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Bryan Reines   March 14, 2016

Propaganda and Self in the Modern Age

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An abstract of
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Philosophy Department

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Abstract
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The term "propaganda" appears in political discourse frequently and carries with it a foul connotation. But what precisely is our concept of propaganda as we move into the twenty first century? What is the status of propaganda in a world where governments have a diminished ability to control information? This project examines a totalitarian iteration of propaganda and eventually advocates its reconception in light of modern political and technological trends: democracy, liberalism, and mass media. The project questions theories of propaganda that require a propagandist and imply unidirectionality, asserting that, like many other spheres of contemporary life, propaganda has undergone its own democratization. Finally, the work acknowledges how this investigation of modern propaganda originates in the earliest attempts to apply philosophy to convention (nomos) and therefore looks to Plato's depiction of the tension between philosophy and politics, exploring how individuals should act within large, mostly free, information saturated, modern democracies.

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Acknowledgements

First I thank my advisor, Dr. Frederick Marcus, for the enormous amount of time he contributed to this project and my education. Next I thank Dr. Harvey Klehr and Dr. Donald Verene for their contributions to my thought and willingness to read and review this work. I am also grateful to Dr. Ann Hartle, Dr. Judd Owen, and Dr. Michael Sullivan for their time and effort clarifying and challenging my ideas. Finally, I want to thank my friends and family, specifically Mr. Karl Kingma, whose faith in my abilities exceeds all but my faith in his. Karl, I often felt as though I wrote this paper with and for you. I am grateful you will not allow me to have the last word.

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INTRODUCTION

"There is probably in the mind of every man, hidden under the ashes, a quickening fire, and the greater the number of ready-made doctrines the mind has received blindly the more is this fire threatened with extinction."

Georges Sorel[1]

Man in a modernity characterized by nation-states, economic globalization, industrialization, advances in telecommunications, and the general proliferation of information, resides in a funhouse (contemporary cave) with regard to political affairs. Bombarded with information, he finds rapid and erratic gestalt imagery. He is accosted by his initial interpretations, then their inverse, then back, unable to find a compromise between total and competing narratives. The funhouse does not merely fashion to him an external reality, but turns his gaze inward presenting him with conceptions and models of self. The central premise of this enterprise is that man would be wise to reflect upon the way in which these political and technological developments affect him.

For the man in a literal funhouse, there seems to be two options. Resignation, escape from the deception, or a curiosity-driven persistence to uncover the mechanisms at work. In political life, the stakes are much higher. Man cannot, with ease, exit the domain of the political. At best, he can turn his back and relegate himself to a pre-object permanent infantile state; he can pretend that if he does not look, no monster lurks. This illusion cannot persist. The goings-on of the political world reach into his sphere, to tap his shoulder and point, to offer a hand up, to throttle him. Man cannot leave the funhouse with any surety that the funhouse will not follow: either through an explicit interrupting of his daily life or a subterraneous shaping of his self. Therefore, the question becomes not fight or flight, but how to fight. He can stay and accept the

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[1] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (6).

reality presented to him, or stay with vigilance and doubt, working, to investigate the distortions and their causes, to tease reality from appearances. But before the arduous task of fighting propaganda, whatever we mean by that, can begin, man must recognize his existence inside the funhouse and the nature of this dwelling.

Therefore, the goal of this endeavor is not to shed light on modern mechanisms of deception, the techniques by which propaganda thrives, the channels by which it flows, though that is necessary, but to conceptualize the problem of propaganda. Eventually this study, which we will soon see intertwines with the pursuit of truth and wisdom, branches into psychology, economics, political science, the natural sciences, and history; and these disciplines must be utilized with the intent of discovering how man can reside, or even thrive, in this funhouse. But first a guide is needed to direct and propel these tools and my hope is that this project contributes to that groundwork. The investigation, therefore, will be one of descension, into the existence, essence, and *reason* d'être of modern political propaganda.

This investigation of propaganda's nature and its effects on the individual will be comprised of three parts. First, I will examine the development of George Orwell's philosophy of propaganda and self as he grapples with these topics through different genres: *Homage to Catalonia* (memoir), *Animal Farm* (satire), and *1984* (his magnum opus). Second, I will turn to Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* for his dissection of the phenomenon of propaganda and his account of its origins and ubiquity in a modern society characterized by technique. These chapters review the traditional model of propaganda and develop the necessity, brought about by modernization, of critically examining and altering this conception. Third, I will look to *The Republic*, Plato's foundational text of political philosophy, for his treatment of political deception and individual flourishing. Plato's articulation and

treatment of the tension between philosophy and politics cuts to the core of this project and guides my conclusions about the role of the philosopher and the good life. I will build on these thinkers' notions of propaganda and the self to conduct my own meditation on the issue. With the rapidly evolving political society in mind, I will explore propaganda and the self, discover if a necessary tension between these concepts does persist, and if so, attempt to formulate the beginning of an approach for prudence: how one can live justly in a corrupting world.

In justifying this approach, I appeal to the same challenge posed to the modern man who must not only understand and evaluate, but filter and sort: judiciousness. I will draw my own conclusions only after an even-handed examination of each of these thinkers. Like a jurist returning to a perennial conflict, I will examine the characteristics of the problem at hand by looking toward our predecessor's formulations and conclusions. These authors and their works provide a natural order for investigation. Orwell supplies vivid and jarring literary accounts, outlining the existence and the import of the topic in the modern world. Ellul's taxonomic approach and rational analysis, broadens and puts into focus the problem at hand, moving our consideration from the existence of propaganda and its dangers to the phenomenon's modern essence. Plato's account of the abiding and vexing relationship between politics and truth reminds us both of the ancient history and the gravity of the topic. Plato, and the other pillars of this study, will be consulted and examined in light of modern trends in an effort to guide man's resistance within the funhouse.

ONE
Orwellian Propaganda

"Truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are."
Friedrich Nietzsche[1]

Before his death, Orwell gifted us with at least three texts, *Homage to Catalonia, Animal Farm,* and *1984,* that can stand on their own as spirited pedagogic masterworks, but they need not. In isolation, these works demonstrate the horrors of war, illustrate the weakness of man, and warn of a world where Truth is merely the utterances of the powerful. United, they give us a coherent picture of Orwell's philosophical development. That philosophy centrally consists of man's struggle in the political world, a struggle against propaganda, coupled, with a constant refrain of alarm.

The questions I pose to Orwell, and the other thinkers of this inquiry, aim to get at the core of the problem facing man: What is the nature of propaganda? How does propaganda work on modern man? How does it affect the self?

To understand how Orwell conceives of propaganda, I will give a genetic account of his thought beginning with an examination of his direct experiences in *Homage to Catalonia*. These experiences were formative to Orwell's imaginative conception: what propaganda *could* be if man faces setbacks in this enduring struggle. Orwell's organization of *Homage to Catalonia*, its form alone, imparts an insight about the realities of political life. His discussion of the political intricacies of the Spanish Civil War, along with his detailed account of the factions involved, their roles, and ideologies, are, as much as possible, deliberately set apart from his personal

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (47). All Nietzsche citations, with the exception of *Human, All Too Human*, refer to Walter Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche*.

account of the war, despite it being a "frankly political book".[2] [3] In this early writing, Orwell would blame no reader for wanting to "skip" the "horrors of party politics," a horror he frequently suggests is worse than actual combat (*HC* 36). But he also recognizes the futility of giving his full account of the war without some explanation of the political as he first saw and now sees it, and the impossibility of completely segregating, into chapters, his experience in the war and the politics of the day.

The concrete political elements of the war shake Orwell from the abstract slumber that drove the Englishman (with no material ties to Spain) to voluntarily insert himself into the Spanish Civil War. Politics, he writes, "began to force itself upon my attention" (*HC* 36). His initial abstraction rejected the political as irrelevant and distracting, evident by his frequent query: "Why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war?" (*HC 36)*. The attitude driving this query was "carefully disseminated" by English newspapers painting the struggle as a "beautifully simple" fight against the Fascists (*HC* 36, 35). Orwell's world, in which he could remain apolitical because the nature of the war was a fight with the Fascists and that fight was clear, did not correspond to reality. Worse still, this illusion was not self-created, but other-created to "prevent people from grasping the real nature of the struggle" (*HC* 36). The complexities of the Spanish Civil War drive Orwell to reexamine the beliefs fed to him by the English press (*HC* 36). Further, it is not the abstract political theories that disturb Orwell: "When later on I decided that the P.O.U.M. [Worker's Party of Marxist Unification] were right, or at any rate righter that the Communists, it was not altogether on a point of theory" (*HC* 51). Instead, the impact of the political strife on his self became too great to ignore. "[I]t was too obvious," he writes about the factional struggle, "that one's own destiny was involved. . . .

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[2] George Orwell *Homage to Catalonia* (36); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*HC*).
[3] George Orwell, *Why I Write;* hereafter cited parenthetically as (*WIW*).

Everyone, however unwillingly, took sides sooner or later" (*HC* 36). Orwell the soldier's

abortive attempt to ignore politics echoes Orwell the author's attempt to quarantine politics in

Homage to Catalonia. It was not the fighting but the "slanging-match in the newspapers" that

made it difficult for Orwell to "think about the war in quite the same idealistic manner" (*HC*

136). This awakening molds the rest of his time in Spain, colors his previous experiences, and

develops Orwell into a thinker who later becomes chiefly concerned with the political, truth, and

propaganda.

In addition to the form, the matter of *Homage to Catalonia* reveals insights into Orwell's

nascent philosophy of propaganda and demonstrates how his time in Spain affects his later

works. In addition to the mostly stagnant physical war on the front lines, Orwell notices an

inclusive and perhaps more important war of ideas raging around the world. The "journalists in

the rear," largely propagandists according to Orwell, fought the war from afar, "safe at home"

(*HC* 50).

Orwell's disgust for these belligerent non-belligerents flows through his pages and he

never denies the impact of their actions (*HC* 50). "I believe that libels and press-campaigns . . .

and the habits of mind they indicate, are capable of doing the most deadly damage to the anti-

Fascist cause" (*HC* 134). The conflict of ideas raging in the pamphlets and newspapers is more

real, if not as bloody, as the conflict between the trenches. The press's fabricated accounts and

false accusations were strategic maneuvers (*HC* 126, 151). On the battlefield, all animosities

were arbitrary. Orwell recounts numerous times where the humanity of his supposed enemies

accosts him and peaceful, if not pleasant, interactions ensue (*HC* 151, 100). On the front lines

too, nearly laughable propaganda proves more effective than armed coercion. The sluggish pace

of war (due to trench warfare without artillery) along with limited and ineffective resources,

made "the real weapon… not the rifle but the megaphone" (*HC* 15, 32). Shouting simple slogans

across contested ground became commonplace, and Orwell never doubts its results (*HC* 33).

Sometimes, Orwell reports, the "artist" with the megaphone simply tortured the enemy Fascists

with tall tales of "buttered toast" which no one had seen in weeks (*HC* 33). He argues that the

very reason one might assume this propaganda to be ineffective, the subject's placement in a

position of life or death struggle with clear knowledge of the propagandists intentions of

conversion, is the very reason for its success (*HC* 33). The "poor devil of a sentry" freezing and

hungry simply cannot withstand the constant assault on his morale; even the knowledge that this

information comes from those who would not hesitate to kill him does not mitigate its effects

(*HC* 33). Moreover, Orwell, caged in a foxhole next to his own team's propagandists, fully

cognizant of the reality (that no side had any butter at this point) and the intent of the lie (to

break the will of opposing sentries), could not keep his own mouth from watering (*HC* 33).

Propaganda, for Orwell, at least insofar as it is aimed at the cold, tired, and weary, elicits a

Pavlovian response, operating on an emotional rather than an intellectual level.

In *Homage to Catalonia,* Orwell expects that escape from the Spanish Civil War, an

"appalling disaster . . . apart from the slaughter and physical suffering," will return his humanity;

"With my discharge papers in my pocket I felt like a human being again" (*HC* 173, 152). He

looks back to his naivety, "I did not make any of the correct political reflections. I never do when

things are happening," with an air of confidence about his greater ability to understand events in

hindsight (*HC* 160).

But Orwell's conclusion, as well as his later work, asserts that it is not just the war-

entrenched soldier, but modern man more generally that finds himself susceptible to propaganda.

The chaos Orwell describes during a rare moment of action on the frontlines—"nobody had the

dimmest idea which way we were going"—epitomizes his ideological realization that the "Left-wing press is every bit as spurious and dishonest as that of the Right." (*HC* 75, 50). In reality, Orwell learns that although the comforts of peacetime England, the "wild flowers," the "slow-moving streams bordered by willows," "the familiar streets" and "men in bowler hats," will slow his breath and lull him back to "deep, deep sleep," he fears this fact and one other: that England may "never wake till [she is] jerked out of it by the roar of bombs" (*HC* 174). Once awakened from his naïve slumber, and shown the complexities of political conflict, as well as the vicious means in which men's attitudes and behaviors are formed and manipulated, the dream has been exposed as just that, a dream. Although Orwell may later find himself temporarily neglecting the messy political world and the phenomenon of propaganda, England's sleep—his own innocence—has been exposed as unreal. Orwell's conception of politics as merely a distraction, exhibited early in *Homage to Catalonia,* becomes the sentiment of Julia in *1984:* "'Who cares?' she sa[ys] impatiently. 'It's always one bloody war after another, and one knows the news is all lies anyway."[4] Winston, *1984's* protagonist, on the other hand, feels "the abyss opening beneath [his] feet at the thought of lies becoming truths" (*1984* 155). These experiences in Spain make Orwell politically conscious; this much he acknowledges in the essay *Why I Write*. After the Spanish war, Orwell is driven to write by his "sense of injustice," "because there is some lie that [he] want[s] to expose;" Orwell writes and lives for the sake of unveiling reality (*WIW*).

Orwell's Imaginative Conception

Orwell seeks to uncover reality and make his philosophical and political contribution not with formal syllogisms, but by capturing the human experience. Elements of *1984* that prove so relatable and poetically effective, namely the terror of a lifetime of paranoia, and its contrary, the

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[4] George Orwell, *1984* (154); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*1984*).

defiant act of a momentary public hand squeeze (in a society where even an "invisible wink" at the wrong time can out one as heretical) originate in Orwell's personal experience in Spain and are the impetus for his stance (*HC* 161, 117, 147).

Salvation in Animal Farm

Despite his dejection, Orwell's corpus contains *Animal Farm*, his first attempt to blend the political and artistic "into one whole" (*WIW*). In his essay *Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels*, Orwell distinguishes himself from Jonathan Swift (whom he greatly admires) on his ultimate attitude concerning man's struggle in political society:

> The most essential thing in Swift is his inability to believe that life— ordinary life on the solid earth, and not some rationalized, deodorized version of it— could be made worth living. Of course, no honest person claims that happiness is *now* a normal condition among adult human beings; but perhaps it *could* be made normal, and it is upon this question that all serious political controversy really turns.[5]

This surprising declaration may be regarded as a mere example of the naivety of pre-*1984* Orwell. But penned in 1946, a decade after Orwell set out for Spain (by his own admission the inflection point on his intellectual journey), this disclosure, taken alongside *Animal Farm*, points to Orwell's genuine hope concerning the human condition.

The assertion that "perhaps [happiness] *could* be made normal" invites the question: How can it be made normal? Like *1984*, *Animal Farm's* ending engages the problem of governance and bemoans what has become the status quo. However, these works, specifically *Animal Farm*, aspire rather than despair. In *Animal Farm* Orwell conscientiously attends to the genre, satire. While *Animal Farm* does conclude with a reminder about the futility of political revolution and the corrupting nature of politics, its form reflects considerably on the intent of its author. Orwell's satire, like Swift's, does not merely comment on society, but takes an active role in

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[5] George Orwell, *Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels*.

altering it. Orwell exposes the wrong course of action and may point out how difficult it is to proceed correctly, but his tone is not submissive. Hope in *Animal Farm* does not come cheap, but it comes.

Animal Farm's content respects its form, and written only one-year prior to Orwell's examination of Swift, implies Orwell's answer to the inquiry: how does man avert the frightful outcome presented and procure a better alternative?

Orwell's answer contains two prongs. First, the individual must be educated. He must be historically and politically literate enough to maintain an awareness of his present situation, and the past that has brought it forth. Second, the individual must be courageous.

Orwell's attention to education, literacy in particular, in *1984* and *Animal Farm* is the source of his hope. In *1984* the act of writing takes on importance as both the novel's entry point and the moment of Winston's awakening. "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER," Winston writes five times in his new diary before lamenting that this act makes "no difference" (*1984* 18, 19). The Thought Police would capture him and the diary, and in doing so erase the moment from history. "He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear" (*1984* 27). But he writes anyway, "for the future, for the past—for an age that might be imaginary," though his words and thoughts face certain "annihilation. . . . How could you make an appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive?" (*1984* 27). Winston's writing alone is an act of rebellion, but one that requires an audience for permanency and reality.

In *Animal Farm* Orwell attributes much of the animals' failure to ignorance and lack of education. He focuses deliberately on the problems facing an illiterate population. Squealer, functioning as the tyrant's propaganda minister, assures the populace that unless a certain

resolution had been "written down [some]where" it must be "pure imagination," and probably traceable to Snowball, the now non-existent opposition leader blamed for all the farm's plights.[6] Squealer's duplicitous emphasis on formality demonstrates the regime's recognition of its advantage over the population: the pigs had "taught themselves to read and write" (*AF* 32). The regime, profiting off the population's illiteracy, successfully alters the society's "Commandments" to its own ends (*AF* 123). Literacy for Orwell, like each element of the satirical allegory, symbolizes a deeper and more complex object of his investigation. A frequent critic of journalism and written propaganda, Orwell understands as well as anybody that literacy often increases rather than decreases man's susceptibility to propaganda. The illiteracy in *Animal Farm* then represents a deeper political and historical illiteracy that Orwell seeks to expose.

In fact, the animals' inability to read and write becomes this more general inability to be politically aware and historically conscious. The regime frequently revises history for its own tactics by convincing the animals "that their memories had been at fault" or they were "mistaken" (*AF* 93, 67). Further, the animals' inability to think critically, specifically in regard to the regime's dictates, allow Napoleon, the tyrant, to maintain power with devastating consequences (*AF* 81).

Napoleon's seizure of power can also be traced to his malicious education of the "nine sturdy puppies" that later become his tools of repression and fear (*AF* 41, 57). While Snowball, the well-intentioned leader, devises plans for furthering the farm's interests, Napoleon aims at personal gain through educating the youth. As Napoleon demonstrates his political savvy by personally educating the young pigs, Orwell emphasizes the importance of education to the political order (*AF* 106).

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[6] George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (67); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*AF*).

Orwell outlines another component necessary to avert the disastrous outcomes of *1984* and *Animal Farm*: courage. Orwell juxtaposes the sheep in *Animal Farm*, who have little knowledge but are politically hyperactive, with Benjamin, the donkey, whose apathy renders his complex understanding of the political situation irrelevant. The sheep's refrain, "Four legs good, two legs bad," "put[s] an end to any chance of discussion," while Benjamin's abstention from political activity limits the possibility of productive discourse emerging at all (*AF* 59, 56). Benjamin fears that any political activity may diminish his ability to survive, a fact he acknowledges in his "cryptic" answer to the question of whether the revolution has made him happier: "Donkeys live a long time. None of you has ever seen a dead donkey" (*AF* 38). But Orwell implies that if Benjamin had exercised his wisdom ("he could read as well as any pig") before Napoleon consolidated power, the farm's trajectory could have been different (*AF* 38). Instead, Benjamin rebels far too late; "galloping" even (unusual for the old lethargic donkey), to save his good friend Boxer the horse from literal liquidation (*AF* 113). Benjamin then "breaks his rule" against reading (in a private setting) to vocalize Napoleon's newest decree: "ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS" (*AF* 123). Benjamin's prescience can be critiqued as self-fulfilling. He indeed outlives the other animals like he promised, but at the cost of bearing witness to injustice and his best friend's premature death (*AF* 17). Benjamin "seemed quite unchanged" by the animal revolution, going about his work in precisely the same way as before (*AF* 37). At least initially, he did not believe the animals would be more successful at governing themselves than Jones the farmer was. Benjamin was not wrong; the animals failed at self-governance so miserably that they lost themselves and morphed into what they hated most: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which

was which" (*AF* 128). But Benjamin cannot be applauded for he was not—or should not have been— the passive observer he played. Benjamin, an animal unable to escape the politics of the farm, exceeded his peers in both intelligence and experience, but chose to recede into private life. Orwell's conclusion, the failure of the animals to govern and the transformation of the pigs, confirms Benjamin's initial outlook, but for this Benjamin shares some culpability, certainly more than Boxer, the industrious horse who intended to "devote" his retirement to "improv[ing] his mind . . . and learning the remaining twenty-two letters of the alphabet," a task impossible for him to accomplish (*AF* 112, 40).

Orwell is no naïve optimist. He indicts neither Napoleon nor Big Brother, but allows them the freedom of self-incrimation. In attending not to the malicious tendencies of humanity's nemeses, but to the good man's method for triumph, he demonstrates a penchant for hope rather than complacency. Orwell lets readers cast their our own moral judgment on Big Brother and Napoleon and saves his ink to demonstrate what man must overcome (techniques of control), how he must persevere (with critical thought and courage), and why he must do so (because he can attain a free life and a happy existence).

Orwell's doubts not that the individual can find happiness in a world dominated by competing political forces, but that he can find this happiness without intellectual and moral fortitude: education and courage. Without the former we are liable to become bleating sheep, victimized horses, or worse, mindless attack dogs. Without the latter we become Benjamin the donkey, capable of greatness, but unable to attain it, relegated to the status of a tragic Greek figure—a Sisyphus or Tantalus—chasing our loved ones and recognizing our blunders, but always too late. *Animal Farm's* dark humor suggests the possibility of our escape; *1984* does not.

Truth and Propaganda

In *1984,* Orwell further elaborates his conception of propaganda and its effects. He makes strong political and philosophical arguments, erected upon the bedrock of his experience with political deceit in Spain and his post-*Animal Farm* maturity, concerning propaganda and what he sees as its dialectic, Truth.

Though Orwell never directly provides readers with his own analysis of the Party's philosophy of Truth and propaganda, like he does with peace and war, he provides careful readers with the tools to probe the "central tenet of Ingsoc [newspeak for English Socialism]" (*1984* 199, 213). Orwell wastes little time presenting a dystopian world where the protagonist is unsure of even the year: "to begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984" (*1984* 7). It is no coincidence that the work's title references this first instance of the "mutability of the past" and the "lack of objective reality" that defines the Party's philosophical stance, a stance characterized by the Party's untraditional conception of "absolute truth" (*1984* 213).

In *1984* each ministry of Big Brother's regime exhibits a "deliberate reversal of facts. . . . The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture, and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation" (*1984* 218). In a "shallower sense" these misnomers are "deliberate exercises in doublethink" aimed at controlling Oceania's population (*1984* 216, 199). However, Orwell explains, speaking through the (contrived) opposition leader Emmanuel Goldstein, that each ministry's name also bears an "inner meaning" not grasped by the "vast majority of Party members" (*1984* 199). These inner meanings illuminate the Party's total philosophy. A close examination of the "Ministry of Truth," therefore, will make not only the Party's ideology of truth and propaganda clear, but also Orwell's own stance by contrast.

To understand what the Party means by "absolute truth," Winston must relinquish his prior conception of the term. Truth, for the Party, has only a phenomenal and not an ontological existence. Reality exists only in the mind and has no independent basis, "nothing exists except through human consciousness" (*1984* 265). Thus, Truth exists only insofar as it is documented through "written records" and "human memories" (*1984* 213). As Winston's occupation in the Records Department—as a "careful" and "deliberate" forger of history—and his capture by the thought-police suggests, the Party equally dominates these physical and mental realms (*1984* 183, 224). "It follows that the past is whatever the Party chooses to make it" (*1984* 213). Absolute truth does not endure eternally, but is simultaneously alterable and unaltered "in any specific instance," a position requiring "doublethink": the simultaneous acceptance of two contradictory beliefs (*1984* 213).

Orwell critiques the Party's philosophic stance, exemplified by the Nietzsche quotation that opens this chapter, on practical and moral grounds. The entirety of *1984*—the tyrannical limits on freedom of speech and thought, the Party's mass deception, the torture of sleep-talkers, the indoctrination of children that results in the destruction of the family, the repression of natural sexual desires, and the inhumane waste of precious resources—combine to form Orwell's practical and moral indictment of the regime's attitude towards Truth.

Orwell eclipses the moral and practical realms with a discourse on metaphysics, transcending the literary sphere and becoming philosophical. Surpassing Kant's transcendental skepticism that "does not concern the existence of things" and directs its doubt towards "only the sensory representation of things," the Party's philosophy rests on the furthest extreme of

skepticism.[7] Big Brother's skepticism, like Descartes' methodological iteration, completely

"den[ies] the existence of the corporeal world" (*Pro* 44). Nietzsche's radical embrace of truth as

merely illusion—the "thing in itself" being "incomprehensible to the creators of language and

not at all worth aiming for"—suggests he may be the Party's closest philosophical companion.[8]

However, not even Nietzsche consistently seems to promote such an extreme form of skepticism:

"there may be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it can scarcely be disputed."[9]

The Party, therefore, more zealous than even Nietzsche in its romanticization of power,

maintains a "haughtiness" and "self-importance" that Nietzsche detests. Nietzsche recognizes

man's limited role in the history and future of the universe: "There have been eternities when

[human intellect] did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened" (*OTL*

42). The Party, on the other hand, rejects Winston's tortured plea that there exists a "whole

universe outside us" (*1984* 265). "The stars can be near or distant, according as we need them"

replies O'Brien, the Party's representative (*1984* 266). The Party's philosophy not only

challenges the notion that the "thing-in-itself" is accessible to human consciousness and

examination, but that it lacks any basis in reality whatsoever. Big Brother, trapped in its own

Cartesian *cogito*, "collective solipsism," as O'Brien refers to it, is Nietzsche's "mosquito . . .

float[ing] through the air with . . . self-importance, feeling within itself the flying center of the

world," but with the power to make it so (*1984* 266) (*OTL* 42).

Thus, for the Party, dialectics fade as opposing concepts amalgamate. The calculated

nomenclature, "Ministry of Peace," reflects a change in the meaning of "war" (the very . . . word

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[7] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (44); hereafter cited parenthetically
as (*Pro*).
[8] Friedrich Nietzsche *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (45); hereafter cited
parenthetically as (*OTL*).
[9] Friederich Nietzche, *Human, All Too Human* (9) .

become[s] "misleading") to denote a continuous phenomenon that ensures "perpetual peace" (*1984* 199). The meaning of truth also undergoes this antipodal transposition and becomes what we call, propaganda.

Propaganda and Self

For the Party, propaganda, or the creation and revelation of Truth, shapes the individual totally. Big Brother's stance on Truth extends to the human condition: "Men are infinitely malleable" (*1984* 269). The Party, through technologies like telescreens, speakwrites, microphones, and torture devices, exercises its power and controls thoughts and attitudes. While Orwell does choose to end *1984* (as well as *Animal Farm*) with melancholia, the thesis of both works—a moral warning—and the author's constant dissent, demonstrates repudiation of, rather than submission to, the Party's extreme skepticism.

Orwell similarly rejects the Party's philosophy of self: that humans do not share a nature (*1984* 269). His personal experiences in the Spanish Civil War that reveal the humanity of his combatants cause him to reject the Party's philosophy, and this sentiment is repeated with vigor in *1984:* "the people under the sky were also very much the same . . . held apart by walls of hatred and lies, and yet almost exactly the same" (*1984* 220). The Party possesses the ability to break the individual, but this power presupposes an individual in need of breaking. People like Winston and their subversive ideas must exist. The party needs a nemesis and finds one in whatever it is that humans naturally share.

What is the essence of this individual's existence? Early in *1984*, through Winston, Orwell establishes that the individual's essence is layered: "the object was not to stay alive but to stay human . . . they could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought; but the inner heart . . . remained impregnable" (*1984* 167). For Orwell the depth of the

self resides not in the body or the mind, but the heart: "Now he had retreated a step further: in the mind he had surrendered, but he had hoped to keep the inner heart inviolate" (*1984* 280). The Party's re-education technique, comprised of "learning . . . understanding . . . [and] acceptance," attempts to control the individual from the outside-in. This technique succeeds, Orwell asserts, because it correctly understands the individual. The Party breaks Winston's body and mind with ease, but Winston's struggle against the political abides until his heart is conquered, until "he love[s] Big Brother" (*1984* 280, 297). In winning "the victory over himself," it becomes absurd to speak of Winston as maintaining any autonomy or individuality. The Party's ability to generate authentic love from Winston not only demonstrates its ability to exceed Winston's naive expectations—"They could not alter your feelings"—it also demonstrates the Party's complete displacement of Winston's agency: "for that matter you could not alter [your own feelings] even if you wanted to" (*1984* 167). Winston undergoes complete absorption into the Party: self-"annihilation" (*1984* 27).

In securing Winston's eventual betrayal of Julia—his last bastion of freedom and resistance—and his profound love, the Party proves not its moral or metaphysical rectitude, merely its power (*1984* 286, 297). Orwell's tone is not of a man capitulated or convinced by Big Brother's doctrine, but one expressing a despondent fearfulness. The Party's absurd ideology scares Orwell not in itself, "surely there must be some way of demonstrating that it was false," but only in combination with its efficacy: what it can accomplish with the right technique (*1984* 266).

TWO
The Democratization of Propaganda

"He who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties."

John Stuart Mill[1]

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* gives us reason to fear propaganda's influence even if it cannot rise to the dystopian heights of *Animal Farm* or *1984*. Orwell's fictive texts warn us, but they warn us of a specific kind of propaganda delivered by authoritarian regimes whose proliferation Orwell feared. Whether ideologically right or left, Orwell targets hierarchical, totalitarian regimes ruled not by competing interests but power monopolists. He had good reason to fear this type of governance; authoritarian dictatorships accounted for an astounding amount of death and suffering in the 20th century.[2]

But it is not the propaganda of the illiberal regimes of Stalin, Hitler, Mao, or Kim Jong-Un that I seek to explore. Instead, for two reasons, I seek to examine the possibility of propaganda in liberal democratic societies. First, the tactics of top down Soviet style propaganda have been well examined. Second, these authoritarian tactics and regimes have been largely discredited, thanks to a number of prolific authors like Orwell.

Friedrich Hayek, another of these authors, defends liberal democracy from Mussolini's charge that the more complex civilization becomes, the more restricted individuals need to be.[3] In *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek's defense of market based liberal democracies is predicated on the link between economic and political power (*TRS* 125). No class, Hayek argues, no matter its

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[1] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (75).
[2] Alan Charles Kors, *The Age of Communism Lives*.
[3] Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (91); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*TRS*).

political vision, can control the economy without eventually usurping the people's sovereignty (*TRS* 110). Hayek sees economic competition as the stalwart against tyranny that makes freedom's survival possible. The freedom of individuals for Hayek is both the end to be achieved by government and the means for attaining that end (*TRS* 102).

The fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in an age of hope, that liberal democracies would proliferate, that Orwell's nightmare had been avoided. Francis Fukuyama, who, in his 1989 essay *The End of History?*, gathered evidence of the "total exhaustion of viable systemic alternatives to Western liberalism," was one of these hopefuls.[4] But Paul Berman, like many of Fukuyama's innumerable critics, asserts that it is not so clear that liberal democracy will triumph.[5] Seeing the specter of European totalitarianism within political Islamism, Berman repudiates Fukuyamian "willful delusions" regarding totalitarianism's extinction and places the blame at the feet of liberalism's own successive "failures" (*TL* 174, 206). Meanwhile, a possible resurgence of right-wing illiberalism, characterized by a xenophobia that seems likely, because of mass migration, to persist, has struck fear into liberal hearts.[6] We may not yet be free from all prospects of the Orwellian nightmare.

I possess neither the skill nor audacity to try my hand at prophecy. In 2016, the fate of liberal democracy remains unknown. Instead I want to explore the concept of propaganda in an age where Fukuyama's proclamation of universal liberal democracy and Friedrich Nietzsche's feared "Last Man," the comfort seeking "agreeable" liberal democrat who "blink[s] stupidly and wonder[s] about dinner," is supposed (*TL* 166).[7] I seek what inspired Alexis de Tocqueville's investigation of America, "an image of democracy itself, its penchants, its characters, its

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[4] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.
[5] Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (174); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*TL*).
[6] The Economist, "Playing with Fear."
[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (130); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*TSZ*).

prejudices," in relation to concepts of political deception and the individuals subject to that deception.[8] What is the status of propaganda in a liberal democracy with open discourse and a free press?

Though this liberal democratic order may sidestep the *top down* propaganda disseminated by kings and governors, is it free from the concept completely? To answer this question about the status of propaganda in an information-laden society, we must explore what our notion, or a useful notion, of propaganda is. I assert that these two tasks—exploring the concept of propaganda and understanding its status in the liberal democratic order—intertwine.

The concept of propaganda, because it is employed so often and in such politically charged contexts, demands this exploration. Two extreme positions challenge the necessity of this task. One asserts that propaganda does not exist in non-authoritarian contexts; it is a bogeyman charge used to indict political opponents. The other asserts that everything is propaganda, that all pieces of information are just that, pieces, and are therefore inescapably partial in some direction. But these radical challenges invite, rather than discourage, the undertaking of this project. If propaganda does not exist in the liberal democratic paradigm, why? What element of propaganda is incompatible with liberalism and democracy? If, on the other hand, everything in this order is propaganda, does the notion of the common good disintegrate into private interests? How are individuals to learn and live together?

I am under no illusion that all people reside in liberal democracies, nor am I confident that we ever will. This exploration also does not seek to prove the superiority of liberal democracy, itself only a conceptual label placed atop the flexible and dynamic reality of partially democratic and partially liberal regimes. In fact, scholars like Fareed Zakaria, Peter Signer, and

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[8] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (13).

Shadi Hamid assert that liberalism and democracy are *not* natural bedfellows and these "two

strands. . . are coming apart in the rest of the world".[9] Zakaria, *contra* Fukuyama, traces the

failure of modern democracies in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia to "bring

constitutional liberalism" and notes, "Western liberal democracy might prove to be not the final

destination on the democratic road, but just one of many possible exits" (*RID*). While Zakaria's

argument leads him to question American foreign policy that often advocates democracy rather

than liberalism abroad, (After all, "the 'Western model' is best symbolized not by the mass

plebiscite but the impartial judge.") Hamid, noticing that Islamization seems to follow freedom

in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, sees Zakaria as a wishful thinker and toys with the possibility that

some cultures may choose democracy but not liberalism (*RID*).[10] Regardless of whether liberal

democracy comes apart at the seams, flourishes, or fails, and whether this flourishing or failure

suits us, we must consider political deception in light of these concepts that have long been a

focus of political philosophy. This work is a critical examination of any claim that vibrant

discourse is incompatible with propaganda, that propaganda requires a nefarious propagandist,

and that nothing stands between us and political flourishing but Big Brother and his kin.

Truth and Motive

Our attempt to define and explore propaganda in a theoretical liberal democracy must

begin with a common notion of propaganda in its authoritarian form. Identifying the common

elements of propaganda and their transmutations allows us to examine the change in

propaganda's nature or perhaps its dissolution as a useful concept. Jacques Ellul, because he

conceives of the world as primarily characterized by technique, an unstoppable trend that reduces

reason to method and sanctifies the continuous hunt for maximum efficiency, rather than a

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[9] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy;" hereafter cited parenthetically as (*RID*).
[10] Shadi Hamid, "The Future of Democracy in the Middle East: Islamist and Illiberal."

struggle between competing ideologies, begins this task of identifying propaganda's plasticity with indifference toward typical distinctions between different political and economic orders.[11] In this section I will outline Ellul's conception of propaganda, and its role within a liberal democratic order, for the sake of reconceiving the phenomenon in light of modern developments.

Although the task of defining propaganda lies at the very heart of this project, we must begin with an examination of the commonly perceived elements of the phenomenon: truth and intention.

Ellul warns us that propaganda must not be confused with falsity. Any notion that propaganda consists of "tall stories" must be discarded if we are to understand propaganda's nature.[12] Not only does this conception of propaganda as falsehood stymy its examination, it dangerously assures the individual that factual accuracy insulates him from political deception (*Prop* 52). In reality, effective propagandists have long realized that "lying must be avoided" (*Prop* 53). Even Goebels, the "Big Liar," and Lenin insisted that the information they disseminated must be accurate (*Prop* 54). For propaganda to be believed and adopted into the individual's conceptual framework, it must not be easily contradicted. Propagandists, because the goods they sell are not discrete, tangible, or rivaled, rely on repeated interactions, and therefore credibility, at least as much as commercial advertisers.

Thus, effective propaganda relies not just on the facts, but the context in which information is revealed or withheld to an audience. Deliberate silence surrounding accurate facts aims to lead the public to seemingly "obvious conclusions" (*Prop* 57). Consider an example not of propaganda, but ordinary deception: a chess novice told by a grandmaster opponent that his

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[11] Donald Phillip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (143-145).
[12] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (52); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*Prop*).

knight will not be taken if it retreats may draw the conclusion that retreating is his best option. If the grandmaster then, taking advantage of the retreating knight, proceeds to checkmate the novice on the following turn, the novice would likely feel duped. The novice feels he was deceived although nothing factually inaccurate was presented to him. The philosophical question of whether the novice was *lied* to hinges on another factor, the reason the novice would be unlikely to listen to his opponent at all: motive.

The motivation for the dissemination or suppression of information largely determines the extent to which the novice feels cheated and the label of deception seems appropriate. If the grandmaster offered the statement with good intentions, thinking at the time it was the best move, or if he even offered the statement without thought as to how it would affect the novice, the gravity of the offense is mitigated, the novice feels less misled, and it becomes much more difficult to label the initial statement as deceptive (*Prop* 57). The importance of intention to our conception of deception troubles both the investigator of deception and potential targets. How is the novice ever to know that the grandmaster's post-game apologies are sincere? Without confidence these apologies are sincere, a confidence that can rarely be attained, the novice remains confused about the moral wrong inflicted upon him whilst concretely feeling the consequence of the statement: his defeat. Therefore, reaching the verdict of deception in a specific case appears to require at the least an intimacy with the alleged deceiver and at most powers beyond our grasp.

Ellul critiques the role of intention in Marbury B. Ogle's definition of a propagandist: one with the "intent of influencing his listener" (*Prop* xi). Intent, if it is to be given a central role in the concept of propaganda, must go beyond Ogle's mere "intent of influencing" that fails to shield well-meaning teachers and priests from the charge of propaganda (*Prop* xi).

One could thicken the role of intention in the concept to do more work, to properly distinguish between propagandists and sincere educators. Malice or self-interest, in addition to the intent to influence, seems to offer this distinction and provide a basis for the negative connotation that Ellul and common opinion attaches to propaganda. However, parsing malicious intent and beneficent intent requires a knowledge of the alleged propagandist's mental state, if he aims to "inculcate[e]. . . rather than explain" ideas, advocate for positions, or further his own interests at the expense of the listener (*Prop* xi).

The relativist position again rears its head. Is not every action driven by motivations within the actor? Is an educator who presents balanced and varied perspectives not engaging in his own type of advocacy for a critical approach?

Ellul, seeming to respect the importance of a thick notion of intention, alleges that to understand propaganda we must "turn not to the psychologist, but to the propagandist" (*Prop* xii). However, consonant with his proclivity to grasp the whole, Ellul argues that propaganda feeds on itself exponentially and has a tendency to distort the propagandist's own views to the extent that he can advance propaganda in "good faith" (*Prop* 60). Furthermore, while Ellul admonishes psychologists who engage in statistical or simulated studies of propaganda, his own (admittedly working) definition of the phenomenon revolves around "methods" of "psychological manipulation" (*Prop* xii, 61).

J.M. Balkin, legal theorist and philosopher of culture, goes farther than Ellul, asserting that understanding not only propaganda (what he labels "ideological effects" characterized by "harmful" consequences), but the transmission of information ("cultural software"), is possible with an analysis of psychological mechanisms like cultural heuristics, narratives, homologies,

metaphor, and metonymy.[13] Ellul and Balkin's attention to mechanisms of understanding offer

tangible benefits to any investigator of propaganda concerned less with what specific beliefs he

holds than the reasons why he holds such beliefs. While essential to a total account of

propaganda, a complete catalogue of these mechanisms, by Balkin's own admission, eludes us

(*CS* 173). Furthermore, even if we generously assume man can translate his clinical knowledge

of these mechanisms into behavioral adjustments, if Ellul is correct that modern man, because of

his role in the political sphere, needs propaganda, then the advantages gained from a mechanism-

based approach may be meager (*Prop* 139). I seek a useful and modern reconception of

propaganda that transcends the cataloging of psychological mechanisms. But first we are

required to examine the ways, if any, that propaganda has changed because of political

developments and Ellul's claim that modern man depends on propaganda.

Democracy and Propaganda

In moving from the chess example (of standard deception) to propaganda, we must

examine "mass society," what Ellul considers a prerequisite to the existence of propaganda. Ellul

does not see the concepts of "individualist society" and "mass society" in contradiction, but

rather fundamentally linked (*Prop* 90). The necessary connection between the individual and the

mass creates the possibility for effective propaganda and serves as the basis of Ellul's critique of

what Martha Nussbaum labels a "detache[d]" conception of liberalism (*Prop* 91).[14] Individualist

and mass society is one, Ellul asserts, because the destruction of feudalism "frees" the individual

from "local structures," throwing him into an "unstructured mass society" (*Prop* 90).

"Membership in local groups," that insulated the individual from "external influences," gives

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[13] J.M. Balkin, *Cultural Software* (110); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*CS*).
[14] Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (61).

way to an "individualist *reality*" where man is "not at all the master of his own life" but "subject to innumerable forces" (*Prop* 91).

Ellul presents a dangerous problem that accompanies the new role for the individual in political life. Urbanization has brought the masses physically closer to the ruling class, while advances in communication have brought disparate peoples closer together by increasing opportunity for discourse as well as the rate of information's travel (*Prop* 122). "The Chief of State is in contact with the people" (*Prop* 122). Ellul also points to two other phenomena, an already "deeply ingrained" aversion to censorship and a heightened (although not necessarily "deep") interest in politics, and, the growth of larger polities, like nation-states, that make every political decision affect more people in more ways (*Prop* 123). The masses and public opinion have become an increasingly larger variable in the considerations of governors; governments "can no longer operate outside the pressure of the masses and public opinion" (*Prop* 124). But Ellul, because of his critique of men as rational actors and his unfavorable view of herd mentality, sees this trend that democrats welcome as problematic (*Prop* 124). Ellul concludes that public opinion is too volatile, irrational, "incapable of conceiving of long-term foreign policy," "divided on principal questions," and ill informed to lead any government, much less one with consistent and wise policies (*Prop* 125). Government cannot, Ellul writes, wait for public opinion to form and be heard on important security issues. In the American context, a perennial spat between Congress (who the Constitution grants the power to declare war) and the Executive (who, because of modern technology, the nation expects "to act immediately" and "worry about congressional approval later") bears out Ellul's conclusion.[15] The 1973 War Powers Resolution, passed in spite of an executive veto, aimed to limit the military action that

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[15] Lee Epstein and Thomas G. Walker, *Institutional Power and Constraints: Constitutional Law for a Changing America* (278); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*IPC*).

presidents could take without congressional approval, but the fact that "hundreds of military actions" have occurred "without declarations of war" (including "two major long term efforts") points to a reality that rapidly improving military technology, and a more time- sensitive battlefield, has reallocated constitutional powers towards a unitary actor (*IPC* 278). The democracy faces a bind: the regime "*cannot follow* public opinion. But it *cannot escape* it either" (*Prop* 126). Ellul concludes, "as the government cannot follow opinion, opinion must follow the government (*Prop* 126).

Ellul witnesses the trends of modernity: urbanization, industrialization, globalization, and democratization, as paradoxically bringing individuals deeper into the fold of political life whilst increasing the rulers' need to deceive them. Although in 2014, the Economist Intelligence Unit found that only 24 out of 167 countries investigated (12.5% of the world's population) were "full democracies" and Freedom House found that the "acceptance of democracy as the world's dominant form of government is under greater threat than at any point in the last 25 years," all but a handful of regimes claim to be democratic.[16] [17] [18] This fact along with a reminder that many of modernity's worst tyrants—Hitler, Stalin, Tito, and Mussolini—all claimed to draw their power from the people's sovereignty, demonstrates the extent to which democratic theory has prevailed in the war of ideas (*Prop* 129). Despite alleged democratic regression in Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States, the failure of the Arab Spring to bring stability and democracy to the Middle East, President Putin's increasing authoritarianism, China's "abysmal [Democracy Index] score," and Latin America's "disappointing performance over the last decade," Ellul appears more correct than ever in his assertion that "for the average

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[16] The Economist, "Democracy Index 2014;" hereafter cited parenthetically as "*EIU*."
[17] Arch Puddington, "Discarding Democracy: A Return to the Iron Fist."
[18] Nobelprize.org., "Democracies in the World."

Westerner, will of the people is sacred" ("EIU" 2-19) (*Prop* 129). This discrepancy, between the triumph of democratic ideals and the reality, elucidates a need not only for the state to "plead its case" to the people, but also to "give the people the feeling they crave," the feeling that the government is subservient to them (*Prop* 126, 127).

Ellul's critique of democracy, his warning that the demand for propaganda might be greater as democratic theory proliferates, begins with a rationale for why the "modern State, even if it be liberal, democratic, and humanist, finds itself. . . in a situation in which it must use propaganda" (*Prop* 138). However, because Ellul conceives of propaganda in relation to the age of technique, and thus as mutualistic but unidirectional, a flow of information from a propagandist to a hankering audience, Ellul concerns himself not just with the state, but also the reasons underlying the individual's need for propaganda (*Prop* xii).

The Individual and Democracy

A democratic framework gives modern man an increased responsibility in political affairs that only become more complicated as economies intertwine, technology advances, and sectarian boundaries fall (*Prop* 139). Answers about macroeconomics and foreign policy strategy that perplex experts are beyond the reach of most citizens. Thus the individual in tension between the pressure to participate and his own inability to solve or even "grasp the world's economic and political problems" craves "values," "explanations, [and] judgments"—an "ideological veil" (*Prop* 140).

The concept of democracy, originating from the Greek δημοκρατία (*dēmokratía*), "the rule of the people," invites lasting questions about what exactly is required for the people to be considered ruling. Suffragists have worked to define "the people" and implement practical definitions. Other political theorists, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles-Louis de Secondat,

Baron de la Bréde et de Montesquieu, as well as the contemporary legal theorist Richard Posner, grapple with various methods of governance, their feasibility, and the furtherance of popular sovereignty. This question of how the people can exercise their sovereignty is the very question Ellul's critique of democracy and modernity brings to the fore. How are people, especially in a modernity characterized by large nation-states and complexity, to live public and private lives simultaneously, to tend to their personal needs while retaining their sovereignty?

Rousseau and Montesquieu offer competing conceptions of the ideal democracy that demonstrate their understanding of the problem and frame our advance toward its consideration in the modern age. Posner, in his evaluation of the feasibility and desirability of these competing conceptions of democracy, brings us to modernity and a re-confrontation of the issue facing the democratic man.

Rousseau deifies a democratic polity in which the members are "properly informed," not bound up by any "sectional associations," and act in the "general" rather than their own "private interest."[19] Posner labels Rousseau's model "Concept 1 democracy."[20] This "loft[y]" conception demands a lot from us, requiring "civic-minded," "open-minded," and other-regarding humans with "formidable intellectual and moral capacities" and time to spare (*LPD* 133). Posner, citing legal theorist Cass Sunstein, expresses skepticism about "achieving consensus in political matters," going as far to say: "deliberation is not effective in bridging fundamental disagreements" in the actual world (*LPD* 135).

For these reasons, especially in the "morally heterogeneous" United States, Posner prefers what he labels "Concept 2 democracy" (*LPD* 138, 139). This idea, which aligns with

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[19] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (72-72); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*SC*).
[20] Richard A. Posner, *Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy* (130); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*LPD*).

Montesquieu's preference for a "moderate government" that protects liberty by dispersing power, recognizes direct democracy is "feasible" "only in the tiniest polities" (*LPD* 139).[21] Concept 2 democrats, Posner asserts, are "unillusioned," recognizing the "unworkab[ility]" of Rousseau's model on a modern stage (*LPD* 144, 145). They also recognize the normative superiority of a system that considers "politics ancillary rather than ultimate," that finds nothing "intrinsically valu[able]" or "ennobling" about private citizens "jawing in the agora" (*LPD* 144). Careful to not completely devalue political deliberation, Posner relegates its place from "bringing about consensus" to lesser goods like "blow[ing] off steam" or signaling public opinion (*LPD* 139). If we are to accept Posner's assertion that the Concept 2 model, characterized by the "buying off of clamorous interest groups" and the negotiation and compromise of interests (in contrast to less negotiable "ideas"), is a more accurate model of American democracy than its alternative, we should grapple with problems that Posner's "economic interpretation" of this democracy reveal (*LPD* 166, 188).

Posner explores the possibility that this competitive Concept 2 democracy, as opposed to Concept 1 democracy, is analogous to an economic market (*LPD* 188). Voting, as opposed to deliberation ("Voting is the antithesis of deliberation and the mark of its failure."), creates "two sides of a market sharply differentiated" into active sellers (candidates) and passive buyers (voters) (*LPD* 187, 189). In this conception, a buyer does not design products, but rather "chooses from a menu presented by the sellers" (*LPD* 189). Though Posner argues that Concept 2 is practical, legitimate, and preferable, his economic metaphor brings to the surface the issue of propaganda.

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[21] Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (150); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*SOL*).

The "economist turned political scientist notices," Posner writes, that the "electoral market is deficient in the conditions that would enable the 'buyers,' the citizens, to make sound choices" (*LPD* 189). Not only do political buyers (voters) lack the strong personal incentive present in commercial markets, but they are asked to buy products (candidates) "the value of which is almost impossible to determine even if the voter irrationally invests a great deal of time and effort in studying the candidates and the issues" (*LPD* 189). To restate the problems, it should come as no surprise that "public opinion is not strongly self-interested" because an individual's vote is "unlikely to have any effect on [that individual's] welfare" (*LPD* 190). Second, because of the trends Ellul notices—the formation of mass society and interdependent economies and politics—it is unclear how buyers (voters) would gather the information requisite to advance their own self-interest if they so desired. In the political market we lack the "cheap and accurate signal," price, which guides economic markets (*LPD* 189). Instead voters rely on "information shortcuts," like "inferring a candidate's suitability from the identity of his supporters and opponents" or looking to "political affiliation" that "corresponds to a trademark" (*LPD* 191). Although Posner seeks to diminish the impact that these unfortunate "market" conditions have on democracy taken as a whole, he neglects the effects that a reliance on "information shortcuts" and a constant subjection to external (and self-advancing) political pressures may have on individuals (*LPD* 192). Posner makes his arguments in favor of Concept 2 democracy with regard to political stability, not individual flourishing.

I have no stake in any argument over the plausibility or desirability of either conception of democracy. Perhaps, as Posner maintains, utopian Concept 1 democracies truly do tend towards "dystopic practices" that carry with them a great likelihood of a pernicious type of propaganda (*LPD* 164). Nevertheless we should not ignore the pressures facing a modern voter

in a Concept 2 democracy (*LPD* 164). In the next section, I assert that our devotion to liberalism, not a single theory but a wide ranging set of theories, shields us from authoritarians and their propaganda, but simultaneously threatens to expose us to an alternative form of political manipulation.

Liberalism and Propaganda

A devastating consequence of Ellul's confrontation of democracy and propaganda emerges when we consider liberalism. Despite liberalism's manifold iterations, ranging from libertarian interpretations on the right to egalitarian and corrective justice concerned theories on the left, free thought and free speech lie at the heart of liberal theory. Liberalism's most powerful literary advocates, like Arthur Koestler in *Darkness at Noon* and Orwell in *1984*, explicitly revel in the notion of individuals possessing autonomy over their minds and language.[22] [23] Though theorists like Owen Fiss observe a modern cleavage within liberalism on the issue of speech, tracing liberalism's theoretical lineage reveals it is difficult to overestimate the liberal vanguard's concern for free thought and expression.[24] In fact, when self-identifying liberals do challenge the freedom of expression, like with legal challenges to pornography or hate speech, it is typically the result of a tension between individuals or groups and an alleged curtailing of freedom (*LD* 4). Some liberals see the state as "*the* threat against which the individual must be protected" while "others understand freedom in more social terms" (*LD* 5). But whether the First Amendment is considered only an end in itself (a private right) or also a means of "preserv[ing] the fullness and openness of public debate" ("a public right"), the liberal tradition generally values free speech and thought as paramount, a primary commitment to the individual (*LD* 5). Therefore, in a

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[22] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (256-262).
[23] George Orwell, *1984* (299).
[24] Owen Fiss, *Liberalism Divided* (1); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*LD*).

democratic order we find states and individuals hungry for propaganda, and, in the liberal framework, because thought and speech receive such sturdy support, a heightening of the Ellulian tension—between the pressure to participate and the improbability of wisely doing so. A fear arises that our notion of liberal democracy binds propaganda to our core values.

Fiss recognizes the value of healthy public discourse, but, like Ellul, warns of modernity's threat to that good (*LD* 15). But before looking to solutions we must understand the problem, the manner in which liberalism's respect for pluralism simultaneously insulates us from the seemingly more threatening Orwellian propaganda and opens the door to a more ineluctable reconception of propaganda.

John Stuart Mill, recognizing in *On Liberty* both man's fallibility and the danger of censorship, forged an argument demonstrating that more speech, more vibrant discourse, in a competitive "market place of ideas," beats all other options.[25] [26] Balkin, though less concerned with authoritarianism, agrees with Mill's epistemological conclusions and rejects the necessity of a Hobbesian definer, a moral or political Leviathan.[27] Understanding our attraction to "ideal observer theories" that seek a perfect authority to settle human disputes, Balkin nevertheless critiques this stance on the grounds that this observer, to be unlimited by any perspective, must be totally devoid of not only human characteristics (gender, class, sexuality), but also the experiences that would color its worldview (*CS* 157-158). Human understanding and judgment, Balkin asserts, comes only with our "situatedness," "finitude, " and "historicity," what Aristotle calls *phronesis* or practical wisdom (*CS* 158-159).[28] Thus, "the notion of a transcendent position is incoherent" (*CS* 157). A perspective is both an "apparatus for understanding the world" and a

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[25] John Stuart Mill *On Liberty* (22-24); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*OL*).
[26] William O. Douglas, *United States v. Rumely*.
[27] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (216); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*Lev*).
[28] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VI.

limitation (*CS* 157). Filters then, while partial, deliver us the possibility of limited understanding, and their antipode, the total vacancy of filters, would leave us with "no apparatus at all," an understanding of "nothing, not everything," (*CS* 157). Therefore, Balkin concludes that the study of propaganda, "necessarily a self-critical study," "does not involve. . . distancing ourselves from the tools of understanding in order to reflect upon them," but the abandonment of "a false notion of a self that exists separate and apart from its forms of understanding" (*CS* 135). But while Balkin contends that our thoughts—as well as our thoughts about thought—change, "our cultural software is constantly being rewritten," these changes are not necessarily for the better (*CS* 136). "If we can be educated, we can also be manipulated" (*CS* 136). Therefore, deception, tethered to our ineludible tools of understanding, an inescapable element of even an order that rejects epistemological, moral, or political authoritarianism, deserves consideration in a modern context. It is liberalism's respect for the individual, freedom, and choice that further provokes our reconception of propaganda in the democratic order.

In *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman, concerned with understanding social character, examines two "revolutions" that construct the modern age.[29] The first revolution, understood by Ellul as the turn to "mass society," entails the clipping away of the strings that attached feudal man to his family and clan, to tradition (*Prop* 90) (*TLC* 20). Riesman alleges that this first revolution serves as the context for a second revolution (*TLC* 21). Riesman begins to understand this second revolution by hypothesizing three types of social character—"tradition-directed," "inner-directed," and "other-directed"—that develop based on the society that "molds" its population in order to "secur[e] conformity" (*TLC* 23, 29). The first character, pressured to fit within the "niche" dictated by his community, is "adjusted," not individuated (*TLC* 27). The

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[29] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (20); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*TLC*).

individual does not make a conscious effort to conform, but rather the "social need" for idiosyncrasy is "minimal" (*TLC* 27). Change within this tradition-based society, like the molecules within a cold compound, is slow (*TLC* 27).

Riesman contends that the decay of the feudal political order, characterized by castes and a lack of social and physical mobility, gave rise to the phenomenon of "inner-direction" (*TLC* 28). The society that garners conformity through inner-direction "is characterized by increased personal mobility, a rapid accumulation of capital, . . . intensive expansion in the production of goods and people, and extensive expansion in exploration, colonization, and imperialism" (*TLC* 30). Inner-direction acts as a counterbalance to an increasing amount of external options presented to individuals. Following the Renaissance, the blacksmith's son, freed from the familial tradition, enters a world of choices inconceivable to his ancestors. The individual's direction, instead of coerced by a finite set of external options, is guided by the early instruction he receives from "elders" (*TLC* 30). The inner-directed individual, faced with "novel situations" that a "code cannot encompass in advance," is not "channel[ed]" through a "rigid social organization," but by his own "highly individualized character" (*TLC* 31). This individual, still very much influenced by tradition, his parents and social authorities do much of the guiding after all, is piloted by a metaphorical gyroscope operating within him (*TLC* 32).

Though the inner-directed individual can learn from experience and respond to his social milieu, he has not yet become the new "type of character" that Riesman seeks to expose us to (*TLC* 35). The modern character, Riesman's "other-directed man," is produced by "capitalism, industrialism, and urbanization" (*TLC* 35). Character again shifts based on society's need for conformity, a need that largely changes with economic advancement. The third type of man, corresponding to the Colin Clark's "tertiary sphere of the economy (trade, communications, and

services),” does “white collar work” and is literate, educated, and encircled by “words and images from the new mass media of communication” (*TLC* 24, 36). Riesman alleges that peer groups, in addition to the family, mold this type of man (*TLC* 37). The other-directed man, molded by contemporaries directly and indirectly (through mass media), becomes attuned to the “actions and wishes of others” (*TLC* 38).

The tradition-directed type, constrained in his behavior by the “small number of individuals with whom he is in daily contact,” fears the community’s shame (*TLC* 40). The inner-directed man, dependent on his “gyroscope” shaped by authority figures, experiences “guilt” when dragged off course by impulses or external stimuli (*TLC* 41). The other-directed man, educated by a “far wider circle” than his parents, understands the necessity not of “a code of behavior,” but of receiving and participating in the “circulation” of his peer’s message (*TLC* 42). He becomes at “home everywhere and nowhere” and is stricken with “anxiety” regarding the attitudes of the intangible cohort he experiences through personal interaction as well as the imagery of popular culture presented through different and continuously evolving mediums: publications, radio, television, and the Internet.

Riesman, vigilant in reminding readers that these characters are “construction[s],” undertakes the unenviable task of tracing the evolution of human social character (*TLC* 48). Riesman, pointing to changing “social and economic conditions,” discovers that children of the new type are not subjected to as much “deprivation and hardship” as their forerunners, and because they no longer possess “immediate economic value” these children are “scarcer” with more “staked” on them than in an “earlier epoch when many children were not raised to maturity” (*TLC* 67). Furthermore, both parent and child are presented with models of behavior by “mass media” and are therefore impressed upon by other families and traditions (*TLC* 69).

The other-directed man, a cog in a vast and interdependent economy driven by the principles of the division of labor and economies of scale, consumes fervently. But while the inner-directed man, "at least in America," is concerned with external conformity via consumption ("keeping up with the Joneses" syndrome), the other-directed man is additionally driven towards conformity on a deeper level of "inner experience" (*TLC* 40). Thus, popular culture, which assumes a role as a primary educator of the other-directed man, is a "tutor in consumption" and Riesman asserts democratic politics become, like "goods, games, and entertainments," a consumable good of which this man is a "purchaser, player, spectator, or leisure-time observer" (*TLC* 219). Media that directly focuses on politics (and contemporary popular media that indirectly influences culture) trains its consumers with historical interpretations and reactions to current events (*TLC* 219).

Although Riesman recognizes that modern democracy's assault on the individual's autonomy is "less total and relentless" than "under totalitarianism," he maintains that "the diffuse and anonymous authority of the modern democracies is less favorable to autonomy than one might assume" (*TLC* 288). The other-directed man has been trained to respond to "subtle but nonetheless constricting interpersonal expectations" rather than the overt authority of a disciplinarian parent or autocrat (*TLC* 288). As Ellul asserts, it is not solely the modern individual who is shaped through education and socialization (*Prop* 92). Neither Ellul nor Riesman speak of a pre-modern age where man was fully autonomous, true to himself, or wholly self directed. Man's social nature is hardly in dispute. Rather it is the character of the society that shapes the individual, and the effect on the individual, that becomes the object of study for these thinkers and the investigator of propaganda. It is this changing nature of the social order and man's relation to it, brought about by political dynamism and economic revolution, that Ellul and

Riesman contend demands our attention. Thus, it behooves us to make explicit a reconception of propaganda instigated by Ellul when he writes, "propaganda is a good deal less the political weapon of a regime (it is that also) than the effect of a[n] . . . integrated society," an effect that carries with it "certain identical results" independent of the regime from which it emanated (*Prop* xvii, xv). It is a reconception spurred by the paradox of our residence in a society that respects individuals qua individuals and places that mammoth burden of self-governance upon us, but is simultaneously integrated, increasingly complex, and fertile soil for Riesman's other-directed man. The bright ecstasy roused by our escape from Big Brother, if we can ever escape from the totalitarian threat, stirs Ellul and incites his warning that the tensions facing man, ensnared by his remarkable distinctness from other men but desire to exist constructively with them, has not been relieved but merely reformed in the modern age.

THREE
Propaganda of the Self

"For in the end, [Huxley] was trying to tell us that what afflicted the people in *Brave New World* was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and why they had stopped thinking."

Neil Postman[1]

Our recognition of the persistence of the political problem facing man, first brought about by a consideration of Orwell and then modern democracy, characterizes a descent that originates in the earliest efforts at political philosophy. As was demonstrated by an analysis of Big Brother's relativist metaphysics and Jacques Ellul's discussion of man in mass society, the study of propaganda consists of the wedding of two ancient philosophical questions. The first question is presented by metaphysics and epistemology: what is Real or True? The second lies at the heart of moral and political philosophy: what is the individual's relation to others and society? Plato's *Republic* gifted the western world with its first comprehensive consideration of these two questions considered not in isolation, but in relation to each other. A modern treatment of these two problems must similarly be relational and therefore must take Plato's original treatment as its point of departure, the foundation of our ascent.

Leo Strauss asserts that, even more than with other writers, because Plato never speaks directly but through various (and often ironic) mouths, the task of understanding the Platonic teaching depends on a consideration of its form.[2] Strauss asks: How can we make sense of an author that speaks through intentionally deceitful mouths? (*CM* 51) The form of Plato's teachings cannot be teased from the prevalence of Socrates' irony: the "dissimulation of [his] wisdom" for the sake of conversing with interlocutors of varying wit and character (*CM* 51).

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[1] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (163).
[2] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (50); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*CM*).

Plato's Socrates, in the *Phaedrus*, explains the absence of his written doctrine, but Plato himself parts ways from his educator by crystallizing Socrates' conversations and thereby—if only by picking and choosing which conversations to immortalize—laying out his own teaching (*CM* 55). What drove Plato to diverge from his teacher in regard to the worth of the written word?

Plato writes, reason suggests, because he thinks writing has value that outweighs the harms of which Socrates was concerned. Plato's form then, "How" he writes, is of utmost concern because it reveals Plato's attempt to evade what Strauss labels "the essential defect of writing" (*CM* 52). Strauss contends, because of Socrates' tendency to speak differently to different people in an effort to pursue a common goal, that this "defect of writing" is rigidity, its "equal accesib[ility]" to those who are literate, its lack of the natural ebb and flow of conversation that depends on chance and makes every human interaction unique (*CM* 52, 60). Thus, Plato's divergence from Socrates, his evasion of writing's defect, produces a literary form, the dialogue, most akin to a true human interaction. Plato seeks to retain Socrates' "common quest" for truth in the written word (*CM* 52).

Yet according to Strauss, Socrates implies in the *Phaedrus* that good writing is characterized by "logographic necessity": the "necessity" of each part of the writing to the whole (*CM* 53). This "law of logographic necessity" dictates the way in which Plato's works can never be the same as the conversations they represent. Authored by one man, as opposed to an interplay between many, these "radically fictitious" dialogues "den[y] chance" (*CM* 60). Plato sees a value that Socrates did not see (or at least did not see before it was too late) in delivering his teachings through a form that works hard to demonstrate "in what manner the teaching conveyed through the work is adapted by the main speaker to his particular audience" (*CM* 54). By informing us of Socrates' "particular audience," we depart on our own quest to discover

"how that teaching would have to be restated in order to be valid beyond the particular situation of the conversation in question" (*CM* 54). Therefore, Plato's form establishes his desire to continue the Socratic tradition of philosophy as a common endeavor that requires multi-sided communication, and the furtherance of that tradition by attempting to capture transcendental truths through attention to particulars.

Platonic Dialogue and Relativism

Working to understand the form of the Platonic dialogues not only helps us read Plato; it counsels our modern endeavor into political philosophy. J.M. Balkin, in his consideration of cultural relativism, rejects the notion that "questions of what is just and unjust (true and untrue) exist wholly within a given culture" (*CS* 143, 153). If accepted, this notion, that justice is "wholly internal" to cultures or individuals, has vast consequences for not only moral discourse, but also the nature of relations between society and its parts, whether those parts are individuals or cultures (*CS* 153). If both "applying the aggressor's standard of justice to victims is a category mistake" and vice versa, then objections fall on deaf ears; justice is merely as Thrasymachus says, "the advantage of the stronger;" and Hobbes is correct that man's condition is one "of Warre of everyone against every one" (*CS* 153) (*Lev* 189).[3] But Balkin warns that the very reason many are drawn to this form of cultural relativism, a respect for the value of others and a humility about one's own possession of answers, "ironically. . . require[s] the presumption of transcendent ideals" (*CS* 154). As Jean-Francois Lyotard explains, justice for this type of relativist is the "multiplicity of justices" and thus simultaneously "the justice of multiplicity" (*CS* 154).

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[3] Plato and Allan Bloom *The Republic of Plato* (338b10-11); Plato will hereafter be cited parenthetically by margin and line number. Citations of Allan Bloom's interpretive essay will note page numbers parenthetically, for example, (*Rep* 307).

Strauss also points out the paradox. Those who reject our ability to acquire "any genuine knowledge of what is intrinsically good or right" conclude we are "compel[led]. . . to be tolerant of every opinion about good or right. . . . Only unlimited tolerance is in accordance with reason."[4] Therefore, what first appears as the "passionate rejection of 'absolutes'" is simultaneously the embrace of not only a "recognition of a natural right," but of a "particular interpretation of a natural right" where the "one thing needful is respect for diversity or individuality" (*NRH* 5). The relativist position, in razing all ground, demolishes the very perch from which it makes its claim.

There does exist the possibility that any dialogic encounter between actors is simply a transmutation of the battlefield, a move away from force explicit to a new force of persuasion. Friedrich Nietzsche indeed makes this claim that reason is merely Socrates' tool of "revenge."[5] A victimized party would then only engage in dialogue as an expression of its own will to power and Socrates, the most shrewd sophist who seeks the tyrant's throne through the back entry, has significance as the "discover[er] of a new kind of *agon* (contest)" (*TI* 477). But this claim, that reason and dialogue are tools of "self-preservation and self-expansion," endangers Nietzsche's own philosophic project, for he ends not in destruction, but in the creation of a new horizon.[6] We may ask Nietzsche what his own philosophic discovery, that is both anti-moral and anti-philosophical (in the Socratic sense), contains if not merely his own will to power. We must ask: if you use reason and the written word not to elucidate, for you joyously admit elucidation is impossible, do you use these tools not to educate but deceive? Would you object to the use of the word "deceive" because "being is an empty fiction," "the 'apparent' world is the only one: the

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[4] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (5); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*NRH*).
[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (476); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*TI*).
[6] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (97).

'true' world is merely added by a lie?" (*TI* 481). Recall Polemarchus' reminder to Socrates: "could you really persuade if we don't listen" (327c3). Nietzsche's account gives us no reason to listen and in fact does the opposite. Therefore, Nietzsche's positive project, like the relativist one that Balkin and Strauss describe, in its desire to express itself with that shared tool that makes sharing possible—language—gasps for its first and last breath simultaneously.

We look then to a moderate form of relativism that Balkin does accept: the treatment of the other with "hermeneutic charity" (*CS* 152). This charity does not mean that if we take enough time to understand other cultures or people we will agree with whatever claims about Truth or Justice they make, but rather that we should treat peoples, cultures, and texts first as if they have "something to teach us" (*CS* 152). The claim differs very little from Strauss' view that we must take a historical rather than historicist approach to our interpretation of classical philosophy. That is we must first seek to understand "the philosophy of the past exactly as that philosophy understood itself" and not "better than it understood itself" by superimposing our own concepts and context upon it.[7]

Approaching culture, peoples, and texts with hermeneutic charity allows us to understand how "transcendent ideals" "spring forth" from the rhetorical situations we encounter when being with others (*CS* 149). The dialogic encounter, no matter our audience, reveals the activity of being social. To exist with others, to use language of any kind in an attempt to communicate, is necessarily an appeal to something shared even if the only texture we can ascribe to it is a "normative order," what for Plato's Socrates is the "*idea* of the good" (*CS* 166) (508e2). This role of language threatened Big Brother, triggering the regime's attention to and domination of

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[7] Leo Strauss, *On Classical Political Philosophy* (99).

language. A chief "purpose of Newspeak was. . . to make all other modes of thought impossible" (*1984* 299).

Thus, by examining the Platonic dialogue, along with help from Strauss, Nietzsche, and Balkin, we have seen the problems inherent to the relativist stance that plagued our inquiry since its first appearance in Big Brother's doctrine and its subsequent charge that everything is propaganda. Though this examination has by no means elucidated what is True or Real, nor delved into metaphysics, we have given a "pragmatic" account of what is required for being with others, for social interaction (*CS* 168). We have seen from the Platonic dialogue not that philosophy can attain its end, defined as the knowledge of the whole, but that the activity of philosophy is possible, and perhaps necessary, because the Nietzschean anti-philosophy suffocates in a singular mind, as it cannot be shared with others. This justification for the philosophic activity makes possible the further pursuit of the two questions that compose the study of propaganda: What is Real? And what is the proper relationship of the individual to society?

Philosophy and Politics

These questions converge during Plato's discussion of political deceit and lies. As Allan Bloom points out, Plato, likely deliberately, arrives at lies and their varying usefulness when he turns to education with Adeimantus, after exposing the nature required of warriors with Glaucon (*Rep* 351). In *Animal Farm* we noticed a similar relationship between deceit—and its utility to a regime—and the education of individuals. This link requires both internal and external consideration, how the deceit affects the society and the individual being deceived.

In this discussion of the warrior's education with Adeimantus, Socrates distinguishes between a "true lie," ignorance in the soul," and "the lie in speeches" (382a5-b9). The distinction

comes with a normative judgment from Socrates that the true lie is and can be seen by "everyone" of a higher order (382b4). Socrates goes so far as to call this true lie the "real lie" that is hated by both gods and men (382c3). In contrast, the "one in speeches" "is a kind of imitation. . . and not quite an unadulterated lie" (382b9-c1). Socrates' subsequent discussion (now with Glaucon) of "imitation" in couch making and poetry reveal, through Socrates' preference test—providing the many options to a fictive man and gauging his answer—that each iteration of an activity, for example the crafting of a couch versus the painting of that instance of creation, brings that activity farther from nature and thus renders it less true and significant (599a-600a, 597d-598a3). This conversation with Glaucon turns to Homer and back to "the education of a human being" (599d1). If Homer were truly capable "not of imitating but of knowing," Socrates says, then surely his deeds, in addition to his stories, would be known and honored (599d2-600c4).

These conversations on imitation inform one another to demonstrate a hierarchy: the conversation with Glaucon reveals the Socratic critique of Homeric poetry (it is far from knowledge, truth, and wisdom) and the exchange with Adeimantus exposes the greater significance and danger of lying to oneself rather than being lied to (602b6, 382b4). Distance from the soul then, like distance from nature, corresponds to a detachment from reality. Plato implies, like Orwell in his discussion of Winston's distinct levels of character, that deep inside the individual exists both the highest possibility of knowing and of ignorance, of education and of deception.

Therefore, the lie of speeches, far from the lies we tell ourselves, is useful in certain circumstances and thereby hated always by gods, but not necessarily humans (382c3). "The demonic and the divine," because they are free from fear, folly, and madness, "are wholly free

from lie": they are "true in deed and speech" (382e6-e9*). On the other hand, humans find use for lying to friends and enemies, particularly when we do not know "the truth about ancient things" (382d2). These cases where lies can be justified share a fact pattern: intersubjectivity. Each, in dealing with interpersonal relations, is inherently moral and political. Socrates distinguishes between the moral-political realm, where justice, not truth is highest, and the philosopher's domain, where truth has no rival. Socrates implies not only that lies have a justified place in social interaction because of human frailty, but also that a fundamental distinction based on a difference in ruling principles (Justice versus Truth) separates the political and philosophical—a grim harbinger of an unsatisfactory and irresolvable tension. It is no coincidence, Strauss recognizes, that what Socrates calls "'the true city' *i.e.* the truthful city" is not a city of men, but pigs (*CM* 99).

The "good city" of men therefore, that which Socrates creates and rules, requires a specific kind of the lie in speech: "the noble lie" (*CM* 102). The noble lie, not just interpersonal, is at the foundation of the political order. Socrates and Glaucon establish this lie, a myth that ferments feelings of kinship to the land upon which the *polis* resides and, by making the society a hierarchical family—and thus creating a natural basis for the unequal distribution of power— diminishes internal strife.

In order to bridge the fracture between the political (that which seeks Justice) and the philosophical (that which seeks Truth), to realize the ideal city, Socrates and his interlocutors must posit an individual—the lawgiver or political philosopher—that can cope with this problem of the highest order. This city alone, in which "political power and philosophy coincide," allows for private and public flourishing (473d2-473e5). But this coincidence, while "not impossible,"

depends on "chance" according to Strauss (499d4).[8] It is a telling irony if Socrates, concerned

with "being rather than. . . opinion" ("coming into being"), asserts that the only resolution of this

aporia is impermanent and lacking internal logic (534a2-c3).

Despite Socrates asserting that it is "not natural that a pilot beg sailors to be ruled by

him" or that a ruler "beg the ruled to be ruled," the metaphor Socrates gives—of the sailors

"quarreling with one another" over who is to rule the ship (while the "true pilot" remains gazing

at the stars)—contradicts this claim, making the philosopher's graceful rise to the helm appear

both improbable and *un*natural (489a1-489c6). Bloom asserts that the conditions for the political

empowerment of the philosopher, the "actualization of the good city," are "somewhat

overstated" in this section (*Rep* 398). Strauss agrees, noting how "strange" it is that Socrates

makes it appear that it is "easier to persuade the multitude to accept the rule of the philosophers

than to persuade the philosophers to rule the multitude" (*CM* 124). Bloom suggests that Socrates

has ulterior motives throughout the creation of this image (*Rep* 398). Socrates "charms"

Adeimantus, sets him out upon his own path of 'philosophizing," and defends philosophy against

the charges levied by various Athenians (*Rep* 400). I synthesize Bloom and Strauss to proceed

one step farther: Socrates makes this claim—that the real difficulty is convincing the pilot to

steer the ship—strategically, to reframe the debate surrounding philosophy. The facts of

Socrates' own trial demonstrate the improbability of the multitude approaching the philosopher

with the gift of political power—after all, Socrates comes to the Athenians with an *apologia*

(defense) not an appeal for power—but nevertheless Socrates claims this improbability is only

half of the challenge, and the easier half at that (539e4). Socrates' strategy, fashioning a natural

ideal directly opposite the actions of Athens (according to him the citizens should be tirelessly

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[8] Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?* (33).

begging, even coercing him to rule, rather than threatening his execution) makes Athenian politics appear ludicrous and guides Adeimantus towards the philosophic life.

We find additional evidence that Socrates' strategic claim, that it is more natural for the pilot to be offered power than beg for it, opposes his real teaching when we examine Socrates' account of regime change. Despite Socrates' teaching "that the end, not the origin, of a thing is its nature," Socrates places the ideal city first rather than last when speaking to Adeimantus, inverting the position the ideal city occupied in Book II (when Socrates and his interlocutors crafted the "city of sows" then a "feverish city" prior to crafting the ideal) and asserting that the development of political society is one of devolution (372d-373a) (*Rep* 416). Socrates now claims that the ideal city comes first, despite it "require[ing] experience" and "the discovery of philosophy," appealing to Glaucon's "prejudice in favor of the ancestral," while simultaneously exposing a regressive view of society (in which what is best deteriorates over time) and reminding readers of the difficulty—if not impossibility—of permanently resolving the tension between politics and philosophy driving the dialogue (*Rep* 416). Socrates frequent demonstration of the difficulty of achieving the coincidence of political power and philosophy, the necessary condition for societal and individual flourishing, undercuts any claim that the true pilot will naturally gravitate towards a position of leadership and therefore that the pursuit of Truth can be permanently and comfortably reconciled in a human political domain ruled by prudential concerns (473d3, 499d4) (*CM* 122). A chief concern stemming from the tension between the political and philosophical life becomes the proper role of the philosopher in politics. As Socrates makes clear to Glaucon, "the having and doing of one's own and what belongs to oneself would be agreed to be justice" (434a1). Justice, not a virtue found within the city, is the well ordering and well functioning of the whole that results when each man does what is natural

for him to do, when wisdom, moderation, and courage are present (441c-e, 443). What then is the philosopher's role in begetting Justice?

Socrates, whether or not he believes in the materialization of the ideal city, intends to posit the philosopher as a leader in order to expose what a city would have to be like for a philosopher to rule and also begin a discussion about the role of the philosopher as we judge real regimes against our ideal. What we seek is a theoretical incarnation of the political philosopher, a theoretical resolution of the tension between ordering a city well (Justice) and finding Truth, which mimics the practical difficulties besetting the realization of the ideal city (441d-e) This understanding, of how a lawgiver committed to truth can be justified in lying, depends on the contrast Socrates makes between lies. Socrates makes this contrast with images of the divided line and the cave. Thus we must examine not only these images, but also Socrates use of images as a tool of education.

Socrates and Images

While Socrates levels significant charges against Homeric poetry—going so far as to advocate its moderate censorship—and speaks of an "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry," both Socrates (in his conversations) and Plato (in his re-presentation of those conversations) demonstrate a fondness for allegories and metaphors (607b5). Nietzsche may rise, showcasing these instances of poetry as exhibits of Socrates' sophistry. But let us examine the declared distinction between the classes of poetry that Socrates critiques and wishes to use, discover if these cases are like and should be treated alike, or if they are marked by a significant difference and Socrates' teaching, advancing more than his self-interest, has value.

Understanding Socrates' charge against Homeric poetry requires us to examine the effects that poetry will have on the ideal city and the reason for these effects. Socrates outlines

these effects to Glaucon and contrasts them with the ideal: "And if you admit the sweetened muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings in your city instead of law and that argument" (607a4-a7). Poetry, Socrates warns, not only cannot be "taken seriously as a serious thing laying hold of truth," it also weakens the "regime" of individuals and therefore—because Socrates posits the nature of individuals is related to the character of the political order— communities (608b1-2). Why is poetry unable to lay hold of truth and tempt men to "neglect justice and the rest of virtue?" (608b7-8).

Bloom argues that Socrates substantive critique of Homeric poetry is not its dependence on imitations or neglect of the practical, but the very aspect that makes it resemble philosophy: the striving to give an account of the whole (*Rep* 429, 430). According to Bloom, it is the manner "in which one finds out about. . . the view of the whole" that is Socrates' true concern, the "real quarrel" between philosophy and Homeric poetry (*Rep* 429*)*. Socrates' critique then is that Homer seeks to deliver an account of the whole without giving "a picture of a universe which makes it possible to comprehend the possibility of wisdom" or an account of the perspective from which the poet can give his impression (*Rep* 430). Homer lacks the self-reflection that Socrates grapples with throughout *The Republic*, a dialogue that, while explicitly aimed at seeking political flourishing, never loses sight of (or ceases to justify) its own existence as a philosophic act (*CM* 127). This lack of self-awareness in Homeric poetry is the basis of Socrates' claim that while the legislator, the artisan of the whole city "treats of happiness," the poet is merely the political founder's imitator (*Rep* 431). While Socrates' political craftsman seeks to understand nature, then use law and convention to promote well-being, the poet remains subservient to "the tastes and passions of [the] audience" and is therefore "a servant of convention" (*Rep* 432). Bloom's account, by explaining the reason the poet's images do not

suffice—Homer's images lack a nook for Homer himself and poetry's success as popular

entertainment falls prey to a similar other-directedness as David Riesman's modern man—

exonerates Socrates from the charge of hypocrisy stemming from his own use of images.

In contrast with the poets, Socrates seeks to use images not to evoke pleasure or pain, but

for the epistemological reason that simply grasping *what is* lies beyond the reach of humans.

Socrates compares himself to geometers who use images they have drawn "for the sake of"

making arguments about squares or circles in the abstract (510d7-8). We previously saw Socrates

both aiming to grasp the nature of human beings and political power by conjuring a particular

image—a captainless ship—to extrapolate a general teaching. Socrates, unlike Homer and with

an air of self-consciousness, explains his use of images, and his epistemological and

metaphysical teaching, by using another image: the divided line (509d7).

The Divided Line and the Cave

Socrates' line is divided first into the "visible" and the "intellected" (509d8-10). The

visible subsection is divided into images (a plant reflected in water) and beings (the material

plant we could touch). The intelligible subsection is also cut into two parts: mathematical

reasoning (reasoning depending upon hypothetical principles) and forms ("that which argument

itself grasps" by examining the nature of principles themselves) (511a1-c2). This image, if

Socrates indeed advances it in earnest, distinguishes (hierarchically) between that which is

gleaned from the senses and that which is grasped by the mind. Not only does the intelligible

slice form intellection while the visible part informs opinion, but the reasoning possessed by the

geometers only amounts to "thought (*dianoia*: discursive reasoning) and not intelligence (*noesis*:

grasp of the whole)" (511c9, 533d1-534c5) (*Rep* 464). The highest segment then has to do not

with change, "coming into being," but with being (534a2). Socrates' forms, principles that make

the material world intelligible, can be grasped only in the minds of men and this grasping can only come as a result of "discussion," "argument without the use of any of the senses" (532a5-6).

Socrates then gives texture and color to his geometric metaphor (the line) by conjuring a vivid and poetic image of a cave occupied by bonded prisoners. These men are deceived (by the cave, a fire that is their only source of light, and puppeteers) into "hold[ing] that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things" (515c2). Glaucon agrees with Socrates that such a man, if he were ripped away from this perspective and taken out of the cave, would be "in pain" and "dazzled" (515c8-9). Though the man would be escaping the deception, and thus "nearer to what *is*," he would suffer and doubt (515d3). The man, harassed by the sun's strength once outside the cave, would first make out shadows and reflections, then the trees and people causing the shadows and reflections; then he would look towards the heavens at night, making out "the stars and the moon," learning their trajectories and relations. Finally the man could look to the sun and conclude that it "is the source of the seasons and the years, and is the steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing" (516b8-c7).

Importantly, Socrates story of the cave does not simply reiterate the divided line, but instead uses the geometric image twice to construct another teaching. The transition of the man leaving the cave to breathe the air of reality is not the moment of ascent from opinion to intellection; rather it is the moment of exit that begins the man's journey on the line. The exit starts with appearances and ascends to directly grasping the sun as the ruling principle that causes and guides everything else that the man encounters (516a-517a). I say the image of the cave employs the divided line twice, once when the man resides inside the cave and once when

he escapes, but it really uses the absence of the image in the former case and its presence in the latter.

The men in the cave are not blind until their escape. All the elements of the divided line exist within the cave: shadows (conflated for beings), the beings that produce the shadows, and the light provided by the fire. But Socrates does not tell of these imprisoned men as either having an ascent or descent to *mis*understanding. Instead their existence is jumbled, unordered, uninformed. They not only lack the clarity to understand that their source of light, the fire, is not really the source of their existence, but that the fire connects their sight and the objects to make their experience possible. With no understanding of causes, the prisoners lack what Socrates gives his audience and Plato gives readers, a concept of the fire as it correlates to the sun (514a3-516c7). The prisoner's chaotic and disordered experience differs from life outside the cave where the man begins to understand causation and render his experiences intelligible.

Therefore, upon exiting the cave, the man leaves not the visible realm for the intelligible, but the unnatural array for the natural divided line. It is telling that the escapee first lays his eyes upon water, organisms, and celestial bodies, not products of convention. The man, after leaving the cave, does not stumble upon a *polis*. The world of convention—of puppet masters and shadows, peers "contest[ing] about the shadows of the just" despite "never [having] seen justice itself"—had mired the man in deceit and unknowing; now he is free to study the nature of natural things.

Crucially, the natural domain, as the metaphor suggests, encompasses convention. Though the distinction between nature and convention presides over the image, the cave exists within the world outside of it. Its imprisoned inhabitants share a world with the escaped and the sun rules over all men regardless of their residence. Recall, "[The sun] is in a certain way the

cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing" (516c1-2). If the man's escape from the cave of convention begins with his first experience of the natural becomings and beings, it ends with an understanding of the ruling principle—the whole—and thus circles back around to an understanding of convention. The cave, through the activity of "the true science," is reconceived in its proper relation to other parts of the same whole (*Rep* 401). Socrates, though he tells of a man that escapes messy convention to nature and subsequently finds truth, again distances himself from the Nietzschean position. All convention is not equal. The problem is not that the cave, the world of convention, is perspectival, that Justice itself does not exist, but rather that the men in the cave "have never seen justice itself" (517e2). The man that leaves the social for nature (and the pursuit of the truth about the natural) arrives at a greater understanding of the social and his own origins. Only this man, who understands the world of convention in its proper relation to the world of nature, would be capable of seeing justice itself.

Thus we have found what we sought, that theoretical incarnation of the political philosopher, the man that had to escape the cave to possess the knowledge required to order it well. And we have also seen the theoretical resolution of the tension between the philosopher's sacred bond to truth and the lawgiver's to justice. As we were reminded from the outset, even intentional dishonesty and duplicitousness are sometimes justified in social interaction (*Rep* 353). What Socrates has given us, with image layered upon image—the true pilot gazing at the stars, the geometrical line conceptually proportioned, the cave in the world—is a frequently deceitful, yet in a sense honest demonstration of the education of an individual. (Socrates remains humble about his own understanding, acknowledges his use of images as tools, and attempts to keep his images "proportion[ate]") (508b13). With irony and taunt, Socrates has seized his interlocutors—who began the dialogue by seizing him with threats of physical force in

the Piraeus, the embodiment of convention—and attempted to drag them from the cave (*Rep* 440).

The lawgiver may be permitted and even required to deceive, but his deception is not akin to the poet's or the puppetmasters'. Instead it is like the constructive deception of the wise educator—Socrates. The noble lie aims to fundamentally persuade citizens by obscuring the truth about the origins of society and the nature of men; it, like Ellul's propaganda, is a mass lie to be widely spread and believed. But the lawgiver's lies, like Socrates' irony, serves not the disseminator but the audience of the falsehood. The noble lie is "need[ed]" by the city and serves the purpose of the city entire, not one section (414b8). Again, the intent of the disseminator becomes crucial when examining our attitudes toward deception. Socrates asks Glaucon to assume the beneficent intent of this lawgiver, but looking at the audience of the deception—it is best if "even the rulers" believe—assuages some of our fears associated with political manipulation (414c1). Bridging the divergent demands of Justice and Truth, at least in theory (in practice we must always doubt both the intent and the reasoning of deceivers) requires understanding deception—in education and politics—in terms of higher and lower truths. Socrates concocts the "well-bred" lie only after exploring with Glaucon the parts of the ideal city and their proper roles (*Rep* 455). The noble lie, though deceitful, seeks to substantiate and instrumentalize what Socrates and Glaucon have discovered about the society, its parts, their functions, and internal harmony, and it does so in service of the truth about what is required not for a proper understanding of history, but the higher truth of what is necessary for individual and societal flourishing. As Bloom writes, Socrates "proceeds a step beyond the earlier recognition that the *idea* of justice transcends any possible city. In turn, the *idea* of justice is only one of many *ideas*, which are treated in the comprehensive study of the good" (*Rep* 401).

What is the value of turning back to Plato's *Republic* for the modern democrat faced with Ellulian pressure: the responsibility to self-govern and the inability to do so effectively? What does the Socratic tradition offer as we optimistically look beyond the totalitarian nightmares of the last century? Socrates' image of the cave functions as a metaphor primarily on two levels. The literal reading, of the man's escape from physical coercion, is explicitly political. The story tells of the freedom gained when the man, released from bondage, is given the opportunity to explore the world. But Socrates, evident by his transition to the cave from the divided line, also has in mind a philosophic reading: the man escapes the ignorance of convention and, in wonder, gains an understanding of the nature of things and himself. A reading of the cave image that seeks to harmonize both of these interpretations may assert that Socrates uses the cave to demonstrate that a form of political freedom, at least the physical freedom to move, explore, think, and learn, is necessary for the good life. Locked in the cave, shackled, shielded from the universe, the man soon to escape is pitied, never blamed, by Socrates and Adeimantus. Though the man seeks to remain in the cave, Socrates presents this inclination as understandable, and Adeimantus agrees. The man's "annoy[ance]" at having been dragged is akin to Socrates' frequent metaphor of a sick man who expresses specific desires, because of the illness, contrary to his best interest (516a1).[9] Neither man is blamed for his desires (they are seen as the desires of his ignorance or illness) nor are moments wasted discussing whether or not these desires can be usurped. The image seems to answer, quite simply, that political freedom (of movement, thought, and association) is *necessary* for the good life that seeks knowledge and practical wisdom. The better question for this interpretation of the cave image, the question posed by this project, is whether these political freedoms are *sufficient* for the good life.

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[9] Plato, *Laches* (192e6); Plato, *Gorgias* (478b11).

To understand Socrates' answer to that question and the reasoning behind it, we must pay greater attention to the philosophic element of Socrates' cave. Bloom seeks to expose the Socratic teaching by contrasting Socrates' account of the cave with Enlightenment thought. Bloom argues that in opposition to what the Enlightenment will propose, Socrates denies that the philosopher can illuminate the cave; "he is a guide, not a torchbearer. . . . The attempt to illuminate the cave is self-defeating: a part of man craves the shadows" (*Rep* 403). Where the Enlightenment "teaches that the cave can be transformed; Socrates teaches that it must be transcended and that this transcendence can be accomplished only by a few" (*Rep* 403). Socrates seems to advocate, according to Bloom, that the only political action the philosopher must take is escape (*Rep* 407). What Bloom calls a "perfect circle"—the philosophers must be compelled to rule, but the people must be persuaded to anoint the philosophers—is a reiteration of the point Socrates makes with the image of the captainless ship: the empowering of the philosopher seems improbable "not [because of] an accidental difficulty of communication, but a "real conflict of interest" (*Rep* 407).

According to Bloom, Socrates asserts throughout the dialogue, by means of the ship and cave imagery, that the philosopher, though he engages in dialectic, is in some regard an anti-social being. Bloom finds further basis for his assertion that the "perfect city is revealed to be a perfect impossibility" and that the philosopher must flee the city by doubting what he sees as Socrates' implication that "philosophers will complete their labors and come to know the *idea* of the good" (*Rep* 409). To Bloom, the philosopher, whose political legitimacy rests on his knowledge of the whole, appears never quite able to grasp his crown. Bloom, pouncing on an opportunity to bludgeon "utopianism" and champion a "moderate" "spirit of reform," argues that Socrates' construction of the impossible city "moderates the moral indignation a man might

experience at the sight of less-than-perfect regimes" (*Rep* 410). Bloom's insights, though immense—especially in light of the horrors of Fascism and Communism—fail to carve a niche for the philosopher within political life.

But just as cities, never being able to realize the *idea* of justice, must exhaustingly inch closer to it, the philosopher, even if unable to obtain the *idea* of the good, must do the same (472a-e). The philosopher, though never attaining his unassailable right to rule (according to the Socratic standard), works toward that right with the city in tow. Though Bloom may assert that the weight of the city only holds the philosopher back on his quest up the divided line, by his own account, "the man [in the cave] is liberated from his bonds not by his own efforts but by a teacher who compels him to turn to the light" (*Rep* 406). If the philosopher is truly to recede into the private sphere, the *polis* lacks its educator and thus the possibility to inch closer to the *idea* of justice. The philosopher's escape dooms the city by entrusting it to the strongest of those who think they know Justice (but do not); and, breeding disorder and civil strife (not to mention imprudent foreign policy), his withdrawal also endangers the philosophic activity that requires leisure. What Bloom's interpretation should suggest but does not is that the philosopher must recognize his limitation of both capturing the *idea* of the good and ruling over the city, but also that he cannot abdicate his responsibility to the *polis* that he too depends on. With this Socratic humility (Socrates never asserts he posses knowledge of the whole), the philosopher re-enters the public sphere modestly, not as the artisan of the city (which in practice Bloom fears for good reason), but as a fallible intellectual leader who constantly engages the city in dialectic. Bloom asserts that "Socrates' political science" shows the "superiority of private life. . . . While the best city exists only in myth, the best man exists actually" (*Rep* 415). But if Bloom maintains that grasping the *idea* of the good is impossible for the philosopher, we must wonder why the

philosopher would be in such a rush. If one cannot capture the *idea* of the good, would it not be a

better life to bring the city along in one's quest for Justice and the Good, rather than submit to a

route that threatens the philosophic activity and so miserably fails the test of generalizability?

The Lie of the Soul and Reconceiving Propaganda

In his "Interpretive Essay," Bloom largely neglects the "true lie" that "all gods and

human beings hate" (382a4-5). It is tempting to argue that this neglect is the result of Bloom's

interpretive tunnel vision. While not contradicting his anti-utopian account, the lie of the soul

adds another dimension to Socrates' teaching. But in fact, Socrates himself has little to say about

this worst kind of lie. What Socrates does propose is that "to lie and to have lied to the soul about

the things that are, and to be unlearned, and to have and hold a lie there is what everyone would

least accept" and "voluntarily wish[ing] to lie about the most sovereign things to what is most

sovereign in [one]self" is what any individual "fears. . . more than anything" (382a7-382b5).

Though Bloom insists that Socrates' anti-utopian demonstration of the impossible ideal city

proves "political idealism is the most destructive of human passions," Socrates suggests

otherwise: self-deception is the tendency we rightly fear most (*Rep* 410).

Unfortunately in an epoch of informational, political, and economic democratization, our

fear of this tendency should only increase. Totalitarian illiberalism often arrives with a

pernicious form of deception, but liberalism, in attempting to shut out other-directed

manipulation by valuing individuals' speech, thought, and right of association, opens the door to

freedom and thus *self*-deception. It may rightly be insisted upon that the freedom to self-deceive

falls under the realm of good problems. A world immune from self-deception is one without any

individual freedoms. Nevertheless, Socrates insists that self-deception bears a shadowy, but

grave danger. Recalling Nietzsche's Last Man, Neil Postman, in *Amusing Ourselves to Death,*

juxtaposes George Orwell and Aldous Huxley to expose a worry that man's fear of self-deception may be subsiding when we need it most:

> What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egotism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy.[10]

But even Huxley could not foresee the scope of the problem. In his 1958 collection of essays, *Brave New World Revisited*, Huxley, quite reductively, contrasts "the totalitarian East" and the "democratic West."[11] Huxley fears that even a "legally free" press may be biased towards the wealthy if costs of production ("wood pulp" and "modern printing machinery") are too high (*BNWR* 35). While Huxley admits that "State ownership and government propaganda" is more "objectionable" than "economic censorship," he finds that both species of propaganda undermine the Jeffersonian ideal that posited ignorance and freedom as mutually exclusive (*BNWR* 34-35). Capitalism allows (if not encourages) major and minor news outlets to be owned by moneyed interests (MSNBC, the FOX news channel, and CNN are all owned by conglomerates or moguls and purchases of newspapers by the mega-rich on both the right and left continues to raise eyebrows.)[12] In fact, in America, charges have been levied that the media is biased in favor of parent corporations and the profit motive, but others attempt to make the case that persistent ideological or racial biases persist in the media. Regardless of the undoubtedly complicated reality of media biases, sources of information are so manifold that we must be skeptical that

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[10] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (xix-xx).
[11] Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (35); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*BNWR*).
[12] Jack Shafer, "If Sheldon Adelson Really Wants to Control the Press, He's 100 Years Too Late."

evaluating bias, quite like labeling propaganda, can become a Rorschach test. It is therefore reasonable that the advent and proliferation of the Internet could be a tool that democratizes the press—a great equalizer that over time acts as a stalwart against the domination of information by any segment of society. However, Huxley astutely observes that the "vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant" preys on our "almost infinite appetite for distractions" (*BNWR* 36). But Huxley, understandably concerned about the influence of the government and the wealthy, did not see that the most effective distractor of man might be himself.

The Internet gives a soapbox to all; it has transformed all content receivers into potential content creators. Balkin recognizes that "culture" is not "top-down" but more like the "network of networks called the Internet, which has no center" (*CS* 93). Culture has always been like the Internet, but the Internet need not be confined to metaphor; it tangibly changes the way information and ideas are distributed, spread, valued, and re-disseminated—the Internet makes culture appear in its own image. Balkin understands that "cultural software is written and rewritten through acts of communication and understanding" and that changes in communication technology alter the environment in which memes compete in their "meme pool" (*CS* 93). Prior to the Internet and mass communication, "each individual [was] a potential source and a potential target of memetic infection" (infection being "ideological effects" that promote "injustice"), but new technologies increase the rate of memetic transmission and "communication continually introduces variation" (*CS* 94, 96). When memes that advocate for the favoring of one segment of society over another (whichever segment that happens to be) thrive and profligate, we can say that propaganda, like information, has become democratized.

But why "propaganda?" Perhaps the concept has suffered from imprecise use and now obscures more than clarifies; if we still cannot retire "propaganda," should we at least harden its edges—fossilize Orwell's totalitarian examples and Huxley's pluto-propaganda? What I have laid out in these pages may be thought not to qualify as propaganda. My concern, propaganda of the self, not that we will self-deceive so much as self-deception will not be feared, may not be so ubiquitous and noxious to rise to such a level of danger. But, Huxley's dystopia aside, the proliferation of communication technologies and information likely signal that we have not seen this phenomenon in its final or maximally dangerous form.

Thus, is the concept worth not only saving but evolving? Does the negative connotation attached to "propaganda" carry a weight (like Nietzsche's vivid critique of democracy or Ellul's sense of dread) that can be repurposed? Reconceiving propaganda to redirect its heft warns us of democracy and distraction in the information age. This reconception furthers Orwell's recognition that modern man finds himself in a foxhole yearning for buttered toast. Our buttered toast is short form journalism, viral videos, and clickbait headlines. This formulation of propaganda, like Ellul's, depends on mass society; it is after all mass society that, by shrinking our world and imposing political consequences on distant groups, decreases our intimacy with issues of concern and brings the confrontation between the political and philosophical into the modern age. The reconception, through a synthesis with Balkin, shares Ellul's consideration of propaganda as a force that persists across regimes—like water in a pipe-maze always able to find an opening—by its attention to multi-directionality that blurs the conventional propagandist-propagandee distinction. We have witnessed the problem of branding propaganda based on the intentions of its disseminator. In this age of mass communication and information let us question whether it is more useful to consider propaganda at its most potent when the intentions of

disseminators are rivaled in importance by the intentions of consumers. Michel de Montaigne writes inspiringly about the possibility of true education and understanding as long as we use reason and are not "corrupted" by "precepts": "it is no more according to Plato, than according to me, since he and I understand and see it the same way."[13] But allow me a dark inversion: *it is no more according to the information's source, than according to me, if I have chosen this information for myself and opened my mind to its infiltration*. Montaigne writes: "Truth and reason are common to everyone, and are no more his who spake them first than his who speaks them after" (*Ed* 111). And I say it must be the same with those ideas that are not wholly true and well reasoned.

This warning has a two-fold purpose. First, it brings a concern regarding self-deception to the fore. Socrates may be wrong that lying to oneself is worse than being lied to by another; it may also be inaccurate "that everyone hates" this lie "most of all" (381b4-5). But deception of any kind, as this study has made clear, must be examined—at least for its content, motive, and consequences—before it can be dismissed. We cannot guard against that which we do not recognize and understand. Second, the warning hopes to consecrate education and courage, to use Benjamin the donkey's tragic error (absconding from politics) to caution the Socratic philosopher, advocate his humble reentry into the public sphere, and encourage the use of his tool, the dialectic, to hunt with others for what is relevant, true, and just, to fight not only political totalitarianism, but a more debasing, if not more illiberal, threat: self-deception in the modern age.

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[13] Michel de Montaigne, *Of the Education of Children* (111); hereafter cited parenthetically as (*Ed*).

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