

Walter Lippmann's Democracy

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Abstract

Walter Lippmann's Democracy Dustin Williams (Under the direction of Michael Lienesch)

Walter Lippmann's work is often characterized in a variety of different ways, including progressive, conservative, liberal, and realist. However, it is rarely if ever characterized as democratic, despite Lippmann's commitment to democracy, both in declarations of allegiance and in the substance of his work. While Lippmann is critical of the public, his intent is not to create some form of oligarchy. Instead he advocates the role of representative government and the necessity of public discourse. It is my hope to illuminate the democratic aspects of Lippmann's work by looking primarily at several of his most important works: *A Preface to Politics*, *Drift and Mastery*, *Liberty and the News*, *Public Opinion*, *The Phantom Public*, and *Essays in the Public Philosophy*. A close examination of these works reveals a consistent commitment to a nuanced theory of democracy. This thesis examines the character of that democratic theory.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Walter Lippmann was one of the most significant American political theorists of the twentieth century, yet his work as a theorist is largely forgotten. Most scholars remember him as a journalist and political commentator. When students of political theory discuss him, it is most often in reference to his debates with John Dewey over the role of experts in American society. This focus has led to a commonly shared view of Lippmann as an elitist thinker, a neo-Platonist, and even an anti-democratic theorist. Yet at heart Lippmann was a democrat. From his earliest essay *Preface to Politics* to his final essays, his work is full of incisive critiques of American democracy as well as prescriptions to fix these problems, to ensure the preservation of America's liberal democracy. But it is also inspired by a normative vision that is deeply democratic, aimed at creating a self-governing society able to meet the needs of an inclusive public.

In general, most students of Lippmann emphasize his inconsistency. The earliest Lippmann scholars concentrated on the changes that characterized his work. According to this view his conception of politics changed drastically over the course of his career, primarily as a response to World War I. Historian Sidney Kaplan (1956) was typical of early scholars in arguing that experience of the war advanced Lippmann's distrust of public opinion. In particular, Kaplan notes Lippmann's move towards a more authoritarian expert organization in the wake of World War I. Lippmann felt that the public and press interfered, complicated, and (in Lippmann's opinion) destroyed the peace process. According to Kaplan,

Lippmann was still venting his frustrations with the way the public wrecked the Fourteen Points some forty years later.

Other scholars (Wright, 1973; Steel, 1980; Diggins, 1991) have elaborated on this common theme, describing how Lippmann moved from being a pragmatic humanist to a conservative championing natural law. Diggins in particular notes Lippmann's post-war distress over the lack of political authority in America, which would lead him to advocate a strong executive. The lack of authority led Lippmann in turn on a quest to determine what should be the ultimate source of authority. In his *The Promise of Pragmatism* (1991), Diggins charts what he describes as Lippmann's transition from pragmatist to instrumentalist, abandoning the subjectivity of pragmatism for the objectivity of Catholic natural law.

A second school of thought represented by political scientist Heinz Eulau, who argues that Lippmann was caught between being a realist and idealist. Eulau describes Lippmann's struggle to resolve his internal conflicts. "Ultimately, of course, there would emerge," argues Eulau, "out of the interplay of hopes and fears, dreams and disillusionments, the apparently detached observer of the public scene who writes with a finality not matched by many other journalists" (Eulau 1952, 303). Yet Eulau sees this air of definitiveness as symptomatic of a man beset by doubt and ambivalence. Thus Lippmann's ambivalence makes it difficult to classify his work, because he was seemingly torn between several conflicting ideologies (conservatism and liberalism, pragmatism and natural law, realism and idealism).

A third school of thought sees Lippmann's inconsistency as a product of his pragmatism. Political theorist Francis Brooks Collinge (1965) makes the ironic case that it was Lippmann's consistent pragmatism, his refusal to embrace any single political stance, that led to his seeming inconsistency. Analyzing changes that emerge throughout his work,

Collinge looks at Lippmann as the essential pragmatist who never tied himself to one static theory of government, and was always open to possibilities as long as they produced different and better results.

One other school suggests that Lippmann was a realist who was hesitant to practice utopian modes of theorizing. Journalist Charles Wellborn (1969) characterizes Lippmann's work as operating in two distinct realms: the common, human world, rife with problems; and the "world of essence" where form and ideal are more important. Wellborn recognizes that there are both critical and normative elements to Lippmann's work, and that the two realms are not easily reconciled. Therefore any attempt to look at Lippmann's work as a cogent whole is rife with contradictions, producing no tangible product.

In addition, there are some more psychological explanations of Lippmann's lack of commitment to a static form of government or philosophy. Philosopher Hari Dam (1973) looks at the wide scale changes in Lippmann's thought, and tries to explain his constant "zigzagging" as the hallmark of someone who constantly changes his mind but is never willing to admit that he is wrong. Dam attributes part of this to Lippmann's own insecurities, which he saw as an extension of Lippmann's vision of himself as "a representative of the modern marginalized man" (Dam, 158). Dam discusses different areas of Lippmann's thought and tries to compartmentalize his work. He looks at Lippmann's career as an "intellectual odyssey" and sees him as going through different phases. Dam sees Lippmann as someone who alternated between the roles of philosopher and public commentator, with whichever role he was assuming at any given point greatly influencing his work at that time.

By contrast, more recent Lippmann scholarship emphasizes consistency. Some scholars examine Lippmann's ideas on the role of journalists in a democracy, perceiving

Lippmann as favoring an aristocratic form of government. Journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel (2001) argue that Lippmann saw democracy as fundamentally flawed and beyond repair, because humans are inattentive, biased, and ignorant. Kovach and Rosentiel see Lippmann as wanting to suppress the public and deny them their full, creative potential. Thus they cite a number of critics who think Lippmann is the reason that “newspapers and TV have aimed their coverage at elite demographics, ignoring much of the citizenry” (Kovach and Rosentiel 2001, 27).

Others look at Lippmann as a philosopher who remained committed to the cause of liberalism. Larry Adams (1977) argues that while Lippmann’s work can be described as elitist and radical, both of these themes are secondary to his commitment to liberalism. Adams describes the liberal tradition as “a house of many mansions” and it seemed that “Lippmann was bent on dwelling in all of them—as socialist, Progressive, diplomat, skeptic, moralist, advocate of *Realpolitik*, natural lawyer” (Adams 1977, 184). While Lippmann may have tried many methods, his end remained the same, to establish liberalism as “a political method—a system of limited government and individual liberties” (Adams 1977, 184).

Barry Riccio (1994) makes a similar argument, although coming to a different conclusion. Riccio agrees that Lippmann was a liberal, though uncomfortable with the liberalism of his day. In his *Walter Lippmann: Odyssey of a Liberal* (1993), he considers Lippmann a constant critic, which is not to say that he never advocated an ethos of his own. Instead he was opposed to the ‘utopias’ hawked by political elites, and wanted a more reasonable and practical account of politics. Riccio notes that Lippmann was more concerned with the fact that utopians never talked about the means to their utopias and focused only on

discussing its final form. Riccio highlights Lippmann's skepticism towards the practicality of any utopian ideals.

Yet none of these accounts are successful in producing a complete account of Lippmann's philosophy, for all fail to account for the depths of Lippmann's commitment to democracy. Kaplan fails to properly describe changes in Lippmann's work. While he sees World War I as a distinctive breaking point, it represents more of an addition to his philosophy rather than a break, since many of the same themes are present in Lippmann's pre-and post-war writings. While Diggins does a good job of accounting for changes in Lippmann's philosophy, by tracking the different forms of authority he advocates, he does not take into account the consistencies in Lippmann's work, specifically his alliance with pragmatism that persisted throughout his career. Dam focuses too much on breaking Lippmann's philosophy down into pieces, when there is more to be gained by looking at his work as a whole. While Lippmann was responsive to the changing world, the seeming contradictions in his thought are more a result of the turbulent times in which he worked than a sign of philosophic uncertainty.

All told, previous Lippmann scholars have failed to notice consistent themes throughout Lippmann's work, many of which are democratic. While Lippmann was critical of democratic precepts like the common will and self-government, he did not seek to eliminate these concepts. Instead he wanted to redefine them and give them a more practicable application. Admittedly, he thought this would require a more powerful executive to lead the nation. Yet while Lippmann's concept of democracy is elitist, it is ultimately aimed at creating a vital society of individuals free to express themselves—while still taking into account the average citizen's ability to be properly informed beyond their immediate

interests and worldview. The goal of this work is to illuminate and elaborate on these democratic elements, showing that despite his skepticism about the limits of public life, above all else Walter Lippmann was an advocate of democracy.

Chapter 2: Preface to Lippmann's Politics

Lippmann's approach to political theory was unique, sharing the influence of sources ranging from socialism to pragmatism to an American brand of Platonism. His earliest influences were socialist. In 1906 Lippmann enrolled at Harvard, where he quickly became enthralled with socialism. Compelled by the slums of Chelsea, Lippmann organized and served as president of the Harvard Socialist Club, his first foray into politics. Also at Harvard, Lippmann met Graham Wallas who encouraged his reading of Marx, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. Under the tutelage of Wallas, he developed a concern for the lower class and the worsening condition of the poor. While Lippmann would later temper his support for socialism—his service as secretary to Schenectady mayor and socialist George Lunn was particularly disillusioning—he would for many years continue to call for more expansive social welfare programs. In fact, throughout his life he would champion a minimum standard of life for all citizens, and the creation of what he called the “Great Society.”

Then came pragmatism. The philosopher William James would have a profound influence on the development of Lippmann's political thought. While never formally teaching him, James would frequently have the student in his home to discuss subjects ranging from philosophy to politics. For Lippmann, the epistemology of pragmatism would prove particularly significant, becoming an enduring element of his thinking. Throughout his life, Lippmann maintained that truth could change from one circumstance to another, being for the most part mutable. New experiences require a reconfiguration of one's ideology, and there are no invariable truths. The fact that an idea was not a realistic option at one point in

time did not preclude it from ever being a practicable one (thus it was important to keep all options open.). While Lippmann never became a full-fledged pragmatist, his experience based political theory (as well as his tendency to change his mind as circumstances varied) reflects the profound impact of James' friendship.

At Harvard Lippmann was also influenced by a more classically conservative strain of thinking championed by George Santayana. He cites Santayana as the primary reason he never became a full-fledged pragmatist. Santayana was a believer in natural order, a philosopher who contended that form is determined by nature, with a time and a place for everything. His neo-Platonism provides the roots for what Diggins calls Lippmann's natural law, the idea that legitimacy is grounded in a natural order that dictates the proper course of action. While Santayana admitted that circumstances change, he believed that there remained one acceptable solution for each particular set of circumstances. Moreover, he argued that the state should be looked at as an organism. This idea is essential to Lippmann's vision of statecraft, where the governing body must know what is in the best interests of the state and act on those interests if the organism is to survive. Santayana's influence would also be felt in Lippmann's critique of the mass public, since both thought a regimented public was too restrictive to provide the freedom necessary for a good society.

Lippmann's first book, *A Preface to Politics* (1913), begins to bring these influences together, laying the groundwork for his political thought. In *Preface*, Lippmann argues that routine has little place in politics, because it inhibits political creativity. He describes his astonishment at the lack of political creativity in America in response to pressing issues (for example, how slow the country was to respond to the dangers posed by trusts). It is a marvel, he wrote, how "a changing country has managed to survive in spite of a static government

machine” (Lippmann 1913). The needs of the country were changing, and government had to keep pace. He elaborates, “We have it seems, been seduced by a fictitious analogy: we have hoped for machine regularity when we needed human initiative and leadership” (Lippmann 1913, 23). Here Lippmann applauds progressives such as Teddy Roosevelt, who “knew these things were achieved through initiative that burst through formal restrictions” (Lippmann 1913, 24). He describes Roosevelt as an example of a leader who recognized that the needs of the nation were changing, and who used government to meet the changing needs of the nation. This is how politics should work, he concludes, because the world is characterized by “vast changes, economic and psychological, and these changes demand new guidance” (Lippmann 1913, 25).

One problem, however, is that the few who are successful in altering politics to meet the needs of the nation have a tendency to become less radical over time. Political organizations like Tammany Hall are an excellent example. These organizations are successful because they cater to needs of citizens which the rigid “machinery” of government is unable to address. However:

Tammany itself becomes rigid when it is too successful, and only defeat seems to give it new life. Success makes men rigid and they tend to exalt stability over all the other virtues; tired of the effort of willing they become fanatics about conservatism” (Lippmann 1913, 25).

When handed the power associated with government, politicians will inevitably become more conservative. Those placed in positions of power will begin to look at themselves as right, and will abandon the practices that brought about their rise. “The one thing you can count upon is that the rulers will come to think that they are the apex of human development” (Lippmann 1913, 25). Though leaders should never abandon the innovative practices that put them in office, all too often they do. Lippmann does not want us to “think that safety lies in

repetition. It's a mistake due to poverty of imagination and inability to learn from experience" (Lippmann 1913, 24-25).

Lippmann did not see government as a problem that could be changed with one policy or change in institutional design. Instead, he believes that a new philosophy was necessary to correct the mechanical nature of government. Looking at the history of political philosophy Lippmann failed to find one theorist who provides "an outline of statecraft that will be fairly complete and relevant to American life" (Lippmann 1913, 155). One reason for the failure is that while there is no form of government appropriate for all situations, most theorists treat their proposals as "true and binding, and none of the systems are" (Lippmann 1913, 155). Theorists have failed to realize their solutions will have little value beyond their current era. They have been searching for the philosopher's stone—a transcendent form of statecraft that doesn't exist—when they should have been looking to address the problems of their day. In fact, each theorist "has contributed something, some wisdom about events." Looked at in the bulk, however philosophers "can't all be right or all wrong" (Lippmann 1913, 155).

For Lippmann, political philosophies are the product of responses to particular crises. Even Plato, whose theory is often seen as timeless and transcendent, was writing in response to the problems of his time. "His constructions his formal creeds, his law-making and social arrangements are local and temporary" (Lippmann 1913, 159). Lippmann describes the works of Plato as useful only insofar as what they reveal about human nature. It is the little bits of wisdom Plato gives about human nature and the interactions between humans that are transcendent. It follows that the reforms proposed by any philosophy serve little purpose for future generations. What matters are the problems that prompted the philosophers to write in

the first place. For Lippmann, political philosophy offers no solution for all time. “No thinker can lay down a course of action for all mankind—programs if they are useful at all they are useful for some particular historical period” (Lippmann 1913, 159).

Lippmann also posits that the failures of past philosophy are rooted in method. In *A Preface to Politics*, he is critical of those who start their enquiries by asking the question, “What is the aim of government?” Theorists of the past have opted to “decide upon the ultimate method of statecraft and then elaborate the technique of its realization” (Lippmann 1913, 151). They opt to work from an end, instead of towards an end. While this method is rational, writes Lippmann, it defies the natural order of things, leading to “all kinds of theoretical tangles and pseudo-problems” (Lippmann 1913, 151). For pragmatists direct experience is necessary to properly diagnose society. Reforms “come from an effort to state abstractly in intellectual terms qualities that can only be known by direct experience” (Lippmann 1913, 151). Confusion ensues because the conjectures of theorists are based on unique experiences, which minimizes their applicability to other situations.

Thus Lippmann did not look at democracy as the chief aim of statecraft. The chief end of statecraft was freedom. Instead of settling on one conception of democracy and forcing this arrangement to work in all situations, Lippmann focuses on finding the form of democracy that best steers society towards freedom. Democracy should be seen as an instrument rather than an end in itself. America cannot depend on two hundred year old conceptions of democracy to handle contemporary problems. As society encounters new problems, it should tinker with institutional arrangements, redefining democracy. Only through this method can democracy begin to approach its ultimate goal the “fullest, freest expression of talent” (Lippmann 1913, 149). Movement towards the free expression of talent

will sometimes result in harsh critiques of democracy, but those are necessary for society to move forward. Lippmann declares, “The best servants of the people, like the best valets, must whisper unpleasant truths in the master’s ear” (Lippmann 1913, 149).

A Preface to Politics earned Lippmann the censure of his old mentor, Graham Wallas. Wallas described *Preface* as anti-intellectual, and his critique seemed to spur Lippmann in the direction of an even more scientific method. Beginning with his *Drift and Mastery*, written in 1914, Lippmann began to emphasize a scientific approach to the study of politics, making the case for scientific theories with sound grounding as the proper means of redress for institutions and policies no longer relevant. Lippmann argues that “scientific invention has made the old authority impossible” (Lippmann 1914, 16). While this argument does not mark a significant departure from the theoretical underpinnings of Lippmann’s critique of routine, it does mark a change in the method he felt was best suited for finding the appropriate mode of statecraft. No longer finding a loose free play of ideas suitable, Lippmann starts in *Drift* to advocate a more scientific analysis of the competing methods of statecraft. This scientific method is best described as pragmatic, calling for the free competition of ideas without any prejudice towards preexisting ones. The prevailing idea should be that which is most effective at addressing the needs of the public.

Lippmann believed that scientific exploration would lead to the creation of objective measures to help shape the form of government and determine policy. In his seminal work *Public Opinion* (1921), he trumpets the necessity of objective measures. Objective measures are necessary, he says, because the public cannot be informed on all the matters necessary to be qualified policy makers. Thus he calls on social scientists to provide “the instruments of analysis by which an invisible and most stupendously difficult environment can be made

intelligible” (Lippmann 1921, 236). These instruments would give the public an accurate and clear representation of the world, especially the “unseen world.” By the unseen world he means everything that the people cannot experience firsthand, but that affects their lives. In order to comprehend this unseen world, social scientists must create objective measures. When they develop these measures (for example, criteria that can be used to determine the appropriate interest rate for particular economic circumstances), there will invariably be problems with them, but they will offer a marked improvement upon the existing system. These objective tests are meant “to break down the dam, break through the stereotypes and offer men a picture of the facts” (Lippmann 1921, 233). No longer would the public be in the dark about the unseen world, because for the first time they would be able to understand public affairs. In short, objective tests make “parts of this Great Society intelligible to those who manage it” (Lippmann 1921, 234).

Objective measures are necessary because the public is limited in its capabilities. The average citizen does not have the resources to make an informed decision on the issues the government handles. In *The Phantom Public* (1925), Lippmann says that “no individual can know all about everything all the time, and while he is watching one thing a thousand others undergo great changes” (Lippmann 1925, 25). Society is too complex and too fluid for anyone to comprehend more than a slice of it in any sufficient detail. Thus he describes the ideal of “the omniscient, sovereign citizen” as unattainable, and its pursuit misleading (Lippmann 1925, 39). It is foolhardy to believe that a person can work forty hours per week and be properly informed on all the issues a government handles. Surveying a collection of contemporary books used to teach citizenship, he concludes that in order to become a good citizen one must “have the appetite of an encyclopaedist and infinite time ahead of him”

(Lippmann 1925). By contrast, objective measures allow citizens to be presented with unbiased facts when the public is called upon to make a decision and, in turn, allows for the rule of reason. For, “of all the tests which public opinion can employ, the test of inquiry is the most generally useful. If the parties are willing to accept it, there is an atmosphere of reason “ and the “prospect of settlement” (Lippmann 1925, 133).

Lippmann does not believe in a clear demarcation between issues that are public and issues that are private. Public/private distinctions do not account for the dual nature of many actions, and they fail to account for the idea that what constitutes a person’s private interests is what he calls “elastic” (Lippmann 1921, 28). In *Public Opinion*, he uses the sale of a piece of land as an example: while “the sale of a land is considered a private affair... the price may not be,” since while individuals may be able to privately negotiate the price of a sale, the actual transfer is a matter of concern for the government (Lippmann 1997, 28). The public/private distinction fails because some activities are actually both.

In *The Phantom Public*, Lippmann offers his suggestion for a better way to characterize these types of actions, proposing a typology that classifies activities based on the capabilities of humans. The important contrast is not between public and private; it is “between humans doing specific things and humans attempting to control general results” (Lippmann 1925, 51). Lippmann prefers this distinction because it better takes into account the capabilities of society. In other words, he divides the world into things a specific individual can control and those they cannot. For example, if the sale of a company creates a monopoly, the sale can be blocked in the interest of society. In short, people are capable of controlling specific things they have personal contact with but cannot control the actions of

others, since any attempt to control the actions of others “is beyond the capabilities of the average citizen” (Lippmann 1925, 52).

Lippmann is skeptical of the individual’s ability to unite behind a cause and bring about change. The divergent interests and limited capabilities of the public make the existence of a common will impossible. He explains, “men do not think alike, nor want the same things... their private interests are so distinct that they do not easily merge easily in any common interest, and we... no longer expect to find a unity which absorbs diversity” (Lippmann 1925, 98). For Lippmann there exists no Hegelian common will that forces action on an issue. Instead solutions to problems are more likely to exist when “two conflicting interests have found a *modus vivendi*” (Lippmann 1925, 98). This *modus vivendi* occurs when disparate interests unite to achieve change. That change is not long term or harmonious. It is merely a means to action. Lippmann’s *modus vivendi* occurs when “conflicting interest[s] merely find a way of giving a little and taking a little, and existing together without too much bad blood” (Lippmann 1925, 99).

If society is constantly changing, how can objective measures properly measure the way human needs are changing with it? The key is that objective measures—the tools of social scientists—are constantly changing also. These measures are not objective in the sense that they are transcendent; they are objective in the sense that they are the most appropriate measures for the given time. The essence of American politics (and in turn American philosophy) should be *invention*, both in terms of the creation of objective measures to gauge societal conditions and in changing governmental structures to meet these diagnoses. In *A Preface to Politics*, Lippmann chastises “the routineer” and praises “the inventor.” The routineer, in wanting to keep government exactly how it has been, creates clumsy policies

through a rigid adherence to an archaic method. The routineer is often blindsided by situations that could have been avoided with more flexibility. He relies on taboo. In short, he thinks, “whatever does not fit into his rigid little scheme must have its head chopped off” (Lippmann 1913). This distinction summarizes the essence of Lippmann’s pragmatism, and his commitment to the idea that there is no single static form of government appropriate for all situations. It is essential that all options be kept on the table, because as human experience changes so do human needs, thus government must also constantly be changing to address the needs of society.

For all the “zigzagging” Lippmann was supposed to have done did throughout his career, it is clear that he was unwavering in his belief that the chief end of government is to serve the interests of the people. Democracy at its best provides the public with all they freedoms necessary for a vital life. In *A Preface to Politics*, Lippmann reminds us that “the object of democracy is not to imitate the rhythm of the stars but to harness political power to the nation’s need” (Lippmann 1913, 22). Lippmann posits this as why party bosses were considered more powerful than politicians in the early twentieth century: they were organized in a way that granted them the power necessary to ensure that the demands of the public were being met. While Lippmann would not idealize labor organizations, he recognizes what they reveal about power; “the boss, the bosslet—the men who are it are there exercising the real power” (Lippmann 1913, 21). Rather than criticizing these institutions because they are contrary to ideal definitions of democracy, Lippmann focuses on what they reveal about the true nature of power, which is that real power is closely related to leadership. The people need a leader who, through reason, is able to determine what, amongst the many competing interests, is in the best interest of the public: “For the object of democracy is not to imitate

the rhythm of the stars but to harness political power to the nation's needs" (Lippmann 1913, 21).

In an essay entitled "The Indispensable Opposition" (1939), Lippmann would champion the necessity of free and open discourse for all healthy societies. Here he describes the right to speak freely and act in opposition to the government as essential for society. He is critical of those who treat it as an ideal, rather than a practical necessity. Doing so makes the defense of opinion "rest not on its substantial, beneficial, and indispensable consequences, but on a somewhat eccentric, a rather vaguely benevolent, attachment to an abstraction" (Kern and Griggs 2005, 53). If the freedom of opinion is treated merely as a right then it will only be safe in times of peace, which is an insufficient support for an essential aspect of society. Instead Lippmann sees the freedom of opinion grounded in practical experience: "we have concluded on the basis of practical experience, which goes back to the Magna Carta and beyond, that we need the opposition. We pay the opposition salaries out of the public treasury" (Kern and Griggs 2005, 54).

The foundations for freedom of opinion are not Lippmann's only concern on the matter. He is also bothered by how freedom of opinion is employed in modern societies with their emphasis on freedom of speech. The right to speak is only half of the equation, for the right to speak means nothing if no one is listening. What matters most is "that out of all the speaking and listening, the give-and-take of opinions, the truth should be arrived at" (Kern and Griggs 2005, 54). Freedom of speech does not matter, because it cannot lead to the truth if no one is listening. True liberty is not inherent in a society where anyone is "free to set up a soapbox" or "hire a hall where he may expound his opinions to those who are willing to listen. On the contrary, freedom of speech is established to achieve its essential purpose only

when different opinions are expounded in the same hall to the same audience” (Kern and Griggs 2005, 55). Additionally, freedom of speech doesn’t matter if certain parties are privileged in their opportunities to have their voice heard by those who matter. “For, while the right to talk may be the beginning of freedom, the necessity of listening is what makes the right important... What matters is not the utterance of opinions. What matters is the confrontation of opinions in debate” (Kern and Griggs 2005, 55). This is the essence of liberty for Lippmann, which should be the aim of every government. In sum:

Freedom of speech is best conceived, therefore, by having in mind the picture of a place like the American Congress, an assembly where opposing views are represented, where ideas are not merely uttered but debated, or the British parliament, where men who are free to speak are also compelled to answer... Thus the essence of freedom of opinion is not in mere toleration as such, but in the debate which toleration provides. (Kern and Griggs 2005, 56)

Chapter 3: Public Opinion

One consistent theme throughout Lippmann's later work (1921 on) is his willingness to criticize the public. His critique of the public is rooted in his experiences as an advisor to Woodrow Wilson. After promoting the progressive agenda in *The New Republic* (1914-1920), Lippmann became Wilson's foreign policy advisor in 1916. Lippmann's input was integral to the creation of the Fourteen Points. He would ultimately be dismissed from Wilson's staff, perhaps because Wilson never fully trusted Lippmann because of his prior alliance with Theodore Roosevelt. However, Lippmann did not leave his post harboring resentment for Wilson; instead he would direct his frustration towards the public. He saw the public as the reason that the Fourteen Points was not passed in the United States. This experience lead him to the belief that the public should not be trusted with decisions of this magnitude and that the public cannot be expected to govern on affairs that are beyond their universe. Lippmann's critique of the public, first presented in *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* would become a consistent theme throughout the rest of his work.

Lippmann believed the Fourteen Points were a victim of majority rule. The masses were not foreign policy experts and could not know what was in the best interests of the nation. Lippmann thought it was ludicrous that "the opinions of fifty-one percent" of a group were seen as inherently better than "the opinions of forty-nine percent" (Lippmann 1927, 55). What mattered most to Lippmann was that correct decisions were made. In refuting the applicability of majority rule for all situations Lippmann traces the genealogy of the concept. Majority rule is grounded in "the doctrine of ultimate human equality," which holds that all

humans are created equal, in spite of the fact that this theory “cannot be tested in human experience” (Lippmann 1927, 53). Lippmann would be more willing to lend credence to majority rule if it were grounded in experience, as if the wisdom of the masses had been demonstrated through the ages. But there had been no such experience, and therefore could be no uncontested wisdom in the idea of majority rule. Majority rule “is the rule of force. For while nobody can seriously maintain that the greatest number must have greatest wisdom or the greatest virtue, there is no denying that under modern social conditions they are likely to have the most power” (Lippmann 1927, 56).

In *Men of Destiny* (1927), Lippmann uses the Scopes Monkey trial as an example of the clash between truth grounded in experience and the demands of the *demos*. In this example Lippmann sees William Jennings Bryan as his foil, seduced by the opinions of the majority. While many view Bryan’s stance as an expression of his religious fundamentalism, Lippmann saw it as an expression of his commitment to majority rule. Bryan “argued that a majority of the voters in Tennessee had the right to decide what should be taught in their schools” (Lippmann 1927, 46). Lippmann thought experience favored evolution and was grounded in real world observations. Yet these lessons would not be taught in Tennessee, since the majority was opposed to the truths revealed through experience. Lippmann asserts:

Mr. Bryan would not have won the logical victory he won at Dayton if educated people had not been caught in a tangle of ideas which made it seem as if the acknowledgement of the absolutism of the majority was necessary to faith in the final value of the human soul. (Lippmann 1927, 600)

How does the public become misled? What forces drive public opinion and what problem does the current state of public opinion present? Lippmann makes these issues the focal point of his aptly named work *Public Opinion*. Lippmann defines public opinion as “the pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their

needs, purposes and relationships” (Lippmann 1922, 18). The designation of opinions as pictures is important; humans thus operate in pseudo-environments blurred by their own biases. “We shall assume that what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him” (Lippmann 1922, 16). There is little that individuals know for themselves, which impairs their ability to be fully self-governing. Lippmann makes this assertion, and expands it to theorize that success would be far more common if people had accurate information on the issues they are expected to make decisions on. “If the connection between reality and human response were direct and immediate, rather than indirect an inferred, indecision and failure would be unknown” (Lippmann 1922, 17).

The problem with public opinion goes deeper than individuals adding their own “spin” to what they see. Public opinion’s deepest flaw is that it forces people to form opinions on matters that are unknown to them. “Public opinion deals with indirect, unseen, and puzzling facts, and there is nothing obvious about them” (Lippmann 1922, 17). Lippmann’s primary focus is on the relationship between public opinion and the political process. The political world “is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined” (Lippmann 1922, 18). Therefore, citizens must form opinions about the political process with nothing more than second-hand abstractions of the way politics work.

There are several factors that contribute to humanity’s reliance what he calls pseudo-environments. Pseudo-environments are mental images of the way a situation is created by secondhand information. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann cites censorship and privacy as main factors in the development of pseudo-environments. There are certain key bits of

information the public is kept “in the dark” about, which makes the public reliant upon second-hand accounts. Therefore, there persists a constant separation between the public and the events that influence their opinions. Lippmann uses French communiqués from World War I as an example of how propaganda is used to distort public opinion. “Instead... of letting the public act on all the facts which the generals knew, ... [French Officials] presented only certain facts, and these only in such a way would be most likely to steady the people” (Lippmann 1922, 24). Lippmann emphasizes that the people who arranged the pseudo-environments knew the real environment. Yet this pseudo-environment was only loosely grounded reality. “We have learned to call this propaganda. A group of men, who can prevent independent access to the event, arrange the news to suit their purpose” (Lippmann 1922, 27). These forms of censorship are often invoked in the name of privacy. (For example, government communiqués regarding the events of a war are classified.) Lippmann abstains from commenting on the virtue of this practice, opting to “remind you of the distance which often separates your public opinion from the event with which it deals” (Lippmann 1922, 29).

Censorship distorts public opinion because it creates a distance between the potential observer and the event. The problem of distance is essential to Lippmann’s critique of public opinion, because it diminishes the accuracy of the information the public uses to form their opinions. While censorship distances the observer from the event; there are many circumstances where the “body of fact never reaches the whole public at all, or only very slowly. For there are very distinct limits upon the circulation of ideas” (Lippmann 1922, 30). For example, the average citizen is rarely exposed to topics that are not in their own interests or the interests of those they associate with. People “live in grooves, are shut in among their

own affairs, barred out of larger affairs, meet few people not of their own sort, [and] read little” (Lippmann 1922, 31). Thus, people are rarely forced to come in contact with opinions that differ from theirs. Income also affects an individual’s access to information; Lippmann notes:

The size of a man’s income has considerable effect on his access to the world beyond his neighborhood. With money he can overcome almost every tangible obstacle of communication, he can travel, buy books and periodicals, and bring within the range of his attention almost any known fact of the world. (Lippmann 1922, 32)

While information will be out of reach for some, others have the necessary resources and choose not to inform themselves to their full capabilities. In *Public Opinion* Lippmann notes that technology has made full access to information more realistic—however, this will not fix the ails of public opinion. Because people are self-imposed and self-indulgent, they turn away from the opportunity of knowledge and, in turn, the human scene. Lippmann comments on “the portions of the sovereign people who spend most of their spare time and spare money on motoring and comparing motor cars... talking always on the same old themes” (Lippmann 1922, 32). He sees this as the more common reason that a gap exists between the public and their information. For “men’s ideas determine how that income shall be spent, and that in turn affects in the long run the amount of income they will have” (Lippmann 1922, 32). Even when there exists the possibility of fuller knowledge, society instead opts to couch itself in the pseudo-environments of their respective social sets. “Worlds of interest are waiting for them to explore, and they do not enter” (Lippmann 1922, 32).

Lippmann was indeed critical of the role social sets have played in the decay of public opinion. He sees the social set as a sort of biological clan, with membership closely

related to member's opportunities for love, marriage, and children. Lippmann's concern over social sets extends to the role one's social set plays in determining their contact with information. "Affairs within its immediate competence each set more or less determines for itself" (Lippmann 1922, 36). Basically these social organisms determine which issues are within the purview of the individual. Lippmann criticizes this arrangement:

Since position and contact play so big a part in determining what can be seen, heard, read, and experienced, as well as what is permissible to see, hear, read, and know, it is no wonder that moral judgment is so much more common than constructive thought. (Lippmann 1922, 36)

Thus one's social position can vastly affect one's ability to form the caliber of opinion necessary for society. All too often, constructive thought is eliminated and replaced by judgments based on the historical patterns of our respective social sets.

Even those who want to become informed will have trouble finding the time. Lippmann thought current conceptions of democracy asked too much of the average citizen: "Man's history being what it is, political opinion on the scale of the Great Society requires an amount of selfless equanimity rarely attainable for anyone for any length of time" (Lippmann 1922, 36). Lippmann is not only concerned with the issue of time, but also with how the public utilizes what little time they devote to public affairs. He cites three studies from the early twentieth century that found that the average citizen spends little more than fifteen minutes per day reading the paper. Lippmann is hesitant to base too much on the findings of these studies, because he acknowledges there are other sources people turn to for information (magazines, etc). He does, however, acknowledge that "the time each day is small when any of us is directly exposed to information from our unseen environment" (Lippmann 1922, 40).

Society is therefore forced to rely on stereotypes. Stereotypes form the basis of the pseudo-environments discussed earlier; they are how we account for the gap between what

we know and what we are expected to know. Instead we depend on the accounts of others to inform us. Lippmann identifies the problem with allowing others to recount events, since “even the eyewitness does not bring back a naïve picture of the scene” (Lippmann 1922, 53). The observer cannot bring back an unbiased report because in most circumstances what they see will be affected by what they *expected* to see. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann sees the role of the observer as “always selective and usually creative. The facts we see depend on where we are placed, and the habits of our eyes” (Lippmann 1922, 54). The role prejudice has in human thought is important for Lippmann, because it prevents an intelligible understanding of human affairs: “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see” (Lippmann 1922, 54-55).

Lippmann sees stereotypes as a form of defense for our position in society. Stereotypes allow us to create taboos, which all too often are the basis of governing mechanisms. In *Public Opinion*, he says “the systems of stereotypes may be the core of our personal tradition, the defenses of our position in society” (Lippmann 1922, 63). Stereotypes are the ideas we are comfortable with and any challenge to these ideas is viewed as a threat because of the roles tradition and routine play in our lives. The use of stereotypes as defense is analogous to Lippmann’s critique of the public for its reliance on routine instead of creativity. He writes:

[Stereotypes] are an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts, and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of the world to which we are adapted. [...] There we find the charm of the familiar, the normal, the dependable. (Lippmann 1922, 63)

We depend on the stereotypes at the core of our routines for their guidance in the decisions we make. Thus we get defensive when we feel that someone is attacking one of these

organizing principles. Lippmann elaborates, “No wonder, then, that any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack upon the foundations of our universe, and, where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any distinction between our universe and the universe” (Lippmann 1922, 63).

For Lippmann biases are unavoidable and they are borne of our culture. The majority of stereotypes that shape human understanding of events are the result of ingrained cultural understandings and practices. “In the great booming, buzzing confusion of the world,” he writes, “we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann 1922, 55). People rely on the stereotypes of their culture for their definiteness and stability. Lippmann uses the words of John Dewey to elaborate: “The problem of the acquisition of meaning by things, or of forming habits of simple apprehension, is thus the problem of introducing (a) *definiteness* and *distinction* and (2) *consistency* or *stability* of meaning into what is otherwise vague and wavering” (Lippmann 1922, 54). In other words, we will always turn to the customs we view as definite and stable. Deeply-ingrained stereotypes are also passed down through generations, until “it seems almost like a biological fact” (Lippmann 1922, 61). He elaborates:

The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. (Lippmann 1922, 59)

As a result the public becomes resistant to information and experiences that run counter to their stereotypes, which is detrimental to public opinion. Public opinion must be

sensitive to constant changes in the world if it is to govern. Lippmann categorizes two reactions people have when they encounter information antithetical to their stereotypes:

If the man is no longer plastic, or if some powerful interest makes it highly inconvenient to rearrange his stereotypes he pooh-poohs the contradiction as an exception that proves the rule, discredits the witness, finds a flaw somewhere, and manages to forget it. But if he is still curious and open-minded, the novelty is taken into the picture, and allowed to modify it. (Lippmann 1922, 66)

Lippmann expects the public to reject most ideas counter to their stereotypes; we are creatures of habit, which is one major problem with making public opinion the object of primacy in a democracy. “It is only when we are in the habit of recognizing our opinions as a partial experience seen through our stereotypes that we become truly tolerant of our opponent” (Lippmann 1922, 82). He thought toleration was a good thing, because if the public is not tolerant and flexible their opinions begin to take on a totalitarian nature. He discusses what opinion looks like and what it should look like in *Public Opinion*:

Generally it all culminates in the fabrication of a system of all evil, and another which is the system of all good. Then the love of the absolute shows itself. For we do not like qualifying adverbs. They clutter up sentences, and interfere with irresistible feeling. [...] Yet nearly every opinion about public affairs needs to be deflated by some word of this sort. But in our free moments everything tends to behave absolutely, -one hundred percent, everywhere, forever. (Lippmann 1922, 100)

This critique of the public extends beyond problems with delivery of information and the use of stereotypes; it also includes the self-interested nature of the public. Public opinion is flawed because the public is only going to be interested in matters they perceive as having a direct effect on their lives. Given that the public is unable to realize how the decisions of government affect their lives, they are disinterested and uninformed on the policy issues their opinions are supposed to be shaping. Therefore drama must be introduced to make the public interested in political issues. Lippmann describes the process: “In order to make politics

popular, issues have to be found, even when in truth and justice, there are none—in the sense that the differences of judgment, or principle, or fact, do not call for the enlistment of pugnacity” (Lippmann 1922, 106). Pugnacity is essential in order to keep the public’s interest, even if it has to be manufactured. By pugnacity Lippmann means conflict, the dramatic arguments of the parties that keep the public entertained. If “pugnacity is not enlisted, those of us who are not directly involved find it hard to keep up our interest” (Lippmann 1922, 106).

Yet such pugnacity is not present in the majority of political issues. Its absence means one of two things: the public will be disinterested in current events, or issues will be sensationalized to stimulate public opinion. Because of the weight given to public opinion, there will always be forces trying to mobilize it, and those trying to interject it in another direction. Lippmann acknowledges that public affairs are dull until “somebody, with the makings of an artist has translated them into a moving picture” (Lippmann 1921, 104). He adds that there are two types of pictures that resonate most deeply with the public: sexual passion and fighting. While Lippmann argues the former has little place in politics, “the fighting motif appears at every turn. Politics is interesting when there is a fight, or as we say, an issue” (Lippmann 1921, 106). Therefore, those trying to stimulate the public—be they partisans or journalists—will try to depict the issue as a struggle. Essential to the drama of any struggle is the “bad guy;” in every argument “the picture of some real evil, such as the German threat or class conflict, is recognizable” (Lippmann 1921, 109).

Lippmann’s critique of the public would become a favorite target of his critics. In his review of Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* in *The New Republic*; John Dewey describes Lippmann’s work as the most “effective indictment of democracy as currently conceived

ever penned” (Dewey 1922, 286). While Dewey is willing to accept Lippmann’s critique of the public, he is dissatisfied with his prescriptions for remedying the problems of society. Dewey takes issue with Lippmann over the role of the press and the use of organized intelligence. These differences are essential, because they are in essence differences over the best way to mend public opinion. Dewey argues, “Mr. Lippmann seems to surrender the case for the press too readily” (Dewey 1922, 288) Dewey thinks Lippmann should hold out more hope for the press as a source for information and, in turn, a means for improving the quality of public opinion. While reviewing *Public Opinion*, Dewey asserts that the successful union of social scientific fact with literary presentation, while not easy, is “the only genuine solution of the problem of an intelligent direction of social life” (Dewey 1922, 288). However, Lippmann feels that news coverage is episodic at best, and thus insufficient for properly informing the public.

Dewey also took issue with Lippmann over the role of experts in a democracy. Lippmann wanted to establish an “expert” class to create objective measures to guide the public and public figures in their decision-making. Dewey supports the idea of expert decision-making, but is opposed to the idea of an “expert” class, which he saw as elitist. Dewey advocates the direct enlightenment of popular opinion, and is thus also critical of Lippmann for abandoning the public. The argument extends Dewey’s essential critique of Lippmann—that he places too much value in educating elites over the public. Dewey argues that democracy demands “more thoroughgoing education, than the education of officials, administrators, and the directors of industry” than Lippmann proposes (Dewey 1922, 288). Focusing on educating only government officials losses sight of the challenge of democracy. Dewey thinks that while the task of education will not be easy; dismissing the possibilities

“is to miss something of the range and challenge” posed by a democratic education.

Lippmann would respond that the problem is not in the capabilities of humanity to learn everything demanded of education. The problem is staying educated after the citizens leave school. Lippmann argues for an education geared towards teaching the public how to stay informed on public affairs, when they are pressed for time, and do not have the leisure to study the issues in depth.

What Dewey is proposing is what Lippmann would dismiss as the fallacy of the omniscient citizen. The omni-competent citizen is the idea that the average citizen is capable of being informed on the business of government. Lippmann describes this as a principle that is “for most practical purposes true in the rural township” (Lippmann 1922, 173). Democracy has expanded beyond the rural township, however, and individuals no longer experience first hand all the circumstances a government must handle on a day-to-day basis. The public is no longer in “the rural township where individuals remained in one environment their entire life and were able to be reasonably informed on all the issues the township would face” (Lippmann 1922, 173). In these rural townships it was practical to assume that the public could be informed on the issues facing government, the same cannot be assumed of modern society. Modern states are too expansive, there is no way the public can remain informed on all of the government’s business but we ask them too. Thus the public looks at a “complicated civilization” and sees no more “than an enclosed village,” which is the most that can be hoped of the public given how their other responsibilities. They are not able, from a time standpoint, to have the expertise necessary to make governing decisions.

In *The Phantom Public* (1925), Lippmann elaborates on the proper role of the public. He first considers the current role of the public in government. Noting that we often see democratic government as the expression of the will of the people, he thinks this sentiment overstates the role of the public in American government. He writes:

We must abandon the notion that the people govern. Instead we must adopt the theory that, by their occasional mobilizations as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally.
(Lippmann 1925, 62)

Therefore if government were supposed to be the direct expression of the will of the people, voting would have to be the proper gauge for determining the will of the people. Lippmann thinks this is a dubious claim; “We go into a polling booth and mark a cross on a piece of paper for one of two, or perhaps three or four names. Have we expressed our thoughts on the public policy of the United States? Presumably we have a number of thoughts on this and that with many buts and ifs and ors” (Lippmann 1925, 56). Votes are little more than promises of support, and do little more than express which of two options a person prefers. “The public does not select the candidate, write the platform, or outline the policy [...] the action of a group as a group is the mobilization of the force it possesses” (Lippmann 1925, 57).

While Lippmann does not see voting as an expression of the will of the public, he does think it is the most we can ask of it. There is simply too much for the public to consider given all the other concerns they have. “For when public opinion attempts to govern directly it is either a failure or a tyranny... The theory of democracy has not recognized this truth because it has identified the functioning of government with the will of the people” (Lippmann 1925, 71). Thus far democracy has demanded too much of the public and has

failed to account for its limitations. A more applicable theory would “say that the ideal of public opinion is to align men during a crisis of a problem in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis. The power to discern those individuals is the end of the effort to educate public opinion” (Lippmann 1925, 68). The public’s power should be limited to selecting those most able to direct policy in a crisis, instead of trying to superficially educate the public on the broad scope of issues that government handles. Instead of trying to educate the public on the nuances of tax policy, the public should be educated on how to select leaders who will moderate tax crises. These leaders are found through the use of objective tests:

The aim of research designed to facilitate public action is the discovery of clear signs by which these individuals may be discerned. The signs are relevant when they reveal by coarse, simple and objective tests which side in a controversy upholds a workable social rule, or which is attacking an unworkable rule, or which proposes a promising new rule. [...] In such an alignment it does not, let us remember, pass judgment on the intrinsic merits. It merely places force at the disposal of the side which, according to objective signs, seems to be standing for human adjustments to a clear rule of behavior. (Lippmann 1925, 69)

Once we have the appropriate tests for determining who should be in charge then the public can begin to fulfill their potential. However, this system will need a new theory of democracy: “Public opinion, in this theory, is a reserve of force brought into action during a crisis of public affairs” (Lippmann 1925, 69).

While Lippmann is critical of the public in *Public Opinion*, he does not think the public should be isolated from the governing process. In *The Phantom Public* he advocates allowing the public a voice when they think government is acting contrary to the needs of society. The public is the force that can provide the ultimate check over government. In addition, the public is not the only party at fault in Lippmann’s critique of the public’s

problems; the media and the organization of government also play a significant role in the corruption of public opinion. It is important to remember that while Lippmann is critical of public opinion he does not intend to marginalize the public or its needs. Instead he wants to restructure public opinion to align the public “in such a way as to favor the action of those individuals who may be able to compose the crisis. The power to discern those individuals is the end of the effort to educate public opinion” (Lippmann 1925, 68).

Chapter 4: The Press, Elites, and Experts

The Press

After leaving Harvard, Lippmann began his career as a journalist muckraking for *Everybody's Magazine*, where he spent two years honing his skills. He credits his editor at *Everybody's*, Lincoln Steffens, with teaching him the importance of penetrating a story and constructing analyses instead of merely relying on simple exposes. Steffens's effect on Lippmann's writing could be seen throughout his career as a publicist, in which he became known for his criticisms, critiques so well crafted and penetrating that John Dewey admitted to getting lost in their precision. Lippmann would go on to become one of the founding editors of *The New Republic* in 1914, where he stayed until 1920. He would also continue to write his syndicated column "Today and Tomorrow" for the rest of his professional life. His career in the press gave him an insider's knowledge of its faults.

Lippmann thought the press posed as great a threat to democracy as corrupt officials or a disinterested public. The press is essential to a well functioning democracy, enabling the public to fulfill their duties. In *Liberty and the News* (1920) Lippmann describes the role of the press: "For the newspaper is in all literalness the bible of the democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct. It is the only serious book most people read, the only book they read every day" (Lippmann 1920, 47). The press is the exclusive source of the majority of the public's information. Therefore "the power to determine each day what shall seem important and what shall be neglected is a power unlike any that has been exercised

since the Pope lost his hold on the secular mind” (Lippmann 1920, 47-48). Moreover, an editor is able to determine which issues are put on the periphery and which issues are put front and center. These decisions have a substantial affect on the attention paid to an issue by the public:

In a newspaper the heads are the foci of attention, the odd corners the fringe; and whether one aspect of the news or another appears in the center or at the periphery makes all the difference in the world. The news of the day as it reaches the office is an incredible medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, suspicion, clues, hopes, and fears, and the task of selecting and ordering the news is one of the truly sacred and priestly offices in a democracy. (Lippmann 1920, 47).

Given the role Lippmann assigns to the press, the consequences will be grave if the press fails. In *Liberty and the News* Lippmann is concerned about the current state of the press, which has become too involved in the circulation of propaganda: “Into this extremely refractory, and I think increasingly disserviceable mechanism, there has been thrown, especially since the outbreak of the war, another monkey-wrench—propaganda” (Lippmann 1920, 47). Government power brokers have too much control over the content news agencies publish. While there may be no way to stop nations from publishing propaganda, the press should be able to parse out the facts and not be overrun by the propaganda disseminated by governments:

Thus, if the National Council of Belgravia wishes to publish a magazine out of its own funds, under its own imprint advocating the annexation of thrums, no one will object. But if, in support of that advocacy, it gives to the press stories that are lies about the atrocities committed in Thrums; or, worse still, if those stories come from Geneva, not from the press service of the National Council of Belgravia, then Belgravia is conducting propaganda” (Lippmann 1920, 50).

Problems of propaganda are not limited to foreign affairs, and while the offenses are less flagrant, the problems of propaganda are still very real in domestic politics. Lippmann believes that the national press is biased towards the opinions of those who live in big cities.

Because of this bias “it is easy to parrot what those who live in a few big cities who have constituted themselves the only and true authentic voice of America. But beyond that it is difficult” (Lippmann 1920, 52). And the fact remains that the average citizen does not have the time required to gather a truly representative story on their own. This shortcoming of public opinion can be tied directly to the press: “We do not think nationally because the facts that count are not systematically reported and presented in a form we can digest” (Lippmann 1920, 53-54).

Lippmann cites these flaws as inherent to a mechanism of news-supply ill equipped to provide the public with necessary information. There are several flaws with how the press bridges the gap between the eyewitness and the reader. Lippmann notes, “This machine works marvelously well at times, particularly in the rapidity with which it can report the score of a game or a transatlantic flight, or the death of a monarch, or the result of an election” (Lippmann 1920, 41). The problem is that the information the public needs requires more thorough reporting. It is not enough to know why a monarch died; the public also needs to know the circumstances surrounding the death of the monarch. However, the press finds these circumstances the most difficult to cover, primarily, because of its division of labor. He writes that “where the issue is complex, as for example in the matter of the success of a policy, or the social conditions among a foreign people, where the real answer is neither yes or no, but subtle, and a matter of balanced evidence—the subdivision of labor involved causes no end of derangement, misunderstanding, and even misrepresentation” (Lippmann 1920, 41-42). In such situations the public is not only dependent upon the reporter, but also the eyewitness. Eyewitnesses are often involved in the event—thus “they can barely be expected to have perspective. Who, for example, if he put aside his own likes

and dislikes would trust a Bolshevik's account of what exists in Soviet Russia" (Lippmann 1920, 42).

Aside from the biases of their eyewitnesses, reporters are also limited by the fact that the easy way to do their job is to respect the status quo. Those in power will provide greater access to reporters who are supportive of their decisions. If a reporter "is to earn his living, [they] must nurse [their] personal contacts with the eyewitnesses and privileged informants. If he is openly hostile to those in authority, he will cease to be a reporter" (Lippmann 1920, 43). Reporters are trapped in these situations because they are dependent upon those who are party to government decisions for their information. Lippmann recalls World War I, where "at the Peace Conference, news was given out by agents of the conferees" (Lippmann 1920, 43). Thus the reporter is at the mercy of those in charge and to defy the wishes of those in charge would not be advisable. Unless "there is an opposition party in the inner circle who can feed him news," reporters are left with nothing to report (Lippmann 1920, 43). Even in the circumstance of an opposing party, the reporter must be careful that their source is not biased. In terms of reporting government business, there often exists no unbiased source of information. Thus the facts are diluted and the public is left without a clear idea of what is happening.

In addition to the problems with the way newspapers acquire and present information, Lippmann also takes issue with the way editors perceive their role in society. Troubled by editors who viewed themselves as instructors instead of reporters or information mangers, he felt their role had grave consequences on the quality of public opinion. He describes this fear: "Since the war, especially, editors have come to believe that their highest duty is not to report but to instruct, not to print news but to save civilization, not to publish what Benjamin Harris

calls ‘the Circumstances of Publique Affairs, both abroad and at home,’ but to keep the nation on the straight and narrow path” (Lippmann 1920, 7). When editors become instructors it stifles public opinion, because it does not allow the public to make the decisions on their own. Changes in the role of the press have contributed to the fact that “there has been no free play of public opinion in the world” (Lippmann 1920, 7). The burden of these claims falls on reporters, who are less concerned with presenting an unbiased account of the circumstances they observe. Instead, “the work of reporters has thus become confused with the work of preachers, revivalists, prophets, and agitators” (Lippmann 1920, 8). Public opinion is flawed and the newspapers have played no small role in the erosion of the quality of public opinion. In short, “the current theory of American newspaperdom is that an abstraction like the truth and a grace like fairness must be sacrificed whenever anyone thinks the necessities” (Lippmann 1920, 8).

In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann acknowledges that the position of the press is unique; while they operate as a business, newspapers are expected to disinterestedly deliver a public good. Because of their peculiar role, newspapers are forced to operate differently than any other business. News services are often seen as something that should be delivered free of cost or at little cost, when the actual production of a newspaper can be an expensive endeavor. Given the costs, newspapers must turn to advertisers since citizens will not pay high prices for their news. The citizen “will, however, pay handsomely for the privilege of having someone read about him. He will pay directly to advertise” (Lippmann 1922, 204). In turn newspapers will have to cater to the interests of advertisers, who will want to reach more affluent households. For newspapers circulation “becomes an asset only when it can be sold to the advertiser. [...] The paper, therefore, which goes into the homes of the fairly

prosperous is by and large the one which offers the most to the advertiser” (Lippmann 1922, 205). This obligation affects the quality of the material printed, because newspapers will not want to anger their advertiser’s targets. Therefore newspapers will be biased towards the interests of the upper class customers. Newspapers are “bound to respect the point of view of the buying public. It is for this buying public that newspapers are edited and published, for without that support the newspapers cannot live” (Lippmann 1925, 205).

Given these circumstances, Lippmann would argue that the gap between the press and the truth is irreconcilable. The content of newspapers will always be subject to biases of reporters. However, there is hope for the press: Lippmann’s democracy makes room for a media that returns to journalistic standards of objectivity, instead of focusing on profits. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann elaborates on the ideal role of the press as one that can “record only what has been recorded for it by the working of institutions” (Lippmann 1922, 228). The press is not equipped to record the governing forces. The press, like society, has failed because of “the failure of self-governing people to transcend their causal experience and their prejudice, by inventing, creating, and organizing a machinery of knowledge” (Lippmann 1922, 230). Lippmann’s solution is to have public opinion organized for the press by experts so that it might direct the masses based on fact—unfettered by its own bungling nature. Lippmann expands: “My conclusion is that public opinions must be organized for the press if they are to be sound” (Lippmann 1922, 19-20). While Lippmann is unstinting in his critique of the press, and while his recommendations for reform are general, they are nonetheless effective. Lippmann trusts the press to do little more than publish the findings of government agencies and the preferences of the public. The press should be an instrument of the public, meeting the needs of the public, in order to help society do a better job of being self-

governing. The press should view itself as disinterested presenters of the facts, instead of the interpreter of public affairs. Doing so would allow the public to form opinions based on unbiased fact.

Elites

Lippmann's hopes for reforming the machinery of knowledge included reforms to the educational system. Education systems need to be changed, because it did not comport with the needs of the public. Lippmann makes his most incisive critiques of the education system in *The Phantom Public*: "Democracy, has never developed an education for the public. It has merely given it a smattering of the kind of knowledge which the responsible man requires" (Lippmann 1925, 148). Interestingly, Lippmann believes his sort of education is necessary for the individual being prepared for public office. It is not sufficient, however, for educating citizens. Education "has been aimed not at making good citizens but at making a mass of amateur executives" (Lippmann 1925, 148). The public is taught to act like executives in that they are required to learn a little bit of everything. The result of this system "is a bewildered public and a mass of insufficiently trained citizens," which leaves few with the requisite knowledge to be effective in government (Lippmann 1925, 149).

The existing education system prepares citizens as if they are going to be students their whole lives, with the time and resources to stay abreast of all relevant social and political issues. The demands of adult life are too great, however, and society needs an education that will equip citizens with the tools to take on varying issues as they arise. "The problems of the modern world appear and change faster than any set of teachers can grasp them, much faster than they convey their substance to a population of children" (Lippmann

1925, 27). Instead, we need a system of education that prepares students for any set of problems—a sort of education that prepares citizens for the times in their life when they do not have a civics book and the time to read it at their disposal. Lippmann is skeptical of how far education alone can go in improving society’s ability to self govern: “The most they can conceivably attempt,” he says of educators, “is the teaching of a pattern of thought which will enable the citizen to approach a new problem in some useful fashion” (Lippmann 1925, 27). Here Lippmann separates himself from those who argue that education is capable of instilling the public with some form of universal morality. Education, he writes, demands more than a “good conscience.” Moralistic attempts at education reform fall short, because “conscience is no guide in situations where the essence of the difficulty is to find a guide for the conscience” (Lippmann 1925, 28).

Lippmann is skeptical of educators’ ability to reform, because they are uninformed on the matters that should concern the average citizen. Thus he suggests enlisting the aid of contemporary “political theorists” (here he seems to mean social scientists who can figure out the best method for training people how to gather information). The “pattern [of education] cannot be invented by the pedagogue. It is the political theorist’s business to trace out that pattern. In that task he must not assume that the mass has political genius, but that men even if they had genius, would only give a little time to public affairs” (Lippmann 1925, 27). Lippmann elaborates on such a system of education in *Public Opinion*, where he calls for a working model of the social system as the precursor to education reform. While it may be some time before the political scientist delivers such a model, there are steps that the public can take in the meantime to better equip themselves for making decisions in an ever-changing world:

What [educators] can do is to prepare them to deal with the world with a great deal more sophistication about their own minds. He can by the use of the case method, teach the pupil the habit of examining the sources of this information. He can teach him, for example, to look in the newspaper for the place where the dispatch was filed, for the name of the correspondent, the name of the press service, the authority given for the statement, the circumstances under which the statement was secured. He can teach the pupil to ask himself whether the reporter saw what he describes, and to remember how that reporter described other events in the past. He can teach him the character of censorship, of the idea of privacy, and furnish him with knowledge of propaganda. (Lippmann 1922, 256)

Lippmann sees education (especially civic education) as a means of teaching citizens *how* to think, and not *what* to think. By teaching the public how to think are preparing the public to encounter any number of circumstances, instead of teaching them about how unique events have been handled in the past. Education reform would be essential to Lippmann's attempt to reform the "machinery of knowledge." Much like his proposed changes to the media, Lippmann's ideas to change the education system are geared towards improving citizens' ability to procure and process information. In order to make the public more capable of governing itself, educators must first be able to educate the people about how to educate themselves about the business of government.

Experts

Lippmann thought the machinery of knowledge and, by extension, democracy was fixable, but its repair would depend on the creation of an expert organization. This class would consist of "intelligence experts, who would make one policy area their specialty, in order to better inform the public about policy decisions. The problem with [existing] expert organizations is, they reverse the process by which interesting public opinions are built up"

(Lippmann 1922, 233). The information released by governmental research bureaus is viewed as dry and boring compared to the political drama created by partisans and the media.

However the advantages of research are clear:

They break down the drama, break through the stereotypes, and offer men a picture of the fact, which is unfamiliar and to them impersonal. When this is not painful, it is dull, and those to whom it is painful, the trading politician and the partisan who has much to conceal, often exploit the dullness that the public feels, in order to remove the pain that they feel. (Lippmann 1922, 233)

If the public is going to have any responsibility they need to be told the truth. They need the information provided by research bureaus, and should not be dependent on parties and the media for their information.

Expert organizations are necessary in America because of the demands created by American society. It was originally thought that lawyers would be the augurs of democracy—the few capable of thinking deductively about rights and wrongs. Yet the needs of American democracy changed and lawyers are no longer sufficient:

Experience has shown that the traditional lawyer's equipment was not enough assistance. The Great Society had grown furiously and to colossal dimensions by the application of technical knowledge. It was made by engineers who had learned to use exact measurements and quantitative analysis. It could not be governed, men began to discover, by men who thought deductively about rights and wrongs. (Lippmann 1922, 233)

Because society was created by science and exact measurements, it is necessary for society to be controlled by those who understand the science of society. For, society “could only be brought under human control only by the technic which had created it” (Lippmann 1922, 233). If this is true then government must become more reliant on experts who create the social scientific measures that form (or should form) the basis of all government action. In *Public Opinion* Lippmann notes this trend: “Gradually, then, the more enlightened directing

minds have called in experts who were trained, or had trained themselves, to make parts of this Great Society intelligible to those who manage it” (Lippmann 1922, 233-234).

While government officials have relied heavily on experts in many fields, they have shied away from seeking the advice of social scientists. This trend is disturbing to Lippmann, who thinks that the social scientist would have much to add to any administration:

Yet curiously enough, though he knew that he needed help, he was slow to call in the social scientist. The chemist, the physicist, the geologist, had a much earlier and more friendly reception. [...] But the scientist who has human nature as his problem is in a different case. There are so many reasons for this: the chief one, that he has so few victories to exhibit. He has so few, because unless he deals with the historic past, he cannot prove his theories before offering them to the public. (Lippmann 1922, 234)

However, the problems of the past are bound to be different than the problems of today, given the drastic nature of the changes made by technology. Today the social scientist is left without an appropriate laboratory in which to conduct research. Since “the social scientist cannot begin to offer the assurance of a laboratory test, and if his advice is followed, and he is wrong, the consequences may be incalculable,” governors are taking a much a larger risk by taking the advice of social scientists (Lippmann 1922, 234). While the designer of a bridge bears a lot of responsibility, the issues on which the social scientists are likely to be consulted would have consequences that would affect a whole nation. Therefore until a method that provides great certainty is created, social scientists have their work cut out for them. Currently social scientists depend on the reports of Congress, census data, and polls that flow down from government as data. Lippmann considers this a fatal flaw in the social scientist’s method; “instead of being the man who generalizes from the facts dropped to him by men of action, he becomes the man who prepares the facts for the men of action” (Lippmann 1922, 236). Thus far, social science has largely been the business of deciding

whether or not public officials decided wisely. This does little to *direct* public officials, which Lippmann sees as the intended goal of social scientists. Lippmann is troubled by the “ex post facto” nature of social science. He writes, “the real sequence should be one where the disinterested expert first finds and formulates facts for the man of action, and later makes what wisdom he can out of comparison between the decision, which he understands, and the facts, which he organized. (Lippmann 1922, 236)

Experts are not only beneficial to government officials; their more important purpose is to bridge the gap between the private citizen’s knowable and unknowable world. Like the executive, private citizens cannot begin to fully understand the world around them. They need experts to break the world down into knowable pieces. For Lippmann, “The practice of democracy has been ahead of its theory. For the theory holds that the adult electors taken together make decisions out of a will that is in them” (Lippmann 1922, 239). However, this will does not exist; as noted in Lippmann’s critique of the public, much of the world is beyond the public’s grasp.

Since experts will be relied upon to provide information to the public, it is of the utmost importance that they remain unbiased or disinterested. If they are not, they will become partisans competing for the support of the public, which will lead to a further web of stereotypes to distract the public from what is really going on. Indeed, Lippmann takes the argument a step further, desiring experts to be divorced entirely from the policy process. He argues that it is “no accident that the best diplomatic service in the world is the one in which the divorce between the assembling of knowledge and the control of policy is the most perfect” (Lippmann 1922, 240). If the expert cares too much or becomes too invested in a specific issue, their work becomes biased. The expert “is there to represent the unseen. He

represents people who are not voters, functions of voters that are not evident, events that are out of sight, mute people, unborn people, relations between things and people” (Lippmann 1922, 241). Experts do not exercise force in a traditional way, and they are not philosopher-kings endowed with all of society’s power. Instead, the expert’s power lies in confronting stereotypes and other sources of misinformation. “By making the invisible visible, [the expert] confronts the people who exercise material force with a new environment, sets ideas and feelings at work in them, throws them out of position, and so, in the profoundest way, affects the decision” (Lippmann 1922, 241).

Lippmann acknowledges the chances for corruption in the expert organization. It will no doubt be difficult for these experts to fully extract themselves from the policy process: Therefore institutional safeguards must be created to prevent the experts from framing the information they are gathering in a certain way. Lippmann recognizes that “experts will remain human beings. They will enjoy power, and their temptation will be to appoint themselves censors, and so absorb the real function of decision” (Lippmann 1922, 241). The expert organization is not to become another bureaucracy, which Lippmann sees as an organization that only uses facts they deem appropriate in order to justify the decisions they make. To prevent the problems of bureaucracy from occurring in intelligence organizations, Lippmann advocates institutional safeguards that keep the bureaucrats separate from the experts:

The only institutional safeguard is to separate as absolutely as it is possible to do so the staff which executes from the staff which investigates. The two should be parallel but quite distinct bodies of men, recruited differently, paid if possible from separate funds, responsible to different heads, intrinsically uninterested in each other’s personal success. (Lippmann 1922, 242)

Experts would also have lifetime tenures so they could not be threatened or captured by any other government agency. They would require unlimited access to all government files, so as not to become subject to partisan propaganda. To further safeguard the intelligence organization, Lippmann advocates paying for these agencies through a trust fund, because “no agency of research can be really free if it depends upon annual doles from what may be a jealous or a parsimonious congress” (Lippmann 1922, 243). Independence is the best way to ensure that the intelligence organization is not sucked into the same partisan “games” that characterize the rest of government. For Lippmann independence turns on three points: “funds, tenure, and access to the facts. For clearly if a particular Congress or departmental official can deprive them of money, dismiss them, or close files, the staff becomes its creature” (Lippmann 1922, 243).

While the intelligence organization will primarily deal with government officials, it is also responsible for the public. Experts are supposed to present facts from the unseen world to government officials that will force the officials to make decisions that are in the best interest of the public. If they do not, the public still has the power to remove officials from power. While the public may not be able to decide whether administrators gave an issue due consideration, “the outsider can ask experts to tell him whether the relevant facts were duly considered” (Lippmann 1922, 251). Experts would also serve the public by acting as a check on the media. If the media presents a biased or false account the experts would alert the public, helping to prevent the further dissemination of propaganda and stereotypes. In general the expert organization’s duty to the public is serving “as a source of general information, and as a check on the daily press” (Lippmann 1922, 251).

Lippmann's expert organization is designed to improve democratic societies in two ways. First, experts improve the quality of public opinion by providing the public with unbiased information, which improves the public's ability to make decisions pertaining to government. Second, and more importantly, the primary goal of experts is to remove self-interests from the governing process by steer decision-makers in the direction of policies that are in the public's best interest. Lippmann prefers this system to the existing system, where self-interested politicians are supposed to be the unbiased representatives of the public.

Chapter 5: The Public Philosophy

Lippmann's brand of democracy is often considered elitist. But his elitism can only be understood in a democratic context. Lippmann's democracy is based on rule by the most talented, those most able to lead the nation and protect the interests of the public, and not by the landed upper class. Positions of power were only meant for those most suited to achieving the ends of government. Yet it is important to understand that Lippmann was not advocating a form of oligarchy. He did think that the representative and executive elements of government had distinct features and needed to be separated. Lippmann's chief concern was the creation and maintenance of a vital society, and he saw the isolation of the executive from the electoral pull of self-interests as essential to the creation of a vital society. Electors should not vote for those who cater to their self-interests; instead they should vote for representatives and executives according to their ability to govern. For Lippmann this "must be the principle of election;" that "electors are choosing, not someone to represent them to the government, but the governors themselves" who will represent the interest of the public (Lippmann 1955, 53).

While Lippmann argues that democracy is not the chief end of statecraft, he does believe that democracy offers the best chance for the people to fully and freely express themselves. Government should be geared towards one thing only: the needs of the people. While this does not make a government inherently democratic, it sets it on the course of democracy. Any regime that meets Lippmann's stated ends of government will have to

include some form of representation. In his *Essays in the Public Philosophy* (1955), one of his latest works, he is clear in his belief that representation is essential to the preservation of liberty: “For it is indispensable to the freedom and order of a civilized state that the voters should be effectively represented” (Lippmann 1955, 54). These representatives are not meant to be trustees of constituent interests; rather they are to be delegates, closely aligned with their constituents. “In the general run of the mundane business, which comes before the assembly” the representative is “duty bound, to keep close to the interests and sentiments of his constituents, and within reasonable limits to do what he can to support them” (Lippmann 1955, 54).

It is also important for Lippmann that the popular will and the public are considered two distinct entities. The public extends beyond those living and voting to include past and future generations. His conception of the public is influenced by Edmund Burke’s conception of virtual representation. In *The Public Philosophy*, he argues that people are not represented in contemporary democracies because “a prevailing plurality” does not represent the interests of the people (Lippmann 1955, 32). For Lippmann *the people* is a broadly conceived entity from which individuals come and go, but which is representative of more than the interests of those who currently comprise it. Admittedly, this definition of “the people” does seem incongruous with pragmatism, which argues for a government grounded in experience. Lippmann addresses this contradiction:

From what we have been saying we know that we cannot answer the question by attempting to forecast what the invisible community, with all its unborn constituents, will, would, or might say if and when it ever had a chance to vote. There is no point in toying with any notion of an imaginary plebiscite to discover the public interest. We cannot know what we ourselves will be thinking five years hence, much less what infants now in the cradle will be thinking when they go into the polling booth. (Lippmann 1955, 42)

Despite this, public opinion is still not congruent with the needs and interests of the public. Well-trained executives are needed to determine what amongst the diverse wants of the public are truly in the interests of the public. This distinction is pivotal: “*The People* as a corporate body are the true owners of the sovereign power, The People, as an aggregate of voters, have diverse, conflicting self-interested interests and opinions” (Lippmann 1955, 38). The interests of people threaten the freedom of *the people*. Put simply, the history of the twentieth century has already shown us that “the enfranchised masses have not, surprisingly enough, been those who have most staunchly defended the institutions of freedom” (Lippmann 1955, 40).

Since voters cannot be fully trusted to represent the interests of *the people*, executives must serve as trustees of those interests. This is not to say that the government should be comprised only of the executive branch. Instead, there needs to be a clear distinction between executive and representative elements. Conflating the two poses the largest threat to the interests of the people. When executives are subject to the whims of the public they become less prone to honesty and, instead, are driven by the desire to win elections:

As the malady grows the executives become highly susceptible to encroachment and usurpation by elected assemblies; they are pressed and harassed by the haggling of parties, by the agents of organized interest, and by the spokesmen of sectarians and ideologues. The malady can be fatal. It can be deadly to the very survival of the state as a free society if, when the great and hard issues of war and peace, of security and solvency, of revolution and order are up for decision, the executive and judicial departments, with their civil servants and technicians, have lost their power to decide. (Lippmann 1955, 27)

Therefore (and ironically), executives must be at least partly insulated from the public in order to protect the public interest. Lippmann is clear in his belief that “no relationship sound or unsound could exist until the functions of execution and representation” have

“become differentiated” (Lippmann 1955, 28). Traditional sources of executive authority (e.g., heredity) have been refuted as illegitimate sources of power. The disintegration of traditional sources of executive authority has left the executive dependent on elections alone as a source of legitimacy. This leaves executives with “no status and no tenure which reinforce their consciences, which invest them with power to understand the tides of popular opinion and to defend the public interest” (Lippmann 1955, 49). Executives dependent on popular elections will find it necessary to pander to factions and special interests, which will in turn distract them from looking at the realities of the world. For “in the daily routine of democratic politics, elected officials can never for long take their eyes from the mirrors of the constituencies” (Lippmann 1955, 49).

Thus while advocating a stronger executive, Lippmann maintains a belief in the importance of the representative function of government. The representative aspect of government caters to special interests, however, and thus must be kept in check. Lippmann wants to make it clear that he is not implying that the voters are not entitled to the representation of their particular opinions and interests. Voters’ opinions and interests should be taken for what they are—a check upon the executive power. The public does not have the time or information to enact legislation. However, should government fail to meet the needs of the nation, the people should exercise their power to appoint a new executive. In *The Phantom Public* Lippmann advocates the use of the public as a type of reserve force, since they are the ones “who must pay, who must work, who must fight and, it may be, die for the acts of government” (Lippmann 1955, 54-55). Lippmann’s democracy remains elitist in this regard: the public should never play an active role in the creation of legislation. It is of the

utmost importance, though, that government remains representative, for the purpose of government is to meet the needs of the public.

Lippmann sees modern democracies developing in two ways: in one they develop into totalitarian states, in another, they progress along the current liberal democratic framework. Drawing on the work of de Tocqueville, he differentiates healthy and morbid versions of the development of democracy. Referring to De Tocqueville's work after *Democracy in America*, Lippmann looks at the differences between the English aristocracy and the *ancien regimes*—specifically the differences between “enfranchisement by assimilation into the governing class” and “enfranchisement by overthrow and displacing the government” (Lippmann 1955, 65). The English model of assimilation is more capable of achieving the end towards which both models are aimed—a society with free institutions under popular government. The assimilation model:

Presumes the existence of a state which is already constitutional in principle, which is under laws that are no longer arbitrary, though they may be unjust and unequal. Into this constitutional state more and more people are admitted to the governing class and to the voting electorate. The unequal and the unjust laws are revised until eventually all the people have equal opportunities to enter the government and to be represented. (Lippmann 1955, 65)

This model served as the basic framework for the founders until the Jacksonian era, when the “Jacobin” doctrine became the prevailing ethos of America. The Jacobin doctrine is defined “by overthrowing the ruling class and by liquidating its privileges and prerogatives” (Lippmann 1955, 66). Lippmann favored the stability of the English model. This is not to say, however, that he was an advocate of a rigid government. He was sensitive to the fact that experience would require changes to government and, in turn, creativity. If government should become too sensitive to the whims of the public, a tyranny of the masses would be inevitable, and Lippmann considered this an undesirable option.

Jacobin theories of revolution forsake the civility essential for the maintenance of the liberal democratic way of life. One aspect that is absent from these theories, and in turn American society, is a public philosophy. In *Essays in the Public Philosophy*, Lippmann writes that western societies are compromised because “they are cut off from the public philosophy and the political arts which are needed to govern the liberal democratic society” (Lippmann 1955, 96). Basically a public philosophy is a philosophy that the public buys into to promote civility. A public philosophy is the linchpin to Lippmann’s democracy, and is integral to its success. He acknowledges, however, that to speak of a public philosophy is “to raise dangerous questions” (Lippmann 1955, 96). The idea of a public philosophy is dangerous because its content is bound to be controversial, bringing forth issues that the people would not readily welcome them to the private realm. Thus it will be difficult to establish a public philosophy, because “it is easier to follow the rule that each person’s beliefs are private and that only overt conduct is a public matter” (Lippmann 1955, 96-97). Lippmann does not consider the creation of a public philosophy as contradictory to first amendment rights, which created fixed boundaries that sovereigns could not overstep. Indeed, he argues that the founders who created these boundaries “would certainly have denied that community could do without a general public philosophy. They were themselves adherents of a public philosophy—of the doctrine of natural law, which held that there was law ‘above the ruler and the sovereign people’” (Lippmann 1955, 97). As time passed, the public philosophy of the founders had become unfashionable, replaced by an emphasis on privacy in modern democracies. For Lippmann democracies were ceasing “to receive the traditions of civility in which the good society, the liberal, democratic way of life at its best, originated and developed” (Lippmann 1955, 96).

The presence of a public philosophy makes a significant difference in the way freedom is defined in a society. In the presence of a public philosophy true freedom reigns, because everyone is united behind the needs of *the public*. The public philosophy “was founded on the postulate that there was a universal order on which all reasonable men were agreed: within that public agreement on the fundamentals and on the ultimate, it was safe to permit and it would be desirable to encourage, dissent, and dispute” (Lippmann 1955, 100). In the absence of a public philosophy, a vacuum is created where people would previously have discussed moral and theological issues. Creating a space for these types of discourse is necessary to a vital society, since it is through the free play of these ideas that new ideas are assimilated into the framework of democracy. For this reason, Lippmann encourages a body of positive principles and precepts that a good citizen cannot deny or ignore. This philosophy does not need to be cultivated, because it already exists: “there is such a thing as the public philosophy of civility. It does not have to be discovered or renewed. But it does have to be revived and renewed” (Lippmann 1955, 101). Revival and renewal are challenging tasks, since the public treats the doctrine of civility not as an abandoned principle, but as an antiquated one. Indeed, the idea that the public philosophy is antiquated forms the root of the public’s disbelief. “How can [the public] be expected,” asks Lippmann, “to provide a positive doctrine which is directly and practically relevant to the age we live in?” (Lippmann 1955, 102).

Nevertheless, democracies need a tie that binds the many factions present in any society. To Lippmann this requires the recognition of a transcendent rational order. Instituting a rational order will be one of the first steps in a return to civility, the ultimate end of the rational order. The rational order is a “common law” that is “valid” for the many

divergent groups living in a “large and heterogeneous” state. This common law; “is ‘natural’ in the sense that it can be discovered by any rational mind, that it is not the willful and arbitrary command of the sovereign power” (Lippmann 1955, 106-107). Drawing on the Roman principle *ius naturale*, “which is ‘the law imposed on mankind by human nature, that is, by reason in response to human needs and instincts,” Lippmann elaborates on what natural law is today. Natural law is the glue that holds society together. Only through reason can society determine what is in its best interests. Natural law is not “a body of actual law,” he writes, “which can be enforced in actual courts.” Instead it is a way of looking at things, a type of interpretation with reason at its core.

A public philosophy will also establish a public criterion of right or wrong, which is lacking in modern culture where everything is accepted as private. These public criterions will only encroach on the “willfully irrational,” those who are interested in subverting the government. This stands in contrast to “prevailing popular culture,” where “all philosophies are the instruments of some man’s purpose, all truths are self-regarding, and all principles are the rationalizations of some special interest” (Lippmann 1955, 114). However, the public cannot be coerced into supporting the public philosophy. This is why the broad appeal to reason is essential, because everyone must genuinely defer to the standards promulgated in the public philosophy. Also, in order to get the public to accept a public philosophy it is “necessary to demonstrate the practical relevance and productivity of the public philosophy” (Lippmann 1955, 115). These steps are necessary because government must have the consent of the governed, and it also must be accessible for any that want to be involved in government.

Lippmann’s democracy is committed to allowing dissent. The only boundary Lippmann puts on dissent is that it cannot be irrational. Lippmann argues that counter-

revolutionists “who surpass freedom in order to propagate the official doctrine, reject the procedure by which in the free society official policy is determined” (Lippmann 1955, 133).

Doing so violates the dictates of reason, which support civility and the idea that all parties should be given a voice as long as they do not suppress the voice of another group. Thus he is open to the idea of radical reform if such reforms become necessary:

The borderline between sedition and radical reform is between the denial and the acceptance of the sovereign principle of the public philosophy: that we live in a rational order in which by sincere inquiry and rational debate we can distinguish the true and the false, the right and the wrong. ... Rational procedure is the ark of the covenant of the public philosophy. There is no set of election laws or constitutional guarantees which are unchangeable. What is unchangeable is the commitment to rational determination. (Lippmann 1955, 132-133)

Reason should serve as the only limit on citizens living in a democracy. It creates a public philosophy that can be shaped by experience, while still granting the executive bodies with the requisite authority. The public belief in reason is essential for Lippmann, far more important to sustaining a democracy than any other principle. “It is not possible to reject this faith in the efficacy of reason and at the same time to believe that communities of men enjoying freedom could govern themselves successfully” (Lippmann 1955, 134).

The rule of reason and civility cannot be restored to one generation alone; it is a task that must be passed from generation to generation. Modern society proves that once the public philosophy is ruptured it will cease to be. The public philosophy starts out small and is added onto by subsequent generations as reason and experience dictate, for Lippmann this is the only way that society can progress is by preserving the practices of previous generations:

No one generation can do this. For no one generation of men are capable of creating for themselves the arts and sciences of a high civilization. Men can know more than their ancestors did if they start with a knowledge of what their ancestors had already learned. They can do advanced experiments if they do not have to learn all over again how to do the elementary ones. That is why

a society can only be progressive only if it conserves its traditions. (Lippmann 1955, 136)

Tradition is essential to Lippmann's democracy, however this does not mean adherence to a certain form of government machinery. Instead it means a continual building on the previous generations base of reason. Reason grows over time as more common experiences are accumulated, which creates a larger base of knowledge that only the irrational can ignore. Thus, "the free political institutions of the Western world" have been "conceived and established by men who believed that the honest reflection on the common experience of mankind would always cause men to come to the same ultimate conclusion" (Lippmann 1955, 134)

The presence of a public philosophy creates a second, civilized, nature in citizens. Citizens' first nature has always been to follow their instincts; appetites, which make one incapable of being a citizen, characterize these instincts. For Lippmann, Plato's Socrates is "the classic portrait of the civilized citizen," and by extension the perfect example of how a sovereign should behave (Lippmann 1955, 138). By refusing to escape from prison, Socrates is the epitome of the citizen. By refusing to escape he is "saying that he is not the organism of his muscles and his bones, his reflexes, affections, and instincts." Moreover Socrates is the person who governs that organism. He exercises what St. Thomas Aquinas called "a royal and political rule" over his "irascible and concupiscible powers" (Lippmann 1955, 138). These reflexes, affections, and instincts are a person's first nature, which must be controlled if democracy and liberty are to coexist. The instincts of the organism contradict the rule of reason, which is essential for the salvation of modern democracy. Quoting Cardinal Newman, Lippmann observes that the first nature of citizens is "ever insurgent against reason" (Lippmann 1955, 138). Socrates did not believe it would be human to turn away;

instead he opted to master his desires, which Lippmann believes makes one fully human. For Lippmann, “this is the image of a man who has become fit to rule. He is ruled within by his second and civilized nature” (Lippmann 1955, 139).

While Lippmann stood by his work in *The Public Philosophy*, he was nervous about its reception. He was afraid that people would misinterpret the work, and miss the aim of his argument, which would lead to a nervous breakdown of sorts. Lippmann’s initial fears are documented in a letter to his friend, Bernard Berenson, where he writes, “you won’t suspect me of having become some kind of authoritarian crank” (Blum 1985, 578). However, others were concerned about Lippmann’s use of natural law. Harvard president and friend McGeorge Bundy, upon seeing the manuscript urged Lippmann’s editor, Edward Weeks, that it not be published until Lippmann had weeded out the theological connotations of ‘natural law,’ otherwise, “it will be said that Lippmann has no logic for argument, that like Royce he had taken refuge in the bosom of God” (Steel 1980, 493). Lippmann biographer Ronald Steel notes that when Weeks went to deliver this news to Lippmann he found him tense and distraught. However, when he told Lippmann of Bundy’s concerns, Lippmann responded “that he had done all he could. The book would have to stand or fall on its merits” (Steel 1980, 493). Lippmann was anxious that the public would miss the point of the book, and dismiss it because of its antimajoritarian impulses and reliance on natural law. Steel notes that Lippmann’s “apprehensions were soon confirmed...based on excerpts that had appeared in the *Atlantic*, and the bound copies that had gone out to reviewers. The responses were not what he had hoped” (Steel 1980, 493). Lippmann would soon find himself hospitalized after collapsing in part because “the lukewarm early reception by his friends, combined with emotional and physical fatigue” (Steel 1980, 493). Usually of steely resolve, Lippmann was

devastated that those that meant the most to him misinterpreted a book he had poured so much effort in to. However, *The Public Philosophy* received glowing praise from Charles de Gaulle who endorsed Lippmann's sentiment "that democracy had become confused with parliamentarianism, with the usurpation of popular sovereignty professional politicians who had neither the authority nor the confidence to deal with problems" (Steel 1980, 495). This is how Lippmann meant for the book to be received, rather than being interpreted as some half-baked theory of divine right and authoritarianism, which was the reception most often afforded *The Public Philosophy*.

Lippmann's democracy is comprised of two main principles; the establishment of a rational and universally accepted public philosophy, and a clear demarcation between the executive and representative facets of government. While these practices are not inherently democratic, the way that Lippmann employs them is democratic. Lippmann's makes the arguments he does because he sees these reforms as the best hopes for the existence of a truly self-governing society. In addition, it was of the utmost importance to Lippmann that the public philosophy be created so that everyone member of society can honestly believe in it without any form of coercion. As far as the stronger executives go, Lippmann saw this as a way of governing a world that is unseen and beyond the realm of the average citizen. In the end, however, it is citizens who are in control, the true guardians of the public philosophy.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

While Lippmann is often perceived as elitist and anti-democratic, these characterizations are overblown. In fact, he advocated a vital society that encouraged discussion and debate, as long as these took place within the bounds of reason and civility. Lippmann also thought that public opinion was in need of a drastic overhaul, which can only be accomplished by reforming the roles of the public, press, educators, and experts. These reforms were necessary for improving the quality of information that citizens could glean from the limited time they can devote to public affairs. The press, with the aid of experts, must seek to become more objective and more in tune with the needs of the public, instead of the needs of their advertisers. Education must be reformed to teach citizens not about public affairs at the time, but how to gather this information for the rest of their life, since we live in an ever-changing world, where the nature of public policy is constantly changing. And while Lippmann did think that only a few should govern society, he also held that the executive branches were open to all and subject to censure if they defied the precepts of reason. He was not interested in creating a form of authoritarian rule; instead he wanted to give those in charge of governing the power to govern. Lippmann is often described as undemocratic because of his often, harsh, critiques of the public. In truth, Lippmann recognizes that there are changes that the public has to make in able to continue being self-governing in the modern world. He concludes:

My hope is that both liberty and democracy can be preserved before the one destroys the other. Where this can be done is the question of our time, what with more than half the world denying and despairing of it. Of one thing we

may be sure. If it is to be done at all, we must be uninhibited in our examination of our condition. And since our condition is manifestly connected with grave errors in war and peace that have been committed by democratic governments, we must adopt the habit of thinking as plainly about the sovereign people as we do about the politicians they elect. It will not do to think poorly of the politicians and to talk with bated breath about the voters. No more than the kings before them should the people be hedged with divinity. (Lippmann 1955).

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