make that group visible, no method that appeals to reason to bring members of that group into equal political standing.

There is a structural problem in certain imperfectly realized liberal democracies that necessitates civic rhetoric. There is no obvious way that members of the group whose perspectives are invisible could use reasonable claims in public political discourse to compel their fellow citizens into recognizing their perspectives. After all, the same mechanisms that make a group's perspective invisible also silence their voices. Nor is it straightforward to see how the invisible perspectives of such a group could *come to be visible* from discussion among the citizens not in that group.⁴¹ If the perspectives of a group are invisible to everyone else, their interests are not weighted in the forming of laws (this is why, for example, the ethical and political crisis posed by the prison situation in the United States seems particularly difficult to resolve). If the members of the excluded group are without property, they will remain so; if they are without political power, they will remain so as well. To recognize the invisible, democratic deliberation must often be circumvented by appeals to empathy of the sort Du Bois urges in his essay from 1926, which for that reason must be regarded as one of the great essays in democratic political philosophy.

Thus far, I have argued that there is a structural reason why civic rhetoric is required in certain situations. These situations are ones in which societies that take themselves to be guided by the liberal democratic ideals of autonomy, equality, and reason restrict the application of these ideals to one dominant subgroup of citizens (for example, white men). I have argued, following Melvin Rogers and others, that there is no obvious

way of using reason, or reasonable claims, to get members of the dominant subgroup to extend the application of liberal ideals to citizens who are not included (such as, in the history of the American polity, Black citizens). What is required is extending the domain of cognitive empathy to include those citizens, and there is no obviously cogent *argument*, from the perspective of just those citizens who are included in the sphere of liberal democratic ideals, to do so. But I have not addressed the *method* by which the domain of empathy can be expanded. Here too, following Rogers, I think close attention to the particular rhetorical tropes employed by Du Bois is revealing, as in the following passage from *The Souls of Black Folk*:

[F]ew men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites. . . . The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land.⁴²

Du Bois is here clearly employing civic rhetoric directed at a white audience. The question before us is how the rhetoric is supposed to work. What is the *mechanism* by which a passage like this elicits empathy, and leads to the broadening of the sphere of application of democratic ideals?

I think it is best to understand Du Bois here as employing *the liberal democratic ideals themselves*, against a certain understanding of their application. His goal is to undermine a conception of liberal democracy that only extends freedom to whites. His method is to appeal to freedom itself, that liberal democratic ideal that is so cherished even among a nation in which it is restricted to whites. His rhetoric undermines an understanding of those ideals thus restricted, by calling attention to the fact that those ideals are deeply cherished

among nonwhites as well. The goal here is to elicit empathy, by drawing attention to the fact that cherished ideals among the whites are *also* cherished among Blacks. He is eliciting empathy by employing the problematically restricted ideals, and calling upon whites who cherish them to empathize with the plight of those who also cherish them, but to whom they have been consistently denied. The mechanism he is using is therefore a certain kind of undermining propaganda, one that targets the ideal *freedom just for whites*. His argument appeals to freedom, which is understood in the dominant group as *freedom just for whites*. He seeks to persuade them that if one values freedom, one must extend it to those who also value freedom just as much. *Freedom just for whites* is therefore incoherent as an ideal; freedom is an ideal for whites because it is cherished as the highest value. But then it is an ideal for Blacks as well, and must be extended to them. In this way, the liberal concepts can be used against restricted understandings of their proper application.

We have now seen that civic rhetoric is necessary to overcome certain situations that face societies striving to follow liberal democratic ideals, as well as some examples of civic rhetoric. But there is always a cost to bypassing deliberative ideals in discourse in such societies. Are the problems that arise from the invisibility of a group from political discourse worth bearing that cost? I will use the example of the situation of federal and state prisoners in the United States to illustrate the deep ethical and political problems raised for democratic societies by the existence of groups whose perspective has been made invisible.

Unlike in the majority of democracies, in the United States, prisoners cannot vote; they are barred from political participation. The United States is unique among Western democracies in barring some prisoners from voting even after they have been released.⁴³ As a consequence, there is no one recognized by the polity who can speak from the perspective of prisoners. Prisoners have become dehumanized as a consequence. They

now serve as a strategic instrument in politics. A politician summons up crime to elicit fear, and then offers himself as the instrument to satisfy the desire for retribution (though the desire is for retribution of the fear caused by that very politician).⁴⁴ The disappearance from public political life of the perspective of the prisoner has resulted, in the view of many advocates, such as Chuck Colson, in an ethical crisis for the United States. Recent decades have borne witness to ever more draconian prison torture practices, including the extensive use of solitary confinement and inhumane prison-sentencing practices.

What is less often remarked upon is that the disappearance of the prisoners' perspective from public political discourse has resulted in another kind of crisis, a *political* crisis. The dehumanizing of prisoners has undermined our democracy. One example is the widespread practice in the United States of *prison gerrymandering*. In the many states that practice it, prisoners confined there also count as residents of the area where the prisons are. Many prisons are located in rural areas, and many of those areas have too few nonincarcerated residents to allow a representative to the state legislature. In the state of Pennsylvania alone, there are eight state legislative districts that have too few nonincarcerated residents to be state legislative districts without counting the nonvoting (and mostly urban) prisoners in their prisons. Prisons thus give the rural voters in the areas in which prisons are located vastly enhanced political power and money from the state. This, in turn, gives such voters extra incentive to promote brutal prison-sentencing practices to keep the prisoners incarcerated and bring more to their districts.

Prison labor also provides a salient example of the political crisis posed by dehumanizing prisoners. The Thirteenth Amendment, which banned forced unpaid labor, allows an exception in the case of prison labor. This has offered a large opportunity for states to replace good, high-paying public service jobs with often free prison labor. The governor of the state

of Wisconsin in the United States, Scott Walker, in 2011 pushed through a law eliminating collective bargaining by public sector unions in Wisconsin, effectively destroying the unions in a state known for its history of union organizing. The law eliminated the ability of unions to label certain jobs as “union only” jobs. One effect was to allow high-paying union jobs to be replaced by privately contracted prison labor. This effectively incentivizes the state to seek more prisoners for cheap labor.

More generally, the widespread practice of dehumanizing those caught violating laws leads to a situation in which prisoners become a pawn in the hands of Machiavellian politicians who use the fear of crime to represent themselves as the people’s protector.⁴⁵ Plato traces the weak point of democracy to the people’s “propensity to elevate and glorify one man as the people’s protector and champion” (565c). “[T]he tyrant’s point of entry into the society” is his self-representation as “the people’s protector” (565d). To win elections, politicians in the United States self-represent as being “the people’s protector,” by irrationally creating fear around crime and offering themselves as the ones who will deliver retribution. This erodes genuine democratic deliberation and facilitates the actions of demagogues. The disappearance of the prisoners’ perspective from public debate in the United States is thus *both* a moral crisis and a political crisis.

Democratic countries do not have an official ministry of propaganda. Nondemocratic countries, such as Cuba, do. This distinction needs to be explained. We have seen that civic rhetoric is a legitimate, and even necessary, kind of propaganda in countries guided by incompletely realized democratic ideals. But this does not mean that a democratic country could have a ministry of civic rhetoric. The central purpose of Du Bois’s and Locke’s notion of propaganda is to make those contributing to public reason accountable to the perspectives of those of an oppressed group. In effect, it is to make an allegedly democratic state into a genuinely democratic state: to realize democracy. To have an official ministry of propaganda is to

admit that the state is not democratic. It is to admit that there is still work to be done to incorporate some of those subject to the laws into the state as citizens. A state that considers itself already democratic could never have a ministry as an official state entity that delivers even propaganda of the sort called for by Du Bois. To do so would be to admit that the state has fallen systematically short of the minimum requirements for a democracy (which requires, minimally, awareness by the state that it has fallen short). The other function of ministries of propaganda is to bypass democratic deliberation to elicit support for a policy. Even if this is needed for a state emergency, or for furthering worthwhile secondary political goals, it is by its nature, as we have seen, nondemocratic. It is for these reasons that no democratic state can have a ministry of propaganda.

We can now also precisely identify the structural relation between propaganda that is in some sense useful to democracy and demagoguery. The account of propaganda I provide explains precisely why some kinds of propaganda are permissible, and perhaps even necessary, in societies that are guided by liberal democratic ideals, while others are not. The notion of propaganda at issue in the Du Bois–Locke debate, which *increases* reasonableness, is legitimate, even if it does not contribute to resolving the debate. Speech that appears reasonable but serves the goal of decreasing reasonableness by representing a group in the society as not worthy of empathy is always demagogic. It is demagoguery. Thus, propaganda of the sort that repairs wounds to democracy and propaganda that causes such wounds are systematically related.

Demagoguery in a democracy takes the form of a contribution that presents itself as exemplifying the norms of public reason but makes a contribution a rational person would recognize to be inconsistent with these norms. I have now given two examples of ideals of public reason. The first ideal of public reason centrally involves an ideal of theoretical rationality. On this conception, demagoguery is discourse that appears to make a rational contribution to the debate at hand, but instead

serves to cut off rational debate by enlisting the forces of passion to make an impartial reasoned stance impossible. This fits Victor Klemperer's description of the effects of using the word "heroic" around those raised under the education system and moral values of the Third Reich. The second ideal of public reason centrally involves an ideal of reasonableness. The capacity to be reasonable requires, as we have seen, a disposition to take the perspective of others in the community in proposing reasons, to be empathetic to them, and to respect their dignity. A contribution to public reason is reasonable only if it takes into account the reasonable perspectives of all those citizens subject to the policy under debate. On this conception, demagoguery is discourse that appears to take every perspective into account but has the goal of rendering some reasonable perspectives invisible.

A salient feature of many paradigm cases of propaganda is that it is speech that owes its efficacy in ending rational debate not to its settling of the question, but rather to its erosion of second-personal ideals like reasonableness. In many paradigm cases of propaganda, its political effectiveness is initially thought of as explained by its effect in eroding the ideals of rationality, say, by cutting off debate. For example, in the first instance, linking Saddam Hussein to international terrorism after the tragedy of 9/11 raised fears that cut off rational debate. But it must be admitted that it is a possible explanation of why it was so *simple* to raise such fears in the absence of compelling evidence that Iraq was a threat to US security: these fears were embedded within a larger picture that excluded Arab Muslims from a framework of mutual respect. Whether or not this is what was happening in the debate about invading Iraq in 2003, it is undeniable that appeals to passions and fear are often more effective when wheeled against an enemy one considers to be morally repugnant, to lack the norms of humanity. In such cases, the effectiveness of discourse for halting ideals of theoretical rationality must be explained in terms of its effectiveness for ideals of reasonableness, or ideals sufficiently like

reasonableness. The reason we cut off rational debate is usually because of a loss of empathy. It may be, for example, that the real explanation of the effectiveness of fear for the decision to invade Iraq was the lack of the average American's ability to imagine himself as a member of a population being invaded and heavily aeri ally bombed by a vastly more powerful military force, and that in turn was the consequence of stereotypes about Arab Muslims that robbed us of the capacity for empathy toward them.⁴⁶

The mechanisms by which one erodes the normative ideals of public reason are often indirect. Consider the right to free speech. The right to free speech is justified by the fact that it is required for the demands of public reason. As John Stuart Mill famously argued, we cannot expect rational deliberation (including about policy) to end in knowledge unless we allow free speech. The case for government openness is also based on the role public reason plays in democratic legitimacy. It is after all not plausible to arrive via deliberation at the best decision even about which representatives to elect without knowing what the government has been up to and what those representatives have done about it. Given the role of the ideals of public reason in conferring democratic legitimacy on state policy, in a democracy, someone who ultimately seeks to bypass democratically legitimate processes to establish a policy will do so by eroding the ideals of public reason. As we have just seen, government transparency is a requirement of public debate in a democracy. Eliminating government transparency is a way to erode the ideals of public reason, by eroding the possibility of fully informed debate about policy.

If the guiding ideal of public reason in a democratic society is reasonableness, then it follows that a paradigm way propaganda in a democratic society manifests is by representing the perspectives of some of our fellow citizens as unworthy of consideration (and, in the international sphere, representing the perspectives of our enemies as such). But it must be acknowledged that much propaganda does not seem to be of this form.

For example, in the election in 2012, in South Carolina, Mitt Romney accused President Barack Obama of wanting to lift the work requirements of welfare. This was widely acknowledged to be propaganda, for example, it was clearly deceptive, since it was known to be false. But it appears to be economic rather than an attempt to exclude the perspectives of some of our fellow citizens.

To understand why claims about welfare programs are in fact fundamentally appeals to exclude the perspectives of some of our fellow citizens, it is worthwhile to bear in mind the chief Republican strategist Lee Atwater's famous comments, in a 1981 interview:

You start out in 1954 by saying, “[N-word], [N-word], [N-word].” By 1968 you can't say “[N-word]”—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract. Now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites. . . . “We want to cut this,” is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than “[N-word], [N-word].”

Subsequent research by the Princeton political science professors Martin Gilens and Tali Mendelberg has confirmed the success of the strategy of linking talk of welfare programs to the idea that Black Americans are unfit to have their perspectives taken into account. Their research shows that expressions like “welfare,” “the poor,” “food stamps,” and “homeless” all introduce the thought that Black Americans are lazy. In his book from 1999, Gilens shows that “the belief that blacks are lazy is the strongest predictor of the perception that welfare recipients are undeserving.”⁴⁷ There is a large amount of additional evidence that “welfare” has been connected with a flawed ideology of race, in addition to the studies Gilens himself has carried out. Gilens reports similar results from the “welfare mother” experiment from the National Race and Politics

Study of 1991: “[R]espondents are asked their impressions of a welfare recipient described as either a Black or white woman in her early thirties, who has a ten-year-old child and has been on welfare for the past year. Respondents are first asked how likely it is that the woman described will try hard to find a job and second, how likely it is that she will have more children in order to have a bigger welfare check.”⁴⁸ The largest predictor of opposition to welfare programs was one’s bias against Black welfare mothers.⁴⁹

Lee Atwater’s quotation shows that there was a deliberate attempt to appropriate the language of welfare to convey in a nonobvious way what racial slurs did in 1954. Subsequent research shows that the attempts of Atwater and those before him have been successful. Suppose that the implicitly recognized normative political ideal of public reason is reasonableness, and suppose that my characterization of propaganda is correct. It follows that one characteristic form of propaganda in a liberal democracy takes the form of claims that rely on flawed ideology to decrease empathy for a minority group (of course there are others as well). In the next chapter, I will explain the mechanism exploited by the kind of propaganda Atwater discusses, and why it is so effective at perpetuating dominant group ideologies.

In this chapter, I have explained the form of propaganda in a democracy. To preserve the character of democratic deliberation, those deliberating in formal and informal debate over policy are subject to a norm of reasonableness, which requires them to take the perspectives of others into account. Characteristically, then, negative propaganda, or propaganda, will take the form of a reasonable proposal, a proposal that seems to take everyone’s perspective into account (for example, by calling attention to a public threat), in the service of a goal that, rationally speaking, erodes reasonableness. Civic rhetoric is an attempt to share the perspective of a group whose perspective has been made invisible, thereby preventing democracy; civic rhetoric is the tool required in the service of repairing the rupture.