

TWO *Belief and Consent*

Positive and negative self-interest are clearly powerful factors in fostering consent. Nonetheless, at any given time, it is likely that there will be a number of people who are seriously disaffected with the current structure—most obviously the bottom 20 percent who have almost nothing to lose by change. Given that the middle 60 percent are receiving less than their equitable share, it is likely that their consent will be unstable as well, at least insofar as it arises from rational or calculated self-interest alone. In other words, self-interest may not be adequate to prevent the most miserable from developing significant antipathy toward the current structure, even to the extent of engaging in active resistance. And it is unlikely to foster a deep commitment to the status quo on the part of those in the “middle,” who form the majority of the population and could potentially be radicalized by the actions of the most deprived. It is at this point, of course, that more overt coercion enters. Yet systems that rely too heavily on coercive force are inefficient. They are wasteful of resources, breed popular discontent, and are frequently unstable for that reason. As Laura Anker, Peter Seybold, and Michael Schwartz (1987) argue, “Violence and other means of repression (e.g., court cases, public denunciation, and executive orders) may prove counterproductive, dampening the enthusiasm of, or even alienating, those who would otherwise support” a particular social structure (99). This is where “internal coercion” or “ideology” becomes significant—guiding behavior through shaping ideas, producing consent by structuring thought and feeling.

The most obvious component of ideology is belief. Indeed, in concrete

political analyses, consensual ideology is often treated almost entirely in terms of belief. The first function of ideology, after all, is to foster in people the sense that the current system is right, that it is beneficial, that alternatives are threatening, and so on. In short, it operates to overcome the consensual deficiencies of positive self-interest, without recourse to coercion. This is first of all a matter of belief—if belief that is more intricate, varied, and complex than may at first be obvious.

BELIEFS, SYSTEMS OF BELIEF, PROBLEMATICS, AND FOCALIZATION

Whether people acquiesce or not in a certain social structure is, in large part, dependent on what they believe about that social structure, about themselves, and about the possibility of alternative structures. To a great extent, dominant ideology (ideology that fosters consent to the status quo) is a matter of beliefs that conceal oppression—from the oppressors, the oppressed, and those who fall into neither or both categories—and deny the possibility of an alternative, nonoppressive society.

In addition, consent is crucially dependent not only on what specific views are held to be true but also what views are considered to be possible, what claims might be considered as even potentially true. An ideology that fosters consent, in other words, operates both by encouraging positive beliefs and setting the terms of debate so as to exclude certain sets of possible beliefs from consideration or discussion. The latter is called “establishing the problematic,” the problematic being the range of beliefs that are open to evaluation, debate, and the like.

The Gulf War abounds in examples of both consensual beliefs and problematics. Anyone who had occasion to discuss the war with its enthusiasts came to realize that their support was most often based on extensive erroneous beliefs. A February 1991 study by the Center for Studies in Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst showed that there was “a direct correlation between knowledge and opposition to the war” (Jhally, Lewis, and Morgan 1991, 51); false beliefs systematically correlated with support for the war (that is, systematically produced consent). As the authors noted, “Supporters of the war . . . were more than twice as likely to wrongly assert that Kuwait was a democracy than non-supporters” (ibid.); “While support for the war appear[ed] to be strong, it [was] built upon a body of knowledge that [was] either incorrect or incomplete” (52).

As to the role of the mainstream media in producing error and thereby manufacturing consent, the researchers found a strong positive correlation between viewing television news and holding erroneous beliefs: "Overall, the more TV people watched, the less they knew. The only fact that did not fit in with this pattern was the ability to identify the Patriot missile" (50).

It is important to emphasize that these mistaken beliefs are not isolated but part of *systems of beliefs* that are mutually sustaining and "confirming." For example, common ideas about the Gulf War fit into a system of beliefs concerning U.S. foreign policy in general, past U.S. wars, and so forth.

The Amherst survey gives a striking case of this. Not taking into account the postwar results of the U.S. bombardment, "the figure for Vietnamese casualties [in the Vietnam War] is just under 2 million." Nonetheless, "the median estimate of Vietnamese casualties by respondents in our survey was around 100 thousand, a figure nearly 20 times too small. This is a little like estimating the number of victims of the Nazi holocaust at 300 thousand rather than 6 million" (52). Mistaken beliefs of this sort contribute to the plausibility of a whole series of further beliefs, from the general notion of the humaneness of U.S. war practices to the specific idea that the allies were killing almost no one in the Gulf War bombardments. These and other related beliefs work together, supporting one another in a system, each belief or complex of beliefs rendering all the others more plausible.

A particularly interesting misconception about the Vietnam War concerned the peace movement and Vietnam veterans. It was, of course, the U.S. government that sent troops to Vietnam, exposed them to death or permanent harm from enemy fire as well as U.S. defoliants, and refused to grant them certain medical and other benefits when they returned. It was the peace movement—many members of which were Vietnam veterans—that tried to bring the troops back and thus remove them from danger, that set up counseling and other services for veterans, that worked for Agent Orange related medical benefits, and so on (see, for instance, Lembcke 1991). Nevertheless, it was widely believed during the Gulf War that the peace movement of the 1960s was responsible for the suffering of Vietnam veterans. Thus, it came to be widely believed that protesting the Gulf War was contrary to the interests of the U.S. troops—a view that approaches psychotic delusion, but that was widely held and so quite powerful in effecting consent precisely because it fit into this broader system of belief.

The same points apply equally to racism or sexism. The effects of false

beliefs—such as that women cannot do math, or that blacks are not as intelligent as whites—have obvious consequences that hardly require articulation. They lead, say, to the exclusion of women from mathematics courses (by parental decision, the advice of counselors, the decision of women themselves); they lead to the denigration and undervaluing of blacks.

Problematics are in some ways more subtly pernicious—even when the dominant belief in the problematic is ideologically innocuous. Dan Rather's question, "What should our attitude toward Americans of Arab heritage be?" implicitly includes within the range of possible or debatable opinions the racist idea that Arabs may be treated differently from other Americans and that guilt may be presumed in their case. Although this view came to be rejected in the course of the interview, it was clearly part of the larger debate that this question tacitly sanctioned. Rather's question—in the context of the broader discussion of terrorism—also implicitly excludes from the range of possible opinions the idea that Arab Americans are prime victims of terrorism. In this case, the specific belief affirmed in the course of the discussion—that Arab Americans are not necessarily terrorists—is less important than the problematic defined by the entire interview.

Problematics not only structure and limit general debate on socially consequential issues; they also guide individual thought and inference, even for those who appear to have rejected the relevant biases. Consider, for example, the problematic defining race and intelligence. One accepted position is that blacks are intellectually inferior to whites, and that this is biologically determined. Another is that blacks are inferior, but that it is socially determined. A third is that blacks and whites are equal in intelligence. Suppose Professor Smith, who is white, has decided that blacks and whites are equal in intelligence. He or she has still made that decision within the context of the broadly accepted problematic. Smith has a black, British student named Jones. Smith discovers that Jones responds in an unclear way to readings and class lectures. In addition, Smith finds it hard to understand Jones. Again, Smith does not believe that blacks are in general inferior to whites intellectually. In the context of the socially accepted problematic, however, Smith is likely to interpret this particular case in terms of Jones's intellectual capacities. In contrast, had Jones been white, Smith might have assumed that it was a matter of, say, regional accent,

idiom, and vocabulary. Smith might even have entertained the possibility that the problem was a special intelligence or conceptual complexity on Jones's part. In cases such as this, elements of the consensual problematic provide the set of options within which particular problems are thought through—even when one does not accept those elements self-consciously.

In any discussion of ideology, it is essential to distinguish self-conscious beliefs from what might be called “motivational” ones. Self-conscious beliefs are those that people take themselves to hold on particular issues, that they state when asked, that they admit to themselves. Motivational beliefs are those that actually guide thought and action. Such motivational beliefs may be identical with self-conscious beliefs. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases, they necessarily are. Yet they are different in a surprising number of cases—especially cases of social and political importance. For example, while I may be entirely subjectively certain that I believe women and men are equally intelligent, I may repeatedly treat women as if they were incapable of grasping difficult concepts; I might talk in a patronizing manner, overexplain simple ideas, etc. Here, it is clear that my motivational belief is the opposite of my self-conscious one. My behavior reveals that my motivational belief is that women are less intelligent than men. The case of Smith, just mentioned, is slightly more complex, but follows the same pattern. Specifically, it might be said that Smith's self-conscious belief is compromised by a motivational problematic.

Still broader issues are encompassed by ideological problematics as well. Consider the way in which alternatives to the present social system are conceived. In ordinary parlance, “capitalism” and “democracy” are used as virtual equivalents, and “communism” is treated as a subcategory of “totalitarianism.” Totalitarian communism is fairly consistently presented as the single alternative to “capitalist democracy,” directly or indirectly. The propaganda surrounding the Vietnam War was largely a direct representation of this view, for instance. Once this problematic is established, it becomes difficult even to bring such alternatives as “democratic socialism” into the discussion. Not only are such alternatives left out of official debate; they appear to be largely incomprehensible to the majority of ordinary men and women as well.

More exactly, the standard version of the problematic defining social structure divides social ideals into two broad categories, realistic and utopian, with U.S. capitalism and Soviet communism as the two realistic

poles. Note that this sort of problematic inhibits one's ability to conceive of alternatives to the present system in realistic terms. By reducing realistic alternatives to the single case of the Soviet Union, it renders opposition to the current system undesirable. Complementary to this, it undermines the motivational force of truly worthwhile social alternatives by characterizing them as imaginary and unworkable.

The point can be clarified by drawing a distinction between "utopias" and "visions," the latter being Noam Chomsky's (1995, 70) term for genuinely desirable and possible alternatives to the present society. The purpose of a social vision, in this sense, is to serve as a measure for evaluating the current system and a guide for changing that system. A utopia—in the sense of an unreachable and purely imaginary ideal—can serve neither function. Being unreachable, it cannot guide action; being an impossible ideal, a mere fantasy, it cannot reasonably be employed to evaluate the current system. By characterizing as utopian all alternatives other than the USSR, the dominant problematic regarding social structure effectively excludes any possibility of social vision.

This problematic itself is part of a more general narrowing of the idea of eudaimonia or human flourishing. Consider the operation of religion in this regard. In a famous phrase, Marx referred to it as "the opium of the people" (244). The analogy indicates that religion is a form of distracting pleasure that numbs people to their own oppression. But, perhaps even more important, religion operates to co-opt the vision of eudaimonia, and it does so in the service of the present system. Much as a commercial society fashions people's material demands from the impulses of their legitimate needs, religion (or at least officially dominant religion) forms nonmaterial desires out of people's legitimate aspirations toward eudaimonia. Whether it urges people to seek heaven or nirvana, it turns their sights away from establishing a real eudaimonic society here and now; it encourages them to aim for an ideal life beyond this world or in detachment from it. Indeed, it often does this by fostering social consent in specific and overt ways. To take only one of many possible examples, the role of Christianity in the colonial domination of Africa was, as Walter Rodney (1972) has noted, "primarily to preserve the social relations of colonialism, as an extension of the role it played in preserving the social relations of capitalism in Europe." In order to achieve this end, "the Christian church stressed humility, docility, and acceptance," and "preach[ed]

turning the other cheek in the face of exploitation” so that “everything would be right in the next world” (252–53). Finally, and in some ways most crucial, consent-inducing religion distorts people’s conception of a eudaimonic society, for it encourages them to conceive of eudaimonia as a mystical, posthumous, individual communion with divinity, as an emotive withdrawal from material life, and the like, rather than as a practical community of men and women freely working together in thought and action to achieve justice, prosperity, and beauty in all their lives.

Not all religion is consent inducing, of course. Historically, there are cases of religious movements that push against the status quo. The ideological function of religion, however, is most often consensual. After all, the religious views that receive the support of the powerful in a society—and thus, typically become the dominant ones—will invariably be views that support the position of the powerful. To take one example of this, the connection between social hierarchy and religious belief is particularly well established in regard to racism. C. Daniel Batson and Christopher Burris (1994) point out that there is a “positive correlation between being religious and being [racially] prejudiced” (165), such that “church members tend to be more prejudiced than nonmembers, irrespective of the target of prejudice” (Duckitt 1992, 174–75).

A further aspect of consensual ideology closely related to the establishment of problematics is focalization. Focalization is merely the focusing of attention and discussion on one topic or aspect of a situation. Take, for instance, the British conquest of the Igbo. A primary component of their ideological justification for this concerned the Igbo practice of human sacrifice. But the English defeated the Igbo by mowing them down with automatic weapons, killing far more people than would have been sacrificed had the English never encountered the Igbo. As Elizabeth Isichei (1976) put it, “The wars fought to establish colonial rule in Igboland” were “fought in the name of the abolition of human sacrifice, but no historian will ever be able to count the number of human sacrifices they exacted” (139). The Igbo practice was certainly objectionable. Those who believe it is wrong to kill innocent people certainly agree that the practice should have been stopped. At the same time, those who believe it is wrong to kill innocent people should also agree that the British slaughter of thousands of Igbo was far more wrong, if only because the murder was far more extensive. On this particular issue, the British did not so much rely on false

beliefs (the Igbo did indeed practice human sacrifice) or the establishment of a problematic. Rather, they focused attention on one aspect of the situation, to the exclusion of all others. (Of course, they also relied on beliefs and problematics about other aspects of the conquest of Igboland.)

A less obviously bloody example—but one involving deep human suffering nonetheless—may be found in the recent debates over welfare, which focused almost entirely on the apparently staggering costs of the program and on adult recipients. Yet Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) “cost taxpayers approximately \$14 billion per year during 1995 and 1996—only 1 percent of the federal budget” (Defund Corporate Welfare 1997). Two-thirds of the recipients of AFDC are children. All recipients need the money—in the basic sense of the word “need.” Corporate welfare, in contrast, fell completely outside the debate, though it “totals more than \$167 billion per year” (ibid.)—a dozen times the cost of AFDC. Needless to say, this money does not go to poor children. The focus on AFDC expenditures served to occlude the far more extensive, and incomparably less justifiable, corporate welfare, among other things.

As the preceding examples already indicate, ideologically functional focalization is most often bound up with ideologically functional beliefs, systems of beliefs, and problematics. The debate over affirmative action is one such case. Clearly, this has operated to establish a problematic on minorities, hiring, and education—the limits of debate being confined roughly to whether or not affirmative action has gone too far in advancing minorities. (In fact, affirmative action does not seem to have come at all close to compensating for racism, but this view is excluded from debate a priori.) At the same time, this debate has served to focus attention on minority hirings and admissions to schools. As such, it has tended to focus white people’s blame for problems associated with work or education (for example, unemployment) on those minority hirings and admissions, often with serious practical consequences.

Consider the famous case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (438 U.S. 265, 98 S. Ct. 2733, 56 L.Ed.2d 750 [1978]). Bakke had applied for admission to the Medical School at the University of California at Davis. He was denied admission, despite such qualifications as high test scores and grades. His claim in the suit was that his rejection was an instance of reverse discrimination because 16 of 100 places in the class were set aside for minorities. Bakke did indeed have better scores than the average stu-

dent awarded one of these 16 reserved places. But he also had better scores than the average student admitted by the regular admissions procedures. This fact, however, went undiscussed. The entire debate around the case centered on the minority spots, ignoring the places occupied by the many white students whose scores were inferior to Bakke's. Put differently, Bakke's suit maintained that Bakke should have been admitted over the minority admittees due to his credentials. It entirely left aside the fact that his qualifications put him above a much larger number of white admittees. Specifically, in 1974, Bakke's academic qualifications "were superior to at least 42 regular admittees, but he sued the university on the grounds that his qualifications were superior to those of 16 minority admittees" (Hogan 1998, 234). Though it may not be obvious at first, this exclusive attention to the minority slots is quite similar to the British focus on human sacrifice among the Igbo.

Problems with the Bakke case are, no doubt, not only a matter of focalization. Clearly, the biased interpretation of the data—or ignoring of the data in favor of a prior conclusion—was bound up with racism as well, if not on Bakke's part, then on the part of the larger society that was much more likely to give credence to a complaint of reverse discrimination than to one of censorship. (Bakke's rejection seems to have partly resulted from political disagreements with the chair of the admissions committee, and in that sense, seems to have involved genuine free speech issues.) On the other hand, focalization is crucial to this case and many like it.

Indeed, even the narrow attention to "qualifications" is itself partially an ideological focalization. Do higher grades and SAT scores necessarily indicate that someone is a superior candidate for medical school? First of all, there is the issue of the degree to which grades and SAT scores might be biased. It seems immediately clear that there is at least some bias in the verbal component of these tests—given differences between black and white forms of English. But that is hardly the whole of it. There is considerable evidence that even in such supposedly "pure" cases of logical inference as mathematics, people do not rely on rules of logic but on "pragmatic reasoning schemas" drawn from their own experience (see, for example, Holland et al. 1987, 277–79). Odd as it may seem, individuals are better able to solve problems if they concern familiar topics than unfamiliar ones, even though the topic is irrelevant to the logic of the problem. If I

bake, but do not row, then I will be better able to solve a mathematical problem about baking than rowing. This is another likely source of bias in such tests, given that different racial groups often have systematically different types of experience in this country.

Second, and perhaps more important, the purpose of training doctors is, one assumes, to advance the medical care of the entire population. Insofar as black doctors are more likely to treat black patients, and less likely to do so in a racist way, there is a social need for increasing the number of black doctors. Penda Hair (1996) observes that “highly respected studies show that minority physicians are much more likely to treat poor and minority patients whose medical needs are not being met by the existing crop of doctors” (12; Hair goes on to note that “the same public benefit probably also flows from diversity in law schools and other fields of study”). Tom Hayden and Connie Rice (1995) actually followed up the Bakke case in this regard. They report that Bakke “ended up with a part-time anesthesiology practice in Rochester, Minnesota.” They contrast him with “Dr. Patrick Chavis, the African-American who allegedly ‘took Bakke’s place’ in medical school” and who now “has a huge OB/GYN practice providing primary care to poor women in predominantly minority Compton.” They ask, “Bakke’s scores were higher, but who made the most of his medical school education? From whom did California taxpayers benefit more?” (266). The focalization on merit, defined unreflectively in terms of grades and test scores, leaves such issues as these out of consideration as well.

MEANS OF ESTABLISHING CONSENSUAL IDEOLOGY

Before turning to some further categories of belief that have a special ideological function, it is worth considering for a moment just how ideological beliefs, systems of beliefs, problematics, and focalizations are defined and disseminated.

The primary way in which ideologically functional beliefs are disseminated is pretty obvious: through false statements that foster consent and the concomitant suppression of true statements that are damaging to the dominant system of ideas. The most blatant case of this is censorship, one intersection of ideology with coercion. This may appear to have no relevance in the United States, yet that is untrue. For example, it is well known

that U.S. newsmedia in Saudi Arabia were subject to rigorous censorship during the Gulf War (see, for instance, Full-Court Press 1991). According to an article in *Extra!* (Spin Control 1991), “Reporters who tried to cover the war outside the Pentagon’s press pools were sometimes detained and threatened by U.S. soldiers. Marines held a wire service photographer for six hours, threatening to shoot him if he left his car—‘We have orders from above to make this pool system work,’ they told him. A French TV crew was forced at gunpoint to turn over to Marines footage of soldiers wounded at the battle of Khafji.” Moreover, censorship was not always governmental. “When Jon Alpert, a stringer for NBC news for 12 years, came back from Iraq with spectacular videotape of Basra and other areas of Iraq devastated by U.S. bombing, NBC president Michael Gartner not only ordered that the footage not be aired, but forbade Alpert from working for the network in the future” (Casualties at Home 1991, 15).

Wars, of course, are unusual and intrinsically newsworthy events. If one’s country is at war, it is almost certain to be a major topic of reporting. Thus, something along the lines of censorship is required if unsavory facts threaten the official picture. The situation is somewhat different with respect to events or conditions that might be considered less obviously newsworthy. In these cases, the “wrong” sorts of story are usually not pursued from the outset, though when they are, censorship may result. For example, “the dangers of fiberglass—currently in 90 percent of American homes—as a possible cause of lung cancer” is one of those conditions that is not likely to be a focus of media attention. It happened that ABC’s *20/20* did undertake an investigation. The network, however, “bowed to the \$2 billion-a-year fiberglass industry and yanked the story” (Douglas 1996, 17).

But again, most stories of this sort do not require censorship, as they simply never arise. John McManus (1994) notes that “organizational culture normally steers reporters away from sensitive topics before a confrontation point by defining response to certain public information needs as beyond the resources the firm is willing to commit to news, or outside the proper purview of news” (26). Indeed, much of the exclusion is even more mechanical than this implies. There are vast areas of socially consequential events and conditions that are removed from coverage structurally, by the organization of the media—where reporters are sent, how papers or broadcasts are organized, and so on. Once the structure is established, it tends to be self-perpetuating.

Consider local television news. Susan Douglas (1997b) points out that according to one study (which looked at Detroit), “only 2 percent of the local news focused on the government and politics—that translates into eighteen seconds! There was zero coverage of poverty, education, race relations, environmental problems, science, or international affairs during the two months of the study.” She adds that “watching the local news . . . you would never know there was a state legislature, a state court system, or a governor”; in contrast, over 50 percent “of nightly news stories [are] devoted to crime and disasters” (ibid.) This is of particular import at the present time because of the devolution of responsibility for public programs, such as welfare, to state government. Again, it does not appear to be a matter of overt censorship but rather a function of the organization of the news itself—the structure of topics, the placing of reporters, etc.

Discussing local television news, McManus (1994) remarks that “most commercial stations purchase research on how to select, gather, and report news profitably from a relatively small number of news consulting firms,” all of which give similar advice. One result of this is the establishment of common procedures, and hence common exclusions, across stations. More exactly, McManus divides local television news production into three stages: “uncovering potentially newsworthy issues and events”; “choosing among those events and issues”; and “reporting the story” (88–89). The bulk of news “discovery” (stage 1) is “passive.” Television stations find their stories in “local and regional newspapers or wire services or in press releases,” in part because this is much less expensive than hiring a lot of reporters (96), and the reporters they do hire are overworked. At one station, “no reporter said he or she could spend more than a few minutes a day looking for newsworthy events” (100). As such, one-quarter of the stories at this station “were submitted by public relations agents” (100). Others came from routine “morning phone calls to police and fire dispatchers” (101). At other stations, too, reporters “tended to rely on public relations officers and top bureaucrats to warn them about news even though they acknowledged that such officials are unlikely to call public attention to controversies that might show their agency in a negative light” (104–5). The result is obvious: “Passive discovery tends to surrender control over the public information stream to powerful interests in government, large corporations, and among the wealthy” (107), thereby producing news that tends to disseminate consensual beliefs only. When the news

is itself provided by business and government, censorship and other forms of self-conscious manipulation are unnecessary for the preservation of dominant ideology.

This sort of structural limitation or exclusion is by no means confined to the news media. It is found, for example, in university English departments, where until recently almost all the authors taught were white and male. This was not because department heads set out to censor women and nonwhite authors, to prevent instructors from teaching these works. Though such censorship no doubt occurred at times (and various sorts of pressure just short of censorship happened with more frequency), the primary reason for the exclusion of women and nonwhites was a matter of the organization of the profession. The listing of courses in catalogs rarely if ever included Africa, India, or the Caribbean, though each region has many anglophone writers. The catalog descriptions of the courses rarely mentioned women's names, though they typically mandated the teaching of a number of male authors. The anthologies available for courses rarely included works by women or nonwhites, and so on.

Again, this sort of structural exclusion tends to be self-perpetuating. Consider literary theory. There were important traditions of literary theory in India, China, Japan, and the Arab world, but these are entirely absent from courses in literary theory. One reason for this is that the texts are not readily available, and not available at all in textbook form. In response to this problem, I tried to convince several publishers to print a collection of non-Western literary theory. Every one of these publishers turned down the project on the grounds that non-Western theory is not taught, so there is no market. In other words, it cannot be taught, at least in part, because there is no textbook. But no one is willing to publish a textbook, in part because it is not taught. There may have been an element of censorship—or of censorshiplike motivation—in the publishers' immediate refusal of the project (that is, there seems to have been more to it than a mere marketing decision), yet it was not merely censorship either. There was a structure in place that tended toward self-perpetuation, independent of the precise nature of alternatives—alternatives that were, then, systemically excluded from consideration.

Beyond lies, censorship, and structural exclusion, obfuscation and certain sorts of metaphorical indirection are also common. Most often, these serve to obscure significant but unpalatable facts. They may also operate to

imply false statements. Examples from the Gulf War are legion. As Colin McEnroe (1991) observed, in Pentagon newspeak, “bombing a target” became “acquiring an asset,” dead civilians were subsumed under the vaguer category “collateral damage,” the killing or wounding of 100,000 Iraqi soldiers became “the degradation of Iraqi military capability by 15 to 20 percent,” and so forth. At best, a phrase such as “collateral damage” conceals civilian casualties. At worst, it implies that there were no civilian casualties. One is inclined to feel, after all, that if they meant that civilians were killed, surely they would have said so; since they didn’t say that civilians were killed, they must have meant something else. They must have meant that property was damaged—the sort of thing that stands as collateral for a bank loan. They couldn’t possibly be referring to people with the term.

The same holds true with metaphors. When George Bush said that the United States must “push Saddam Hussein back” (quoted in Lakoff 1991b), he was employing pushing a single human being as a metaphor for a military attack on an army of hundreds of thousands, and as it turned out, tens of thousands of civilians as well. At best, this metaphor occluded the real destruction of the war. While it was unlikely to foster a self-conscious belief that there had been no such destruction, it encouraged people to imagine the conflict in benign terms. Indeed, this reduction of war to a nonlethal personal struggle was common to a wide range of metaphors regularly used by politicians and journalists. As Jim Naureckas (1991) explained, “Journalists constantly asked, ‘How long will it take to defeat Saddam Hussein?’ or ‘How badly are we hurting him?’ as if wars are fought against single individuals, rather than nations. . . . ABC’s Ann Compton continued the fiction that the war targeted a single person: ‘If Iraq does use chemical weapons [against rebels], it will bring more air attacks down on Saddam Hussein’s head” (3).

Many of the same practices that operate to determine specific beliefs may function to establish problematics. The most obvious way in which limits of belief are established is through not reporting alternative views. Some views simply get little or no exposure. This has been facilitated in recent years by changes in the laws governing broadcast media. “Until recently, a policy critic who was denied access to the airwaves could appeal to the Federal Communication Commission on the basis of the Fairness Doctrine, which instructed broadcasters to air diverse views on controversial

issues,” says Robert Krinsky (1991). “But a Reagan/Bush FCC bent on deregulation suspended the doctrine in 1987.”

Though the establishment of a problematic is usually an informal and cumulative process, sometimes the limits of discussion are marked explicitly. Fouad Ajami, who served as a political commentator for CBS, claimed that in the media’s coverage of the war, “everyone is being heard: the people who favor this war, the people who think it’s a just war are being heard; the people who think it is just barely a just war are being heard; the people who believe Saddam is a hero are getting their airtime from Amman and from the West Bank and so on” (quoted in Naureckas 1991, 4). According to Ajami, there were three possible positions on the war: the allied attack on Iraq was extremely just; the allied attack on Iraq was just, but barely; or Saddam Hussein’s attack on Kuwait was just. Thus, the only alternative to supporting the allied bombardment was backing Hussein’s aggression. The implication is, if one doesn’t support Hussein’s attack on Kuwait, then logically one must uphold the allied attack on Iraq. The positions of virtually every member of the peace movement were simply excluded. (Note how this is directly parallel to the exclusion of, say, democratic socialism from the range of alternatives to the present social system. In each case, a clearly objectionable system is established as the only realistic option to the status quo.)

Examples of the same sort may be found in most of the numerous polls conducted during the war. As one Gallup poll asked in February 1991, “Do you think U.S. and allied forces should begin a ground attack soon to drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait—or should we hold off for now and continue to rely on air power to do the job?” (The Polling Game 1991, 11). A ceasefire and negotiations simply were not possibilities according to the problematic defined by this question. Rather, there were two options: ground war or aerial bombardment. Whichever position one might take on this issue, one necessarily consents to the war.

Ellipsis, discourse emphasis, and repetition are the standard modes of producing consent-fostering focalization. As to ellipsis, when Bush denounced the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, he did not mention the far worse occupations and annexations that had occurred earlier in the region and elsewhere. For instance, he ignored the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, Moroccan annexation of the western Sahara, Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus, and Indonesian annexation of East Timor. Neither did

the mainstream media cite these cases. The focus of discussion was placed entirely on Iraq. Moreover, here as elsewhere, focalization is bound up with the generation of beliefs. When no comparable cases are mentioned, one's tendency is to assume that none exist, that the annexation of Kuwait was unique and uniquely brutal. In fact, Iraq killed some 700 people when it invaded Kuwait; Israel killed some 20,000 people in southern Lebanon—and received \$25 billion in U.S. aid in the next nine years; and Indonesia committed virtual genocide in East Timor, killing 100,000 people, mostly with U.S. weapons (see Media 1991).

By discourse emphasis, I mean the placement of stories, analyses, reports, or crucial information within stories, and so on, such as to draw or divert attentional focus. For example, the day after the 26 January march on Washington in 1991, the *Hartford Courant* ran a front-page story on Hartford Whalers fans waving U.S. flags at a hockey match and included on the same page a large color photo of a "Support the Troops" rally. The brief story on the antiwar march was relegated to page 11. In this case, focalization did not operate to draw scrutiny and criticism but rather to divert attention from criticisms of the war that might encourage scrutiny of U.S. actions and to stress popular support for the war. Note that focalization has this function, independent of the editors' motives. The editors may have been indifferent to popular enthusiasm for the war, wishing merely to avoid criticism from prowar groups. The result is the same. On the other hand, many cases of this sort are entirely self-conscious, as when a company with a poor record of hiring and promoting women or minorities makes a woman or minority executive its official spokesperson to the media.

A technique related to discourse emphasis is repetition: the amount of time or space devoted to one or another topic or claim. While advocates of the war were regularly consulted, interviewed, and quoted, "only about 1.5 percent of network sources were protesters, about the same number as sources asked about how the war had affected their travel plans" (Nau-reckas 1991, 5). This has much the same focalizing effect as the large, front-page picture of a prowar rally and the minimal, page 11 coverage of the antiwar rally, and serves much the same function. Similarly, a Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) survey showed that the four Israelis killed by Iraqi missiles were given more than three times the media attention accorded the thousands of Iraqi civilians killed by the U.S. bombard-

ment (see Naureckas 1991, 7–8). This clearly focalizes attention on Iraqi crimes, much like the English stress on human sacrifice among the Igbo.

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS, CONFIRMATORY BIAS, AND ANCHORING EFFECT

Unsurprisingly, not all ideological beliefs are equally consequential for the development of consent. Perhaps the most ideologically crucial beliefs are those acquired in childhood. Whether they concern the alleged benevolence of U.S. foreign policy, the supposed rationality of males and nurturance of females, the putative inferiority of nonwhites, or the purported identity of personal freedom and market freedom, the consent of adults is to a great extent built on the beliefs learned as children.

More generally, some beliefs are “fundamental” in that they play a definitive and continuing role in the development of a wide range of more “local” beliefs. Most often acquired in childhood, fundamental beliefs are tenacious almost to the point of being ineradicable. They distort people’s perceptions and even their memories, reforming individuals’ experience in their image. For many years, cognitive scientists have been aware of a broad human tendency to reinterpret experience in conformity with basic beliefs; this is sometimes referred to as “confirmatory bias.” This is, in the first place, a universal human tendency spontaneously to class as confirmatory all data that fit one’s beliefs, while spontaneously classing disconfirmatory data as “exceptions” (see, for example, Mynatt, Doherty, and Tweney 1977; Mahoney 1977, 161–62; and Nisbett and Ross 1980, 238–42). When one meets an irrational woman or unnurturant man, the tendency is to take these as proof of the stereotypes; when one meets a woman who is lucid and careful in her reasoning or a humanitarian man, the tendency is to class these as exceptions, not as evidence against the stereotype. The same tendency is clear in relation to U.S. foreign policy, racism, and so on.

More generally, confirmatory bias involves the confirmatory reconstrual of neutral—or even *prima facie* disconfirming—evidence. As Steven Neuberg (1994) points out, “Numerous studies indicate that identical behavior is often perceived differently, depending on the target’s group membership; these biases in impressions are often in the direction of confirming the perceiver’s stereotype-based expectancies” (107). Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross (1980) give the following example: “The adult black, observed sitting on a park bench at 3 p.m. on a Wednesday might be coded as

unemployed, lazy, and probably on welfare, whereas a white observed in similar circumstances would more likely be given the 'benefit of the doubt'; that is, to be coded as enjoying a day off, relaxing before beginning work on the night shift, or even as being the innocent victim of recession layoffs" (240). In one study, groups were presented with sketches of children engaged in different activities. If the child "was black, his [sic] behavior was judged to be more mean and threatening, and less playful and friendly, than if [he] was white." In short, "the same behavioral act was interpreted differently depending on the race of the person who performed it" (Hamilton and Trolie 1986, 143).

This is not all there is to it. Confirmatory bias is so strong that people tend actually to misperceive or misremember particulars if they conflict with strongly held beliefs. Neuberg (1994) notes that "under some circumstances, targets are viewed in an expectancy-consistent manner even when their behavior is objectively inconsistent with the perceivers' expectancies" (107). In one study, for instance, white television viewers "watched a newscast that showed no photo of a suspect." Afterward, "40 percent believed they saw an African American perpetrator" (Douglas 1997b, 19). Worse still, in one famous study, a number of subjects were shown a picture of a group of people in a subway. A white person held a weapon. When asked afterward who was holding the weapon, many of the subjects identified a black as the malefactor (see Loftus 1980, 39), their perception or memory completely twisted by racist beliefs. Indeed, even when an experience is accurately articulated immediately after it has occurred, people have a tendency to misremember it later on, distorting it in memory to conform to their fundamental beliefs (this has been demonstrated in a number of nonpolitical—specifically scientific—contexts [see White 1992, 156, including citations]).

Nisbett and Ross (1980) explain that in general, "perception of covariation in the social domain"—for example, the perception that blacks are lazy—is most often "a function of preexisting theories," including stereotypes (111). They stress that cognitive tendencies such as this are behaviorally consequential. Indeed, people's behavior "sometimes amplifies" these sorts of judgmental errors (11). In my terms, they not only give rise to motivational beliefs but motivational beliefs that appear to be even more absolute than the correlated self-conscious ones. A biased inference that "many" blacks are lazy, for example, may give rise to behavior that tacitly presupposes *most or nearly all* blacks are lazy.

It may seem that there is a simple solution to this problem: disseminate the facts. But there are several problems with this. First of all, it is difficult to disseminate nonstandard views at all—for the process of dissemination itself is pervaded by confirmatory bias. As Mahoney (1977) has demonstrated, even in science, it is extremely difficult to publish material that does not fit standard opinions. In one study, Mahoney wrote up two different versions of a psychology experiment. The data in the first version were strongly confirmatory of accepted opinion. In the second version, Mahoney merely reversed the data tables so that they were strongly disconfirmatory of accepted opinion. By intellectual criteria, the second version should have been far more valuable, and thus, far more likely to be published. But, in fact, the opposite occurred—the first version was significantly more likely to be published. Largely because of confirmatory bias, this (intellectually less valuable) confirmatory version was evaluated far more favorably than the (methodologically identical) disconfirmatory version. (For other problems with peer review, see Horrobin 1982; for related problems in the conduct of research, see Faust 1984, 89–92, 99.)

Another significant difficulty with “disseminating the facts” as a solution to confirmatory and related biases results from the nature of fundamental beliefs. Even when people come to accept new beliefs, they do not, most often, abandon their fundamental ones. Rather, they accept and apply the new beliefs in narrow contexts, often through self-conscious decision, while generally living their lives on the basis of the fundamental beliefs.

Contrary to what one might assume, everyone holds contradictory beliefs. And they hold them about a wide range of things—almost everything, in fact. People are not paralyzed by this only because the beliefs have different degrees of saliency and/or motivational force. Frequently, that difference in saliency or motivational force is a function of context. One belief is more salient in one context; another belief is more salient in another context. In the case at hand, the fundamental belief could be conceived of as the default belief, the belief held in general. The new belief comes into play—that is, achieves predominance in saliency or force—only when triggered by particular contextual features. In all other contexts, individuals operate unselfconsciously on the basis of the fundamental (default) belief.

This phenomenon is well established in the area of scientific belief. As a number of researchers have demonstrated, even for advanced students in

natural science, “all that straightforward instruction does is place a veneer of scientists’ views over the strongly held unscientific beliefs” (White 1992, 155). For example, most people grow to maturity with fundamental beliefs about the physical world that are roughly Aristotelian. In studying physics, people may come to internalize Newtonian or Einsteinian beliefs. They may be able to act on these beliefs, reason via these beliefs, and the like, when they are taking a physics exam or are doing research in physics. But even those who go on to do advanced work in physics rarely substitute the Newtonian or Einsteinian beliefs for the Aristotelian ones. The Aristotelian ones remain fundamental, guiding thought and action in most of life, while the Newtonian or Einsteinian views are “triggered” only by such contexts as that of research or test taking. As Holland et al. (1987) explain, “Strong rules [ideas, beliefs] learned in childhood will not be forgotten or replaced by subsequent learning. Instead, such rules will remain in the system, to be called up when later circumstances resemble those under which the rules were first learned” (354), which is to say, in this case, the circumstances of ordinary life—in contrast to the far more limited context of the classroom or laboratory. Moreover, at any time, the presuppositions of the former may spill over into the latter, leading, for instance, to errors in exams, or even in the design and interpretation of research. In sum, “people reliably distort the new [ideas or beliefs] in the direction of the old ones, or ignore them altogether except in highly specific domains” (206).

Clearly, the discrepancy between fundamental and contextual beliefs is highly consequential outside of academic science. It is no doubt one cause of such phenomena as the U.S. populace’s contradictory tendency to assert that politicians are all corrupt and dishonest, and at the same time, to accept unquestioningly much of what politicians actually say. It can be seen in the conformist behavior of rebels, the racist actions (and even remarks) of “antiracists,” and so forth. Along with self-interest, it is no doubt one of the reasons for the common tendency of revolutionaries to slip into conformity. In each case, there seems to be a strong, consensual, fundamental belief operating in contradiction with a more recently acquired, nonconsensual belief, with the former asserting itself outside of special contexts or at times when one’s self-conscious vigilance flags.

Finally, a broad cognitive tendency related to both confirmatory bias and fundamental belief is what cognitive psychologists refer to as the “anchoring effect.” The anchoring effect is the expression of a general human

tendency to moderate one's inferences, ideas, and such by reference to preceding instances of the same general type. It is, in effect, a principle of cognitive conformism, whereby any relevant idea or action will serve to anchor subsequent ideas or actions of the same sort. Suppose five people are asked to estimate the price of a car. The first person's estimate will serve to anchor all the others in that it will provide a sort of base from which they will operate. Put differently, whatever their initial impulse might be, they will readjust their estimate to bring it more in line with the first one.

This sounds reasonable enough when it is a question of pricing an automobile. But this tendency extends to all areas and is entirely automatic. In one study, people were asked to estimate various percentages, such as the percentage of African countries in the United Nations. Before giving their answers, they watched their questioner spin a wheel marked with numbers from 1 to 100. After the wheel stopped, the test subjects were asked to give their estimates. Despite the fact that the number shown on the wheel was generated entirely at random, it still had the effect of anchoring estimates. When the number on the wheel was higher, the subjects' estimates were higher; when it was lower, theirs were lower, too (Tversky and Kahneman 1977, 335–36). The same holds for any sort of evaluation, approximation, or inference. If five people are on a committee, evaluating a grant proposal or tenure candidate, the first opinion uttered is likely to serve as a base for subsequent deliberation.

When transferred to politically significant concerns, it should be immediately apparent that the consequences of the anchoring effect will almost invariably be consensual. In effect, dominant ideology always has the first word, and so, establishes a basis for other opinions. This is not true in some mystical sense but quite concretely. The U.S. government is likely to give the first word on any policy of national or international note. That first word will be broadcast throughout the nation, even the world, making it the base for almost everyone's understanding of the policy in question. When the U.S. government said that the only possible response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was military punishment, this served to anchor all subsequent responses, even for the Left. Prior to the government's statement, the Left's response might have been something like "Let's just not bother about Iraq/Kuwait, and instead concentrate our energies on, say, East Timor, Lebanon, or the western Sahara." But after the government

pronouncement, even the Left shifted to advocating a boycott. (I am not saying that the Left was wrong, just that it probably would not have even considered a boycott had it not been for the anchoring effect of the U.S. government position.)

The same point holds in the debate over welfare. When prominent Republican senators or representatives followed Ronald Reagan in insisting that welfare enriches a profligate group of lazy and shiftless men and women, this anchored subsequent debate in obvious ways. More concretely, consider the debate in California over benefits. Governor Pete Wilson articulated a particularly harsh plan, eliminating benefits after one year, reducing them after six months, and more. As one writer put it, “Wilson no doubt staked out such an extreme position on welfare so that any eventual compromise would seem moderate by comparison” (Wilson’s *War* 1997, 11). Whether Wilson set out with this intention or not (perhaps he genuinely advocated the extreme measures he proposed), his statement had the anchoring effect one would expect. Here, it combined with federal law to define a problematic. An editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* maintained that the true path to so-called welfare reform lay “between Wilson’s mean-spirited approach and the Democrats’ overly lenient path”—this “overly lenient path” being “Sen. Diane Watson’s proposed legislation allowing recipients to receive benefits for the full five years allowed under federal law” (quoted in *ibid.*). The anchoring effect of Wilson’s proposal was strong enough to exclude any option to the left of federal law, and thus, any debate over federal welfare policy—other than debate over whether it was overly lenient. By way of contrast, consider how different the debate would have been had it begun with the assertion that inflexible mandates of this sort will deepen poverty, extend unemployment, and harm everyone, and that people should therefore look for legal ways to extend support beyond five years as needed.

INHIBITORY METABELIEFS: IDEOLOGICAL SELF-CRITICISM AND DESPAIR

As several of the preceding examples indicate, consent on a given issue is affected by many beliefs that do not directly concern that issue *per se*. Popular consent to the Gulf War was, in part, based on beliefs about the Vietnam War and U.S. foreign policy in general. Other types of indirect belief are crucial also—as we shall discuss in the next section, part of

popular consent to the Gulf War was based on beliefs about expertise. One belief of particular importance for consent in a wide range of cases is that one is alone or nearly alone in questioning standard views. As Noam Chomsky (1991) has argued, "If you take particular programs like armaments or cutting back on social spending and so on, almost every one of them was unpopular." Nevertheless, "people who answered in polls 'I'd prefer social spending to military spending'—as people overwhelming did—assumed that they were the only people with that crazy idea in their heads because they never heard it anywhere else." As a result, they "feel like an oddity" (ibid.). The consensual effects of this are clear. It is difficult to maintain confidence in one's own judgment when absolutely everyone else appears to have come to precisely the opposite conclusion.

Returning to the Gulf War, while there was not widespread opposition to it, there was far more significant opposition than was reported in the mainstream media. People who might have questioned the justification of the war were strongly discouraged from doing so by the portrayal of protesters as a tiny, fringe element. Minor examples could be seen in various reports on local antiwar rallies. A striking case may be found in the *New York Times* report on the national antiwar rally in Washington on 19 January 1991. This article numbered the crowd at 15,000—10,000 fewer than the police count of 25,000, and 60,000 fewer than the organizers' count of 75,000 (see *Anti-Anti-War Coverage* 1991, 19). Worse still, "in the first five months of the Gulf crisis, only about one percent of the coverage on the three nightly network news programs dealt, even tangentially, with popular opposition to Bush administration policy" (ibid.). According to *Los Angeles Times* television critic Howard Rosenberg, the ABC affiliate in Los Angeles unofficially banned coverage of peace demonstrations (*Cleared by Self-Censors?* 1994). There was a similar misrepresentation of the international scene, with little attention paid to the ways in which members of the UN Security Council were manipulated and even bribed into supporting belligerence (see, for example, Weir 1991, 15).

In such circumstances, it is unsurprising that most people found the justice of the war unquestionable. People were not necessarily simply being conformist; here as elsewhere, that was an important factor, but that was not all there was to it. Even independent-minded people are and should be inclined to criticize the conclusions of their own thought. The fact that everyone else has come to a different conclusion is often good reason to

think that one is wrong. If someone had a momentary hesitation, a question about the justice of the war, and then saw that many people felt the same way, he or she might develop a fully critical attitude because his or her initial hesitation or question would appear reasonable. Yet when virtually everyone else seemed to find the justice of the war beyond doubt, such a person was likely to assume that his or her hesitation or question was misplaced. If one works an algebra problem and comes up with one answer, but the teacher and all the other students come up with another result, it is not merely sheepishly conformist to assume that one is wrong; it is reasonable self-criticism.

This ideological self-criticism may be understood as a sort of “inhibitory metabelief”: a belief that may or may not undermine one’s dissident beliefs but that in any case inhibits one’s full commitment to, development of, and action on those beliefs. A second inhibitory metabelief that is particularly crucial for consensual ideology is aimed not at oneself and the validity of one’s own beliefs but at the social world and the possibility of implementing one’s beliefs. Even when one does not accept the problematic that categorizes as utopian all superior alternatives to the current social structure, one may easily come to believe that changing the current structure is impossible in practice. In other words, one might in principle accept that a better society could exist, that it is not somehow excluded as a result of, say, human nature. Still, one might be unable to see any practical activity that will help to move society in that direction. One may succumb to a sort of political despair, a feeling that political action is simply hopeless given the current circumstances. Despair is probably most common among those who strongly feel the need for social change—most obviously, those who are particularly brutalized by the system (for example, the most immiserated 20 percent)—but who also feel entirely alone, unconnected with others who share their views and commitments. Such despair is a recurring theme in the literature of European colonies: for instance, in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe’s Okonkwo commits suicide when he sees no hope for the Igbo in resisting complete subordination to the British, when he looks about his society and finds no one but himself with the will to resist.

Marxists have long recognized such despair as a particular danger to any progressive movement and have stressed the importance of solidarity as a response. It is through joining with others in collective struggle that

oppressed people begin to sense their strength and gain the confidence needed to fend off despair. This is also the reason why some marxist literary critics have insisted that literature should not be tragic only but should hold out hope for future struggle. Literary works should not pretend that there are no difficulties, that liberation will be easy. But they should make clear that these difficulties are not insuperable, that it is possible to overcome them through group action. I am not sure how much difference literature makes in this regard, yet it does seem clear that individuals are less likely to fall into political despair if they are joined with others in collective struggle. Indeed, it seems less probable that they will fall into those forms of personal despair that have obvious political roots—the despair caused by unemployment (see Cohen and Rogers 1983, 29), by the realization that one is gay (Heinze [1995] points out that the suicide rate for young gays and lesbians is several times greater than average [9]), and so on. Despair concerns the possibility of real change, in society as well as one's own life, and is bound up with a sense of alienation from others. As such, it is, in the first place, acts of solidarity that dissipate despair; and it is the absence of solidarity that makes despair so thick as to suffocate not only action but, in the most extreme and tragic cases, even the ordinary will to live.

THE CREATION OF EXPERTISE AND THE PACIFYING FUNCTION OF CONSULTATION

Having considered the content of beliefs, and the relation of beliefs to one another, it is important to take up the ideological definition of authority—the expertise granted to those who disseminate ideological beliefs—as well as the interaction between those who articulate consensual ideology and those who accept it. For these do not merely provide a context for consensual ideology; they are a crucial part of it, too.

One of the central methods for fostering beliefs, defining problematics, and creating focalization is the establishment of expertise. After all, it is experts or authorities who set up the poles of debate, focus on the topics of primary attention, and the like. This is true equally of the political experts interviewed on *Nightline* and the academic experts whose articles appear in the most prestigious journals.

The first thing to note about authority is that what comes to count as expertise in any given system will be a function of hierarchies of domina-

tion. This is true for the simple reason that those who are assigned the systemic role of authorities (news anchors, policy analysts, and so on), are those who have succeeded in some systemic hierarchy. And those who have succeeded will, on the whole, be those who act in accordance with the principles of that hierarchy. This is so even in supposedly pure intellectual meritocracies, such as the university, as indicated, for example, by Michael Mahoney's (1977) research on the strong confirmatory bias of scholarly publication. As already mentioned, his research shows that work supporting standard views is significantly more likely to be published than methodologically identical work disputing standard views (see Hogan 1993). This—effectively consensual—establishment of authority will only be more prominent in explicitly political systems, in corporations (including corporate news media), and so on. There are, of course, exceptions. But the tendency is almost inevitable, and unsurprisingly so.

To make matters worse, any dissidents from standard views who do manage to achieve some level of institutional authority are rarely given any public forum. They do not function as experts in the most consequential ways. For example, they are virtually excluded from the mainstream media, in discussions of U.S. foreign policy, cognition and gender, affirmative action, or whatever. As Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) remark, the vast majority of “experts” appearing in mainstream media are government officials, former government officials, or members of conservative think tanks (for instance, almost 70 percent on the McNeil-Lehrer *News Hour*, 25).

Those dissident voices that do make their way into the media are typically presented in such a way as to deny any authority to the views. Naureckas (1991) points out that during the Gulf crisis, “when anti-war voices were heard, it was very rarely as in-studio guests partaking in substantive discussions” (5). Rather, antiwar views were typically confined to brief interviews with ordinary individuals participating in antiwar rallies. “Relying, as network TV did, on random protesters to present a movement’s views is to deny that movement its most articulate and knowledgeable spokespeople. The situation is comparable to depending on interviews with the crowd at a Republican rally to convey the views of the Bush administration” (ibid.). Indeed, “a survey conducted by FAIR of the sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news found that of 878 on-air sources, only one was a representative of a national peace organization—Bill Mon-

ning of Physicians Against Nuclear War. By contrast, seven players from the Super Bowl were brought on to comment on the war" (ibid.).

The situation is similar across the board. For example, the same principles apply to politically consequential academic science—witness the ease with which the shoddiest research claiming gender or race difference can gain national media attention (see Faludi's [1991] discussions of the former).

Finally, the recognized experts operate not only to disseminate beliefs; they also perpetuate the system of expertise, and deepen the division between experts and ordinary people. In some ways, the ideal expert is one who never has to explain anything, who has convinced people that his or her topic is so recondite, or so politically nuanced, that it simply cannot be made comprehensible to nonexperts. If this is accomplished, the reaction of the populace can only be something like, "Well, they're the experts. I suppose they know what they are doing. It's beyond me."

This is obviously true in academic disciplines, including areas of research that are politically and socially important (such as race and intelligence). It is also true in political discourse. During the Gulf War, the air of technical expertise surrounding the obscure language of governmental spokespersons tended not only to occlude unsavory facts, as discussed above, but to establish those spokespersons as authorities with sophistication well beyond that of average people. It is difficult to think of oneself as competent to question the decisions of officials when one does not even comprehend the terms of the debate. The inclination is to think that special training is required, that the average person can no more have a rational view on the "degradation of military capability" than on the nature of quarks.

Or consider the economic analyses offered by different political authorities to justify such policies as cutting social benefits or giving more money to big business. A good example is provided by the proposals put forth in the report of the Advisory Council on Social Security. These would affect every U.S. citizen. Yet one political commentator wrote that the report is "so complicated, technical, and jargon-laden that it makes your average computer-instruction manual look like a comic book" (Douglas 1997a, 19). Despite its universal impact, almost no one is likely to feel capable of evaluating this report or its proposals.

In short, the system of expertise operates not only to foster consensual

beliefs about particular actions or events, such as the Gulf War, and confine debate on those issues within a narrow problematic. It also encourages the more general perception that judgments about politically consequential situations require inaccessible technical knowledge. Largely by means of this view, it promotes a broad, content-neutral deference to authority. This, in turn, tends to encourage a passive attitude toward politics, where citizens leave political life in the hands of the experts, implicitly trusting their decisions. In the most extreme case, the citizenry does not consent to individual policies or practices as such, but in effect, to whatever the authorities decide. Indeed, this stance was frequently articulated by ordinary people interviewed during the Gulf War: "It's not up to us to say the war is wrong," explained one interviewee (Rallies 1991, A6).

On the other hand, this does not mean that people feel they should not be consulted. Indeed, consultation complements and completes expertise; it makes expertise "democratic," or at least buttresses the perception that it does not contradict, but incorporate, democracy. Though further research is no doubt in order, some early studies indicate that people are more likely to be satisfied with, say, a social structure or government policy if they feel the government has considered their opinions—even if government policy runs counter to those opinions, and to those people's interests. As Michael Baer and Dean Jaros (1974) summarize it, "Though individual participation may have little direct consequence for substantive policy output, it may be of tremendous import in the level of disaffection in—and therefore the stability of—political systems" (365). In other words, if people believe that their opinion has been taken into consideration, they are far more likely to consent to government policies, even if the policies show no effect of this consideration.

The entire operation of democracy under capitalism clearly functions to encourage the belief that the political system incorporates the views of citizens, most obviously through elections. These elections, however, are at best processes of elite decision and popular ratification, as Chomsky (1987) has argued (24). A number of writers have stressed that capitalist democracy is structured in such a way as to confine policy formulation to a narrowly class-based group. This is true in two senses: the members of government are predominantly bourgeois (see, for example, Nader 1982), and nongovernmental members of the moneyed classes have access to and influence on members of government, the outcome of elections, and the

like, to a degree proportionate not to their numbers but their economic status (as discussed in my introduction). In elections, members of all classes do have a voice. Nevertheless, with rare exceptions, they are only able to choose from a set of options already formulated by members of the elite, options most often limited by a narrow problematic (for a striking example of this—the virtual identity of Eugene McCarthy’s and Richard Nixon’s views on the Vietnam War, despite their different rhetoric—see Anker, Seybold, and Schwartz 1987, 100).

Thus, the form of the system—as well as the rhetoric of politicians, lessons learned in grammar school civics classes, etc.—facilitates the view that the opinions of ordinary people count, even though the system in fact allows virtually no room for those opinions, no scope for their articulation, no possibility for their implementation.

Most people, of course, probably recognize that their opinions do not have any real effects. That is exactly the point. The pacifying effect is produced by the mere fact that people can vote in elections, that they can write to their representatives and receive replies, that government officials appear to pay attention to the results of opinion polls (which are themselves seen as representing the views of the people, even though these results are largely a residue of the way the polls have prestructured relevant problematics). In short, the pacifying, and thus consensual, effect is produced by people’s sense that their opinions have been “considered” by the authorities. This is part of what allows people to accept them as authorities. Individuals can grant them both expertise and authority over their lives, thereby more readily consenting to their judgments, insofar as the authorities’ decisions are based not only on private knowledge but “take into account” the views of a wide range of other people, of the citizenry in general. Again, this is true even if the actions of the authorities do not evidence any practical influence of the views supposedly taken into account.