Jeffrey Friedman

IGNORANCE AS A STARTING POINT: FROM MODEST EPISTEMOLOGY TO REALISTIC POLITICAL THEORY

The volume number is a lagging indicator,[1] but *Critical Review* was founded 20 years ago. As we enter our third decade, I am pleased to report that Routledge, storied publisher of the two most important influences on *Critical Review*—Austrian philosopher Karl Popper and Austrian economist F. A. Hayek—will now be marketing the journal, affording scholars and students around the world searchable electronic access to two decades of "content." This seems, then, to be an appropriate time for a stocktaking of that content, one that might also serve as an introduction to the journal for new readers.

When I started *Critical Review* I was animated, in part, by a dim recognition that Hayek and Popper shared more than Viennese origins. While Popper was a social democrat and Hayek was a classical liberal, both of them were profound theorists of the causes and consequences of *human ignorance of a complex world*.

Popper's own starting point was our ignorance of the natural world, and the resulting errors in our scientific theories. But as Hayek recognized, ignorance is an even more appropriate starting point when it comes to the study of human behavior. For one thing, human behavior is (sometimes) governed by human minds, and the

Jeffrey Friedman, Executive Director, Critical Review Foundation, P. O. Box 869, Helotes, TX 78023, edcritrev@gmail.com, a visiting scholar in the Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin, and the Max Weber Senior Fellow of the Institute for the Advancement of the Social Sciences, Boston University, thanks Shterna Friedman for ruthless editing and Peter J. Boettke and Chris Wisniewski for helpful suggestions.

Critical Review 19(1): 1–22
ISSN 0891-3811 print, 1933-8007 online
DOI: 10.1080/08913810701497506

human mind's attempts to understand the world—whether natural or social—are relatively unpredictable (e.g., Hayek 1952; Popper [1957] 1991). On top of that, Hayek argued, the social scientist must allow for endless variations in personal knowledge—and in people's *interpretations* of what they think they know.

Hayek emphasized interpersonal differences in knowledge and interpretation because those are what he saw in economic life: different consumers with knowledge of what they think they each need; entrepreneurs with varying "local" knowledge of what they think will suit consumers' felt needs. Hayek's perspective, especially when married to a Popperian emphasis on the conjectural nature of knowledge, sculpts a *Homo economicus*—and a *Homo politicus*, I think—that have little in common with the orthodox neoclassical model of the all-knowing, isolated rational chooser.

If knowledge is interpersonally variable then we must allow, at the very least, for interpersonal forms of *ignorance*, too: one person may not know what another knows. And if the world is complicated enough, or simply vast enough, that people can be ignorant of some of its aspects, surely it is complex enough or vast enough that they can also be *mistaken* about parts of it. If knowledge is conjectural, however, experimentation (both scientific and economic) may discover truths that correct people's mistakes. Thus, markets and science may be *imperfect processes of ignorance alleviation through error correction*. Finally, if experiments are tests of *interpretations*, then people may not only be knowledgeable, ignorant, or mistaken about discrete facts or "data," but about theories of how facts cause and affect each other—and, therefore, about how best to draw conceptual lines around "the" facts; and about which facts are important to know.

As for *Homo economicus*'s social isolation: theories and interpretations originate in human minds, but most people are relatively passive consumers of theories and interpretations developed by other people. My adoption of someone else's theory, while perhaps a random matter of which theories I happen to encounter and find initially persuasive, is, on the other hand, not completely unpredictable (at least if I am a member of a group to which the law of large numbers can be applied). The heuristics that I use to assess persuasiveness must either be genetically wired or culturally imbibed. And my theoretical views must be constrained not only by the heuristics that I use to assess persuasiveness, but by the fact that I live in a specific place and time,

where some theories are readily available to me and others—having been forgotten, unpublicized, discredited, or not yet invented—are not. It would seem, then, that a logical culmination of the Hayek-Popper view is to place great weight on the importance, the potential mistakenness, and the interpersonal transmission of theories: i.e., on culture. The vagaries of culture add yet another layer of complexity to social science, above and beyond the complexity facing the natural scientist.

Naturally and culturally acquired ideas and interpretations, each of them as fallible as the people who—starting out ignorant—*need* to acquire them if they are to try to understand a complex world: this is standard post-Renaissance epistemology. Yet even as the humanities have left conventional epistemology behind, confusing epistemic sophistication with "post-modern" skepticism,[2] the social sciences have gone in the opposite direction, essentially reviving Plato by assuming, implicitly (few would be so foolish as to believe it explicitly), that people have godlike knowledge of everything they need to know—having forgotten, as it were, only what it is "rational" for them to ignore. The Cartesian *cogito* is no triumph for these rationally ignorant masters of the universe, who not only know that they exist, but who know all the other things that are useful to know, excluding only the "information" whose benefits (they somehow know) would not justify the costs of learning it.

Descartes, by contrast, thought that all claims to knowledge should be questioned, because naturally and culturally perceived truths can be illusory. Descartes led to Hume, thence to Kant and Popper. Kant and Popper led to Hayek (Gray 1984; Clouatre 1987). Not surprisingly, then, Popper and Hayek were both keenly interested in ignorance and error, and in biological and scientific (and, in Hayek's case, economic) evolutionary processes by which ignorance can be overcome, errors corrected, and knowledge acquired.[3]

In hindsight, the papers published in our early volumes seem to have succeeded rather well in asking about the implications of the Popper-Hayek presumption of ignorance.[4] Good answers, however, were not immediately forthcoming. It turned out that grasping the implications of ignorance required a great deal of ground clearing (an effort that continues).[5] And as the ground cleared, it became apparent that something was missing: a bridge between, on the one hand, Popper's ignorance-centric philosophy of science and Hayek's ignorance-centric economics; and, on the other hand, politics.

Political Ignorance and Modern Democracy

We found the bridge, logically enough, in political science, where "public ignorance" had long been the premier finding in the study of public opinion. A robust literature, tracing its lineage to Philip E. Converse's "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics"—which *Critical Review* brought back into print last year (Converse [1964] 2006)—quietly kept alive subversive questions about the political competence of the public that had been asked by Walter Lippmann ([1922] 1949) and by Joseph Schumpeter (1950)—yet another Austrian economist.

The main lines of public-opinion research were first reviewed in these pages in 1998, and have been explored since then by a growing number of eminent researchers.[6] In the past decade, *Critical Review* has also published much work by younger scholars[7] who share a desire to explore the causes, consequences, and normative implications of public ignorance by building upon, but going beyond, the established lines of research. The current issue continues both of these trends, with pointed discussions of recent developments in the literature by distinguished public-opinion scholars Robert S. Erikson and Benjamin I. Page; and with inaugural publications by Sebastian Benthall, Stephen Miller, and Christopher Wisniewski, along with a debate over Samuel DeCanio's own inaugural publications, which appeared herein previously. This issue of the journal is therefore a good benchmark of the progress we have made, and of at least the "known unknowns" that remain to be explored.

Miller shows that "liberal" and "conservative" members of the general public share strikingly similar suspicions about employers, businesses, and profits—affirming that, as Converse pointed out, political observers may attribute a spurious logic to public opinion by projecting onto the public ideological differences that are the province of a highly politicized few. Page and Erikson, on the other hand, argue that public opinion is more logical, if not ideological, than it may seem.

Wisniewski's paper challenges the ability of academic "cultural studies" to grasp the realities of political culture; his argument is contested by noted cultural-studies scholar Mark Fenster. And lest anyone interpret Conversean research to commend the rule of experts, Benthall, reviewing Philip E. Tetlock's devastating research into (the absence of) social-scientific expertise (Tetlock 2005), points out that mere inertia, in the form of computer extrapolations of present conditions, predicts the future better than does even the most open-minded group of "experts" (cf. Taleb 2005).

In another article, however, economist Bryan Caplan disputes whether Tetlock's findings are as devastating as they appear. The question of so-called experts' expertise is fast becoming a favorite in these pages. Future issues will feature debates on social-psychology literature that, *inter alia*, seems to confirm that experts succumb to a "spiral of conviction," such that they compensate, with dogmatism, for their relatively high levels of knowledge (Friedman 2006a, x–xiv and Appendix).

The Reign of Elites

The Wisniewski-Fenster debate, like that between DeCanio and Daniel Carpenter, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Martin Shefter, suggests that vast research frontiers can be opened by treating ignorance as a starting point in the study of politics. The two debates also illustrate how such research might be integrated with the extant literature to portray modern politics and government far more realistically than has been done to date. Pending the needed research, such a portrait as the one I will now paint is speculative—but it is not purely speculative, since it comports not only with the extant research, but with abundant anecdotal observation of mass democratic processes.

DeCanio asks whether the public's ignorance of politics unwittingly confers a significant degree of "autonomy" upon bureaucratic, judicial, and legislative decision makers. Wisniewski asks what it means to say that the sources of political actors'—and non-actors'—political beliefs is "cultural." Both questions lead to profound epistemic and methodological issues, the resolution of which directly affects one's overarching view of modern political reality.

According to the "Public Ignorance/State Autonomy" (PISA) paradigm that DeCanio champions, public opinion can constrain the autonomy of state officials only to the extent that the public knows what the officials are doing (or to the extent that the officials fear that the public will find out). This constraint presumably shrinks as the size of the state grows (Somin 1998, DeCanio 2000a, DeCanio 2000b, DeCanio 2006). The more things the state does, the less likely that any one of those things will be publicly scrutinized.

This leaves modern democracy with two different sources of governance: the "masses," in the rare cases in which they know and care about what the state is doing; and the "state elites" (bureaucrats, judges, and

legislators) who, according to the theory, normally make policy decisions, far from the public eye. Does the ignorant masses' inability to ensure that public officials seek the public good mean that the officials seek their own advantage—as popular opinion, echoed by public-choice theory, might suggest?

The answer seems to be no, for the most part. For instance, there is surprisingly little evidence of bureaucratic self-seeking (e.g., Kelman 1987; Blais and Dion 1991; Lewin 1991, ch. 4). The self-interest of bureaucrats seems to be constrained by the fixed terms of advancement in the civil service and by group norms of public service. The same types of constraints would seem to apply to judges. It also stands to reason that recruitment effects would tell against pecuniary motives: neither the pay scales, nor widely taught understandings of the impropriety of self-interest in government—as opposed to its propriety in the economy—would suggest government service as an avenue for the avaricious.

While such constraints might keep self-interest under control, they would still, according to the PISA paradigm, leave considerable scope for state officials to take actions that might be unpopular if they were to come to public attention. If not self-interest, however, what would be the motive for such potentially unpopular actions?

It is logical to suppose (pending further research) an overlap between the tiny fraction of the public that the literature shows is constrained by some political ideology—the *ideological* elite—and the even smaller number of people who make bureaucratic, judicial, and legislative decisions—state elites. Conceivably, this overlap is quite thorough, with state elites effectively a subset of the larger, ideological elite. The ideological elite surely includes people who are intensely interested in politics but don't actually work in government. But personal experience suggests that people who pursue careers in government are likely to be ideologically aware and, indeed, ideologically driven. After all, they are there, in their opinion, to do good—the definition of which begs for ideological definition.

Research on ideology thus far converges on dogmatism as its key trait.[8] To the extent that state elites are indeed ideological elites, then, what we would mean by state autonomy is, generally speaking, rule by dogmatic elites. Normatively speaking, if the actual alternative to rule by the ignorant is rule by the doctrinaire, then modern democracy poses a true Hobson's choice.[9]

Where do ideologies come from? Converse ([1964] 2006, 64) suggested that "the broad contours of elite decisions over time can depend

in a vital way upon currents in what is loosely called 'the history of ideas.'" Yet there has been a paucity of research integrating the history of ideas with the actions of political elites. One reason for this is, surely, a positivist legacy that privileges statistical evidence over other kinds. How could one possibly *quantify* the formative influence of Marx's, or Freud's, or Keynes's ideas (or Hayek's) on the political elites of a given era?

No matter. To the extent that state elites are ideological elites, we should investigate the sources of their ideologies, whether with quantitative or "qualitative" methods.

The Occasionally Sovereign People

If not ideology, what determines how the apolitical mass public exercises its occasional veto over semi-autonomous state elites—and its unquestionable ability to rotate elites—through the electoral mechanism?

The public-opinion research shows that most citizens, like most bureaucrats, try to govern not selfishly but "sociotropically": that is, they tend to vote for the politicians whom they think will advance the public good (e.g., Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Kiewiet 1983; Lewin 1991, ch. 2). In the absence of ideological guidance about which politicians fit that description, however, sociotropic voting decisions can be based on any number of criteria of the public good, including cues from party leaders (Zaller 1992) or interest groups (e.g., Lupia 2006), characterological or issue heuristics (e.g., Popkin 1991, ch. 3), sympathy with or antipathy toward certain groups (see Kinder 2006, 209), and retrospective economic assessments (e.g., Fiorina 1979), to name several.

But the public has little direct access to information about partisan statements, interest-group endorsements, politicians' character traits and issue positions, or the economic conditions experienced by other citizens. Such "data" must be *communicated* to the public. And if a member of the public is to understand and use the communicated facts, she must, however implicitly, infer their usefulness from theories, however tacit, about why this particular information is important—and about how to interpret it. One needs a causal *theory* to infer that policy A is conducive to prosperity, or to any other aspect of collective (or, for that matter, personal) well-being. Even the retrospective voter is inferring that some policy undertaken by the incumbent party is responsible for whatever the

voter interprets as good, or bad, economic results: "the nature of the times" heuristic, to echo Converse ([1964] 2006, 16ff.) again, is as theory-laden as any other heuristic.

Information-mediating theories may be hard-wired; or they, like the information being mediated, may be communicated from other people. (Or both.) Thus, if we want to know *how* state autonomy is likely to be constrained by the public, it would seem that, among other things, we should study the information and ideas explicitly and implicitly conveyed to the public by the mass media. As part of this research, one might investigate the political beliefs of media personnel, whose own implicit causal theories must play a role in the selection of, and the spin unwittingly placed upon, the information and ideas that they convey to the electorate.

Investigating media personnel's beliefs would also be logical in order to understand *when* state autonomy is likely to be constrained. If, as the PISA paradigm maintains, ignorance is the normal public condition; and if the public can pressure legislators to stop only what the public knows is happening; then, however occasionally, the public must be informed about what is happening, and that depends on the belief of media personnel that something *important* is happening. Given the breadth and depth of public inattention to politics, it would probably take a media firestorm (or a barrage of campaign ads) to inform a large segment of the public about any particular state action. Presumably, then, state actions that media personnel find deeply objectionable will be prime candidates for popular constraint, and other state actions usually won't (unless they can be linked by a well-financed opponent's media consultants to an incumbent politician or party).

Is Ignorance Imposed?

Consider the alternative to the assertions I have just made. If the political world were so simple and straightforward that culturally mass-mediated interpretation of it were unnecessary, then we would need only to open our eyes in order to achieve, for all practical purposes, omniscience about it.

That, for example, is the implicit epistemology of Marx. He didn't think that proletarians will achieve class consciousness by finding the workings of the world illuminated in the pages of *Capital*. Rather, what he thought necessary is that proletarians be put on the same factory floor

with each other, where they can directly—without mediation—observe each other's exploitation, and draw the right causal conclusions.

Popper (1963, 7–8) called this naïve epistemology "the doctrine of manifest truth." As he pointed out, if the truth is so very obvious, then ignorance—not knowledge—becomes anomalous. *How can people fail to see what is manifestly true?* Somebody must be *deceiving* them. "The conspiracy theory of ignorance," he wrote, "is a curious outgrowth from the doctrine of manifest truth" (ibid.).

Both DeCanio and Wisniewski are, in part, contesting the conspiracy theory of ignorance. In DeCanio's case, the alleged conspirators are state elites who, as Ginsberg contends, *manipulate* public opinion by *deliberately* creating public ignorance. No doubt this sometimes happens, but do we have reason to think it so widespread that it is an important source of state autonomy? In a society such as the United States, after all, the government does not control the media. Thus, control over public opinion on the part of *state* elites rather than *media* elites would require a *conspiracy* between the two, in most cases.

Similarly, the academic discipline of cultural studies, which Wisniewski contrasts against the much-needed *study of political culture*, tends to reduce culture to a giant conspiracy to promote public ignorance—albeit a very sophisticated type of conspiracy (and a very specific type of ignorance). The conspirators need not even be people, with proper names, who plot their deceptions in secret. "Discourses" that serve to uphold the present order *somehow* arise, Foucault believed, and discourses have the same effect that deliberate lies would have, but much more insidiously. Thus, "ideology" is insinuated into popular culture, shielding the status quo from uprisings against it by the people—who would otherwise apprehend its *manifest* oppressiveness.

By "ideology," cultural studies scholars do not mean what Converse meant: any belief system that (we think) helps us understand the world—including the belief systems of cultural studies scholars. Instead, they mean by "ideology" what Marx meant: *only* belief systems that blind the masses to their own domination and exploitation. Such belief systems, it is assumed, have to be imposed on the masses through ideological manipulation. Otherwise, the true oppressiveness of the status quo would be so *obvious* that it would apprehended by all, and revolution would follow.

In cultural studies, then, cultural processes move "the masses" *toward* ignorance. That they would, otherwise, know the truth is the implicit

assumption. By contrast, studies of cultural processes that *begin from* mass ignorance would seem to be natural for scholars familiar with the political-science research.

Here, at the mass level with which Wisniewski is dealing, quantitative approaches might find some traction. However, to the extent that cultural influences are incremental, cumulative, and of varying effectiveness, qualitative methods might be more appropriate. (So, too, as cultural studies scholars recognize, might attention to the entertainment media—not just the news media.)

Is Ignorance Chosen?

Oddly enough, quantitative approaches now share the methodological middle of the road with their polar opposite in political science: rational-choice theory.

Where quantitative scholars are staunchly empiricist statisticians, rational-choice "formal modelers" are resolutely apriorist mathematicians. Their formulae start with the notion that political behavior is instrumentally rational.

This notion is unobjectionable as long as it is treated as an ideal type, so that empirical research can then see whether and where the formulae are relevant. Below, David Meskill applies rational-choice theory to some real-world aspects of democracy, without violating the dictum of Mancur Olson (1965, 161), who concluded *The Logic of Collective Action* by pointing out that there are—of course—cases of "nonrational or irrational" political action; and that, in those cases, "it would perhaps be better to turn to psychology than to economics for a relevant theory." In sharp contrast, rational-choice *universalists*, or "economic imperialists," assume that *all* political behavior is instrumentally rational—even ideology; and even ignorance.

Rational-ignorance theory is built atop the theory of rational nonvoting. This offshoot of rational-choice theory begins with the fact that in a mass election, the odds of any one vote changing the outcome are minuscule. Therefore, it would be logical for an instrumentally rational member of the electorate to advance her political goals by doing almost anything other than going to the polls. Rational-ignorance theory then points out that there is little reason to acquire political information that, by the logic of rational nonvoting, would serve only to inform a vote that

it doesn't make sense to cast in the first place. Thus, according to rational-ignorance theory, people deliberately *choose* to be politically ignorant because they *know* that their vote wouldn't matter anyway.

The most glaring problem with the theory of rational nonvoting has always been "the paradox of voting." The hundreds of millions of votes that *are* cast indicate that (in the case of hundreds of millions of people) the theory does not apply to the real world. The prevalence of voting has similar consequences for the rational-ignorance hypothesis, since it would never be instrumentally rational to cast a vote that one *knows* is inadequately informed: doing so might mean voting for the opposite of the outcome one would actually favor if one weren't ignorant.[10]

It would seem, then, either that voters vote for non-instrumental reasons (such as the fulfillment of a perceived duty to vote); or that voters are instrumentally rational, but are ignorant of the astronomical odds against their vote affecting the outcome. Alternatively, they may simply be ignorant of their own larger political ignorance, rather than having *chosen* to be ignorant for any reason at all. This is to say that those voters who are instrumentally rational and ignorant are ignorant *inadvertently*—not rationally, nor irrationally, but accidentally.

"The flight from reality in the human sciences"[11] is, in large part, a flight from the messiness of ignorance, and the directly related messiness of human error. One result of the social-scientific "rationalization" of human action is to subtract from the human condition the experience of *surprise*.

Surprise is always a product of ignorance: either ignorance *simpliciter,* or ignorance of the fact that what one thought one knew turns out to have been wrong. We are surprised by "unknown unknowns"—of which, a post-Hayekian economist points out, we are "radically," as opposed to rationally, ignorant (Ikeda 2003). What makes surprise surprising is the ignorance that makes surprise unchosen. One might as reasonably concoct a formal model of the unexpected as one could assign odds to an unprecedented event (cf. Taleb 2007). But the pointlessness of modeling them formally or statistically does not make unknown unknowns any less important.

Only God is never surprised. By the same token, the rational chooser of ignorance is effectively omniscient: rational ignorance is knowing not only what one should, but what one shouldn't (rationally) know—which one therefore deliberately decides to ignore.

Where the Marxist portrays ignorance as being deliberately imposed on the people by bourgeois ideologists, the rational-ignorance theorist

portrays ignorance as being deliberately imposed by the people on themselves. But how do voters, any more than bourgeois ideologists, know the relevant "information": the theory of rational nonvoting, and the odds on which it is based? These are hardly matters routinely communicated to the public by the media or anyone else, which is presumably why so many people do, in fact, vote—and why so many make assiduous (if unsuccessful) efforts to be politically well informed.

From Ignorance to Error

Just as it is so often simply assumed that ignorance is a rational, "knowing" choice, it is usually assumed that the heuristics used by ignorant voters, such as the retrospective or nature-of-the-times heuristic, are *good* substitutes for knowledge (but see Somin 1998, sec. II; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000, 155). This assumption is captured in the habit of calling heuristics "information shortcuts": voters, whose time is scarce, are supposed to have figured out that they don't need to master the entirety of the political universe in order to vote intelligently; they can use a given heuristic to reach the same destination (an intelligent vote) more quickly. The problem is that you can't know whether you're taking a shortcut or making a wrong turn unless you already know where the intended destination is. The only guarantee that political heuristics aren't simply shortcuts to error is, again, the implicit assumption that heuristics-wielding voters are effectively omniscient, such that they *know* which heuristics are good ones.

If our models of politics are to have a place for error, we have to reset the default from knowledge to ignorance and, as Popper and Hayek did, treat knowledge as the epistemic exception. As a rule, no rational being would deliberately make a mistake—ever. Therefore, if in politics people do, in fact, err; and if they are, in fact, instrumentally rational; then their errors must either be due to a defect in their reasoning, or to their inadvertent ignorance of the fact that they are heading in the wrong direction. In short, they must err because they are human beings, often lost in the vastness of the world.

Readers who have been puzzled by the extensive attention that *Critical Review* has paid to rational-choice theory may now, I hope, better understand.[12] It all goes back to the Austrian economist, Hayek.

Rational-choice theory is parasitic on orthodox neoclassical economics, which initially assumes godlike, perfect knowledge on the part of

economic agents. For this reason, profits and losses, among other economic realities, are anomalous in the orthodox view: no perfectly knowledgeable entrepreneur would incur losses, nor would he fail to compete away another's profits (Kirzner 1997; Friedman 2006b, sec. II). Even when the orthodoxy has been amended to take account of the cost of acquiring information that one *knows* is valuable, radical ignorance, hence error, remain as anomalous in the economic orthodoxy as they are in the rationalist view of political ignorance that has been derived from that orthodoxy.

The deployment of the perfect-knowledge assumption by neoclassical economics has been aptly described in these pages as a triumph of precise, elegant modeling over reality (Boettke 1997)—and it is the principal *casus belli* between "Austrian" economists, such as Hayek, and their orthodox neoclassical colleagues. The Hayekian roots of the journal therefore uniquely suit it to resist economic imperialism, just as its Popperian roots suit it to the study of error.

The economic imperialist characterizes ignorance as the rational choice in a large electorate. This obscures the possibility that voters, even (in their own eyes) "well-informed" voters—indeed, even political elites—who have *not* chosen to be ignorant might, nonetheless, *be* ignorant, inadvertently. Consider, once more, the ideologies that Converse ([1964] 2006, sec. II) explored. In his telling, ideologies are bundles of beliefs that are loosely connected by "crowning postures"; both the postures and the links among them are, Converse suggests, of doubtful validity. *In the mind of the ideologue,* however, the ideology makes sense: indeed, everything the ideologue learns after mastering the ideology seems to confirm how sensible it is. How simple the world becomes!—as long as one selectively perceives it, *ignoring* what the ideology has prepared one to discount as impossible or unlikely, or what it simply hasn't flagged for attention. The ideologue doesn't know whatever her belief in the ideology keeps her from knowing; and one cannot rationally calculate the benefit of knowing what one doesn't know.

Meanwhile, someone who has learned another ideology sees the world very differently. What is "manifest" to one is not obvious to all. When an ideologue notices others' disagreement with his own manifest truths, how does he interpret it?

> The opponent has always to be explained, and the last explanation that we ever look for is that he sees a different set of facts. . . . So where two factions see vividly each its own aspect, and contrive their own

> explanations of what they see, it is almost impossible for them to credit each other with honesty. . . .
>
> [The opponent] presents himself as the man who says, evil be thou my good. He is an annoyance who does not fit into the scheme of things. Nevertheless he interferes. And since that scheme is based in our minds on incontrovertible fact fortified by irresistible logic, some place has to be found for him in the scheme. Rarely in politics . . . is a place made for him by the simple admission that he has looked upon the same reality and seen another aspect of it. (Lippmann [1922] 1949, 82–83)

"Out of the opposition," therefore, "we make villains and *conspiracies*" (ibid., 83, emph. added).

This picture sits uncomfortably, at best, with the prettified view of politics that follows from treating knowledge as the default position. Indeed, the ugliest parts of real-world politics may, themselves, have the same starting point as the rational-ignorance theorists' airbrushing of those parts: the starting point of assumed knowledge. The ideologue thinks of his ideology not as an ideology, but as a bundle of obvious truths, *known to all*. Why would the ideologue's opponent advocate the opposite of what "everybody knows"? He must *know he is wrong* (as conspirators do). But only a villain would knowingly advocate what is wrong.

If we take ignorance in politics as seriously as Popper and Hayek took it in science and economics, then not only the errors in people's political beliefs, but the dogmatism, self-righteousness, paranoia, and vilification that mark political believers may all be illuminated. What is dogmatism if not ignorance of one's own ignorance? What is self-righteousness if not anger that others are ignoring the "manifest truth"? What is the paranoid tendency, if not the conflation of others' ignorance with their knowing deception? Why vilify one's opponents, if not because the harm they do is intended as such? *Un*intended consequences, not deliberate evil; *well*-intended opponents, not demons; misguided idealists, not knowing utopians; erroneous perceptions, not lies; contestable interpretations, not delusions; and the widespread discounting of these complexities in favor of the commonplace political preoccupation with motives, mendacity, and malevolence—these are only a few of the things that are overlooked if we fail to start with ignorance.

In the current issue, Jon A. Shields examines some of these unpleasant realities; future issues will feature symposia on American presidents as demagogues; on whether dogmatism is cognitive or affective; on Ilya

Somin's *The Politics of Ignorance* (forthcoming); and on Caplan's *The Myth of the Rational Voter* (2007). Such topics are rich with normative implications as well as empirical ones.

Popper argued that democracy can achieve good results, despite public ignorance, by means of policy experimentation. Taking Hayek's side in the matter, and (sometimes) John Stuart Mill's, I have used evolutionary psychology to suggest in these pages that error correction is likelier in the private than in the public sphere, due to the greater possibilities for effective private experimentation.[13] Similarly, Somin (1998) has argued that the agenda of democracy must be reduced and localized if there is to be any hope for well-informed public policy in the face of public ignorance. Caplan, however, thinks that public ignorance (of economics) could be remedied by the ministrations of an economically literate elite. David Ciepley (1999), similarly, has argued here for rule by experts—but not necessarily economists. Such recommendations gain added currency with the rise of "the new paternalism" (e.g., Thaler and Sunstein 2003), based on psychological research into *private* ignorance. If not rule by philosopher-kings, or economist-kings, what about rule by psychologist-kings?

What is fairly certain, unfortunately, is that there is all too much empirical fuel for such normative debates. Truculence, indignation, misunderstanding, bias, and disastrous mistake: the list of ignorance-based realities could be extended, and their study is crucial. They threaten our well-being and, now, our very existence. There may never have been a better time to take ignorance seriously than 20 years after this journal started to do so.

NOTES

1. I hatched the plan with Dennis Auerbach and Milton Mueller, inspired by Weber's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* and, more immediately, Paul Piccone's *Telos*. The format, however, was to consist primarily of long review essays, *à la* the *New York Review of Books*, to enable scholars to criticize each other's ideas at length. The first issue appeared in the winter of 1986–87. By 2001, chronic understaffing had caused us to fall so far behind schedule that we skipped two years so as to catch up to the calendar (volume 14 is dated 2000; volume 15, 2003).
2. See, *inter alia,* special issues treating Derrida, Foucault, de Man, and Saussure (vol. 3, no. 1); and Fish, Lyotard, and postmodernism in general (vol. 5, no. 2).

3. Popper's work as a whole treats scientific knowledge as an evolutionary outcome in the metaphorical sense, in which theories better adapted to reality survive experimental challenge. Jarvie 1988, Munz 1988, and O'Hear 1988 discuss the compatibility of Popperianism with the natural selection of sensory apparatus; see also Radnitzky and Bartley, ed., 1987. In complementary fashion, Hayek's work in intellectual history (e.g., Hayek 1952 and 1954) takes it for granted that error, based on ignorance, may also grow over time—presumably because in intellectual history, there is no evolutionary reality check. Later in his career, however—dissatisfied, I suspect, with the increasing irrelevance of "the planning mentality" as a cultural explanation for widespread economic attitudes with which he disagreed—he posited affective rather than cognitive evolutionary explanations (Hayek 1983). I have argued that these must, at the very least, be supplemented by simple ignorance of economics (Friedman 2005, xliv ff.), if not cognitivist evolutionary explanations (Friedman 2006b, sec. V) of what Hayek sought to explain.
4. Lavoie 1987 attempted to extend Austrian insights about economic ignorance into a new understanding of contemporary democracy. Other agenda-setting papers were Halverson 1991 (on state autonomy in modern democracy); Cornuelle 1992 (on the irrelevance, to social democracy, of the Austrians' argument against communism); Maryanski 1995 (on how human evolution bears on human well-being); Prisching 1995 (on public ignorance); Borchert 1996 (on differences between public opinion and elite governing opinion); Greenfeld 1996, Tyrrell 1996, and Weber 1996 (on nationalism as the central heuristic of modern politics); and Boettke 1997 (on the relevance of "Austrian" perspectives even to social democracy).
5. A list of the ground-clearing articles would encompass at least half of the first ten volumes. More selectively, then: Clouatre 1987 challenged the coherence of Hayek's epistemology. Legutko 1990 questioned liberal relativism, as did later contributors. Shibles 1994 and Kuspit 1995 questioned the aesthetic effects of capitalism. Sunstein 1994 emphasized the successes of many piecemeal regulatory interventions. Lane 1994 asked whether wealth increases happiness—a matter subsequently discussed in vol. 10, no. 4. Friedman 1989, 1990, and 1997 tried to dismantle the synthesis of Austrian economics and libertarian philosophy, prompting debates in vol. 6, no. 1 and vol. 12, no. 3. The critique of rational-choice theory began in vol. 9, nos. 1–2. Lewin 1998 began the critique of *public*-choice theory.

   Papers debating various Popperian and Hayekian themes are too numerous to mention, but many of them are contained in special issues devoted to Hayek (vol. 3, no. 2 and vol. 11, no. 1) and to both Hayek and Popper (vol. 17, nos. 1–2).
6. See the empirically oriented work of Anderson 1998, Bennett 2003 and 2006, Converse 2006, Fishkin 2006, Graber 2006, Kersh 1998, Kinder 2006, Kuran 1998, Lupia 2006, Popkin 2006, Ravenal 2000, Shapiro 1998, Tetlock 1998, Wawro 2006, and Wilson 1998. On normative implications, see Althaus 2006; Hardin 2006; Posner 2004; and Talisse 2004 and 2006.
7. E.g., Bramwell 2004; Ciepley 1999, 2000, and 2004; DeCanio 2000a, 2000b, 2005, and 2006; Hoffman 1998, 1999, and 2003; Niemi 2003; Salam 2003; Savodnik 2003; Somin 1998, 2000, 2004, and 2006; Upham 2005; and Weinshall 2003.

8. See, e.g., Lord, et al., 1979; Putnam et al., 1979; Converse and Pierce 1986; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Kunda 1987; Jennings 1992; Johnston 1996; Zuwerink and Devine 1996; Lundgren and Prislin 1998; Taber and Lodge 2006.
9. Friedman 2006a, ix-x, and Friedman 2005, xxi-xxv.
10. But see Somin 2006, 257–62.
11. Borrowed from the title of Shapiro 2005.
12. E.g., vol. 9, nos. 1–2, republished, with a revised introduction, as Friedman, ed., 1996.
13. For defenses of Popper's view, see Eidlin 2005 and Notturno 2006. Shearmur 2006 responds to Eidlin; Friedman 2006b, sec. IV, responds to Notturno; ibid., sec. I, sketches the evolutionary-psychology argument.

REFERENCES

Althaus, Scott. 2006. "False Starts, Dead Ends, and New Opportunities in Public Opinion Research." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 75–104.

Anderson, Richard D., Jr. 1998. "The Place of the Media in Popular Democracy." *Critical Review* 12(4): 481–500.

Bennett, Stephen Earl. 2003. "Is the Public's Ignorance of Politics Trivial?" *Critical Review* 15(3–4): 307–38.

Bennett, Stephen Earl. 2006. "Democratic Competence, Before Converse and After." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 105–42.

Blais, André, and Stephane Dion, eds. 1991. *The Budget-Maximizing Bureaucrat*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Boettke, Peter J. 1997. "Where Did Economics Go Wrong? Equilibrium as a Flight from Reality." *Critical Review* 11(1): 11–64.

Borchert, Jens. 1996. "Welfare-State Retrenchment: Playing the National Card." *Critical Review* 10(1): 63–94.

Bramwell, Austin. 2004. "Against Originalism: Getting over the U.S. Constitution." *Critical Review* 16(4): 431–54.

Caplan, Bryan. 2004. "Is Socialism Really 'Impossible'?" *Critical Review* 16(1): 33–52.

Caplan, Bryan. 2007. *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ciepley, David. 1999. "Democracy Despite Voter Ignorance: A Weberian Reply to Somin and Friedman." *Critical Review* 13(1–2): 191–227.

Ciepley, David. 2000. "Why the State Was Dropped in the First Place: A Prequel to Skocpol's 'Bringing the State Back In.'" *Critical Review* 14(2–3): 157–214.

Ciepley, David. 2004. "Authority in the Firm (and the Attempt to Theorize It Away)." *Critical Review* 16(1): 81–116.

Clouatre, Dallas. 1987. "Making Sense of Hayek." *Critical Review* 1(1) (Winter 1986–87): 73–79.

Converse, Philip E., and Roy Pierce. 1986. *Political Representation in France*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Converse, Philip E. [1964] 2006. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 1–74.

Converse, Philip E. 2006. "Democratic Theory and Electoral Reality." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 297–330.

Cornuelle, Richard. 1992. "The Power and Poverty of Libertarian Thought." *Critical Review* 6(1): 1–10.

DeCanio, Samuel. 2000a. "Beyond Marxist State Theory: State Autonomy in Democratic Societies." *Critical Review* 14(2–3): 215–36.

DeCanio, Samuel. 2000b. "Bringing the State Back In . . . Again." *Critical Review* 14(2–3): 139–46.

DeCanio, Samuel. 2005. "Murray Edelman on Symbols and Ideology in Democratic Politics." *Critical Review* 17(3–4): 339–50.

DeCanio, Samuel. 2006. "Mass Opinion and American Political Development." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 143–56.

Eidlin, Fred. 2006. "Popper, Social-Democratic Politics, and Free-Market Liberalism." *Critical Review* 17(1–2): 25–48.

Fiorina, Morris P. 1979. *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Fishkin, James S. 2006. "Beyond Polling Alone: The Quest for an Informed Public." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 157–66.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 1989. "The New Consensus: I. The Fukuyama Thesis." *Critical Review* 3(3–4): 373–410.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 1990. "The New Consensus: II. The Democratic Welfare State." *Critical Review* 4(4): 633–708.

Friedman, Jeffrey, ed. 1996. *The Rational Choice Controversy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 1997. "What's Wrong with Libertarianism." *Critical Review* 11(3): 407–63.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 1998. "Public Ignorance and Democratic Theory." *Critical Review* 12(4): 397–412.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 2000. "After Democracy, Bureaucracy? Rejoinder to Ciepley." *Critical Review* 14(1): 113–37.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 2005. "Popper, Weber, and Hayek: The Epistemology and Politics of Ignorance." *Critical Review* 17(1–2): i–lviii.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 2006a. "Democratic Competence in Normative and Positive Theory: Neglected Implications of 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.'" *Critical Review* 18(1–3): i–xliii.

Friedman, Jeffrey. 2006b. "Taking Ignorance Seriously: Rejoinder to Critics." *Critical Review* 18(4): 469–532.

Graber, Doris A. 2006. "Government by the People, for the People—Twenty-First Century Style." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 167–78.

Gray, John. 1984. *Hayek on Liberty*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Greenfeld, Liah. 1996. "The Modern Religion?" *Critical Review* 10(2): 169–92.

Halverson, John. 1991. "Plato's Republic and Ours." *Critical Review* 5(4): 453–74.

Hardin, Russell. 2006. "Ignorant Democracy." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 179–98.

Hayek, F. A. 1952. *The Sensory Order: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hayek, F. A. 1952. *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason*. New York: The Free Press.
Hayek, F. A. 1954. "History and Politics." Introduction to idem, ed., *Capitalism and the Historians*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Hayek, F. A. 1983. *Knowledge, Evolution, and Society*. London: Adam Smith Institute.
Hoffman, Tom. 1998. "Rationality Reconceived: The Mass Electorate and Democratic Theory." *Critical Review* 12(4): 459–80.
Hoffman, Tom. 1999. "Humanism and Antihumanism in Lasch and Sandel." *Critical Review* 13(1–2): 97–114.
Hoffman, Tom. 2003. "The Quiet Desperation of Dahl's (Quiet) Radicalism." *Critical Review* 15(1–2): 87–122.
Ikeda, Sanford. 2003. "How Compatible Are Public Choice and Austrian Political Economy?" *Review of Austrian Economics* 16(4): 63–75.
Jarvie, Ian. 1988. "Evolutionary Epistemology." *Critical Review* 2(1): 92–102.
Jennings, M. Kent. 1992. "Ideology among Mass Publics and Political Elites." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56: 419–41.
Johnston, Lucy. 1996. "Resisting Change: Information Seeking and Stereotype Change." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 26: 799–825.
Kelman, Steven. 1987. *Making Public Policy*. New York: Basic Books.
Kersh, Rogan. 1998. "Anti-Democratic Demos: The Dubious Basis of Congressional Approval." *Critical Review* 12(4): 569–84.
Kiewiet, D. Roderick. 1983. *Macroeconomics and Micropolitics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kinder, Donald. 2006. "Belief Systems Today." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 197–216.
Kinder, Donald, and D. Roderick Kiewiet. 1981. "Sociotropic Politics: The American Case." *British Journal of Political Science* 11: 129–61.
Kirzner, Israel M. 1997. "Entrepreneurial Discovery and the Competitive Market Process: An Austrian Approach." *Journal of Economic Literature* 35(1): 60–85.
Kuklinski, James H., and Paul J. Quirk. 2000. "Reconsidering the Rational Public: Cognition, Heuristics, and Mass Opinion." In *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, ed. Arthur Lupia, Matthew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kunda, Ziva. 1987. "Motivated Inference: Self-Serving Generation and Evaluation of Causal Theories." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53(4): 636–47.
Kuran, Timur. 1998. "Insincere Deliberation and Democratic Failure." *Critical Review* 12(4): 529–44.
Kuspit, Donald. 1995. "Art and Capital: An Ironic Dialectic." *Critical Review* 9(4): 465–82.
Lane, Robert E. 1994. "The Road Not Taken: Friendship, Consumerism, and Happiness." *Critical Review* 8(4): 521–54.
Lavoie, Don. 1987. "Political and Economic Illusions of Socialism." *Critical Review* 1(1) (Winter 1986–87): 1–34.
Legutko, Ryszard. 1990. "Society as a Department Store." *Critical Review* 4(3): 327–44.

Lewin, Leif. 1991. *Self-Interest and Public Interest in Western Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewin, Leif. 1998. "Man, Society, and the Failure of Politics." *Critical Review* 12 (1–2): 1–12.

Lippmann, Walter. [1922] 1949. *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press.

Lodge, Milton, and Ruth Hamill. 1986. "A Partisan Schema for Political Information Processing." *American Political Science Review* 80: 505–519.

Lord, Charles, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1979. "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37(11): 2098–2109.

Lundgren, Sharon M., and Radmilla Prislin. 1998. "Motivated Cognitive Processing and Attitude Change." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24(7): 715–26.

Lupia, Arthur. 2006. "How Elitism Undermines the Study of Voter Competence." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 217–32.

Maryanski, A. R. 1995. "What Is the Good Society for Hominoids?" *Critical Review* 9(4): 483–500.

Munz, Peter. 1988. "Sense Perception and the Reality of the World." *Critical Review* 2(1): 65–77.

Niemi, Alison. 2003. "Film as Religious Experience: Myths and Models in Mass Entertainment." *Critical Review* 15(3–4): 435–46.

Notturno, Mark Amadeus. 2006. "Economism, Freedom, and 'The Epistemology and Politics of Ignorance': Reply to Friedman." *Critical Review* 18(4): 431–52.

O'Hear, Anthony. 1988. "The Evolution of Knowledge." *Critical Review* 2(1): 78–91.

Olson, Mancur. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Popkin, Samuel L. 1991. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Popkin, Samuel L. 2006. "The Factual Basis of 'Belief Systems': A Reassessment." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 233–54.

Popper, Karl. [1957] 1991. *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge.

Popper, Karl. 1963. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row.

Posner, Richard A. 2004. "Law, Pragmatism, and Democracy: Reply to Somin." *Critical Review* 16(4): 465–72.

Prisching, Manfred. 1995. "The Limited Rationality of Democracy: Schumpeter as the Founder of Irrational Choice Theory." *Critical Review* 9(3): 301–24.

Putnam, Robert D., R. Leonard, and R. Y. Nanetti. 1979. "Attitude Stability among Italian Elites." *American Journal of Political Science* 23: 463–94.

Radnitzky, Gerard, and W. W. Bartley, III, eds. 1987. *Evolutionary Epistemology, Theory of Rationality, and the Sociology of Knowledge*. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court.

Ravenal, Earl C. 2000. "Ignorant Armies: The State, the Public, and the Making of Foreign Policy." *Critical Review* 14(2–3): 327–74.

Salam, Reihan. 2003. "Habermas vs. Weber on Democracy." *Critical Review* 15(1–2): 59–86.

Savodnik, Peter. 2003. "Ernst Cassirer's Theory of Myth." *Critical Review* 15(3–4): 447–58.

Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1950. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row.
Selinger, Evan M. 2003. "Feyerabend's Democratic Critique of Expertise." *Critical Review* 15(3–4): 359–73.
Shapiro, Ian. 2005. *The Flight from Reality in the Human Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Shapiro, Robert Y. 1998. "Public Opinion, Elites, and Democracy." *Critical Review* 12(4): 501–28.
Shearmur, Jeremy. 2006. "Popper, Political Philosophy, and Social Democracy: Reply to Eidlin." *Critical Review* 18(4): 361–76.
Shibles, Warren. 1994. "Humanistic Art." *Critical Review* 8(3): 371–92.
Somin, Ilya. 1998. "Voter Ignorance and the Democratic Ideal." *Critical Review* 12(4): 413–58.
Somin, Ilya. 2000. "Democracy and Voter Ignorance Revisited: Rejoinder to Ciepley." *Critical Review* 14(1): 99–112.
Somin, Ilya. 2004. "Posner's Pragmatism." *Critical Review* 16(1): 1–22.
Somin, Ilya. 2006. "Knowledge about Ignorance: New Directions in the Study of Political Information." *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 255–78.
Somin, Ilya. Forthcoming. *The Politics of Ignorance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Sunstein, Cass R. 1994. "On Costs, Benefits, and Regulatory Success: Reply to Crandall." *Critical Review* 8(4): 623–34.
Taber, Charles S., and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 755–69.
Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. 2005. *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in the Market and in Life,* 2nd ed. New York: Random House.
Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. 2007. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. New York: Random House.
Talisse, Robert B. 2004. "Does Public Ignorance Defeat Deliberative Democracy?" *Critical Review* 16(4): 455–64.
Talisse, Robert B. 2006. "Democracy and Ignorance: Reply to Friedman." *Critical Review* 18(4): 453–68.
Tetlock, Philip E. 1998. "The Ever-Shifting Foundations of Democratic Theory: Do Citizens Have the Right Stuff?" *Critical Review* 12(4): 545–62.
Tetlock, Philip E. 2005. *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. 2003. "Libertarian Paternalism." *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* 93(2): 175–79.
Tyrrell, Martin. 1996. "Nation-States and States of Mind: Nationalism as Psychology." *Critical Review* 10(2): 233–50.
Upham, S. Phineas. 2005. "Is Economics Scientific? Is Science Scientific?" *Critical Review* 17(1–2): 117–32.
Wawro, Gregory J. 2006. "The Rationalizing Public?" *Critical Review* 18(1–3): 279–96.
Weber, Eugen. 1996. "What Rough Beast?" *Critical Review* 10(2): 285–98.
Weinshall, Matthew. 2003. "Means, Ends, and Public Ignorance in Habermas's Theory of Democracy." *Critical Review* 15(1–2): 23–58.

Wilson, James Q. 1998. "Idealizing Politics." *Critical Review* 12(4): 563–68.
Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Zuwerink, Julia, and Patricia G. Devine. 1996. "Attitude Importance and Resistance to Persuasion: It's Not Just the Thought that Counts." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70(5): 931–44.