Ideology and Reality
Putting Belief and Behaviour in Context

by

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Abstract

This paper investigates how belief, social power, and ideology work together to create the subjectivities and social structures that guide our behaviour. Phenomena such as cognitive shortcuts, memory, bias, empathy, and dissonance are used to trace the effects of power and ideology on social construction and role-taking behaviour. Research on mass opinion in the United States is then used to identify the effects of information and salience on construction. Different conceptions of ideology and interest, drawn from the work of Hume, Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault, and others were referenced to explore the larger social dynamics of ideas and structures. Academic, ethical, and democratic implications are investigated at different points. The paper concludes by connecting parenting style to moral development in order to find strategies for resisting the tendency towards institutional behaviour.
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Foreword

This study is the offspring of 'dissonance', loosely defined as the unpleasant experience of trying to resolve two opposing thoughts. Its origin was in a pair of dilemmas that I faced as an activist:

*The ideas to which I adhere are important and true. I can convincingly communicate these ideas in order to halt the juggernaut of corporate greed and oppression.*

Nobody cares what I think and nothing I do makes a difference.

*I believe that people can treat one another with justice and respect.*

Human history is a depressing litany of self-inflicted harm.

Despite the bleak inception, the sustaining force behind this effort was the hope that there would be some way of accounting for behaviour involved in systemic injustice. I remained optimistic that the human proclivity for perpetrating or enduring oppression may actually have some identifiable features: not a reliable pattern so much as similar traits between different acts of what seems like deliberate depravity. If these traits could be identified and explained, perhaps interventions were possible. If these could further the project of social justice, then perhaps the human condition could be slightly less uninspiring.

This project is the intersection of my professional, activist, and intellectual pursuits. After failing so completely as an activist, it became apparent to me that perhaps waving signs at people was not the best way of engaging with them. My roles as kindergarten teacher and parent directed me toward the notion that the ills of the world were not rooted in poor political judgement, but instead the lack of social development in the everyday people who, directly or indirectly, take part in oppression. I was confident that empathy combined with critical thought might be able to overcome the destructive effects of blinding ideology or indifference. So this project began.
What has followed in the last few years has been an immensely entertaining and hopefully useful inquiry that has spread out in many interesting directions. The first of these was the 'ideology theory' that informed my practice as an anti-globalization organizer: an examination of how belief can guide smart people to do destructive things. But given the fact that ideology trades in ideas and power, a cognitive framework seemed like a necessary component to this discussion. Social and cognitive psychology can provide very useful explanations, however counterintuitive, for the phenomena that 'ideology theory' cannot adequately clarify. Specifically, it can describe how reflexive mental processes, mediated by power and ideology, influence social construction and behaviour. In order to develop a more empirical picture of information and salience, theories of 'mass opinion' were also referenced. The final phase of this project probes the question of supporting child development towards greater pro-social and critical behaviour, and the last chapter is a review of relevant topics in affective, cognitive, and moral development.

First and foremost, this document is meant to help me address some of the injustice in the world in a way that is actually effective. The paradox of this attempt at theorizing is to give me, as an educator and activist, an intellectual framework that guides my practice. It comes from a driving need to have some guidance that is more than folk theory or vague sentiment. Conversely, my whole point is to question dogma at a deep level, so I can never take anything written here too seriously. Regardless of the seeming hubris or occasional lack of qualifying adjectives, this discussion is meant as a starting point for conversation rather than a hard model of institutional evil.

Another important qualification is the abiding and unapologetic use of secondary sources: this document was completed as a tertiary project after my parental and professional responsibilities were met. I look forward to reading the original research when I have some time. Also, in keeping with most writers that I have encountered, I have stuck with the term postmodernism rather than post-structuralism or the diminutive post-al. By way of apology, it is necessary to acknowledge the lack of
illustrating examples. This is not an attempt to elide contingency. Specific applications and analyses
will be available in a later draft.

Too many people have contributed to this work in some way, shape, or form and a few deserve special mention. My spouse, Tina Tse, was continuously supportive and edited an early draft. She models the loving parenting and critical teaching in ways that would put the literature to shame. Thanks to Peter Trifonas and Megan Boler at OISE for their guidance and feedback. Michael Spanner is my own postmodern condition, and is singled out for his relentless unwillingness to let me take anything for granted. Jerome Klassen kindly read an early draft and made some very helpful comments. Brian Fawcett also read an early draft and provided me with insight and encouragement when I began to question the merits of this project. Corvin Russell and Janet McIntosh made essential literature recommendations early in this endeavour. Andrew WK brought the noise.

This thesis is dedicated to two special people. First, I am dedicating this to my big sister Sheila, the original, unstoppable, and shameless rebel. This is the culmination of ten years of thought and action that began with her example. For this, I am deeply grateful. This is also to my daughter Niamh, who I am sure will follow in her auntie's footsteps as a sparkplug of some kind or another.

David Banerjee, 2010
Introduction

Institutional Behaviour

How did Christianity, originally premised on love and forgiveness, evolve into an institution that was responsible for violently unloving and unforgiving acts? How did Marx’s vision of liberation get turned into the violent oppression of Stalinism, Maoism, and the Khmer Rouge?

100,000,000: “men, women, and children who died a violent death at the hands of their fellow human beings in the last century [Waller, 2002, 2002, v].”

Given the dire warnings from scientific bodies about the threat of pollution and climate change, it would seem intuitive that concerned and knowledgeable people with the resources and wherewithal to change their habits would do so. It would seem that the likelihood of massive ecological catastrophe would make people rethink how they live their lives, and in doing so, would totally reorient their daily routines. But it doesn’t.

2: personal allotment, in tons of TNT, if the global nuclear arsenal was to be equally distributed [Krane, 1988, 556].

Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann was found to be in sound mental health by psychiatric standards, and had no real understanding of or commitment to Nazi principles. Nevertheless, he helped to manage the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of human beings, mostly Jews, against whom he bore no grudge [Arendt, 1963 26]. His excuse was that he was merely following orders.

200,000,000: The number of additional humans facing malnutrition as a result of speculation on food commodities in 2008, much of it by pension funds [Food First, 2009].

In Errol Morris’ Fog of War [2003], former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara almost wept when recalling the death of an American bomber pilot, in an otherwise stoic recollection of his role in the incineration of a hundred thousand Japanese civilians.

Most days, I wear clothes that were probably made in a sweatshop, I pay into a pension fund with little to no ethical screen, and I teach a biased curriculum, all before my resource-intensive lunch.
Eichmann was sane. The generals and fighters on both sides, in World War II, the ones who carried out the total destruction of entire cities, these were the sane ones. Those who have invented and developed atomic bombs, thermonuclear bombs, missiles; who have planned the strategy of the next war; who have evaluated the various possibilities of using bacterial and chemical agents: these are not the crazy people, they are the sane people. The ones who coolly estimate how many millions of victims can be considered expendable in a nuclear war; I presume they do all right with the Rorschach ink blots too.

Thomas Merton [1966]

The underlying inquiry behind the preceding vignettes is broad: what is the relationship between what humans believe and how they behave, and what is the role of 'power' that mediates this relationship? As a general question it has a wide range of disparate and conflicting answers. None of these answers can completely and unambiguously describe any one, practical instance of behaviour, let alone being general enough to describe several such examples. Simply assuming that such connections exist is a signal of intellectual hubris, suggesting certitude, a major sin of the postmodern world. Such problems are assumed too complex to yield coherent explanations that reflect reality, in part because reality has become a site of struggle, and laying claim to it is inherently oppressive and usually wrong to boot.

There is, however, a lot of pain and suffering that can likely be mitigated if we better understood the complex relationship between belief, behaviour, and power. As described in the fourth vignette, humanity can entertain the notion of eradicating itself entirely, so such a project cannot be prematurely dismissed as theoretically unpalatable. The simple fact that we can consider mass murder on the scale of human annihilation demands that we need to better understand our motives and behaviour. Accounting for all of the actual violence and suffering – military, economic, ecological, or otherwise – makes this understanding even more of a priority. These hurtful actions, partially illustrated above, can be limited somewhat once we understand our behaviour's roots and dynamics. It is immediately apparent, however, that certitude and utopian ambition are among the first steps on the
road to perdition, the very thing we are hoping to prevent and diminish. Hence, such a project needs to be approached with sufficient humility. But it must be approached nonetheless.

There are certain continuities between the sketches that opened this chapter, beyond the fact that they are unremittingly bleak. Among the less intuitive is the collective nature of these vignettes, the fact that the bombing of Tokyo and the Inquisition were not accomplished by lone individuals nor by a particular elite element. The social and economic consequences of the automobile, including the warming of the planet, are not solely attributable to Henry Ford or Robert Moses but to the millions of daily commuters as well. Oppressive incarceration and punishment exist – in the day to day administration and implementation of prisons – because of the actions of the people in the correctional and legal systems, not merely through the existence of the relevant disciplinary knowledges. The behaviours or effects described are the result of large numbers of people who likely did not stand out, by their society's standards, as inherently sinful, self-interested, egocentric, pathological, personally deficient, and/or dogmatically blind. Leadership and 'ideology', however much deserving of blame, are only as powerful as those who follow their dictates.

Nor, for that matter, do people implicated in oppression and violence always understand or care about the cause for which they serve. The American soldiers involved in My Lai likely did not have an informed geopolitical analysis, given that their typical reading material was comics [Kelman and Hamilton, 1989, 2]. Even the CEOs who manage modern capitalism have an incoherent or lacking 'ideology' of capitalism; they are managers who attempt to maximize profit for their shareholders [Abercrombie, Hill, Turner, 1980, 140]. It is likely, though not impossible, that most consumers do 'believe' in consuming as much plastic as possible. Perhaps sophisticated ideological understanding and reflection may preferably be avoided to prevent dissonance, or maybe they attenuate after the behaviour has become routine.

Given the seeming collective ignorance and indifference, personal ambivalence may seem
counterintuitive. Yet even within the limits of a social context, examples of doubt exist. Eichmann, as Director of Jewish Affairs for the SS, was opposed to the Final Solution in favour of deportation as late as the Wannsee Conference in January, 1942 [Arendt, 1963, 114]. Oppenheimer had deep ethical reservations about nuclear weapons [Rhodes, 1977]. Not everyone in the People's Temple colony ended their life at the behest of Jim Jones. Perhaps this equivocation is to be expected, given the above assertion that brutality often lacks a sustaining ideology.

Whatever other connections exist, the collective, agnostic, and equivocal tone of these inquiries and statistics suggests that these behaviours can be best described as *institutional*. Behaviour within institutions is guided by directives issued from a central authority towards disparate entities charged with executing these as expediently as possible. The individual personality is subordinated to the impersonal organization, and human behaviour is focused upon the goals and maintenance of a meta-human system, with limited space for initiative or agency. The actor routinizes their behaviour, as dissent fades into memory.

If, as Whitehead postulated, “civilization advances by extending the number of operations we can perform without thinking about them” [Cialdini, 2007,7], then the institution is perhaps an optimal adaptive response for individuals who need to operate in multiple, complex relationships to accomplish several objectives in order to have these contribute towards a greater goal. This would remain an academic problem if not for the fact that institutional behaviour is representative of most large-scale violence and injustice that exists in the world today. Fortunately, unlike 'sin' or 'psychosis', it is not transcendental or esoteric; it is genuinely banal.

**Situational Subjectivity**

Imagine us saying to children: “In the last fifty or so years, the human race has become aware of a great deal of information about its mechanisms; how it behaves, how it must behave under certain circumstances. If this is to be useful, you must learn to contemplate these rules calmly, dispassionately, disinterestedly, without emotion. It
is information that will set people free from blind loyalties, obedience to slogans, rhetoric, leaders, group emotions.” Well, there it is.

Doris Lessing [1986, 60]

Since 1963, when Hannah Arendt published her coverage of the Eichmann trial, evil has failed to provide a compelling explanation for violent, unjust, or destructive behaviour [Waller, 2002, 96]. Another concept – ideology – has filled this gap in a somewhat more complete and (sometimes) strategically useful way. Current discussions of ideology often begin by observing that “there are as many definitions as there are theorists proposing them” [Hamilton, 1987]:

An examination of a large number of definitions of the concept revealed no fewer than 27 different elements or definitional criteria which have been combined in various permutations of from two to at least as many as seven.

This ambiguity of 'ideology theory' is related at the very outset to the dual use of the term; it is an epistemological interpretation of reality on one hand and a political program on the other. Is it one, the other, or both? The political use of ideology is usually the terrain of Anglo-American political science discourse, expressing a well-developed set of logically coherent political beliefs which are usually explicitly adopted by adherents. The popular interpretation of the term – as in “Stephen Harper is so ideological, he got off the plane because it had a left wing” – is political as well, and implies a blind allegiance to a dogmatic belief system, usually artificial and delusional, and almost always related to one's opponents.

This latter, pejorative use of the term inherits its delusional character from Continental cultural studies, which is more interested in ideology as epistemology. The first 'ideologists', such as de Tracy, were Enlightenment philosophes who felt that destructive and backward beliefs were injected into society by kings and priests looking to further their own interests. This sentiment was further developed in Marx's German Ideology, with its famous line [in Abercrombie et al., 1980, 7]:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its
ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

The confusion about the term, however, only begins at this point: competing interpretations of epistemology, politics, economics, language, and culture have informed, reformed, deconstructed, or completely reinvented its meaning. *Ideology* is such an abused term precisely because the concept is so important. Generations of scholars, leaders, and activists have, directly or indirectly, been using it to shape the world in a different and, to them, more desirable direction.

It is not ideology, however, that is tangibly responsible for what was described earlier: the focus is on institutional *behaviour* because the things we do – the signing of orders, the purchasing of overpackaged goods, the manufacture of killing machines, the pulling of triggers – is the direct cause of the suffering that this paper aims to address. How we behave is a complex amalgam of existing beliefs and ideology, information, perception, cognition, and power, not to mention our social and material realities.

By focusing on ideology, it is difficult not to become enveloped by the profound intellectual achievements that inform it. Yet the strategies for justice or change suggested by different theories of ideology, such as those of liberalism (Hume), Marxism (e.g. Gramsci, Althusser) and postmodernism (Foucault), are inadequate for contemporary society. Despite the penetrating insights related to subjectivity and the social dynamics of power, this research has an incomplete or anachronistic understanding of how the mind drives behaviour. In short, much has happened in the field of psychology and it seems intuitive that the dynamics of power, knowledge(s), disciplines, ideology, and oppression be placed within a socio-cognitive framework. The goal of this paper is, in part, to propose a model of cognition and ideology that might describe institutional behaviour enough to find ways to prevent and resist it more effectively.
As described in the following chapter, behaviour is premised on the subject's *definition of the situation*. This, in turn, is in part a reaction to specific social forces within the situation – authority, conformity, in-grouping, reciprocity, and scarcity – which provide pressure to construct reality in a particular way, often adopting it from others. It is argued that humans have a cognitive reflex to these situational forces, innate shortcuts that are expressed through our learned ideologies. The realities constructed dictate roles or expectations for behaviour, which are perpetuated, reinforced, or attenuated by situational factors in concert with a memory system that is often prone to flattery and an inherently biased perception.

This model of subjectivity draws on another area of inquiry: not only is *how* people know of central importance, but *how much* is known, and *how well*. More specifically, an accurate description of behaviour requires knowing which ideas and information is available within a given social formation, and how are these notions accepted, remembered, or rejected. Political scientists like Philip Converse and John Zaller use large-scale opinion data to inquire how ideas about politics make it into the public realm, how they shape policy, and how large sections of the public think about them. The primary finding, that people don't think about politics or government in sophisticated ways (if at all), is anathema to the classical liberalism upon which Western democracy is founded. But it does provide an empirically grounded description of political hegemony on a broad scale, especially when measured against its own understanding of surveying. What is even more interesting is the application to other belief systems, beyond electoral politics. The results of this research beg questions about how much people know about their religion, their job, or any belief system or 'institution' within which they operate. How much are people ideologically or principally in support of the institutions within which they exist? How much of their participation is merely expedience or habit? Having probed the role of social practice on the behaviour of the subject, followed by relationship of behaviour to awareness, the next logical step is to inquire how doubt becomes dissent and, subsequently, resistance.
Conditional Agency

*The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.*  
*Stephen Biko [1971]*

Simply rallying to the agenda of justice is not hard – protests are easy to organize – but it is often not successful. Actually advancing the agenda of justice and human agency means finding effective strategies to resist the problematic behaviour described. The ultimate aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of subjectivity in order to find openings for resistance. By advancing a model of 'institution', these strategies may suggest themselves more readily.

As a cautionary note, however, it is worth noting that there is nothing inherently just or noble about the psychological or political science research presented in this study, nothing that suggests an end to institutional behaviour, on a personal or collective scale. Much of what follows would seem to suggest a vulgar determinism that should lead to passivity instead of agency and greater self-determination. Contrary to Rousseau's famous statement about being born free, however, agency and self-determination are not necessarily our birthright. We are born with tendencies to learn and practise in-grouping, obedience, selective memory, groupthink, spurious justification, and a host of other vices.

The version of agency suggested by this study takes effort and education, it takes making mistakes and learning from them, and it takes courage. We have to work for it, while being acutely aware that doing so is inherently ideological. I would not have taken the time to write this if I felt that determinism, psychological or otherwise, overwhelmed our ability to critically change our circumstances. I simply wish to point out that there is some evidence to say that we may behave and even think in predictable ways under certain conditions. I argue that agency exists, but it takes diligence, vigilance, and an awareness of how our minds may operate to be effective.
Overview

In keeping with the aim of this research – supporting resistance – the following chapter attempts to identify cognitive structures and process that relate power to what we think and how we act. To place these theories within an academic context, some of the common assumptions about thinking are explored, with implications of how these construe concepts like 'ideology'. Different constructs from social and cognitive psychology – reflexive thinking, mental shortcuts, memory, dissonance, and routines – are used to explain how we construct social relations. Discussions of situational ethics and of discursive concerns are included in this chapter and throughout the text.

The problem of social construction is expanded in the second chapter, considering how factors like information and salience influence our understanding of situations and judgement of behaviour. In particular, it uses the mass opinion research of John Zaller to probe the depth of construction or the salience of ideology in the American electorate.

Having previously defined the function of 'ideology' in terms of a cognitive subjectivity, it becomes much easier to identify relevant contributions from previous scholarship in ideology theory. In the third chapter, Hume’s theory of interests will be reviewed to see how parts of liberalism make sense of behaviour. Marxist notions of ideology – from commodity fetish, Gramsci’s hegemony, Althusser's Ideology State Apparatuses, and Bourdieu's doxa – will be reviewed in brief to outline how ideas exist within social practice. Next, the connections between discourse and ideology will be sketched through the work of Foucault in order to expand the concept of power. The chapter will end by returning to John Zaller's description of public opinion in order to examine the role of ideas in social structures, thus better understanding institutional behaviour.

The conclusion will review and summarize the research herein, but will also examine some implications for parenting, education, and activism by transforming dissent or ambivalence into effective resistance.
'Learning' and 'culture' have always been the alternatives to 'evolution' for those who reject evolutionary approaches to human behaviour. However, learning and cultural change are themselves evolutionary in the sense that alternative behaviours are created and selected according to certain criteria.

*Wilson [2003]*

The cumulative lesson is that the mind is not simply a sponge that absorbs ambient beliefs and practices, but rather is equipped with architectures that attend to, parse, and organize incoming information in particular ways.

*McIntosh [1998]*

The evolution of the human brain, it has been argued, has been predicated on and paralleled by our social evolution, two concurrent and mutually supportive processes [Hüther, 2004, 55-61]. As recently as one hundred thousand years ago [Hüther, 2004, 60], the human brain was becoming more plastic and able to learn for longer and longer periods after birth, making humans less directly dependent on our instinctive wiring for survival. With this biological development came a cultural development: humans became more adept at learning and, consequently, better able to retain this learning about survival across generations. Natural selection reinforced this by endowing humans with increasing cognitive and affective capacity, which only further supported the development of culture and learning. Much of our behaviour is a product of a nature/nurture interaction, the expression of instincts activated in a particular social milieu.

This narrative has an appealing simplicity that is at once intuitive but, likely, grossly misrepresentative of the complex development of our species. Most theorists and scientists are able to
read into anthropology what they hope to find, in this case a happy tale that supports the humanist vision of social – even altruistic – beings that learned to adapt to their changing world, gradually developing 'agency' to free ourselves from the instinctive baggage that “threatens to clip our wings and lay waste to our utopian visions [Ehrenreich & McIntosh, 1997].” And while it is academically gauche to impute too much meaning into History, this model might also give us a direction toward something better, minimizing our excesses while implying some kind of meaning in our existence.

This explanation also embraces 'evolutionary' social construction [Wilson, 2003], the reconciliation of learning and biological adaptation, which can explain the gaps left by 'nurture' and 'nature' theories by claiming some kind of complex interaction. This is gradually becoming less of an affront to constructivists, for whom biology is one more determining force that limits human potential [Ehrenreich & McIntosh, 1997]. Perhaps theorists are realizing how they have caricatured and unintentionally essentialized 'biological' and psychological research as essentialist. Alternatively, perhaps there is a recognition that social construction is inherently psychological, regardless of our opinion of empiricism. The boundaries between culture and biology are, apparently, blurring somewhat as theorists realize that the dialectical interaction of cognitive and constructed is “where the interesting questions begin” [Ellsworth in Ehrenreich & McIntosh, 1997].

Without this, the willing subjection of the subordinate is simply a matter of 'ideology' or 'compulsion': a social power imbalance in which most people accept or tolerate the norms and ideas of dominant others. How such ideas are able – or not – to cause this subjection is explained by power, “a mysterious agent in a general conspiracy theory about why the social world is the way it is [McIntosh, 1997].” The actual mechanics of power – how subjects accept dominant ideas or norms, or how they reject them – is reduced to a “naive one-way casual theory about social relations” [McIntosh, 1997], without considering the cognitive mediation involved in learning norms and ideas. Instead of grappling with the process and requirements of agency, thus acknowledging its limits, it is almost
easier to imply its limitlessness by reducing power to its most obvious incarnation: language and signs.

In the sponge theory [the implicit model of mind espoused by most theorists of hegemony]... the mind is undifferentiated and porous, and soaks up the representations given by the sociocultural context. Mental representations, in this account, automatically serve the interests of the ruling class through a top-down process of social construction. [McIntosh, 1997]

The mind, with enough exposure and practice, certainly does 'legitimate', 'reify', and 'institutionalize' the dominant social realities to differing extents, but it seems to do so in an indirect way, not simply by soaking them up. The mechanics of social construction are not as straightforward Berger and Luckmann portray in *The Social Construction of Reality* [1966] or in Zerubavel's *Social Mindscapes* [1997]. Social construction is a series of cognitive processes, and the most immediate evidence is that humans do not always behave in a considered manner: our actions are moderated differently by reflexive and deliberative mental processes [Marcus, 2008, 51]. Both types of processes are the result of interactions between biology and ecology, in other words the genetic expression of our social experience, instinctive predispositions to respond to and learn from particular experiences in particular ways.

As explained in this chapter, both types of thinking play different roles in guiding our behaviour. The reflexive processes are the more automatic responses to particular circumstances, which shape our more thoughtful and deliberate actions. This is not an attempt to repackage the split between reason and emotion, as both are too integrated to function independently. Nor is this an empirical rehash of the psychodynamic *id*, as our instincts are not constantly trying to overpower, evade, or commandeer consciousness or deliberate thought. Again, the two are inseparable in their effect on how we socially construe reality and behave in it. Finally, this is not a declaration of pancultural, essentialist values; it is merely a plea to acknowledge – at least conjecturally – that genes have at least some role in social behaviour.
The research of the past century of social psychology has revealed that social context – from chance encounters to work or family – has a predictive influence on the subjective construal of reality [Ross and Nisbett, 1991, 30]. Particular variables within the social situation are the material conditions that shape our consciousness, but not in the direct way that Marx had assumed. Rather than attribute consciousness solely to ideology and experience, this chapter argues that situational variables activate reflexive cognitive operations and responses that then shape our consciousness. I argue that some of social construction occurs through a materialist two-step: powerful social forces (material, external conditions) may interact with our brain's cognition (material, internal operations) to make us construct that situation in fairly predictable ways.

This is not intended to essentialize away the significance of ideas: culture is a fundamental part of the context to which we respond; biology simply adds some constraints and probabilities. This model of cognitive materialism retains a dialectical approach by acknowledging the situation's effect on the mind to construe it in certain ways, in turn directing our behaviour in that situation. Power becomes the asymmetrical ability to shape others' construal of a situation so that they consensually take on particular roles and behaviours. Ideology is the explicit or implicit set of principles that legitimate one's acceptance of another's version of reality. Despite internalizing situational pressures through cognition, responsibility for behaviour lies with the actor, and agency is the disposition and ability to recognize and resist this domination by construction. The goal of this chapter is to list and describe some of the factors that contribute to institutional behaviour, saving implications for subsequent chapters.

Caveat

*I believe that people coming after us will marvel that on one hand we accumulated more and more information about our behaviour, while on the other, we made no attempt to use it to improve our lives.*

Doris Lessing [1986, 26]
Before proceeding, some clarification about 'situations' is warranted. In this text, the terms *situation*, *social* (as a noun), and *context* refer to any set of social relations, permanent or ephemeral, individual or group, oppressed or oppressor. This chapter was based on speculations and research on several such situations – extreme, banal, individual, general – including Jonestown, television commercials, American democracy, family life, the Stanford Prison Experiment, the IMF, slavery, feudalism, the army, the SS, work, my classroom, bureaucracy, Robber's Cave, a courtroom, Neolithic society, academia, and the Milgram Shock Test. None of them is represented in totality, but they are all here at least partially, because this is meant to be a starting point, not a definitive model of 'institution'.

Whatever may be lost in attempts to generalize is gained by the locality of this research: it is in the complexity of daily interactions, the very 'microphysics' of power, that the phenomena of social psychology live and thrive. They explain more about our behaviour, belief systems, and unjust treatment of one another than traditional notions of 'hegemony' or 'ideology'. True, explaining the Third Reich as driven mostly by obedience, conformity, and dissonance resolution seems like a lame cop-out, at least in comparison to an esoteric cultural artefact like the 'discourse of Prussian militarism'. But when it comes down to describing the daily operations of people – the people whose routine behaviour perpetuate institutional injustice and 'The System' – it is these forces and phenomena that stand out.

Psychology itself, like the situations mentioned above, can exist as an institution that perpetuates its own particular behaviours and discourses, not all of them redeeming and many outright oppressive. Its tendency towards normalization and universalism are seriously problematic and have significant influence in how people are treated by the state and other institutions, as outlined by Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, and Walkerdine [1998]. Psychological research needs to critique its disciplinary nature in order to challenge these practices. But this is not an excuse for social theorists to dismiss psychological research which is only partially involved in 'the production of subjects'.
Moreover, the constructs below are meant to be taken as possible factors within thought and action, not mandatory, immutable components that are identical in all humans. Instead of a prescriptive universalism, the assumption here is that some factors work sometimes, to some degree, or maybe not at all.

To critique psychology as an institution is to re-examine its findings in light of other ways of knowing, as in Henriques et al's *Changing the Subject* [1998]. Whatever the worth of this endeavour, it is not the project of this text. Deconstruction is an important tool, but psychological research – be it social, cognitive, and developmental – has found patterns and sketched the dynamics of human behaviour, and to ignore this resource in the pursuit of social justice seems a wasted opportunity.

Moreover, it exposes a certain hubris on the part of discourse analysis, which carries its own set of uncritical psychological assumptions, a nuanced form of ambient behaviourism described above as the ‘sponge theory’. Simply put, any assumptions – linguistic, cultural, structural – that attempt to explain the social behaviour of humans are inherently psychological.

Instead of ignoring psychology or problematizing it into abstraction, it is more useful to be explicit about its shortcomings and – as far as possible – our assumptions. Humans will always need to make sense of their reality and behave within it, so mental processes will operate whether we acknowledge them or not. Addressing them explicitly would help to understand them and, ironically, make them less determining.

**Situations, Dispositions, and Attributions**

*There, but for the grace of God, go I.*

*John Bradford [1555]*

*There, but for the grace of a facilitating channel factor, go we.*

*Ross & Nisbett [1991, 50]*

*I could have been a bum. Anyone can be a bum. All it takes is the right girl, the right bar, and the right friends, and you are well on your way.*

*Bill Hicks [1990]*
The recognition that the situation has an important effect on behaviour implies a diminishing role for personality: enduring character traits are, according to a half century of research in social psychology, less predictive of behaviour than social context [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 2][Levine, 2003, 17][Zimbardo, 2007, xii]. Although this is not immediately counterintuitive, the vast majority of Westerners' polled explain their success as indicative of the virtuous personalities, while their failures were attributed to bad luck or other external features [Levine, 2003, 13]. The converse generally held when accounting for others' behaviour: personality was the salient factor when explaining shortcomings, circumstance was often the reason for positive outcomes. This *fundamental attribution error* points to an overconfidence in ourselves, in the belief that we will be less blindly obedient, more helpful to those in need, and more willing to resist conformity than peers. Likewise, we assume that our behaviour has 'higher' motives (e.g. self-actualization), while others are driven by base needs (e.g. consumption) [Heath & Heath, 2008, 185]. Irony dictates that informed respondents will likely claim to be less vulnerable to the fundamental attribution error.

Part of the explanation is (ironically, again) dispositional: people who do not recognize failure in a given task are the same people who lack the skills to succeed at it [Levine, 2003, 17]. In order to have good judgement, one must know what bad judgement looks like. There is also a heavily cultural component to this lapse in judgement. After examining inter-cultural construals of behaviour, Ross and Nisbett [1991, 185] “suspect that Hindus and many other collectivist people really are less susceptible than Americans to the fundamental attribution error.” Similarly, the allegedly less individualist Europeans are more likely than Americans to believe that the poor are unlucky [Trout, 2009, 81]. The American insistence on self-reliance has important implications legally (criminals – especially black ones – are personally depraved, thus incorrigible), medically (poor people could have a healthy diet if they wanted to, ignoring the realities of inner city “food deserts” [Trout, 2009, 179]), and economically (the wealthy are inherently deserving). From a historicist perspective, this should not be surprising. 
given the Puritanical assumption of double predestination: those whom God has blessed with eternal life will also prosper on Earth. Support for this attitude can be traced throughout American history, although it is far from universal across class (and, by implication, race) [McCloskey and Zaller, 1984, 110, 115, 155].

The consistent use of *lay personology* [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 119] to explain behaviour or social relations is not entirely a cultural construct, and has roots in our perception as well (although perception, as we shall see, is heavily influenced by belief and memory). It is the behaviour that draws our attention to the person and away from the situation, focusing our judgement on the individual and their traits. The context, which is often too ambiguous to make sense of, is easier to relegate into the background. Given our perceptual emphasis on the individual, culturally and cognitively, it is easy to frame discussion in terms of the individual as separate from their context. Once a judgement upon a person's character has been made, our tendency towards *confirmation bias*, discussed below, makes us see more of the same behaviour [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 142]. In terms of judging ourselves, however, our memory is context driven and highly selective, leaving us with a tendency towards editing and forgetting our own setbacks or flaws, disposing us towards unwarranted overconfidence [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 79].

This chronically poor judgement could be somewhat improved by instructing observers how to properly evaluate the impact of the situation on behaviour. The oversight, however, does not stem from simply acknowledging the situation's direct effect on behaviour. Instead, behaviour is indirectly guided by the situation, which influences how it is understood and perceived by the actors. Situational variables (i.e. authority, conformity, scarcity, reciprocity, and in-grouping) influence our construal of the situation through cognitive reflexes. These variables are often too subtle for both actor and observer to acknowledge, and are influenced by a host of other factors (e.g. prior experience, mood, personality). Behaviour is mediated by the subjective construal of the situation, something that
observers cannot fully appreciate. Improving judgement involves more than scrutinizing our assumptions of others’ character or reading context better, it includes admitting that others construe the world in ways we cannot always predict. This is not easy, given the fundamental attribution error, cognitive limits, indifference, and an inherent liberal bias: we simply assume that what we think is not an arbitrary construction, but the truth. (Concomitant with this conclusion is situational psychology’s modesty towards its own conclusions, and a recognition that overconfidence often goes with judgement and prediction.)

The above description does not imply that behaviour can be excused by appealing to a subjective construal of a situation. Nor is this lack of situational absolution an appeal to universal moral principles. Rather, it acknowledges that the actors, when predicting their own behaviour outside of a situation, will usually deny the possibility that they will violate their own values. This is why the fundamental attribution error is so important, because it suggests a subtle type of wishful thinking at play: if violations or transgressions are the result of inherent character flaws, as it is in classical tragedy, then our overconfidence makes us assume that we are immune to it [Levine, 2003, 14]. We want to believe it can't happen to us, so we make failure contingent on the person, not the situation. But morality is more situational than personal, and we tend to underestimate the likelihood of violating our own values that we hold ex situ, under 'normal' circumstances. Context can change so gradually and pressure us so forcefully that we cross our own lines and justify our beliefs and behaviour to ourselves, often with little recollection that we would ever have thought or acted differently.

Despite this inherent variability of subjectivity, some situational pressures yield a fairly consistent effect on construal and subsequent behaviour. Respecting this influence is an important form of humility, which undermines the gratuitous self-confidence that most people (or at least Westerners) feel towards their own hypothetical behaviour [Levine, 2003, 16]. Humility means recognizing that the situation may force us to construe it in a particular way, causing us to behave in ways that – based on
our glowing self-image – we would never imagine outside of that context.

And just as the law in civilized countries assumes that the voice of conscience tells everybody “Thou shalt not kill…” so the law of Hitler’s land demanded that the voice of conscience tell everybody: “Thou shalt kill” although the organizers of the massacres knew full well that murder is against the normal desires and inclinations of most people. Evil in the Third Reich lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. Most Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted not to murder, not to rob, not to let their neighbours go off to their doom… [Arendt, 1963, 150].

Given our overconfident self-image, situational reactions may represent a pathological and pathetic fall from grace. Perhaps, however, we should practise attributional charity [Ross in Zimbardo, 2007, 212] and realize that these behaviours represent normal behaviour in which we ourselves would engage under similar circumstances, regardless of our precious self-image. Perhaps heroic behaviour is abnormal, even when it is considered the moral norm outside of the situation. The nature of evil is truly banal, but maybe humility will make us more vigilant towards a situation's potentially destructive effects [Zimbardo, 2007, 210].

If the situation can generate negative behaviours that people may not expect, the inverse may hold true as well; situations can be changed – possibly intentionally – in order to support pro-social behaviour. Sherif's studies of intergroup hostility were premised on Marx's materialist assumption that “social being determines [human] consciousness” [in Ross and Nisbett, 1991, 38], and he proved that cooperative social environments reduced hostility and increased harmony, regardless of personality, culture, race, or other types of difference. This draws attention away from what may seem like inescapable defects of people (or specific types of people): humans are doomed to depravity only as far as the situation forces this upon them. Changing the situation, the material reality, implies the hope that people can change their behaviour. Far from putting agency outside of the individual, the situation can be improved by the actors from within.
The emphasis on the situation thus far has not been intended to eliminate personality from our judgement, but rather to temper our overreliance on personology and, in doing so, gain some humility. Personality does play a role in our thoughts and actions [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 139], as well as the associations we make and the situations we select to put ourselves in. Nevertheless, personality explains much less about much of our behaviour than situational variables, and self-selection into particular roles that fit our personalities is less likely than we might assume, as described by Ernest Staub in his analysis of SS volunteers [in Waller, 2002, 84].

Prioritizing the situation also throws into question the stability of attitudes and beliefs, and it reflects Zaller's finding that people are often highly ambivalent on a single issue [1992, 93]. One reason is the overwhelming learning process that goes with accepting, rejecting, and interpreting available opinions. A more compelling explanation, according to Zaller, is that opinions are based on what is contextually salient, not on theoretical, comprehensive value statements. Given the situational nature of these opinions, they are rarely considered simultaneously and hence produce little dissonance: fulminations about deficits can give way to anger over the local pool reducing its hours. Predispositions and values exist but, perhaps unexpectedly, their application lacks the consistency that is reserved for the small minority for whom coherence is salient.

Beliefs, then, are the dynamic, context-dependent products of culture and situational pressures, among other things (e.g. personality, prior experience, mood); they are the construal of our reality and an important behavioral guide to responding to it as such. The amalgam that is belief, although highly inconsistent, is only partially arbitrary. Some of the cognitive operations referred to above are automatic mental shortcuts – like obedience, conformity, reciprocity – that are triggered by social conditions and shape our construal and behaviour. The social circumstances that trigger these shortcuts can make us more susceptible to power, the willingness to adapt our construal to that of others. These subsequent beliefs are often rationalized and reconciled by way of dissonance, another set of mental
operations related to our context-driven and highly selective memory and perception. However arbitrary a belief may have begun, it rarely seems so to the believer: the opinion of our opinion is still just an opinion, although highly contingent constructions are often mistaken for the truth.

**Reality-Taking/Role-Taking**

*An ant colony operates without central control. Task allocation is the process that allows the colony to adjust the numbers of ants engaged in each task, in a way appropriate to the current situation. An ant’s task decisions depend on its recent experience of brief encounters with other ants.*

*Deborah Gordon [n.d.]*

...we evolved not as computers, but as actors, in the original sense of the word: as organisms that act, entities that perceive the world and respond to it.

*Gary Marcus [2008, 36]*

Click and the appropriate tape is activated; whirr and out rolls the standard sequence of behaviours.

*Robert Cialdini [2007, 3]*

Much like ants, our primary function is not to reflect on the world so much as to behave in it. Ants live completely in the present because their decision-making capacities are driven almost entirely by instinct, which limits learning to the essentials like the location of food. Similarly, some aspects of our social interactions lie outside of our deliberative range since they require immediate attention, not prolonged consideration. Instinct limits what humans can learn, but our success as a species is not necessarily attributed to a decline in instinct and an increase in learning. Instead, some contest, humans have more instincts with which to use our wider array of learning, supporting a sophisticated genetic survival strategy [Waller, 2002, 141].

Like ants, we can display *role-taking behaviour*, an almost automatic willingness to take on particular behaviours and thoughts in a given social context, sometimes even if it stands as contrary to our prior principles. This is initiated by an instinctive, cognitive reaction to social-situational forces – obedience, conformity, in-grouping, scarcity, reciprocity, or a mix – that disposes us towards a
particular interpretation of reality. We often adapt others' construal to our own, or adopt it outright. This is not to say that role-taking behaviour lacks conscious thought: it may involve a great deal of deliberation, but the initial direction and subsequent perception can be biased in the exclusive favour of one “definition of the situation” [Milgram, 1974, 128][Waller, 2002, 212][Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 58]. Over time, this construal may be reinforced by a memory system that tends to remember things contextually, rewriting the past while filtering the present for the sake of personal consistency, strengthening itself by the resolution of dissonance. As the behaviour becomes reinforced by routine, both the role-taking and reality-taking move further outside the sphere of reflection, if they were there to begin with. It becomes easier to perceive, remember, infer, decide, and behave accordingly.

This is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, “[o]ur capacity to acquire new beliefs vicariously is a key to what allows humans to build cultures and technologies of fabulous complexity [Marcus, 2008, 65].” As Gerald Hüther maintained in the introduction to this chapter, this is perhaps part of our most important adaptation, as it allows humans the rare privilege of thriving almost everywhere on this planet [Hüther, 2004, 40], a privilege based on learning and cooperation. As suggested in the vignettes at the beginning of this paper, however, these adaptations may be extremely maladaptive in contemporary society.

In an evolutionary framework, these adaptations were meant for a different era in which human survival had different requirements. One can speculate that cognitive speed and simplification may have been more adaptive than accuracy and consistency. As such, humans developed instinctive behavioural scripts – called fixed action patterns in animals [Cialdini, 2007, 7] – that are activated by specific features of a given situation. Unlike animals, where the process is almost entirely instinct, the existence of the script is biological for humans, but the content of the script is cultural. Neither culture nor instinct fully determine the script, however, as it is dependent on a whole array of stable and immediate personal and situational factors. Once a shortcut has been activated – again, by conformity
pressures, obedience, reciprocity, scarcity, or in-grouping – we are more likely to construe reality according to these pressures and behave according to our construal. This subjective definition of the situation is what directs behaviour; the situation itself cannot determine how the subject will construe it, although it can lend some probability.

The evolutionary roots of cognitive shortcuts are not uncontested, and suffer from the fact that they are based on speculation. Robert Levine explicitly emphasizes the cultural component to “hot buttons” by explaining different cultural reactions to concepts like honour and aggression [2003, 152]. Even between Northerners and Southerners in the United States, large differences in immediate physiological response (cortisol levels), construal, and behavioural responses were observed among males when threatened or harassed [2003, 151-152]. Levine correctly attributes the contrasting responses to the different attitudes towards “culture-of-honour-type violence” in the two cultures. This does not, however, undermine the role of instinct, but merely illustrates how shortcuts are instinctive cognitive reflexes: expressed through culture, personality, and experience, triggered by the immediate situation.

The purpose of a shortcut is to avoid the expense of time and energy that goes into conscious thought, to enable immediate adaptive behaviours. Much of the time, and probably most of the time for our Pleistocene ancestors, this shortcut and construal process was beneficial for survival. Because it was a useful adaptation for much of our history, we likely never needed to pay attention to it, so we are not adapted to be consciously aware of this process. It is only recently that these shortcuts and other adaptations have become maladaptive and can threaten our survival, and only very recently that psychologists have suggested we pay attention to their effects. As Robert Cialdini emphasizes [2007, 275]:

> With the sophisticated mental apparatus we have used to build world eminence as a species, we have created an environment so complex, fast-paced, and information-laden that we must increasingly deal with it in the fashion of the animals we long ago transcended.

As if the subtle and reflexive nature of cognitive shortcutting wasn't enough, our bias towards
overconfidence almost guarantees that we will not be paying attention when we most need to (ie. when a social psychologist uses us as an experimental subject) [Levine, 2003, 16]. We can thus look back on our behaviour and notice that it did not further our material, social, or personal interests, or may have violated our own beliefs or moral values. Looking back closely, we may notice how something about the immediate situation – what others were doing, what we were being told to do, what was expected of us – may have prompted us to understand the world in a way that was different, incomplete, biased, or simply incorrect.

A substantiating 'ideology' [Milgram, 1974, 142][Zimbardo, 2007, 9], or rationale, is often needed to direct or justify the role-taking behaviour. The willingness of Milgram's obediens was, in part, facilitated by the implicit understanding that science is progress, and progress is Good. Milgram's power – convincing his subjects to take on his putative definition of the situation (ie. the learner needs to learn or be punished) and act in role – was based, at least minimally, on the 'ideology of science'. Often, this ideology serves a narrative function as well, providing and directing the scripts and expectations that are cued by the shortcuts: when the Stanford Prison guards reacted to the mock prison riot with sustained force and degradation, they did so partly because of the cultural expectation that prisoners were supposed to be submissive as part of their penance and reformation. An initial conformity pressure caused prisoners and guards to adopt, to different degrees, a grim reality in which they all felt imprisoned [Zimbardo, 2007, 187, 222]. (Other, less salient, components of different ideologies were also involved in the subjects' construal and behaviour).

Ideology is the gatekeeper for the social construal of reality: it is a set of principles that can legitimate certain people or groups, either as direct sources of constructs or as behavioural guides upon which to infer a social reality. Ideology is also that set of statements, values, or – in Zaller's terms – predispositions upon which we make judgements about our situation. What ideology is not is belief, the actual construction of reality itself, although this shapes ideology over time. Ideology itself
develops with learning and experience, building upon prior situational constructions, while shaped by the cognitive predisposition for consonance. Despite its use here, ideology is hardly as consistent, coherent, or articulate as it is usually imagined: it is often context-sensitive, implicit, highly personal, and, in the face of some social pressures, easily overwhelmed.

The above suggests a specific function for ideology in the subjective construal of the social. But the social constitutes the subject – temporarily, imperfectly, or even unwittingly – by way of role-taking. The script for the role, as suggested above, may be implicit in the construction of the situation, or explicitly communicated from a legitimate source. Reality is constructed not only before, but during and after the subject acts in the situation: the role must, to some minimal degree, be understood and resolved by the subject, so that it has a dialectical effect back onto the social. Ideology interpellates the subject into the social by way of reality-taking and role-taking, but less directly than Althusser assumed.

Because this theme appears throughout this text, it may be worth providing a brief example. In my own career as a teacher, my practice is in part directed by personal and professional values, but much of it is determined by the state who dictates what to teach and how. The shortcuts of authority and conformity motivate me to take the state's curriculum seriously, but only to the extent that my ideology identifies the state as a legitimate authority (which it usually does, at least in this situation). But the process is not entirely smooth; my ideology may guide me to judge that the government-mandated Pioneer unit (i.e. learning about white settlers) is overly colonial, so I might balance it with a focus on local aboriginal history. Nevertheless, the state has behavioural expectations which I have constructed (transmitted through training) and to which I generally adhere as part of my role (e.g. treat students equitably, help children to think critically about their world, make sure they can read at level 34 by the end of grade 3, don't drink in class). Shortcuts begin the process of reality taking, ideology legitimates and guides it, and roles enact it.
Reality-taking does not necessarily create deeply constituted subjects; the purpose or ethics of role could be quite superficial because we are meant to act. A working definition often suffices. Zaller [1992, 92] and Milgram [1974, 142] agree that the legitimating 'ideology' does not need to be well understood or even within one's conscious grasp to be effective, as was certainly the case with Eichmann [Arendt, 1963, 26, 126][Waller, 2002, 182]. This is consistent with the observations of Zaller and Converse mentioned in the second chapter. It is also consistent with the purpose of a shortcut, which is to obviate thinking and forgo developing a critical, deliberate construal of the situation. We are prone, instead, to adopt an available social construction or to construct social relations in a biased way, disposing us towards a particular role and behaviour. Again, this is not to say that we cannot or do not independently construct our reality, but it does challenge the degree to which we do.

Nevertheless, a shortcut cannot be triggered unless there is some prior understanding, otherwise there would be no stability in social relations: arbitrary stimuli would leave us helpless victims to our cognitive predispositions. The very fact that they are at least somewhat specific seems to indicate roots in evolution by natural selection. As stated above, these reflexive shortcuts are not instincts isolated from learning, but rather the expression of instincts through learning. Milgram's subjects existed in a society that accepted the legitimacy of science, which permitted the obedience shortcut to be activated in his particular situation. This, combined with a series of escalating demands, caused his subjects to adopt his version of reality to an extent determined by prior experience, personality, mood, and other factors. Optimal or not, some people in some situations need only a small amount of 'ideological' rationale to take on a given role; the rest of the narrative will be constructed as we go along.

Besides specifying some minimal behavioural expectations, this interaction of shortcut and ideology provides other useful information to perpetuate the situation and role. Along with descriptive information about the situation, such as information to facilitate the role or the function of others in the situation, the actors within the situation often provide information about the social order. This
information may be, initially, heavily supported by shortcutting (think of the drill sargent in Full Metal Jacket) or outright coercion. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this information – whether directly communicated or indirectly inferred – usually promotes the original source of the constructs as a valid, if not the valid, source for future constructs. Finally, values and judgements, though perhaps more challenging to learn and apply, may eventually become part of the definition of the situation.

Part of the variability in construal and behaviour is caused by situational variables called *channel factors*. Some salient situational variables – authority figures, peers expecting conformity – can trigger shortcuts that initiate a significant reaction. A channel factor is a variable that does not begin the process, but elicits a large change in outcome in comparison to its absence. These channel factors can shape our construal by more effectively communicating the reality we are adopting or the expectations of the role we are supposed to take on. For instance, personal appeals for donations are far more effective than general ones [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 47]. Adequate instructions – *savoir faire* – is an important channel for promoting role taking behaviour. Technology as a channel factor *par excellence*, the expedient that permits a human to drop bombs even though they could not bring themselves to spank a child [Milgram, 1974, 147]. Similarly, one could ask if liberalism has persevered not on its own merits, but because liberals generally write funnier and more accessible books than Marxists (they do, incidentally, because Marxism takes itself way too seriously). The purpose of communication is to direct behaviour, so those who can articulate their visions clearly, persuasively, and widely will probably have a disproportionate influence on the construal of others, which we have previously defined as power. Limiting the cognitive expenditure of the audience is an important part of effective communication, as outlined in manuals such as *Made to Stick* [Heath & Heath, 2008]. As we will see in the next chapter, interest and awareness of a situation may have a large effect on behaviour.

Another part of the unpredictable and confusing nature of social behaviour is the myriad
personal variables, especially those whose interaction with the numerous situational variables we may overlook or take for granted. The most intuitive example is the host of other cognitive biases that have been identified by cognitive scientists ([Trout, 2009][Marcus, 2008][Goleman, 2007] list several). Although they will not be discussed here, these frequently shape our judgement in interesting – if not always constructive or logical – ways. Moreover, not everything is a reflex; deliberate self-interest may be an essential motivating force to some behaviour, although it takes place within a given framework. But given the amount of behaviour that, historically, has not furthered material well-being, it is likely that rational self-interest is a pervasive or dominant motive within the limits of context.

As we are attempting to make sense of our world and act within it, reflexively and deliberately, we are usually unaware that the world acts upon us to understand it in a certain way. Despite taking on a reality and a role within a situation, we do not become a different person, unable to access or previous selves or memories by some process of dissociation [Waller, 2002, 120]. We remain ourselves, although we may try to reconcile what we do with what we believe, often by changing what we believe. Shortcuts start the process, dissonance continues it. Internalization and routine make the behaviour more likely and automatic. The degree to which behaviour is determined by this process is based on variables related to subject and situation, suggesting that degree of charity and humility is needed to judge others. This is not to abandon the humanist assumption that structure can never totally decide behaviour, and that structures can be changed.

This process of role-taking – shortcutting, reality-taking, confabulation, dissonance resolution, and routinization – is not intended to be a working model of anything: the non-linearity and messiness of thought, especially when coupled with a capricious memory and unpredictable context, is something that may not be obvious to an outside observer. These processes are simultaneous, interactive, and even competitive as multiple shortcuts intersect in our construal of the situation. This description is intended to be one possible interpretation of how we may act at certain times in certain contexts,
potentially in ways that – when outside of an immediate situation – we may not predict or desire. As suggested already, these shortcuts are immensely beneficial and facilitate social interaction; only under certain circumstances are they implicated in oppressive, unjust, and violent outcomes. Investigating the process by which these outcomes happen may be some use into preventing them, as each of these processes is not without ambivalence, hesitation, or resistance.

The exploration of shortcuts below is intended to provide brief illustrations of some of our socio-cognitive dynamics, and should not be construed, in any way, as an exhaustive account of social construction. These descriptions are not assumed to be accurate representations of thought processes, merely vignettes of how we may construe our social reality and take on a given role within it, under particular circumstances. This treatment follows, in a general fashion, Robert Cialdini's [2007] research related to six shortcuts: reciprocity, commitment and consistency, liking, social proof, scarcity, and authority. What follows is based on his general framework, focussing on five shortcuts (obedience, conformity, in-grouping, reciprocity, and scarcity) before examining the dynamics of selective memory, dissonance (ie. commitment and consistency), and internalization. The discussion in the following chapters will deal with the broader applications of role-taking.

Obedience

The relationship between authority and subject, therefore, cannot be viewed as one in which a coercive figure forces action from an unwilling subordinate. Because the subject accepts authority's definition of the situation, action follows willingly.

Stanley Milgram [1974, 145]

[Milgram's] studies also remind us that the task of understanding and interpreting behaviour must begin with an attempt to appreciate the actor's understanding of the situation.

Ross & Nisbett [1991, 58]

The Milgram Electric Shock Experiment is a direct demonstration of authority's effect on situational construal. Milgram created a deceptive situation in which the subject was ordered by a
researcher to inflict what they believed were increasingly painful shocks on a fellow subject. His colleagues predicted that a psychopathic fringe of 0.1% would willingly inflicting pain against the continued demands of the learner/victim [1974, 31]. In his most common trials, however, he found that 65% of “average” people were ready to follow orders to hurt until they were ordered to stop, usually after the learner was presumed unconscious or even dead [1974, 34] (incidentally, Milgram made sure that his subjects believed that they were actually inflicting pain [1974, 172]). Using different permutations of this paradigm, Milgram and his colleagues identified the different conditions and processes that could elicit destructive obedience to an arbitrary and impersonal authority.

Milgram concluded that the human proclivity towards obeying authority is premised on the adaptive benefits of functioning within hierarchies [1974, 129]. To maximize the benefits of cooperation and a division of labour, he argued, humans need to accept the coordination of a superordinate person, who is usually subordinate to another individual. Milgram described [1974, 129], in psychoanalytic terms, that efficient and coordinated social functioning, *system coherence*, was achieved when the superego's control over behaviour was bypassed in favour of the hierarchy's demands. This instinctive tendency is expressed through the cultural norms of parental obedience, and further developed in schools where authority takes on an “impersonal” quality [1974, 137]. Successful obedience is rewarded by promotion through the hierarchy, which makes one *internalize a social order*, including its emphasis on obedience.

Two important cultural artefacts facilitate the obedience shortcut and the subsequent insertion of oneself into a hierarchy: a set of validating beliefs (in this case, the importance of scientific progress, discussed above) and the appropriate symbols (e.g. lab coat, business-like overview of the procedure, equipment) to demonstrate authority. As subsequent, modified trials demonstrated though, destructive obedience against one's own desires moderately attenuated when authority did not wield the symbols of power so blatantly [Milgram, 1974, 61]. More importantly, very rarely did the subject interpret the
learner's pleas to end the shocks as the orders of authority [Milgram, 1974, 49], unless the authority temporarily became the learner (and the learner became the non-authoritative authority, in which case obedience went to nil [Milgram, 1974, 103]).

The obedience shortcut becomes activated at the beginning of the experiment, as the subject is introduced to the learner/victim (an actor), shock generator, and procedure. In this learning process, the subject begins to construe the situation according to the experimental authority. As the (fake) experimental trials and shocks begin, the subject lives and acts in the experimenter's definition of the situation (which insists on punishing the learner). As the confederate (the learner who is apparently receiving painful shocks) begins to protest and screaming, conflicting definitions of the situations may affect outcomes. When disobedient subjects reformulated the situation [1974, 162] to prioritize the pain they were inflicting (i.e. when they accepted the learner's definition of the situation communicated by screaming), they stopped. When the experimenter's definition of the situation was more salient, as it usually was, the experiment continued.

Even though almost all of the obedient subjects dissented, they remained compliant with the demands and unable to effectively resist the destructive behaviour. Milgram hypothesized that we enter an 'agentic state', working against our own immediate desires toward the goals of the hierarchy. Waller [2002, 110] challenges this explanation by questioning if such a state has ever been observed, and by noting that subjects, both obedient and disobedient, did not uniformly attribute responsibility to the authority. Similarly, there was a great deal of dissent, indicating the subjects retained a great deal of cognitive autonomy, even it was not reflected in their behaviour. To resolve this ambivalence, it is helpful to focus not on the obedience per se, but the construction of the situation that produced it. The lack of smooth, unqualified compliance demonstrates the ongoing importance of construal in directing behaviour, obviating the problem of who, ultimately, was responsible. The subject was in the experimenter's world, which limited behavioural alternatives.
For instance, the experimenter's assurances that the confederate-learner was not being injured was one important condition for the experiment progressing and not being stopped by a disobedient subject. The importance of the experimenter's definition of the situation is compounded as the situation is novel, stressful, and, due to the conflicting tendencies, highly confusing. The experimenter is presented not only as an authority to be obeyed, but an expert who can be trusted as a legitimate source of information: their calm, clear expectations can effectively resolve the equivocation of how to behave. As Ross and Nisbett claim [1991, 58], it is moments like these that we are least likely to disobey.

As we commit to a particular interpretation, a demand for internal consistency forces us to justify our decision (especially in the face of a competing construction, the learner's in this case). To stop and reflect would invite the bleak conclusion that our behaviour has been weak and wrong thus far. In order to obviate this possibility, at least temporarily, the subject is again forced to resolve the ambiguity by committing themselves to the experimenter's construal of reality. Fittingly, Ross and Nisbett [1991, 56] observe that most defiance occurred when the situation was least ambiguous: when the learner ceased pounding on the wall and screaming about their chest pain, only to be silent.

The dynamics of obedience go far beyond this interpretation of one particular case. The point is not an exhaustive account but a brief examination in order to identify footholds for dissent. In fact, one of the most interesting findings of Milgram's work is not that people are obedient: “we do not find evidence in Milgram's research that people are disposed to obey authority figures unquestioningly – even to the point of committing harmful and dangerous acts [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 58].” Rather, it is that the subjects were so poor at being disobedient. Most of the subjects attempted to stop the experiment at points, but had no way of construing an escape route. In fact, Ross and Nisbett argue that had a 'Stop' button – a “disobedience channel” – been available, the compliance rate would have been a fraction of what it was [1991, 57].
In light of this, there is an interesting theme that deserves passing mention: the difference between concrete, informative constructions and abstract, normative ones, especially considering Bloom's Taxonomy [Byrnes, 1996, 65], where knowing is considerably less difficult that judging. Most of Milgram's obedients thought – on some level – that what they were doing was wrong and usually protested, but they felt compelled to follow through nonetheless. Their construal – mediated by the authority shortcut and a minimal ideology – led them to take normative cues from the authority in a highly stressful and confusing situation in which their own judgement was overwhelmed. Since normative judgements are more abstract than operational directives (i.e. push the lever), obedients probably needed more time and concentration to overcome ambiguity and arrive at a decision, although time and space for reflection were not forthcoming in this situation. The issue was not that their construal convinced them that what they were doing was right (although dissonance may eventually have led to this if they did it often enough [Waller, 2002, 209]). The problem was probably that they couldn't make a judgement and resolve the moral ambiguity (i.e. obey authority or stop inflicting pain) in this overwhelming circumstance. With the situation construed as it was, they remained obedient to the constructed social order. As mentioned, disobedients usually reconstrued the situation when it became obvious that the learner was unconscious or dead. The complex problem of judgement, construal, and behaviour will be pursued further in the fourth chapter in relation to moral development, field independence, and locus of control.

The preceding argument illustrates the importance of situational variables in predicting behaviour. Rather than dismissing personal or cultural variables, however, they may have been the distinguishing factors between obedients and disobedients. As we shall see at the end of this study, personality and cultural variables (e.g. locus of control, cultural importance of obedience, religiosity) may have a significant impact on our moral judgment and behaviour. For our purposes, however, social construction is central: although each participant's experience was unique, the situation
predisposed subjects to similar construals that limited available behavioural possibilities: obey or don't.

[Disobedience] is not merely the refusal to carry out a particular command of the experimenter but a reformulation of the relationship between subject and authority... [one in which] the subject has found himself locked into a well-defined social order. [Milgram, 1974, 162].

Similarly, obedience is less about following orders and more about adopting a narrative and placing oneself in a “well-defined social order.” Even when an action may seem like a violation of a moral code outside the confines of the system in which one operates, even when the obedient subject has recourse to their protesting conscience, the dominant construal of the situation may limit the number of choices they can perceive.

Conformity

Philosophers see the implicit understandings of the world that guide how we think and act as invisible moorings in our constructed social reality... As Levinas notes, such a shared sensibility is “what emerges from two people interacting”; our private, subjective sense of the world has its roots in our relationships.

Daniel Goleman [2007, 109]

Goleman is correct that “our sense of the world has its roots in our relationships”; what is not so clear is whether the individuals involved have a symmetrical role in this process of construal. Like obedience, conformity is not – at least initially – a binary all-or-nothing acceptance of construal; all participants contribute to some degree. Unlike obedience, however, conformity explicitly demands that the actor contribute to the group's construal while reconciling it with their own. With conformity comes the actor's validation of others' reality, with its mutually reinforcing investment in their roles and behaviour. Conversely, non-conformity can have a severe impact on the group's construction of reality and can be a catalyst for alternative constructions.

Conformity, similar to obedience, works to construe a situation in two ways [Waller, 2002, 218]. From a cognitive perspective, others are a useful source of information about how to make sense
of a situation, especially one that is novel, confusing, or stressful. In a more affective or social sense, however, the group's authority has a normative role in the process of constructing social values: we may tend towards the values of the group in order to avoid the ire and win the favour of others. Both of these elements, *social proof* and *peer pressure*, play different but complementary roles.

The interactive nature of conformity as *social proof* is demonstrated by the bystander effect, the well-documented tendency of onlookers to remain passive spectators in an accident or conflict [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 41][Cialdini, 2007,129]. What may be interpreted as callous, urban indifference towards the suffering of others may stem more from confusion than apathy: bystanders use other bystanders as guides to appropriate action under unusual circumstances. When others, especially a large group, seem unwilling to help, the bystander construes the situation according to the conformity shortcut: the apparent decision of the group to avoid intervention is proof that intervention is not needed. The *pluralistic ignorance* [Cialdini, 2007, 129] occurs when the others being used as referents are, simultaneously, arriving at the same conclusion based on the (non)behaviour of those using the referent to determine an appropriate response. As the number of passive onlookers increases, the likelihood that the situation can be construed as a non-emergency increases, and vice versa. Far from being complacent or apathetic to another's distress, onlookers read the implicit collective opinion of others as a behavioural norm; when a bystander is alone they are much more likely to intervene. (Looking ahead to the discussion on resistance, this bystander research by Latané and Darley has led to its incorporation in many first aid courses, preparing responders to identify and overcome this shortcut.)

The tendency towards social proof is also a good example of the non-determinist, probabilistic nature of cognitive materialism. As with the bystander effect, a minority report that goes against the apparent consensus of the group can have a galvanizing effect on other dissenters. Solomon Asch, mentor to Stanley Milgram and pioneer in conformity research, unintentionally created experimental conditions in which subjects disavowed their own very concrete observations, ultimately conforming to
the group's opinion (which was predetermined as the rest of the group was made up of confederates) [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 38]. When there was at least some resistance to the dominant opinion, however, consensus plummeted and subjects were willing to maintain their original conviction in the face of the majority. Unanimity of outside opinion will often change a person's beliefs, but even minor signs of defection can strengthen resolve. Reality, therefore, is not simply the representations of others that we automatically soak up; rather, it is the world created by one's own perception and inferences, which happen to be mediated by social influences such as obedience and conformity.

Under the condition of obedience, an authority figure mandates much of the construal of the situation; in conformity, the construction of reality is a group effort. Many situations, however, may concurrently trigger different shortcuts in varying degrees. At times, an official authority figure in the group may elicit obedience from certain members, who are used as sources of social proof for other members who are less directly influenced by the authority. In their analyses of the Jonestown suicides, both Levine [2003, 220] and Cialdini [2007, 156] emphasize that a core of 'true believers', under Jones' direct control, provided a behavioural model for People's Temple members (who suddenly found themselves in the middle of a Guyanese jungle and were under the impression that the CIA was on its way to murder them all). Given the immensely confusing, stressful, and terrifying conditions, most members were likely influenced more by the social proof of Jones' devotees rather than Jones' own authority. Hence, authority need not manifest itself with official cultural symbols, but can be derived from the confidence of those used as social role models (in this case, sadly, the unhesitating willingness of the first zealots to drink the poisoned Kool-Aid). In fact, Levine [2003, 219] implies that Jones' power was partly a result of his sparing use of authority, instead relying on social proof as a behavioural guide.

Social proof evolved because it is useful: it takes individual perspectives and contributes them towards a single, shared version of reality based what limited information is available. In modern,
urban society, however, there are so many complex relationships based in a variety of different contexts, all containing different information, assumptions, and values. Recognition of this rich complexity sometimes accompanies a sense of respect for individual perspectives within this context, including those perspectives of non-elites. This progressive tendency runs through different traditions with varying degrees of commitment, from a liberal recognition of political tolerance to a postmodern insistence on difference. There is the recognition that a unity of opinion – groupthink – has been blamed for the ideological excesses that cause massive violence [Hoffer, 1951]. Individuals can, as per the humanist tradition, be trusted to exercise adequate judgment when not swayed by 'the mob' or 'the system'.

But if the goal is to challenge dogma and rigidity, one must also challenge highly fluid, convenient, or expedient definitions of situation, which reflexively justify our own (lack of) behaviour. The respect for difference, however, may sometimes create a vacuum of principle, one that may be quietly filled with a vision that is less hospitable to the wisdom of difference. The ambiguity that difference invites may be confusing and moral clarity is not forthcoming; it may be hard to deny that plurality can quickly become pluralistic ignorance. Perhaps difference may eventually beget indifference, since sins of omission lay more easily upon our conscience [Trout, 2009, 98]. Worse, it creates an opening for those who are ignorant of, indifferent, or opposed a priori to alternatives, who can lead because they know exactly where they are going, and whose confidence can be a form of informal or consensual authority.

Social proof draws multiple realities towards unity: several heads are better than one when trying to understand the world, and a group of people may be more effectively able to cooperate under a common definition of the situation. But most attempts at social construction are not “unconstrained dialogue” [Eagleton, 2007, 130], in which all members symmetrically construct a common, holistic understanding of a social reality, one that matches more than the optimal contributions of their
individual perspectives and experiences. Our cognitive baggage can interact with pluralism to create a very soft relativism that, in some cases, can thwart resistance or excuse ineffective dissent against injustice. The effect of salience on ambivalence is explored in the next chapter, and the topic of pluralistic ignorance itself will be expanded in the section on Resistance.

The pressure of authority, along with conformity as *social proof*, is among the factors that shape individual behaviour. *Peer pressure*, the desire to be accepted by a salient group, was also likely a significant factor and has a strongly normative influence on our construal and behaviour. The executioners and functionaries of the Holocaust, Waller argues [2002, 218], certainly drew upon each other as sources of information, but were also motivated by the desire to be accepted by their comrades. While many reservists involved directly in the murder of Jewish civilians found their labour horrifying and disgusting, especially initially, eighty to ninety percent eventually became killers [Browning in Waller, 2002, 218]. This conformity went well beyond self-interest (many killers were reservists who were too old for the front); the major penalty for non-conformity in this case was “isolation, rejection, and ostracism” [Browning in Waller, 2002, 218]. Those that refused to kill claimed weakness instead of moral rectitude as their excuse, not wanting to risk further non-conformity. As Dicks reported [in Milgram, 1974, 177], many SS and Gestapo knew what they were doing was morally wrong, but nevertheless adopted a “‘helpless cog’ attitude”.

Nevertheless, the fact that humans don’t always tend towards conformity, and tend towards profound difference at times, is related to the fact that humans cannot be part of all communities and, as such, use different normative and informational referents from which to develop their social realities. In order to better understand this process, it is necessary to investigate the effect of in-grouping, or *liking* [Cialdini, 2007,169], on social construction.
In-Grouping/Out-grouping

... the evolution of sociability, altruism, and the instincts for coalitions goes hand in hand with hostility to outsiders. We cooperate to compete. There is no “us” without a corresponding “them” to oppose.

Waller [2002, 155]

Amongst the evidence against Eichmann's excuse of mere obedience was the fact, to which he attested [Arendt, 1963, 57], that he wanted to excel in his duties. Had he been a mediocre functionary who simply worked for a paycheque and a desk job far from the front, his excuse may have been more persuasive. Eichmann admired Hitler immensely and felt motivated to obey him, but this was only partly responsible for his behaviour: it was likely that conformity directed most of his actions.

On one hand, all of his colleagues were involved in the same process, so that the pluralistic ignorance of the bystander effect may have led them to assume that what they were doing could not have been wrong, for surely others would not be doing it [Waller, 2002, 215][Arendt, 1963, 116 & 131, goes as far as saying that almost no one with whom Eichmann came in contact, inside or outside the SS, was opposed to the plan]. The effects of peer pressure (and certainly self-interest) are evident as well, given his desire win the approval of his immediate superiors, although he felt direct obedience to Hitler himself [Arendt, 1963, 114, 117, 126]. Nevertheless, the disconfirming data is substantial, especially given his aversion to visiting the camps. There is no doubt that these trips left him sickened [Arendt, 1963 87-90], but they did not deter him in his commitment to the Final Solution, a project towards which he was initially ambivalent [Arendt, 1963, 56]. The conformity and obedience that motivated Eichmann were more salient than his revulsion because his colleagues and superiors were part of the group with which he identified, and his victims were not. These former shortcuts are underwritten by the mind's automatic social categorization of us and them, the in-group shortcut.

Rather than encouraging the adoption, in whole or part, of the social construction of a situation, in-grouping helps to determine its merit based on the familiarity of others involved. Hence, the ability
of conformity and authority to shape our construal is proportional to the salience we attribute to those whose reality we take. Those whom we consider familiar or similar, our *in-group*, have a larger effect on our socially constructed reality. We are more likely to trust them as sources of reliable information, seek their approval, and comply with their requests [Cialdini, 2007, 167]. They, in turn, will reciprocate this process, reinforcing their apparent similarity to us, increasing the centrality of our common construal. Eichmann’s ideological conviction that he should do what his Führer commanded was in part an eventual response to the demands of authority. But it was also, over the years, motivated by the social proof of witnessing one’s in-group reflecting and reinforcing the same idea (and, significantly, the competence he felt in this endeavour). Whatever his obedient 'personality' traits, his lived social order gradually enveloped him and made his grim task, to which he had no ideological commitment, seemingly inevitable [Arendt, 1963, 33] (obviously this is not an exhaustive account of his behaviour).

The very existence of a shared, in-group narrative implies an out-group with a (presumably) different narrative. While the in-group is perceived as similar to us in a positive way, the categorizing nature of the mind elides the differences within the out-group and emphasizes their (again, apparent) homogeneity. Whether the differences between groups are fundamentally incompatible or merely ornamental (e.g. Dr. Seuss' *Sneetches*) is secondary. In-group solidarity precedes conscious reflection upon its merits; it is reflexive and automatic, and often based on the most arbitrary shared attribute.

Once the in-group shortcut has been activated, however, it becomes easier to find similarities within the group and differences without. This *accentuation effect* or *halo effect*, linked to our tendency towards *confirmation bias*, is an artefact of our context-driven memory (discussed below) that recognizes and accepts consonant information more quickly than dissonant. Perception, in short, is dependent on prior belief.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner [Waller, 2002, 241] [Tavris
and Aronson, 2007, 58], traces the motive of in-group salience to the amelioration of the actors' self-esteem. Similar to the dialectic between individual and group in social proof, the group's centrality to the individual reinforces the individual's commitment to the group. Ensuring the superiority of the in-group guarantees the actor's feelings of worth: out-group hostility, therefore, may become necessary to promote the primacy of the in-group.

The reflexive, shortcutting nature of in-grouping is demonstrated by the inconsequential and arbitrary bases for such bias. During Tajfel's initial 'baseline' conditions for forming in-groups (i.e. 'minimal' conditions he assumed that individuals would not develop in-group tendencies, like preference in paintings), subjects unexpectedly displayed strong preferences for similar others without having met them. When the basis of the groups is conspicuous, the in-grouping is even more pronounced [Waller, 2002, 239]: the ambivalence and ignorance that plagued Converse' mass publics on policy questions was largely resolved when commenting on questions of racial policy [Converse, 2006, 39][Kinder, 2006, 209]. Sherif's Robber's Cave experiment, which almost deteriorated into *The Lord of the Flies*, seems hardly out of keeping given that in-grouping is the dominant narrative for many versions of history (if not most, though certainly the Old Testament, likely the most widely read history text).

There is a strong adaptive argument to be made that familiarity in social relations (or even in choices of food [Pinker, 1997, 382]) helps to keep us alive. As James Waller suggests [2002, 239, italics in original]:

> Though the *content* of social categories may differ, the *process* of social categorization is universal and pervasive across humankind. It is as natural to our minds as breathing is to our lungs.

If humans can discriminate where discrimination had scarcely existed, then out-grouping seems more than a post-hoc justification for oppression. As with obedience and conformity, it is an instinctive response that we tend towards, especially when we are stressed or confused – typically the worst times
Confusion and panic tend to override deliberation, aid poor decision-making, and give our out-group categories a negative affective tone [Goleman, 2007, 304][Marcus, 208, 50]. Out-group bias may exist on a cognitive level, but it is the affective 'tone' of the bias that predicts hostile behaviour.

What is interesting about Eichmann was the indifference, rather than antipathy, he felt towards the Jewish outgroup. Part of his defence, in fact, rested on the various “kindnesses” that Eichmann had extended towards Jews in his custody (e.g. the highly temporary reassignment to light labour detail prior to being shot) [Arendt, 1963, 51]. While it could be argued that true out-grouping requires the affective quality of hate, it would not make the behaviour any more forgivable. What the above example indicates is the non-centrality of hatred in out-grouping violence, emphasizing instead the power of role-taking in institutional behaviour.

It is affect, however, that can promote reconciliation. Outgroups need not always be perceived as negative, and barriers between groups can slowly erode by working towards common goals, a conclusion reached at the end of the Robber's Cave experiment, and applied in Eliot Aronson's 'Jigsaw' cooperative learning technique for multiracial classrooms [Cialdini, 2007, 182]. Hence, the admission of essentialist social categorization is not the same as asserting that social divisions are inevitable, condemning humanity to oppress itself for the sake of difference. In the spirit of Waller's examination of genocide, it is more useful to admit the possibility that in-grouping and out-grouping are part of the brain's hardware, and that learning about it is the first step towards eradicating oppressive prejudice.

**Reciprocity**

_Moral reciprocity is rational just as rationality is prescriptive... Violations of reciprocity and justice, like violations of logic, “shouldn’t be”._

*John Gibbs [2003, 36]*
There is only one effective psychological strategy to elevate poor people, and it isn't empathizing with them. It is taking out of our hands the decision to help and placing it in the caring hands of fair policy. Empathic imagination is a lousy guide to acts that would promote the priorities we value. It would be difficult to shed this habit of thought, not because it is essential to our nature, but because without outside intervention, heuristics, like habits – nail biting, stewing over insults, and berating outcasts – are generally hard to abandon. Any personal commitment is likely to be unprecedented and unsustainable.

J. D. Trout [2009, 50]

The fundamental attribution error, described above, trades on the assumption that people are the makers of their own fate and, as such, able to overcome the circumstances which structure life. Implicit in this assumption is the inherent fairness that governs many forms of asymmetrical and inequitable social relations. From this perspective, a bias for reciprocity precedes and provides the foundation for a belief that the wealthy are deserving by the very fact that they are rich. Perhaps Calvin's doctrine of double predestination had an instinctive component, which provides the ethical basis to let Wal-Mart make $US36 billion annually in profits (ie. not revenue) while the vast majority of its workers make a living at or below the poverty line [Gerry Hurwitz, personal e-mail communication “How big is Wal-Mart?”, April 26, 2010. I'm willing to question this widely circulated email, although other groups on the web seem to share this opinion of Wal-Mart’s wages].

Piaget's theory of moral development was based on the construction of reciprocity, the sense of justice produced by the interaction of logic and social construal [Gibbs, 2003, 42]. As children become able to think in less concrete, more abstract terms, they come to construct, through play, a very basic understanding of “The Golden Rule” which becomes more nuanced and general with development. For Piaget and Kohlberg, a violation of justice – a lack of reciprocity – is the motivation towards pro-social behaviour [Gibbs, 2003, 37]. Yet such a keen sense of reciprocity, when coupled with the habit of overlooking the structural bases for social relations, may justify the lot of the poor.

The assumption of a just world can use the logic of reciprocity to provide a rationale for
inequality, obviating hard thinking about social relations [Marcus, 2008, 142][Gibbs, 2003, 90][Waller, 2002, 250]. It is, in a sense, a defence mechanism against *emphatic overarousal*, in which we “turn off our empathy before we become overwrought and crippled with unhappiness [Trout, 2009, 42].” Dissonance is caused by the gap between our empathic distress and the impotence we feel in the face of massive and abstract poverty – the hallmark of charity telethons. It can be more easily resolved if it is, somehow, construed as self-inflicted. When the resolution is incomplete, the result is a protective cynicism, a half-hearted admission that need exists, but those that need it should, first and foremost, provide it for themselves [Trout, 2009, 40]. The recent extension of Medicare to the poor and the reaction of Tea-Party conservatives is an interesting case study of these phenomena, especially when coupled with out-grouping.

Empathic distress, the other motive of pro-social action, can be limited by the experiences of those with whom the actor has very little shared experience, because it makes vicarious distress harder to understand and, as a result, to feel [Trout, 2009, 38]. This is why the familiarity bias of in-grouping diminishes the fundamental attribution error: it is easier to attribute a similar person's behaviour to to situational pressures because we share more of their situation [Trout, 2009, 39]. Those that aren't poor have a hard time empathizing because they don't know what its like; they cannot construe that reality. But as empathy becomes more developed, it becomes dependent on cognitive skills like perspective taking. A wider array of realities may make us think and feel differently about others, and may make the situational variables that structure their life more apparent; we may become more prone to *attributional charity*, construing reality in a way that is more sensitive to the violations of reciprocity.

The *just world theory* involves *blaming the victim*, be it the poor or, as with some of Milgram's obedient, the inept learner [Waller, 2002, 251]. But it is not is not an imperative, binary condition; it is in constant tension with our sense of justice and empathy. This tension is only variably predictable, and does not determine counterintuitive or unexpected behaviour. In this vein, a more positive way of
framing the problem is to admit that about a third of Milgram's subjects did experience a violation of justice and empathy, and in doing so were able to find a way to change the definition of the situation [Gibbs et al, 1986].

Empathy takes effort and development to do well; not simply some instinctive altruism. As J. D. Trout [2009, 39] observes:

> Empathy can trigger the urge to help others, sure enough; but it cannot be the ultimate guide. Instead, it is a place to start. Unfortunately, many are paralyzed before the finish.

Like reciprocity, empathy is a deeply wired response to our social world and, in a society that depends on nuanced construal; it may not be adequate for addressing the institutional behaviour that maintains unjust relations. In isolation, both reciprocity and empathy can insist on their own particular interpretation of what is right and what is good. When the two are taken together, however, debilitating ambiguity is lessened and motivation increases, resulting in pro-social (ie. helping or reforming) behaviour [Gibbs, 2003, 115]. This process will be discussed in more detail in below, in the context of moral development and resistance to institutional behaviour.

**Scarcity**

>[Universal and historic] poverty had always been man's lot, and any other state was in degree unimaginable. This poverty was not the elegant torture of the soul which comes from contemplating another man's more spacious possessions. It was the unedifying mortification of the flesh – from hunger, sickness, and cold. Those who might be freed temporarily from such burden could not know when it would strike again, for at best hunger yielded only perilously to privation. It is improbable that the poverty of the masses of the people was made greatly more bearable by the fact that a very few – those upon whose movements nearly all recorded history centers – were very rich.

>John Kenneth Galbraith [1958, 13]

The tendency to blame the poor for their lot is augmented by a subtle, abiding assumption that there is never enough. While stock bubbles are, on one level, motivated by the fiction that what goes
up doesn't come down, the desire for large returns is, fundamentally, the inherent dissatisfaction with one's wealth: more is always better. This reaction is understandable, in part because survival has not been idyllic, as our expulsion from Eden allegorically suggests. While the reciprocity of a paycheque for labour may, as per commodity fetishism, cause us to misunderstand our oppression, capitalism effectively addresses our instinctive reaction to scarcity by constantly matching production to our advertising-based sense of need [Galbraith, 1958, 14].

The experience of scarcity throughout human development has embedded in the human psyche an instinct for assuming that there is precious little, and that which is available should be used forthwith. Evolution, one could argue, has endowed us with tendency to construal in order to enhance our survival. Since that wiring was installed, however, humans have managed to change their world substantially, changing our relationship with scarcity. But scarcity is not frugality; it is a way of living in the present, the motivation to spend now rather than save for an indefinite and abstract future. Far from being academic speculation, it is this bias that necessitates mandatory contributions to pension plans [Trout, 2009, 146].

Galbraith's classic *The Affluent Society* is an analysis of how the West's cultural experience with scarcity still influences economic policy at a time when the problems are rooted in overproduction. He went as far as to predict, in 1958, that this problem would spill over into our ecosystems because we are unable to accept that we have enough [Galbraith, 1958, 199]. But given our tendency to keep what we have rather than risk and profit in the abstract future [Cialdini, 2007, 257][Levine, 2003, 123][Marcus, 2008, 76], one has to wonder if scarcity and familiarity are powerful forces for social stability. As policy goes, familiar is often safer even when it is not in the material interests of the citizens. If it provides well enough, perhaps the current reality may be best (or most adequate) that can be envisioned [Marcus, 2008, 51].

According to Abercrombie and his colleagues (discussed in the third chapter), massive social
change is not immediately triggered by powerful ideas, although they may play a facilitating role. Instead, revolutions tend to occur when routines break down, often because of immediate scarcity [Moore in Abercrombie et al, 1980, 167] (i.e. the bread riots in the French and Russian revolutions). But according to James Davies [Cialdini, 2007, 257], the immediate scarcity can be relative to the preceding situation; specifically, revolutions or upheaval come after a long period of steady growth is followed by a sharp reversal. The Davies J-Curve is the political manifestation of psychological reactance, the feeling of loss when we no longer have those things to which we have grown entitled and accustomed. Rather than alter our social constructed routines to meet the immediate reality of scarcity, sections of society can mobilize – in very idiosyncratic ways, with a variety of outcomes – around the desire to maintain the material benefits of their improved social condition. This does not imply that we always want more, but that living with less is a painful adjustment and not easily made, a condition that progressive forces must come to grips with if it hopes to effectively meet ecological challenges.

**Reflexive Whitewashing and Deliberative Bias**

_The bottom line is that every belief passes through the unpredictable filter of contextual memory. Either we directly recall a belief that we formed earlier or we calculate what we believed by whatever memories can be called to mind._

*Gary Marcus [2008, 44]*

_The self-justifying mechanisms of memory would be just another charming, and often exasperating, aspect of human nature were it not for the fact that we live our lives, we make our decisions about people, we form our guiding philosophies, we construct entire narratives on the basis of memories that are often right but so often dead wrong._

*Tavris & Aronson [2007, 81]*

Beliefs are, as argued above, often context specific because they are based on inferences made from a memory system which is activated by contextual cues. Far from the objective, complete, and deliberate account of past truth, we reflexively recall and elaborate upon memories that may or may not
be relevant, distorted, or outright fabrication.

Unlike computers, which store precise pieces of data in specifically addressed locations, humans evolved to remember the concrete and general, not the abstract and specific [Marcus, 2008, 20]. The major benefit of a context-matching memory is the rapid recall of information without having to sort based on relevance. Forgetting the mass of detail while remembering the categories and patterns increases the efficiency of our brains: general 'schematic' information that is needed in a given context is retrieved, and can be applied to this specific contextual instance. That which occurs recently and frequently is further prioritized [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 73].

Marcus [2008, 28] argues that our brains were adapted to process and remember a fraction of the information that bombards us in contemporary society: “For most of evolution, the costs and benefits of context-dependent memory worked out fine: fast for gist, poor for detail; so be it.” One method of dealing with this current overload, proposed by political psychologist Milton Lodge [Kinder, 2006, 203], is the use of online schema: details are quickly forgotten, but an “ongoing, overall impression” adjusts to new information. These heuristics [Kinder, 2006, 204], be they political candidates or well-advertised products, are branded shortcuts that remove the need for effortful thought, especially when they can be linked through repetition to abstract values like honesty or quality [Levine, 2003, 44].

There is a cost, however, that has a greater effect in a complex society with numerous details to remember: memories can be distorted, and in turn they can – dialectically – cause distortion. “Memory creates our stories, but our stories also create our memories [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 77].” Our recall system is, as mentioned, driven to make matches with context and looks for categories and patterns more than specific details [Marcus, 2008, 21]. Forgetting the specifics implies that they are added as part of recall process: a story outline is composed and the details fill in the blanks. The details, however, are a product of the present, and are under some pressure to be consistent with our current
feelings and opinions. Even more interesting is confabulation: the habit of using others' memories of an event to reconstruct a past reality, making it their own but forgetting that they got it second hand [Trout, 2009, 147].

Despite the arbitrary nature of memory, confidence in our memories is shown to be proportional to the amount of details added [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 87]. Hence, imagination can become 'real' if we simply think about how something might have happened (Tavris and Aronson [2007, 87] attribute this to the fact that 3 million Americans have been abducted by aliens). This is because those memories that are referenced frequently and recently become increasingly easy to recall, which is easier with a sympathetic audience that doesn't challenge the story. Taken together, this means that we may unintentionally create or reinforce our beliefs by changing our version of history, by reflexively editing and and prioritizing certain memories. Even if they are false, enough effort may make them sufficiently tangible to become 'real' (especially once we publicly commit to them). The fact that DNA evidence has reversed numerous capital murder sentences speaks to the serious implications of “imagination inflation” and the unreliability of eyewitness testimony (especially across racial lines) [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 86,130].

Our memory is implicitly focused on the self, and the need to maintain consistency with a current identity or opinion – usually to maintain a positive self-image – tends to bias memories in one's own favour. This effect is augmented by the fact that others (and their shortcomings) are remembered from the first person perspective, omitting an important contextual variable: ourselves and our own behaviour. It may seem valid to remember a former teacher as an ogre, especially if the evidence of our own persistent misbehaviour is overlooked. When it is not possible to forget or repackage a dissonant memory, that particular memory is often recalled from an outside perspective, as if to emphasize how it is not part of our identity [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 79].

Distortion by memory, as opposed to distortion of memory, involves the two other components
of belief: skewing perception in favour of existing thoughts and memories, and creating or reinforcing beliefs by basing inference on distorted memory. Confirmation bias, related to the former, is a reflexive predisposition for processing consonant information with less attention than motivated reasoning, the more deliberative tendency to scrutinize information that is at odds with our beliefs [Marcus, 2008, 53][Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 18]. This essential feature of a match-driven memory is responsible for preferring familiarity, and is responsible for the halo effect, in which a positive first impression will predispose us to screen-in positive features and overlook, as much as possible, negative attributes [Marcus, 2008, 32].

As information is reflexively filtered to match prior assumptions, there is a predisposition to detect patterns that may range from arbitrary to simply false. By focusing attention on an issue (e.g. school shootings) outside of its contextual reality (e.g. in sensational news stories), respondents can draw fearful conclusions (e.g. invest in metal detectors, not books) [Trout, 2009, 89]. Similarly, it can give a false confidence about abilities (e.g. to save for retirement or pick stocks), optimistically ignoring that, in general, this is done poorly [Trout, 2009, 3]. The tendency to future discounting – linked to the scarcity shortcut – helps us to ignore actual 'base rates' and remain overconfident about our judgement, which is partly responsible for the corollary of the fundamental attribution error: bad things are more likely to happen to other people. Once this process is started, it becomes progressively more difficult to change one's mind, partly because meaningful feedback on life decisions is either lacking, filtered out, or simply too slow for our haphazard memory to notice [Trout, 2009, 94].

Familiarity also works by a process of focussing, framing, and anchoring: ideas can be called to mind which subsequently, and often arbitrarily, influence decisions (which, as Zaller [2002, 77-85] notes, explains the variation between different surveys with slightly different questions) [Marcus 2008, 44, 46] [Trout, 2009, 95][Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 63]. Even the choice of words can call upon different memories, which we use as the basis for our judgements: language and signs are certainly powerful,
not in themselves, but because they often determine which memories get triggered causing us to interpret situations a particular way [Marcus, 2008, 29]. Similarly, contrast can skew our perception of an issue, making a mountain out of molehill, but only when compared with an anthill [Cialdini, 2007, 11][Levine, 2003, 91].

Once a memory is distorted or is directing our perception, the inference that constructs new belief from prior information is bound to go awry (or at least arrive at a point that is different from where a more accurate version of history would take us). As Gary Marcus [2008, 62] emphasizes, evolution had no reason to separate the process of inference from the process of belief, facilitating the transformation of tentative assumption into firm conviction. Even the most deliberate judgement can possess traces of personal prejudice: “By leaving it up to our conscious self to decide how much to use our mechanism of deliberate reasoning, evolution freed us – for better or for worse – to be as biased as we want to be [Marcus, 2008, 60].”

Looking in on a context from the third person of future history or present observer, one is astonished at by others' lack of self-awareness, seeming caprice, or meandering inconsistency. But a match-driven memory determines what is salient within a situation, so it is hard to detect our own ambivalence or oversights within that situation. Similarly, reflection outside of a context is difficult because we do not necessarily have an accurate memory of our thoughts within that context: memory, while not pure fiction, has a tenuous grasp on the 'Truth' under the best of times.

**From Compliance to Internalization: Resolving Dissonance**

...self-justification [is] the most normal reaction to [a] pathological predicament.  
*Robert Levine* [2003, 224]

Had Eichmann been instructed to manage the logistics of mass murder in 1934, he would certainly have refused. If the People's Temple not practiced the apocalyptic ‘white nights’ for weeks prior to its sad end, perhaps a different outcome may have been possible. Milgram's rate of compliance
would have been significantly lower had subjects been ordered to inflict massive pain at the beginning of the experiment rather than the end [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 37][Nisbett & Ross, 1991, 56].

Initial institutional behaviour is possible only insofar as it is legitimate to the actor, but what is legitimate is, ultimately, fluid: the situation can dictate values, but it is unlikely to do so immediately. At first, the social situation may prevail upon us to construe it in a particular way due to a cognitive shortcut, and we may behave as we feel appropriate under this interpretation of reality. If behaviour is to continue or intensify, however, the motivating force must shift from the external situation (e.g. authority figures, others) to within actor, who may then perpetuate the behaviour in response to a need for internal consistency.

Our initial behaviour can fundamentally reset our standards for judging ourselves and our actions, especially if we are dedicated to preserving a positive self-perception. This cognitive dissonance is the strain we feel when our optimistic self-concept is at odds with the perception of our behaviour. Following the metaphor of Tavris and Aronson [2007, 32], we stand atop a pyramid of choice: to resolve dissonance in favour of our behaviour would involve self-justification, lowering inhibition against this behaviour in future. To resolve it otherwise would be to admit that our judgement succumbed to situational pressures: prohibitions against such a behaviour would remain, but we would have to live with the guilt of our actions.

A successful institution – be it a used car dealership, cult, or the SS – attempts to minimize dissonance by making commitments gradual, with each step only requiring small amounts of dissonance and justification. Once the anchor point is reset and time is taken to rationalize the commitment, the behaviour is intensified ever so slightly and the cycle of entrapment repeats [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 34]. To avoid defection, people are told “only as much as they can accept [Levine, 2003, 191].” This new, situationally-based value becomes the new baseline for behaviour and judgement. The impetus to continue along this behavioural trajectory ceases to come from the situation
itself but from the actor, who has to justify all of their preceding deeds.

    We're compelled to justify our commitments... once the process begins, it becomes self-perpetuating. If I did it, I must believe it. And if I believe it, I'm more likely to do it again, and more so. [Levine, 2003, 207]

Small commitments allow the actor to do the work of justification, as there is less likely to be obvious outside forces to attribute behaviour to. Once the first step is taken, even disingenuously [Cialdini, 2007, 76], it becomes easier to take another and another; ultimately the initial coercion or compensation cease to be a factor, so we must look to our “own motives for an explanation” [Levine, 2003, 207]. For Milgram's subjects to stop, they would have had to admit that all of the pain they had inflicted to that point was wrong. For many of Jones' followers, not taking the final step may have implied years of wasted devotion (although many other factors were involved in the decision). In order to avoid further dissonance, this reconciliation will take the form of “wholesale adoption” rather than compromise [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 46]. (It is worth asking to what degree consistency is expressed through Western individualism, where mistakes and errors are viewed as personal faults rather than products of context.)

    Directing us towards consistency are two processes of internalization, personal guilt and public shame. From within, we feel the need to match of self-image to our behaviour (or vice versa). Externally, however, we do not always experience direct pressure to conform with social norms; rather the social pressure towards internalization helps to match behaviour with others' expectations of us, which are rooted in our public commitments [Cialdini, 2007, 77]. By even temporarily or unwillingly accepting the definition of the situation and acting within it, we transmit our social reality to others, and thus make a public investment in it.

    Internalization becomes a binary state of being, the exclusive adherence to one definition of the situation, to the point where others no longer exist or matter. This may begin, however, as a gradual,
uneven, and oscillating process; it becomes stronger through gradual escalation and dissonance, until
one reality predominates and roles become entrenched. Constructions other than our own cease to be
possible alternatives, but merely wrong, and we become victims of our own “naive realism, the
inescapable conviction that we perceive objects and events clearly, 'as the really are' [Tavris & Aronson,
2007, 42].” The absence of outside motivators – the threat of punishment or the promise of reward –
makes the principles and norms that guide behaviour intrinsically valid [Cialdini, 2007, 94]. As
Levine notes, internal motivators like guilt and shame are more effective than rules; the only purpose
of a law is to “put teeth into failing norms [2003, 197].”

Justification becomes almost mandatory when a commitment is irrevocable: commitments are
harder to go back upon when too many justifications have already been made, too many costs have
been sunk, when too much money, time, or energy has been invested, or after too many people are
made aware. This is a major function of ritual and the reason that many cultures demand that married
couples first enter into a public initiation ceremony. Social rewards like status and approval are not
only useful behavioural guides, but they are the reminder, via social proof, that maintaining the
commitment has been the right decision and that dissonance can safely be resolved.

Needless to say, the fact that we remember our judgements within a given context helps us to
live with them; when we reset our anchor points we may forget that we ever believed anything
different. If this is not an option, if the past is immutable, we may distance ourselves from that
previous self, referring to it in the third person [Tavris & Aronson, 2007, 80]. The attendant forces of
confirmation bias and motivated reasoning help to selectively accept information to maintain this
cognitive equilibrium.

Besides an accommodating memory, other shortcuts are available to support our habit of self-
justification and dissonance reduction. When direct self-interest is not an ideologically appealing
option, we can minimize negative behaviours or blame victims for their fate, which is made easier by
out-grouping and appealing to the Just World Theory: during the Holocaust, Jews were deemed – in the most hollow, post-hoc way – to have brought their suffering on themselves [Waller, 2002, 252]. Similarly, *mislabling* the victims, another form of out-grouping, strips the victim of identity and community, helping to make anti-social behaviour acceptable or even virtuous (e.g. describing victims as “bacilli” to be cleansed [Waller, 2002, 246][Gibbs, 2003, 146][Kelman & Hamilton, 1989, 19].

Within a bureaucracy, the *diffusion of responsibility* allows people to focus on the details of their work, breaking it into steps which are delegated throughout a group, helping to make the outcome a distant abstraction [Waller, 2002, 214][Kelman & Hamilton, 19891, 18]. While appealing to pluralistic ignorance on one hand (i.e. it can't be wrong if everyone is doing it), functionaries can absolve themselves by the division of labour to deny any tangible wrong-doing (as Eichmann attempted to do [Arendt, 1963, 25]). Nevertheless, they may not want to identify as a mere cog, so they “retain just enough responsibility” and guilt to “make them feel more human” [Waller, 2002, 215]. For instance, rather than causing his victims “undue hardship” in their transportation to the death camps, Eichmann diligently ensured that operations were efficient and expeditious [Arendt, 1963, 108]. Another strategy, *deindividuation* – hiding one's identity – can increase aggression or anti-social behaviour [Waller, 2002, 217]: when one is less identifiable, one can be less concerned about social repercussions, including the dissonance brought about by public shame.

Reflexive consistency can prevent us from confronting ourselves as we would least like to be seen, but dissonance resolution and internalization are, like other cognitive reflexes, probabilistic without being determinist. As Tavris and Aronson contend, they may prevail upon us to behave and believe in particular ways that, outside of an immediate situation, we would not necessarily predict. They are at pains to point out [2007, 223], however, we are hardly the slaves to our own self-justification. This is why consistency is so important, because dissonance resolution can sometimes be felt in ourselves or recognized in others, permitting interventions before attitudes become too rigid.
We take on realities and roles with the support of our shortcutting mind, and we maintain them with the support of self-serving memory and justification. As the mind attempts to limit the amount of energy spent on needless reflection, a role becomes a shortcut itself [Cialdini, 2007, 60]. It determines how we behave and how we relate to others in their roles, so that we can avoid the taxing reflection needed for basic navigation in contemporary society [Satre in Goleman, 2007, 111][Cialdini, 2007, 275]. The role obviates a great deal of thinking about what, why, and should in behaviour, because we must behave.

Practice turns a habit into a shortcut [Goleman, 2007, 157], as already alluded to with savoir faire. Although this paper has taken pains to avoid references to biology or neuroscience, a basic finding that has existed through several traditions of psychology is that the brain seems designed to support canalization [Hüther, 2004, 78] or procedural thinking [Gibbs, 2003, 147], the optimization of routine behaviours by moving them out of the conscious thought and into reflexive execution [de Bono, 1969].

More generally, the routinization processes that are so characteristic of bureaucratic organizations contribute to the weakening of opposing forces. Insofar as actions become routine, mechanical, and highly programmed, the actor can carry them out without making decisions about them or considering their larger implications. The discrete acts can be divorced from the total product to which they are contributing and thus stripped of their moral meaning. Furthermore, as actions are routinized, they become integrated into one's job and normal parts of one's daily work. Normalization, again, helps to dissociate the performance of the task from its meaning in terms of the human consequences it produces [Kelman and Hamilton, 1989, 165].

Even the 'ordinary' reservists who became SS killers were able to adapt and to their gory task, and Waller [2002, 209] speculates that Milgram's obedient would have ceased their remonstrations after greater practice. As routine limits the amount of time and energy spent on thinking about our behaviour or its consequences, we can avoid the painful experience of empathy and dissonance by attending to the details of our tasks [Trout, 2009, 25][Waller, 2002, 214], as if attempting to gain
control over some portions of existence.

Towards a Psychology of Ideology

The situation – the material conditions of reality – is a central element to belief. If belief is our construction of a situation, then it was created in part by particular forces in the situation, social variables that can trigger cognitive reflexes. Cognition reacts to these variables because it carries heavy evolutionary baggage, adaptive shortcuts that bypass reflection. The resulting construal is the interaction of situation and person, proportionately shaped by the power of others to convince us that their version of reality is the most relevant. This process is facilitated by ideology, justified by dissonance, entrenched by routine, and remembered as the best possible choice. The ability to recognize and resist these probabilistic forces is agency, and it is the responsibility of the actor. Before condemning institutional behaviour, it is wise to remember that there but for the grace of circumstance go every one of us.

This explanation is incomplete and only partially correct at best. Among the immediate problems are the limited treatment for affect, personality, and competence. Quite likely, this treatment is a victim of its own situation and errs too much on the side of social construction; it may need to put more faith in subject's senses and capacity for original thought. It can provide, however, a limited understanding of how our world tries to make us construe it and behave within it. The problem then becomes, however, if it is a wise idea to attempt to do something about it; if this is so flawed that to draw implications is to invite the very oppression and injustice that this is trying to mitigate? On the other hand, if it does have some validity, does intervening with cognitive processes lead to the same outcome? Does awareness of this danger diminish it?

The problem of institutional behaviour was sketched in the introduction. This chapter has been an attempt to outline how socio-cognitive factors contribute to this phenomenon. The next chapter looks at the issue of salience and information to social construction and ideology.
Chapter 2

Awareness and Ambivalence

*If, say, a soccer team had the same scores as [these organizations], only 4 of the 11 players on the field would know which goal is theirs. Only 2 of the 11 players would care. Only 2 of the 11 would know what position they play and know exactly what they are supposed to do. And all but 2 players would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than the opponent.*

*Stephen Covey [in Heath and Heath, 2008, 145]*

The argument so far is that social situations pressure us to construe them in certain ways, with guidance from our pre-existing ideology. This is premised on Cialdini's notion that shortcuts were part of evolutionary design to obviate the taxing work of construction, and to ensure a timely and appropriate reaction to familiar environmental factors [2007, 3]. Instead of independently building a critical understanding of our social reality, a force like social proof may cause the subject to automatically infer an implicit reality or accept an explicit one.

The definition of the situation that is constructed is dependent on several variables, including the subject's awareness of the situation, the accessibility of relevant information, and the salience of this construction to their role. These variables are determined by a complex interaction of both subject and social situation, so differing constructions with a range of depth and relevance is not only possible but expected. When a given subject inhabits numerous different social situations and lives roles within each, their realities take on varying degrees of the depth and relevance (e.g. mother, teacher, union steward, neighbour, customer, voter, fan or son, Marine, pastor, Republican, experimental subject).
Similarly, different individuals in a particular context may know, understand, or care about it to different degrees.

The sponge model, however, inherently presumes that subjects have largely coherent and stable constructions of their realities upon which to base their behaviour. Marx assumed that the “false consciousness” which underpinned capitalist social relations was based on a reception and understanding of bourgeois ideology, transmitted from one class to another. Althusser made a similar assumption about social reality 'interpellating' our identities onto ourselves through Ideological State Apparatuses that furnished us with explanations for our lot in life. Since discourse at least assumes its own existence, there is the implication that those who use it are, at a minimum, cognizant of its statements. Although Abercrombie et al question this assumption throughout their book [1980], most ideology theory trades on the underlying assumption in each is that people have a constituted self, with a stable picture of and explanation for their social realities, which they can reference to guide their behaviour.

Similarly, the liberal economic tradition of David Hume and Adam Smith argued that participation in a market was the rational expression of passions [Burchell, 1991, 130]. As a corollary, the actor must attempt to make rational, deliberate decisions in their interests by using the best information available (although the individual could only truly understand their own perspective, attempting to know more would interfere with the 'invisible hand'). A similar assumption went with the contractarian political tradition of John Locke, believing that citizens would use their best judgement and honest debate to arrive at democratic decisions. Both traditions argue that interests and opinions will differ, but they seem to underestimate the degree of social influence on subjectivity. Liberalism assumes a significant amount of autonomy how we construct political reality or calculate economic interests (which, incidentally, is probably why many liberals can agree that advertising to children is unethical, but assuming the same for adults is a hallmark of socialism). The existence of the
fundamental attribution error is indicative of this assumption's subtle ubiquity; liberalism accepts that the subject has enough agency to be the author of their own destiny, furthering their interests by way of deliberate, rational behaviour, based on coherent principles, and apprised of the most correct information.

Mass Opinion

*The best argument against democracy is a five minute conversation with the average voter.*

Winston Churchill [n.d.]

*Converse's essay is best remembered as a relentless and forceful attack on the fanciful idea that citizens in modern mass societies think about politics in ideologically sophisticated ways.*

Donald Kinder [2006, 208]

It has been almost half a century since Philip Converse's *Belief Systems in Mass Publics* [1964] empirically challenged the notion of an informed and engaged electorate. The title of the paper is not intentionally misleading: the main problem for Converse is that, in 1950s America, what little belief that existed was hardly systematic. Converse used volumes of public opinion data to show that, contrary to the common understanding of American democracy, most citizens were incredibly uninformed and had minimal frameworks with which to understand politics. The majority of respondents had no 'ideology' to constrain political opinions which were often flagrantly contradictory (supporting large tax cuts while supporting massive increases to public welfare). The minority of respondents who could articulate a consistent and coherent set of principles and policy choices were found to adhere dogmatically to their prior beliefs, allowing Converse to surmise that this ideological 'elite' were stuck in a 'spiral of conviction'.

Converse's work has been challenged, reaffirmed, and revised, not least by Converse himself. The most thorough and original revision, John Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* [1992], is consistent with Converse's original findings, but seeks to better understand the genesis and
map the dynamics of belief. Zaller moderates Converse's bleak assessment of democracy, focusing on mass confusion more than mass ignorance [Kinder, 2006, 200]: 'non-attitudes' evolve into attitudes that are partial, based on context, and highly transient.

Zaller uses an information-processing approach – called the “Receive-Accept-Sample” model – to examine how people of different levels of awareness receive and accept political messaging, which they use to vote or respond to polls. While people may have stable political values or predispositions, they receive political considerations through the media which, in turn, are used to form short-term political opinions. The considerations are communications from political elites intent on winning the public onto their side of a policy issue or election; collectively, they represent the different available perspectives within policy debates. The political judgement of a citizen, expressed in votes or opinion surveys, is an average of the various political considerations that they have accepted and can remember, weighted in favour of the most recent. Unlike Converse, who computed opinion change as too random to be meaningful [2006, 37], Zaller finds it directly correlated to individual awareness and the intensity (i.e. level of media exposure) of given consideration [1992, 48].

While Converse was less convinced of elite leadership, he concluded that the incoherence of public opinion was a result of people too ignorant to have opinions randomly guessing at survey responses [Zaller, 1992, 94]. For Converse, “belief has extremely low centrality for the believer” [2006, 47]. Zaller treats the lack of ideological constraint as ignorance in part, but also a matter of political inattention and cognitive receptiveness [2006, 44]. People can only resist considerations by identifying “external cues about partisan implications” that may go with a message [Zaller, 2006, 45]: if one trusts the source of the message it is accepted, and vice versa.

Converse and Zaller (somewhat reluctantly) add empirical evidence to the tradition of Alexander Hamilton, Walter Lippman, and Joseph Schumpeter, who believed that the cognitive strain of democracy is too much for any citizen, regardless of initiative or ability [Bennett, 2006]. Their
work directly challenges the 'conventional wisdom' that citizens are informed and interested, at a minimum imperfectly, in political matters. As both reluctantly admit, their work paints an unflattering picture of American democracy that critics and commentators have not been able to easily refute theoretically or empirically.

Unfortunately, this research cannot be dismissed as so much historically-located, disciplinary, and empirical discourse: problematizing it and deconstructing it doesn't refute it. Despite wistful intentions about agency and humanism, the point of this study is to avoid theoretical abstraction and wishful thinking. Building on Converse and others, Zaller presents a rigorous model of mass belief that can empirically match political reality while retaining practical explanatory power of individual behaviour. It is important to acknowledge that, in comparison with the political theories sketched in the next chapter, this model is much less a \textit{post hoc} interpretation of social relations that emerges from an \textit{a priori} political understanding. It is based on massive amounts of survey response and electoral data about how people think and act politically, representing the limited hold that the public has on mass political agency. While Zaller repeatedly emphasizes that his data is merely survey responses and not detailed political ethnographies, he makes survey error and cognitive bias a central part of his argument. Some, such as Jeffrey Friedman, are not sanguine about the conclusions of Converse and Zaller, but are too concerned by the findings to ignore or dismiss them:

\begin{quote}
It seems to me to violate not only the relentlessly non-credulous spirit of Converse's epochal paper, but any realistic appreciation of the human situation, to think that the problem of ignorance could be solved if people just tried harder to make themselves wise. If it were that easy, those who sympathize with democracy would not face, in "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," a significant challenge to their own belief system. But it's not. So we do. [Friedman, 2006, xxxii]
\end{quote}

Lastly both authors were able to relent in the face of subsequent events: Converse admitted that political beliefs did become more salient and coherent in the turbulent 1960s, as compared with the
1950s when he wrote *Belief Systems* [Bennett, 2006, 129]. Zaller publicly questioned his own model after the 'Lewinsky Bump' in Bill Clinton's approval rating demonstrated that Americans actually aren't as fickle as Republican elites hoped [Zaller, 1997].

The work of Converse and Zaller can be mapped, in a very general and careful way, onto other social contexts. Although the plural of anecdote is *not* data, there are numerous examples of incoherent attitudes, some of which were listed in the introduction. Eichmann didn't have any real dislike of Jews or commitment to Nazi principles. American G.I.s in Vietnam were not known for geopolitical acumen. Stephen Covey notes that large-scale occupational surveys show that only 37% of employees understand what their organization does, and one fifth understand their role within it [in Heath & Heath, 2008, 145 ]. Similarly, the 'capitalists' (ie. business owners and bank employees) that this author has encountered don't have a nuanced understanding, if any, of capitalism. Even an individual as intelligent as Oppenheimer was, apparently, motivated by curiosity and discovery more than ideology [1954]:

> When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success. That is the way it was with the atomic bomb.

**Salience and Consistency**

> *Seems like people would never face the problem. They would say the reason things were wrong was the CIA or something. You could never get a person to say, 'Jim Jones has got me out here in the jungle and he's starving me and trying to kill me.'*

> *Richard Clark [in Levine, 2003, 224]*

The above observations are necessary to confront, but not refute, the assumption that people understand their realities or care about their roles. Instead, we find ourselves in situations that are unfamiliar, and we need to make sense of them to know how to behave appropriately: this is necessary for the basic social intercourse of survival. To compensate, evolution developed within us an ability
for vicarious understanding called social construction, based on inference or communication. With it, we have created a society that, Cialdini notes [2007, 277], is so complex that this ability leads to power imbalances in many situations, with construal happening in the interests of some and in opposition to others'. The process described in this chapter can subtly reinforce itself, imbuing interpretation with, if not the status of 'truth', at least enough coherence to avoid extensive reconsideration. Deconstruction is limited by its assumption that those operating within a reality care enough about its critique. Thus, mapping the social and cognitive factors involved is needed to ameliorate some of the injustices of institutional behaviour.

To make sense of information in most situations would require a sophisticated understanding of it; but this has to come from somewhere, as it is not necessarily 'always-already'. We are not born with instincts to guide our behaviour all social environments, which necessitates learning through shortcuts. The point of the reality-taking process is to expedite this learning and obviate thinking for the sake of acting. Situational pressures may provide just enough of a reality to take on a role, without necessitating a thorough understanding of the reality: the subsequent 'working definition' of the situation can be limited in depth, and may not necessarily be the target of critical reflection. Often, as in the case of soldiers, the working definition may be limited to gradual but well-practiced social order, where the only important construction is chain of command.

Through learning, experience, and reflection, however, we may – over time – develop a personal *ideology* that mediates both the subjective construal of the situation and the subject's constitution within it. Ideology is what guides our construction of situations by legitimating shortcuts and by selecting certain others to communicate to us relevant constructions or to direct our inference, defining the situation in a particular way. It also lets us judge our situation or behaviour within it. In a positive sense, it is like Clifford Geertz's “symbolic map” [in Eagleton, 2007, 151] that let's us negotiate reality, only in this context it prevents wanton construction by structuring the social world.
But making sense of information and recognizing its legitimacy is difficult in the face of novelty or complexity, especially when we are anxious or confused (as in many novel or complex situations). The justification for obedience to Jim Jones is a case study of a highly-salient but poorly developed ideology. Far from the 'counterculture' of American life, the members of the People's Temple had only each other to use as social proof [Cialdini, 2007, 153]. The idea that “Father is right” was reflected between members, practiced in Jones' constant preaching, and reinforced by the painful dissonance he inflicted on his most loyal followers [Levine, 2003, 222]. In the middle of a jungle full of (non-existent, but no less terrifying) CIA killers, with little time for reflection and no models of difference, ideological alternatives with which to make sense of a “pathological” reality became very limited to the most immediately available option. As the terror became more present and real (through Jones' deliberate manipulation), existing anxiety and confusion were only heightened.

But the dialectic of salience and knowledge can also work in the opposite direction: the more removed an issue or situation is, the less needs to be known, and the less that is known, the more it fades from consciousness. Situations are not always relevant enough to carefully consider whose interpretation of reality to acknowledge, and it is difficult to develop a guiding ideology related to the situation if it has low salience. Zaller's model is a testament to the observation that people – to varying degrees – rely on others to make sense of social reality; authority, conformity, and in-grouping are needed to determine which information fits into our existing ideology. In a complex situation about which we have an underdeveloped ideology (e.g. a discussion of policy, familiar or not), Zaller posits that it is easier to accept or reject considerations by examining their source. In essence, ideology is developed enough to connect individuals to a legitimate source, but not developed enough to verify the actual information or judge its relevance [Zaller, 1992, 44].

Needless to say, a salient ideology is important for resisting pluralistic ignorance. But an ideology that is based on adequate information and is salient to the subject is probably more conducive
to competence. Similar to the observation in Chapter 1 that good judgement requires identifying bad
decision, J.D. Trout [2009, 3] observes that small stock market players have less to retire with than
an equivalent pensioner. A simplistic ‘ideology’ of investment (triggered by social proof and scarcity,
informed by the old information in today’s business section) doesn’t have the equivalent information
and forecasting that picks winners (like a pension fund), although inherent overconfidence and future
discounting will be slow to acknowledge this (i.e. until it is time to retire).

An incomplete ‘working’ definition in turn constitutes the subject by way of providing
expectations for their role, including how much information they are supposed to take on and who to
get this from. As a situation becomes more routinized, the construction becomes less salient and more
functional, sometimes as a direct response to dissonance. A construct can become closed to further
interpretation or may simply not come to mind because it is no longer necessary: a lack of
contradiction often renders rethinking inessential [Heath and Heath, 2008, 81]. This process again
feeds back on itself: in order to cause dissonance in a subject, a particular issue must be salient.

Complexity also has an effect on the depth of construal. As Janet McIntosh argues [1998]: “the
mind represents some things better than others.” Perhaps, as in the case of commodity fetishism, the
constructions may be distorted but “the single link between value and labour may be easier for the
mind to grasp than the complex relations between wages, money, value, commodities, etc. that Marx
felt objectively underlay our category mistakes [McIntosh, 1998].” Perhaps the problem is not entirely
the injection of bourgeois values and false consciousness of the younger Marx. Nor is it necessarily his
later interpretation of mistakenly attributing additional value to lifeless commodities through
exploitative labour. Unless one is a scholarly economist with the time, energy, skill, and resources to
study these relationships, it might be more intuitive to directly connect ‘an honest day’s work for an
honest day’s pay’. On the flip side, a political economist may not realize their own cognitive bias:
gazing at subjectivity through the lens of the political assumes politics, not a lack thereof (which may
explain the theoretical biases at the beginning of this chapter. This observation applies to every single activist that I've ever met: perhaps their hope for engaging with people is why they are not cynics.)

An ideology that has little salience or that is not well developed may create an inconsistency between the person and their values. Far from being an exercise of unpleasant introspection, it may be evident by examining how some contexts constitute us in a certain role, but others elicit opinions or roles that seem, to some, as contradictory (paying respect to Martin Luther King one day, while complaining about Affirmative Action the next). We often find ourselves “making it up as we go along” [Zaller, 1992, 76] because we neither know how to make sense of the world in a way that matches our values, nor can we explain our role in the broader situation.

Reality taking, in its negative sense, is not always a deliberate 'big lie' or distorted experience; roles and realities may not be salient because they are complicated or distant. If a role has limited importance in the life of a person, especially in comparison to their other roles, it may not merit a lot of reflection. Conversely, learning is based on prior knowledge, so things that are hard to learn take time and energy which may not be either available or worthwhile expending; a lack of understanding may dialectically lead to less salience. Autonomous, critical constructing a definition of the situation may be less expedient than simply a being told what to think, which usually contains advice about who to look to advice for in future. Moreover, indirect but fundamentally important channel factors may not be conducive to increasing salience or understanding: abstract discussions of commodity fetish may not appear in the newspaper as frequently more concrete reports of terrorism or baseball. Although counterexamples abound, books like Made to Stick [2008] are bestsellers because they directly address the very pervasive problem of complexity and salience to construal. (Furthermore, it offers a much less convoluted approach to the non-centrality of class in subjectivity than Laclau and Mouffe.)

The accessibility of considerations, necessary for constructing and behaving within a given situation, is governed by memory, as discussed in a previous chapter. According to this availability
bias [Trout, 2009, 105], the problem of awareness is not only one of salience and complexity, but context as well: the issue is not one of forgetting what considerations to use, but not remembering them because context triggers other memories that are more salient (and, in an adaptive sense, useful) for that situation. In effect, this prioritizes certain thoughts more than others, making consistency more difficult if predispositions are not referenced (which may be an argument against minimum sentences).

Rather than being idle speculation, this is how Milton Lodge's 'online' model of political psychology explains electoral campaigns [Kinder, 2006, 203]: a series of messages that are quickly forgotten but which leave a residual impression, which accumulate into an attitude that can be referenced when it is necessary to vote. Zaller's concern with the 'online model' stems from his assertion that most responses are not based on stable ideas but on whatever information that happens available. Yet both the RAS and online models attest to responses that are based on contextual memory, whether short-term considerations or longer-term impressions. This lack of coherent memories can also explain Converse's observation that the party is a handy shortcut which memory can call to guide decisions [2006, 46], (similar to Zaller's Resistance Axiom, by which voters filter considerations based on the partisan cues [2006, 44]). Inherent in many of these constructions is the recursive notion that those who supplied them are good references for future constructions, setting a trajectory for future belief.

Another site of ambivalence can be found in ideology itself. A context-sensitive memory can influence ideology by prioritizing some recollections and not others; our subsequent construal and role can, in the quest for consonance, cause ideology itself to grow and change. Ideology, in this sense, intersects with construction and experience, including the experiences of socialization (e.g. education, family, peers). Social construction of situations feed back into ideology, shaping it by the salient ideas and individuals in these situations. Ideology, from this perspective, seems layered upon prior constructions, prioritizing contextually salient information to guide decisions and subsequent construal.
It becomes a source of legitimation for the adoption of these same constructs, a recursive process that may eventually form the institutions that structure our lives. Ideology itself changes in relation to the situations it helps to construct, dependent upon the latter's salience. To find the connections between these layers is to tease out the subject's unique 'architecture' of power and knowledge. As we shall see in the next chapter, the effect of elites in ideology is important; not only do they provide opinions and constructions, but they also attempt to convince that they are the best elites to turn to for information.

As Zaller explains [1992], those who have low-ideological salience are less likely to scrutinize considerations which may, in turn, change their (limited) view of the situation and their subsequent (limited) ideologies. Long-shot candidates that run as foils can shift the debate and, in doing so, can move temporary opinions and even relatively stable ideologies, which are easier to change when there is little prior opinion to compete against. This is not to say that people are easily led against their better judgement, but that they are easily led on some issues which may support politicians who do not support their interests. Ideas that run contradict actual experience, when not spun, are hard to accept. Ironically, those who have high-awareness tend to have stable ideologies that only change with elite ideologies (for fascinating – if counterintuitive – case studies, see [Zaller, 1992, 9-13 and 315-319]). As Stephen Earl Bennett [2006, 133] summarizes:

People of moderate political persuasion are “persuadable,” in [Zaller's] model, not because they are thoughtful, but because they are so ignorant of the positions to which their predispositions should lead them that they can easily be misled. Instead of walking in a straight line, they are buffeted by whatever fragmentary elite messages they happen to have heard in the media. The most ignorant members of the public may (sometimes) walk a straighter line, but only to the extent that they are completely uninformed about elite views that would connect their predispositions to issue positions. When a new issue arises, the ignorance of the least informed is liable to make them walk off a cliff.

There is the possibility that this section has overstated personal inconsistency and 'ideological'
ambivalence or incoherence. Between Converse' poles of ignorance and conviction and distributed along Zaller's continuum of awareness, lies an alternative possibility: people may have coherent, consistent, and personally salient constructions of reality. The role within this reality, however, is confined by what Marx called “the dull compulsion of the economic”, the fact that life is not just a construct, not just the Matrix, but a very tangible set of limits on existence. Our ability to adapt is partly unintentional – via shortcuts and memory – and partly the result of an acquiescence to the fact that social existence does not immediately bend to our Will. It is quite possible that subjects are highly constrained in their opinions across situations, and are forced to engage in dissonance reduction in the face of a contradiction between desire and reality. This theme will be addressed in the next chapter.

**From Situation to Institution**

For an ideology to become a set of coherent ideas may require a significant investment of time, research, and reflection. The benefit of this is that it is likely to be available and consistent. In many contemporary contexts, however, ideology is simply a guide that indicates whose communications to trust, or how to evaluate their effect on our inference. As cognitive shortcuts impress a particular definition of the situation upon us, ideology is the set of ideas that can legitimate these sources (or not), and may help us judge the constructions and behavioural expectations. Depending on its salience in a particular situation, it may or may not guide subjects consistently. From the perspective of John Zaller, this latter interpretation can mean a variable attachment to elite considerations, an implicit recognition of a political division of labour: trustworthy elites are good sources of opinion, although these should be scrutinized [Zaller, 1992, 311]. Perhaps the problem of ideology for many is not one of dogmatism, but the opposite: a willingness to allow others to do the hard work of interpreting reality, directing behaviours, maintaining institutions and, eventually, shaping ideologies.

In a narrowly structuralist sense, perhaps institutions are simply this epoch's method for humans to organize themselves into hierarchies, with elite ideas provided for post-hoc legitimation. A situation,
in this sense, becomes an institution when behaviours are performed over a period of time – with the
support of routine – in which they become uncontested (or very poorly contested). It transforms a
multi-dimensional human into a functionary or operative. Belief becomes a packet of social
constructions with behavioural guides (including instructions on whose constructs to use). They are
reduced to elite directives that come from a central authority with little input or agency from those
individuals involved or affected. Power is the ability to create and sustain the idea that elite priorities
demand the attention and energy of subjects. Like ants, unaware of the institutional purpose or how to
relate to the whole, subordinate and elites alike focus on operations while 'purpose' becomes academic.
Hyperbole? Become a teacher.

It is entirely possible that this turn towards structuralism is an effect of the author being
institutionalized by his own model of institution. In fact, the above description is a gross, dystopian
exaggeration, one that could be used to justify technocracy. Life is more than a series of institutions,
and humans are much more than shortcutting, self-justifying information processors with varying
degrees of attention. If this were not the case, you wouldn't be reading this because there would be no
desire or purpose to write it. This is not to suggest that we can think and act independent of our social
context; nevertheless, it does not relegate subjects to mechanical effects of the situation either. This is
an attempt at a realistic humanism, with situations and institutions determining life to degrees, but not
necessarily totalizing.

On a practical level, an institution may hold itself together by compensation rather than
allegiance (although the behaviour is what counts, not the intent). It is also plausible that institutions,
the structures that exhaust the populace and limit discourse, may provide only a range of opportunities,
leaving subjects to grudgingly accept the given arrangements for the sake of expedience. Nor are all
organizations inherently institutional, as questions of purpose, distribution of power, and individual
significance vary considerably.
Whatever the power of structures, in mind or in society, the power of ideology is ambiguous. It may be well-developed and salient enough to resist dominance by social construction, but its lack can facilitate institutional behaviour just as its excess can sustain it. The goal of the next chapter will be to analyze the interaction of ideas, structures, and power in the work of several theorists, in order to identify openings for resistance.
Theories of Social Control
Dominant Ideologies and Mass Opinion

The first chapter described a cognitive process of social construction and subjectivity, in which the situation acts upon the subject to influence its own construal. One of the important facilitating features of the 'reality-taking' process is ideology, the discourse or set of ideas that guide us in the process of social construction: whose reality to accept, how to legitimate it and, on occasion, how to behave when a given role is taken. It also acts as a set of values with which to judge our context and behaviour. In this sense, the subject thinks and acts according to the social demands and expectations of ideology, the controlling boundary through which social context is constituted and constitutive. The second chapter identified some limits to the ability of ideology to construe reality or direct our behaviour.

By attempting to locate the subject in social practice, the psychological model of institutional behaviour moves to the centre of this analysis. In doing so, it obviates the ambivalence related to ideology's function, while leaving its origin and dynamics – the structure – unexplained. This gives enough coherence for a useful discussion while retaining a lot of room for previous scholarship. Without this step, discussions of ideology tend towards incoherence and sophistry.

This process of subject-social constitution is similar to one of the themes that is part of this chapter, namely the degree to which ideology is both the creator and product of social structures. Ideology can be a blinding, elite dogma that renders other social realities unthinkable, and causes a misconstrual the world. Similarly, it could be an unavoidable part of the human experience, a map for
social interaction that is structured by daily existence. It could be a political or disciplinary programme, a set of statements that define what is knowable within a given context. Perhaps it doesn't exist at all, and we are simply the product of 'interests' that organize our social existence.

The competing interpretations are important because they can lend important insights into the general problem of 'institutional behaviour'. This chapter, then, will review some of different theories of ideology, and how they conceive of the relationship between belief, behaviour, power, and construal. Lastly, it will review how referencing to a deliberately psychological model of social construction may provide a more complete and coherent understanding of 'institutional behaviour'.

**Liberalism: Ideology of the Self**

*Passions, volitions, and actions are 'original facts and realities, compleat in themselves' which cannot be true or false, conformable or contrary to reason.*

[Burchell, 1991, 130]

*Liberalism, like ideology, is a term that has swelled with meaning through its history, variably associated with freedom, reason, the state, government, democracy, capitalism, progress, and, disparagingly, modern conservatism. This confusion is partly an artifact of two related intellectual movements that, after the 17th century, sought to understand the behaviour of individuals in social groups. According to the classical Marxist interpretation [Gordon, 1991, 18], the economic liberalism of market theory dovetailed with the political liberalism of the social contract to structure the bourgeois order. But the incoherence of liberalism may, per Foucault, be less related to its dual definition as to the competition between these these two fundamentally different approaches [Gordon, 1991, 18] [Burchell, 1991, 122]. Both streams belong to the liberal tradition within scholarship to focus on population and away from the sovereign [Foucault, 95], and both begin with descriptions of the subject in the social.*

*Social contract theory, which appeared first, sometimes drew upon classical notions of the “the
self-possessed, virtuous citizen” [Burchell, 1991, 128] who put the needs and interests of the polis ahead of their own. In this ‘civic humanist’ [Burchell, 1991, 122] account, members of a population abnegate their natural, pre-existing rights in order to enter into social relations. Law takes the negative form of freedoms that can be exercised until they impinge on the rights of others. Citizens remain governable through their commitment to the law, which can be rationally developed or altered through parliaments. This set of ideas, particularly as developed by John Locke, was expressed by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence.

On the other hand, the interest-based liberalism of David Hume took shape – in part – as a response to the expansion of credit in 17th century England [Burchell, 1991, 128]. The increase in financial speculation and the ensuing political fallout prioritized the problem of human decision-making and the tangible irrationality of the subject. In contrast to the deliberative and reflective citizen voluntarily acting within their social milieu, the subject of interest was, in reality, self-interested, “imagination-directed”, and only partially rational [Gordon, 1991, 21].

According to Hume, individual human behaviour was directed, at its core, by passions that are 'felt', neither transcendental nor rational, but fundamental of individual preferences that motivate all behaviour. Passions are 'upgraded' [Eagleton, 2007, 160] to interests by way of reason. Far from rationally submitting to the contract as an enlightened way to manage social intercourse, reason in Hume's framework has a purpose only as it consciously facilitates passions, the 'servant' that realizes or achieves the goal of interest [Burchell, 1991, 129]. If Hume identified passions as so fundamental and reflexive that reason itself was merely contingent, there is an intuitive assumption that individuals were self-constituted prior to social relations.

The rationally based, negative freedoms of the social contract, limited by the rights of others in the contract, are replaced by a social system that emphasizes the optimal attainment of interests. The human, per Hume, was not to be constrained by arbitrary laws [Burchell, 1991, 131], but rather helped
by institutions which maximized interest. Smith's subsequent notion of “invisible hand” becomes an
elegant solution to the problem of governing the “potentially disruptive” ungovernable passions of
individual interest [Burchell, 1991, 128]: it is a structure for exchange which meets all interests insofar
as subjects attempt to attain only their own [Burchell, 1991, 133].

For Hume, interests are not the result of social construction or interaction; if they are the
ethically irreducible starting point for social existence, then government and law are only valid so far
as the further interest. In order to better explain the social existence of this atomized human, Adam
Ferguson and John Millar build on the theory of interest by adding social dynamics based on 'social'
and 'unsocial' passions [Burchell, 1991, 136]. These social structures exist “always-already”, and they
are flexible based on their ability to advance the interests of the subject. Because no person can deny
their interests in order to become part of a social contract, these additions to Hume reject contractarian
notions of a state of nature in which people existed before they submitted themselves to laws and social
order. Hence, subjects are not *a priori* individuals, submitting to a collective will, but individuals that
are inherently socially situated, motivated to operate in larger social sphere by interests.

These natural and dynamic qualities are fundamentally different from contractual
understandings of society.

The postulate in social contract theory of an inaugural act
of delegation and renunciation whereby the individual is
constituted as a political and juridical subject is one which
interest can never countenance as definitive: nothing can, in
principle, exclude the possibility that interest will dictate
the repudiation of such a contract [Gordon, 1991, 21].

Hence, the interest-liberal version of ideology is based on the conception of *homo economicus*
[Gordon, 1991, 23], who is keenly aware of their interests and can further them through the social
structures (i.e. the market). Structures such as laws are tolerated insofar as they further the interests of
the individual.
Contemporary liberals, notably like d'Estut de Tracy [Eagleton, 2007, 65], considered problem of ideology to be an issue of kings and priest controlling others by way of duplicitous ideas. But ideology, according to interest liberalism, is almost non-existent: the subject has genuine, irreducible drives that are genuinely expressed through reason. Obtaining these interests structures the behaviour of the subject, directing the subject towards their fulfilment of their passions.

But if interest-based theorists such as Ferguson explicitly rejected the contractarian notion of an organic, asocial state that exists prior to social cohesion, it is somewhat curious that the idea of interest should exist with relative independence from social influence. The subject, per Ferguson, does not exist in a state of nature untrammelled by the social, but is part of a social order [Burchell, 1991, 136]. But the question of social construction is not broached; the individual remains reducible to themself, and is not constituted by social forces.

This is simply not a realistic appraisal in a late capitalist urban centre: social reality is permeated by the considerations of others, often elites, and learning these considerations is essential for survival. The merits of this intellectual tradition are not in question here; the point, rather, is to identify if the interest-liberal conception of 'ideology' can expand the notions of vicarious social construction investigated in the previous chapters. These concepts, however, have limited compatibility due to their differing conceptions of how humans come to understand their world. The research presented so far in this paper assumes, in part, that subjects are intrinsically cultured, constructing reality from their social milieu, by way of a legitimating ideology that makes salient particular constructions of others. As humans grow, constructed reality feeds back to expand ideology and change the terms of what is or is not legitimate. Far from denying personal interest, it is important to see how personal interests can be socially influenced, perhaps even determined by others against the better judgement of the subject.

It is worth restating here that the object is not to eliminate the individual's agency by way of collective determinism, but to enhance it by exploring its dynamics. It is impossible to deny Ferguson's
claim that there is no mythical human 'state of nature' [Burchell, 1991, 135], but it is worth pushing beyond the assumption of a self-constituted human to a human who is – in some part – constituted by their social reality. However personal ideologies can become, and however they are shaped by disposition or situational variables, they represent a set of shared assumptions that facilitate social interaction. What is retained from liberalism, however, is the notion that human behaviour is not completely determined by social practice; individual agency, however conditional it may be upon the social, remains the ultimate goal of this inquiry.

The Inadequacy of Ideology, Continued

Much of the contemporary discussion of ideology in Marxism and sociology has been merely a sterile and derivative review of existing theoretical literature... It is widely agreed that the notion of ‘ideology’ has given rise to more analytical and conceptual difficulties than almost any other term in social sciences.

Abercrombie et al [1980, 187]

The failure of social relations to adequately satisfy human need is sometimes linked to the notion that change, be it reform or revolution, is needed. To apostles of these ideas, the change proposed often represents the interests of most members of society. Thus, when such suggestions are ignored or rejected, adherents are forced to resolve their dissonance by either abandoning their beliefs or by explaining their lack of appeal.

One such instance of the latter is the effort of Marxist scholars and activists – such as Gramsci, Althusser, Bourdieu, and Habermas – to explain the existence of apparent social stability under what they consider flagrantly unjust economic and political systems. What they have produced is a myriad of intellectually rich investigations of the human experience, individually and collectively, politically and economically, socially, emotionally, and behaviourally. This effort seeks to explain why, in the absence of massive coercive force, humans are willing to submit themselves to labour in the service of others. Similar to liberalism, there are two main conclusions. The earlier, historicist tradition is similar
to that of Enlightenment scholars: an elite minority have used ideology to convince the majority that the existing social relations are both optimal and, unhappily, inevitable. The later, *structuralist* interpretation felt that ideology was not a conspiracy of 'false consciousness' as much as a reflection of lived injustice. The former sense assumes that ideology creates reality. The latter does not see ideology as a problem of misperception or delusion; rather, it is the epistemological acquiescence to the only option available.

The goal of this section is not to plumb competing interpretations for their rectitude, but to draw on them to better explain institutional behaviour. Marxist ideology theories centre on the role of economic relations in thought, but this treatment seeks to apply these theories beyond labour and production. This is hardly to abandon economic analysis, but to simply take Marx's notion of materialism one step further: ideas are shaped by the many contexts and identities that we inhabit, not just our economic reality and our roles within it. Instead of beginning the discussion with modes of production, it is possible to investigate class relations and other social relations with a broader understanding of ideology. Furthermore, culture provides many strategic openings that economic determinism foreclosed, while still recognizing that structures and institutions play an important part in our beliefs and actions.

Marx's early interpretation of ideology, historical materialism, was a system of distorted ideas that prevented a breakdown of social order, the classic 'dominant ideology'. Like historicists after him, Marx of *The German Ideology* stresses the importance of ideas and beliefs in the perpetuation of a class society, not as a mere reflection of it. Knowledge constructed from daily existence (base) – in particular the dislike of and alienation from labour – is overwhelmed by elite ideas (superstructure) such as narrow individualism. The oppressed seemingly adopt these duplicitous ideas (e.g. inviolability of property, work ethic, aggressive nationalism) as their own and use them to justify their existence and oppression. There is significant ambiguity, however, in this early interpretation of
consciousness [Eagleton, 2007, 73-84]. *The German Ideology* is a polemic against idealism, the notion that ideas are separate from experience. Marx seems unwilling, however, to admit that material practice overdetermines consciousness, possibly because false consciousness would be rendered effectively unassailable.

As Marx matured and became more convinced of the material basis of ideas, ideology ceased to be the basis for social relations and instead becomes as reflection of them through *commodity fetishism*, an natural interpretation of a distorted existence. Social and economic relations between humans are “concealed behind the circulation of commodities, which are no longer recognizable as social products [Eagleton, 2007, 85].” In Marx's analysis of capitalism, workers mistakenly attribute excess value to that which they create for wages of significantly less value; the excess value of the commodity is 'fetishized', or imbued with artificial significance that appears natural. The source of mystification was not bourgeois ideology but the act of *reification* by the worker trying to make sense of their lived reality. This second version of ideology is less convinced of the influence of elite ideas, and uses daily experience to explain self-subjugation. As such, capitalism's inherent economic instability would expose itself as distorted and dig its own grave.

Since the First World War, however, Marxist scholars and others have been forced to explain capitalism's continued existence and, like Christians accounting for the ongoing delay in Christ's Second Coming, have developed scholastic theories. In an attempt to square the rise of fascism in Italy with Marxist theory, Antonio Gramsci drew from Marx's earlier ideas to focus on the role of culture and ideas in the perpetuation of unequal social relations. Whereas Marx took the traditional notion of a coherent social whole and added an element of class conflict [Lyotard, 1979, 12], Gramsci takes a suggestive step towards postmodernity by emphasizing that power is distributed throughout competing social groups within society [Ives, 2004, 128]. One group, often in coalition with others, is able to establish a hegemony – a consensual domination – over subordinate groups within society. Rather than
ruling directly through overt state power (e.g. police), dominant groups attempt to maintain their
hegemony by engaging in a “war of ideas” [George, 1997] within civil society, convincing other
groups of their ideas. Churches, the rich, labour unions, parties, workers, farmers, and other groups
seek to promote their message to the public so that they can have support. Those who communicate
most effectively are more able to establish themselves as dominant.

The origin of ideas becomes an important point for explaining the subordinate behaviour – the
subalternity – of many, if not most, people in society. Gramsci understood subaltern subjects to create
an 'organic' understanding of their reality, occasionally supported by intellectuals who are members of
their social group and share their experience. Hegemony arises when the ideas of 'traditional'
intellectuals associated with other social groups (i.e. the bourgeois) inject their ideas into the subaltern
social milieu. The resulting set of beliefs is almost a lack of ideology, “a 'common sense' that is a
fragmentary result of the sedimentation of ideas and beliefs elaborated by various traditional
intellectuals [Ives, 2004, 78].” According to Peter Ives [2004, 79]:

Subalternity and domination are not only physical domination, power and control over resources. They are
constituted by the inability to develop a coherent world-view, a 'spontaneous' philosophy that actually relates to your
own life and place in society. This is not only an integral aspect of domination; it is also a key factor that prevents
subaltern groups from being able to effectively resist physical domination and the exercise of power against them.

The above remark is reminiscent of the discussion in previous chapters, which drew parallels between
salience and depth of social construction. Resistance is a matter of having a coherent and relevant
ideology that represents one's social position and interests, so that elite or 'traditional' considerations do
not force subjects to construe reality in favour of the dominant groups (and, to give credit where it is
due, Gramsci did not reduce social position exclusively to class [Ives, 2004, 160]). It seems to imply
that Gramsci had a more 'applied' understanding of ideology as it played out in social life; not as a
prison that was as invisible as it was totalizing, but as a continual system of tension between lived experience and imposed ideas.

Gramsci seems to find a strategically practical relationship between materialism and idealism. This was necessary, in part because capitalism had endured multiple crises by Gramsci's time and had yet to fall, making the economic determinism of the later Marx untenable. Alternatively, Gramsci is less concerned with 'false consciousness' as a coherent ideology that misrepresents class interests. He is willing to grant more agency to the human mind as creator of ideas, and locates resistance in the contradictory consciousness experienced by subordinate groups when elite ideas do not match their daily experience. In order to rectify the epistemological problem of hegemony, those that seek to support subordinates can articulate an ideology that validates the subordinate material 'organic' experience, so that the oppressed (workers in this case) can identify with their own interests. Gramsci's work can make a significant contribution when set on a psychological foundation that does not assume mental sponginess.

This historicist interpretation of ideology also identifies with the human potential for self-improvement, not in a narrow capitalist sense of making oneself better suited for the job market, but by recognizing that humans can, with some intellectual support, come to be less ideologically deluded and less oppressed. This sentiment, however, is not necessarily shared by structuralist Marxists like Louis Althusser.

Althusser's account starts from Marx's later work, in which ideology is no longer the *false consciousness* of bourgeois values, but instead an authentic representation of an unjust lived experience. Ideology is not about ideas because lived social reality is the only truth, and subjectivity is merely an illusion to convince ourselves that we exist. For Althusser, the structure of social relations constitutes the individuals *Ideological State Apparatuses* such as the school, church, and family. Members of these institutions 'hail' the subject and, in doing so, force an act of self-reflection which
creates an imaginary subjectivity. This subjectivity creates an illusory relationship of the subject to the larger economic system, of which the individual is merely an 'effect'. Ideology, however delusional it may be, is not a deliberate conspiracy by the elite, but is instead a process that is inherent in social being, necessary for maintaining social relations. There is no outside to ideology from which to critically reflect; it is inherently delusional to the point of being invisible: an affective and symbolic “enabling fiction” that “thwart[s] true insight into the social system, thus reconciling individuals to their locations within it [Eagleton, 2007, 151-152].”

Unlike Gramsci, Althusser's rejection of economic determinism does not elevate ideology to an intellectual artifact that – in its particular historical context – secures unjust social relations. For Althusser, ideology is preconscious and behaviourist, taking Gramsci's notion of ideology as lived practice to an extreme of “self-incarceration” [Eagleton, 2007, 165]. The model of totally constituted subjectivity for Althusser purposely inverts the bourgeois liberalism in which the subject exists prior to the social [Henriques et al, 1998, 95]; he instead places the situation ahead of the “always-already subject” [Althusser].

For Althusser, the situation (in particular Ideological State Apparatuses) exists prior to the subject, who recognizes themself through the structured relationships. There are suggestive parallels between this process of 'interpellation' and the processes of reality-taking and role-taking. Both argue for situational interpellation, but the latter do not expel subjectivity quite so stridently, allowing the subject to have some control over social construction, or at least critically understand their reality and role. Based on the research presented, Althusser's model is too structuralist, prohibiting a dialectical process of subjective construal of social and social constitution of subject.

In this sense, much of the psychology referenced in the first chapter seems more progressive and less determinist than Althusser, because it locates agency within the subject at least occasionally. The model of subjectivity proposed here is based on the observation that situations often force us to
construe them in particular ways, but it does not suggest that this is a totalizing experience in which doubt or resistance cease to exist. Focusing on the subject and looking for agency does not mean abandoning structures; humility and charity come with the recognition that behaviour often depends upon context more than some personal heroism or depravity. Being at least partly aware of how this 'domination by construal' works, what it feels like, and how to recognize and resist it is a part of agency. This limited form of humanism is the ethical guide for this examination of ideology theory, a project that hopes to describe thought and action in ways that yield openings for deliberate intervention.

Instead of contrasting structure and ideas, Pierre Bourdieu sees individuals and groups within a plane of interaction and struggle, in which actors possess certain amounts of capital, assets that can take an economic, cultural, social, or symbolic currency. Actors within these fields learn to adapt and, in doing so, develop certain dispositions within a given social space that affect choices made, activities undertaken, and values held [Fowler, 1999]. The collection of dispositions, called habitus, can be described as “a framework of cognitive apprehension, moral judgement, ethical commitments, or aesthetic inclinations [Mahar, 1990, 7].” Multiplied by the different kinds of capital assets available to the actor, habitus governs struggle and success in economic, social, political, or educational fields [Soules, 2004].

Doxa, the unconscious assumptions and beliefs that underpin habitus, represents the limits of discourse, beyond which cognition cannot reach. The difficulty in consciously identifying these beliefs is analogous to the remark “We’re not sure who discovered water, but we’re fairly certain it wasn’t a fish [Wolfreys, 2000].” Doxa is not unconscious in a Freudian sense, in that these assumptions and belief reside deep in the inaccessible reaches of our psyche; rather it is unconscious because, except for outstanding circumstances, we are given no reason to think about them.

These assumptions, which can be referred to as cultural, are part of our basic, and generally stable, understanding of the world. According to Bourdieu, doxa is perpetuated, or reproduced, from
generation to generation through the misrecognition of symbols of wealth or power, a process he labelled *symbolic violence* [Wolfreys, 2000].

The reproduction of structures of domination in society therefore depends on the imposition of cultural values which are presented as universal but whose content and context are politically and historically determined – and therefore arbitrary [Harker, 1990].

The dominant classes, despite their basic human similarities with the dominated, are conceived as better, smarter, or more hard-working, regardless of the material evidence supporting this belief. Over time, structures such as schools and culture come to inculcate these assumptions from generation to generation, hence reproducing social class and the original doxa, perpetuating this cycle. While this may run contrary to the material interests of the dominated, the imposition suggested above should refer to the imposition from existing cultural structures, and not directly from a dominant group.

Although *doxa* is similar to the traditional Marxist (i.e. epistemological) understanding of ideology, the concepts of *capital*, *habitus*, and *violence* are more fitting with the description of ideology from the first chapter. *Ideology*, in this case, is a legitimating discourse that directs situational construal, similar to the misrecognition of capital, the idea that power is the capacity to shape another person's version of the situation. Doxa, then, is the cumulative picture of the reality which, like this version of ideology, is layered upon prior construction.

Like Bourdieu, Jürgen Habermas seeks understand ideology as an interaction between structure and historical ideas. He accepts Marx's structuralist interpretation of ideology for early capitalism, when economic exchange provided a forthright justification for social relations [Abercrombie et al, 1980, 17]. By late capitalism, however, the reality of economic regulation by governments created the need for political legitimacy while mitigating popular intervention. The state needs no *a priori* justification, as liberal democracy becomes a duplicitous mechanism for “binding the masses loyalty” [in Abercrombie et al, 1980, 18] to the existing system of relations. The power of the electorate is only
in its ability to choose from amongst different technocratic solutions, without any real influence over a system that operates largely by itself. For Habermas, we have returned to a more traditional type of society in which relations were legitimated by central belief like religion; our version of liberal democracy now legitimates the state, while obfuscating social relations.

Ideas now simultaneously produce and are produced by society, and daily practice “rigidifi[ies] human life into a compulsive set of norms and thus block the path to critical self-reflection [Eagleton, 2007, 132].” Structuralism and historicism coalesce into a consciousness provided not by the elite, but by the system itself. Ideology yields to technology, and in doing so purges life of its meaning that is not consumerism, as if The Matrix meets eBay. But as Agent Smith notes, even The Matrix was forced adapt to human needs, to become a reflection of our yearnings, in which both Freud and Habermas recognize a concealed “utopian core”[Eagleton, 2007, 133].

This interpretation of ideology, notes Eagleton, “is not so much false as drastically partial” [2007, 38], and that there is still plenty of meaning in life that is not related to consumerism or politics. Unlike Althusser, Habermas can see a way out of this ideological double-bind; there is hope for human redemption through emancipatory critique – a form of “collective self-reflection” – that seeks to expose the ideological limits on our thoughts [Eagleton, 2007, 133]. When we achieve a participatory socialist democracy, Habermas feels, humans can construct truth with one another through an unconstrained dialogue that is currently prohibited by ideological domination [Eagleton, 2007, 130]. This is similar to Loic Wacquant's [2004] remarks about “critical thought as the solvent of doxa”, or of Gramsci's organic intellectuals reconciling subalterns to their own experience. Each asserts our right to create ideas to explain our context, not alone but consensually with others, in order to change our reality. The system may limit our thoughts and words, but human agency can, with enough effort, change this system. This may seem overly optimistic in light of the model of subjectivity described above, a process that is doomed to be hijacked or at least neutralized by the social effects of cognition.
Another way to look at it, however, may be that such organic, unconstrained dialogue is an excellent strategy that deserves practice, development, and critical attention.

This keen sense of justice that is part of humanism stands in contrast to Althusser's 'anti-humanist' description of ideology, and it is hardly a coincidence that he leaves no way out, no strategy towards a more just society. Marxist interpretations of ideology are explicitly materialist – ideas come from lived experience – but historicists like Gramsci retain a core of idealism, both epistemological and optimistic. While they hold that our ideas do not appear from a vacuum, they are willing to admit that our ideas are powerful and have the potential to liberate.

The Microphysics of Power

One can see here how Foucault's analysis of governmental rationality connects up with the 'micro-physical' perspective of his analysis of an individualizing, disciplinary technology in *Discipline and Punish*. Liberal principles for rationalizing the exercise of political power outline a framework for a possible art of government which depends upon and facilitates a proliferation of techniques for the disciplinary integration of individuals at critical points in the social order.  

Burchell [1991, 142]

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at “nodal points” of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent.  

Lyotard [1979, 15]

The goal of this section will be to relate Foucault's conception of disciplinary power to some of the ideas reviewed above. His approach has been to deconstruct power into a distributed network of relations, instead of a unitary, top-down model that had been previously used to describe power previously [Henriques et al, 1998, 92]. Thus, power does not reside simply in the coercive or deceptive
organs of government, but in individual relationships within the numerous institutions in which we find ourselves. Foucault emphasizes the locality of situational power – not as a faceless institution – but as interactions between the individuals within structures, as illustrated by Lyotard's quote.

A shortcoming becomes apparent, however, with his example of institution par excellence: the Panopticon. The major effect of this technology is “to induce within the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power [Foucault, 1979, 201].” Power over the inmate is internalized and they come to behave as commanded by the structure with no external coercion. Regardless of authority’s intent – corrective, medical, pedagogical, labour – the Panopticon represents the physical allegory of ‘disciplinary society’: “it assures an infinitesimal distribution of power relations” by “making it possible to bring the effects of power to most minute and distant elements [Foucault, 1979, 216].”

The question is not whether this is the case: Foucault's research presents an incredibly insightful and rigorous historical treatment that is certainly beyond my reproach. The question is how. Nowhere does Foucault explain how this internalization of 'panopticism' actually works, beyond a quasi-behaviourist treatment [1979, 202] and, elsewhere, mentioning the inscription of power on 'the body' [1979, 137]. Moreover, if panopticism becomes the dominant form of social organization, how exactly do these obtain disciplinary “power over the mind” [1979, 206] or exercise unofficial “micropower” [1979, 222].

Foucault's presents power as “molecular” [Hartsock in Ives, 2004, 142] and, in doing so, provides a rich analysis of how these dynamics actually work in society. It would seem to be a shame, however, if an extra step wasn't taken to analyse how micropower's dynamics work in people's minds, beyond vague allusions to internalization. Writing off psychology as so much discourse is a tremendous waste of research and misses important opportunities to resist the institutional power that is the focus of Foucault's work. Consider the following [Burchell, 1991, 142]:

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Foucault's analyses suggest that the political problematization of this network of relations constituted a privileged terrain for the elaboration of practical formulae for adjusting the operation of individualizing technologies to the requirement of a liberal government. It is in this area that natural-social man appeared as normal man...

It would seem that if the liberal order had successfully identified strategies for organizing the lives of its subjects, then a progressive project would be to find ways to counter these technologies beyond mere criticism.

Deconstruction unearths an architecture of knowledge within disciplines and practices, and thus offers critique. But knowledges have never dropped bombs and discourse doesn't speculate against food commodities: these actions are the result of deliberate human behaviour, which is only partly a matter of 'discipline' and has limited relevance to a “conduct of conduct” [Gordon, 1991, 48]. To argue, as Foucault did [Gordon, 1991, 48], that politics is answerable to ethics is to ignore the reality of institutional behaviour: external critique is a very limited tool in confronting a system with a well-defined internal logic and mechanisms for maintaining itself. Likewise, a sophisticated deconstruction of substantiating ideologies ignores the reality that ideology is usually not well understood or particularly relevant to subjects. Critique is an important tool in the pursuit of justice, but only if used strategically and in concert with other approaches.

What underpins the hostility towards cognition seems to be a paranoia of semiotic closure, an assumption that any structural body of thought is committed to a totalizing linguistic determinism: where discourse leads so conceptions of the mind will blindly follow. Although this Eagleton-inspired hyperbole may not be entirely accurate (the non-centrality of class in post-Marxism does not imply wanton relativism), it is not entirely unfounded either: postmodernism's strident anti-foundationalism may, in fact, imply an ethical vacuum in which a set of beliefs can become dominant with enough repetition. But speculating about the processes of subjectivity will not determine it. At the risk of
being overly repetitive, it must be stressed that power, construal, and ideology will continue to work regardless of whether they are articulated as such or not. Learning about them and identifying them at work in our selves and society might actually make them less determining, not more. Carefully using the disciplinary discourse of psychology might make integration into the liberal order more critical, and give the subject more agency in how this happens.

In fact, some discourse analysis strikes a chord with the research presented in this text: meaning is not transcendental or external to situation, but (asymmetrically) created through a process of construal. In fact, orienting the discussion towards cognition might contribute to the debate about the power of signifier over their signified, semiotic closure, or the degree to which we have an authentic interpretation of our material existence [as in Eagleton's treatment of discourse, 2007, 200 – 220]. Rather than seeing discursive and cognitive interpretations as fundamentally incompatible, a complementary description can help elevate dissent or doubt into ethical resistance.

The problem with discourse analysis is that it is highly idealist; it simply reduces all behaviour to the enacting of various ambient ideas or discourses; in a way, it is the worst form of mental sponginess. Vague references to ‘the body’ are no excuse. Language is powerful as are thoughts and ideas, but oppression will not instantly vanish from our minds if discourse is purified: Eichmann may have lacked interest and understanding of Nazi principles [Arendt, 1963, 26], but his behaviour was deadly. Not writing injustice off as one of many subject-centred mental representations requires admitting that it needs to be addressed, which requires an effective strategy, which in turn requires an effective theory. An effective theory needs to be based on models of cognition that aren't pure speculation – self-conscious recursive constructions about construction.

The intent of this section is not to disparage Foucault's research, but to identify its use for the needs of society in which institutionalized injustice – by any standards – is rife. The postmodern project, especially that of Foucault, is an example of fine scholarship and subtle acumen. It does not,
however, address the needs of society beyond outlining an architecture for how different knowledges came to be and how they have effected our lives. It remains an academic project. This in not to suggest that modernist approaches will 'solve' or 'remediate' the problems caused by modernism itself. It merely locates postmodern discourse as a 'non-utopian anti-dystopia' focused on the abstract, on providing critique, but not identifying a programme for justice.

But the lessons of postmodernism are valuable when focused on behaviour. As power is distributed throughout the social, not always centrally located, it is worth emphasizing the role of 'microdiscourses' and 'personal archeologies' that structure our social situations and drive our behaviour. Moreover, postmodernism is based on the recognition that modernist practice can go wrong in spectacular fashion. But there is no return to a pre-discursive Eden, so we should not write discourse off and instead proceed cautiously and gingerly as we examine the dynamics of power. In this case, it is a reminder to be vigilant to the universalizing and normalizing tendencies of psychological discourse. After all, progressive projects are their own situations with their own pressures to interpret them in a particular way.

**It's the Economy, Stupid**

*It seems just as plausible to suppose that what we have come to recognize as 'hegemonic neo-liberalism' is a muddled set of ad hoc, opportunistic accommodations to the unstable dynamics of social change as it is to think of it as the outcome of highly coherent political-ideological projects.*

Clive Barnett [2005, 10]

Marx assumed that capitalism would collapse under its own weight, so Marxist ideology theories of the last century were developed in response to capitalism's ability to withstand this assumption [Simon, 1982, 18]. While Gramsci may offer more strategic appeal for confronting ideology, Althusser's determinism has one cold consolation: oppressive social relations are the product of structural reality, not elite manipulation or cunning. Yet it remains possible to acknowledge the
disparity in power between classes and groups within society, while simultaneously minimizing the
degree of control that ideology – structural or historic – exerts. Instead of adopting elite consciousness
through mental production or by lived experience, Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner [1980] suggest that
both dominant and subordinate classes have very partial or limited understandings of “dominant
ideologies”. Participation in an oppressive economic system is not a product of Marxist ideology or
sociological notions of “common culture”, but is instead based on what Marx called “the dull
compulsion of the economic” [Abercrombie et al, 1980, 57]. Using historical descriptions of belief
systems in feudalism, early capitalism, and late capitalism, Abercrombie and colleagues reassert
Wallerstein's observation that “governments are more endured than admired [in Abercrombie et al,
156]”. Their *Dominant Ideology Thesis* [1980] concludes that the oppressed are, historically, largely
ignorant or even hostile to the dominant belief system, while the degree of ideological attachment in
the ruling class varies considerably.

The tempering of the dominant ideology thesis is useful because it does not put the oppressed
subject at the mercy of ambient ideas that are immutably reconstructed within their mind. This
diminution of ideological force grants a greater degree of agency, rejecting the notion that the mind is
simply a sponge that traps subjects in constant illusion. The economic compulsion argument reorients
the target of resistance away from grand ideological debates, towards the local situations and
institutions in which life is lived. Subjectivities of 'class' exist in this description, but they become less
important than making ends meet. More importantly, the distribution and dynamics of information in
different historic social formations – dominant and subordinate – provides a historical parallel to
Zaller's model of the contemporary American electorate. This seems to validate the central argument
of this paper, that behaviour is more than a matter of totalizing ideology.

The authors challenge Marx's assumption that feudal economic stability was maintained by
Christian appeals to the 'vale of tears', whereby peasants would toil for their masters in the hope of
heavenly rewards [1980, 60]. The historical data they present indicates that Christianity was largely
gnored by the rural peasantry and was the sole possession of the feudal nobility, who often had a rocky
relationship with the political and religious stipulations of the Church [1980]. Similarly, they argue
that the radical individualism and focus on property that had united the early capitalists has since given
way to a modern focus on managerialism, now that corporate executives rarely own their enterprises
[1980, 140]. Similarly, the dominated have never been very supportive of the tenets of capitalism, but
have found it expedient to operate within a capitalist framework as few other options were available
[1980]. As Eagleton [2007, 34] notes, it would be tempting blame Thatcher's re-election on ideological
manipulation, but it probably had more to do with mundane political manipulation.

Abercrombie et al balance cultural forces with a realistic approach to human need, while
maintaining a role for ideology and avoiding economic determinism. Social integration, they argue, is
an overstatement of social reality, and what stability exists has more to do with the meeting daily
needs, which requires participation in a system of exchange. This assertion is examined in relation to
the American electorate, below.

The Dominant Ideology Thesis, Revisited

Although we might wish that the opinions held by the elites in a
democracy had largely been shaped by the public, the available
evidence suggests that the contrary is more often the case.
McCloskey and Zaller [1984, 234]

On one level, Zaller's America seems to be a textbook example of the Dominant Ideology
Thesis: the mental production of the elites that is transmitted via the media to the mass who accept
these notions as their own. Zaller's major contribution to Converse's original model is that he is very
explicit about the mechanism and dynamics by which the political elite of different ideological camps
communicate with the public.

In the post-script entitled Elite Domination of Public Opinion, however, Zaller is at pains to
clarify that the elite, however strong their influence, dominate public opinion only when they “induce citizens to hold opinions that they would not normally hold if aware of the best available information and analysis [Zaller, 1992, 313 (italics mine)].” Ideology becomes “a mechanism by which ordinary citizens make contacts with specialists who are knowledgeable on controversial issues and who share citizen's predispositions [Zaller, 1992, 327 (italics mine)].” Zaller takes the liberal leap of faith to assume that the citizenry would generally agree with elite consensus, or in case of elite disagreement, know which elites to support. The political system, in his reluctant view, provides an efficient way to divide the labour of political decision-making, saving the citizenry from wasting time and energy paying attention to politics. The citizens trust the elites because values are generally consistent throughout the different classes and regions, and in the cases where they aren't, the relevant elites would attempt to inform and (electorally) mobilize the sympathetic sectors of the public in order to ensure that generally consensual policy choices are implemented [Popkin, 2006, 251]. Like Gramsci, the hegemony is functionally, if not explicitly, consensual.

Seen from this point of view, Zaller's model instead seems to offer a mild refutation of the notion of dominant ideologies. Marx figured that the owners were able to create a contradictory consciousness by transmitting ideas into the masses, undermining or completely overwhelming other forms of culture or production of ideas. The paucity of political awareness, however, indicates that the dominant ideology is simply not that dominant: many people simply don't care. Over many issues, the dominant ideology simply has no effect: only a small minority actually care about the ideological nature of whatever elite-generated notion they encounter (5%), with about 20% totally apolitical, and the rest distributed somewhere in between. [Neuman in Bennett, 2006, 131. Zaller offers different distributions on a range of issues [1992]]. The elite do not infuse the working-class with a dominant ideology according to Zaller, although they are able to affect the temporary opinions of sections of the public.
While the first explanation may read as a Gramscian version of Brave New World, this latter move may risk diluting Zaller's model too much, so that it becomes an academic exercise rather than an observation of large-scale political behaviour. It implies that since people are relatively oblivious on policy issues, politics does not matter in people's lives, and one can construct meaning within a community that is immune to the outside reality. This is an appealing conclusion for if 'difference' is the only priority, where an idealist construction of reality neatly elides the problem of having to eat or support a family, and thus having to work in a capitalist economy within a state with laws. While many social values have had meaning ironized out of it, important political and economic realities exist.

Government policy structures our lives in very material ways and keeps it within particular limits, regardless of our sentiments towards communal and critical ways of knowing. A more realistic picture may be that culture can certainly exist outside of spheres dominated by capitalism and the state but, unfortunately, politics still matters. (On a more empirical note, Converse explored the possibility of highly unconventional politico-economic belief systems, but found the instances were generated by randomness more than difference [Converse, 2006, 47]).

According to some, like Walter Lippmann [Kinder, 2006, 111], the fact that policy affects our lives to such a persistent and conspicuous degree might further imply that it should be made by those who have the best knowledge of its effects and those who know how to implement properly. Given that modern states are too large for direct democracy on a large scale, one could further argue, policy elites are in a preferable position to take care of the technical aspects of policy. They can receive what guidance about general policy directions from the voting public, who make electoral decisions based on the elite ability to frame the connection between policy and voter predispositions [Kinder, 2006, 113].

But Zaller finds that the elite go beyond their role in make policy recommendations; they also become the drivers of policy (including progressive policy), rallying the public on salient issues. Under these circumstances the basic tenets of political liberalism are almost intact, however inverted.
The problem, even in liberal theory, is that governing elites find themselves in agreement about a very wide range of issues, especially if elite are similar to begin with, and select similar successors; (or, from a structuralist perspective, the institutions that have produced the elites may force role-taking behaviour upon them to abating possible change). Converse [2006, 56] finds a positive correlation between political elitism, social class, and conservatism. The elite do not need the public when they have reached consensus, and elections change into Habermasian contests over technocratic policy. If the elites share similar material interests, there will be limited change in public opinion and corresponding policy unless a significant diversity of salient voter predisposition emerges (enough, that is, to threaten the government with electoral losses or create changes within parties).

Leaving aside the problem of democratic voluntarism – that citizens should run democracies, not elites – the issue of elite rule can be reduced to a question of epistemology: where do mass political predispositions come from? From the perspective of liberal expedience, an elite that coincidentally shares the public's predispositions (again, ignoring the question of democratic voluntarism) would still be able to represent the people's interests, however imperfectly [Popkin, 2006, 251]. It may even be morally noble for them to rally the wayward and indolent public to stick up for their interests (hence, the persistence of 'vanguardism' among much (or all) of the left). From a structuralist perspective, it is tempting to think that mass public education and media saturation create citizens with a relatively narrow set of political predispositions, different only as far as personality permits. This is not so much wrong as partial; Zaller identifies individual traits like personality and interests as the basis of predisposition [Zaller, 1992, 22] but briefly supposes that there is likely an interaction between elite considerations and predisposition. Thus, the more historicist argument supporting disposition formation by elites, intentional or not, cannot be dismissed as so much conspiracy nonsense.

Although Zaller skirted the question of norm acquisition in his later publication [Zaller, 1992], he did, with Herbert McCloskey and Dennis Chong, develop a model of social learning in The
American Ethos several years earlier [McCloskey and Zaller, 1984]. Controlling for variables such as place of residence (urban/rural), psychological flexibility, education, religiosity, political sophistication, and general ideology, they describe the citizen's journey through exposure, comprehension, and acceptance to acquiring elite norms. The political beliefs that become votes and policy are individually predictable according to the above variables, including personality (e.g. flexibility and order-seeking, social benevolence). The fingerprints of elite guidance/interference are, from their point of view, clear.

Elites may not directly mould dispositions – the stable values that guide our decisions – but by operationalizing some over others through policy debates, they become norms that perpetuate their control of the state and, in doing so, indirectly subvert democracy. On an epistemological level, they are preventing people from critically and explicitly constructing their own predispositions. Whatever the power of structures – family, community, inheriting the farm, or availability of post-secondary education – in determining our daily lived experience, the ability to shape both opinion and values is an incredible amount of power that is in flagrant violation to both the precepts of democracy and sentiments towards human agency.

That McCloskey and Zaller [1984] had found the American public and elite mostly united on values of elections, civil rights, and moderated markets should come as no surprise; the mass of citizens, elite or not, fell between left Democrats and conservative Republicans. Rather than assuming that this implies an inherent unity among Americans within a narrow band of the political spectrum, the information presented seems to imply that most people are led to their political predispositions by an elite that effectively limits policy options by saturating the airwaves with a choice few considerations. The capitalist order is in no danger of fundamental change.

If the above arguments are accepted, then elites restrict debate and maintain significant social control by operationalizing and developing predispositions into certain norms and not others. This is not to say that elites do not have important contributions to make to policy, nor can nuanced ideas
about policy or ethics emerge without education that, even when popular in the Freireian sense, demands some 'elite' input. Indeed, Zaller persuasively demonstrates that 'tolerance' towards racial [1992, 9] and homosexual [1992, 317] minorities were elite-driven, often in the face of resistance from the 'group interest' sector of the population, who held incoherent attitudes on everything but race [Kinder, 2006, 209](and, presumably, homosexuality). The role of elites in policy is not a new debate but, if democracy is to be practised as well as verbalized, choice should ultimately be with citizens.

Based on this treatment, Zaller's findings seem to support the dominant ideology thesis, that despite differing levels of awareness, people are dependent on elites for both short-term opinion and stable predispositions. This does not necessarily mean dominant elites are controlling the thoughts of large portions of society; there are often non-dominant elites that intervene in the debate (often at local levels, like shop stewards [Abercrombie et al, 1980, 149]. Often, however, there is a significant consensus amongst the elite, and this gets learned and reinforced in the public as political norms which narrow the scope of debate. The argument for 'the dull compulsion of the economic' is limited by this assertion, as it contends that a significant portion of social and political life is determined not by ideology, but by economic needs. This is not to deny meaning and difference existing outside of the political, and the 'dull compulsion' is quite correct to be wary of ideological integration: most of the public is too uniformed for this and seem content to leave political labour to the elites. But while the mass of the public do not display a slavish devotion to capitalism, they often support – both temporarily and in the long term – the elite-generated positions that maintain the existing social order.

The goal is not to overstate the importance of elite influence but to generate a working model of how power and ideas relate to human behaviour for many people in parts of the developed world. In no way does it refute Wallerstein's observation about people enduring their governments more than admiring them. Repressive and structural factors aside, however, there is widespread support for the existing capitalist state, support that did not emerge from the ether and will not disappear at the first
sign of crisis. For the economic compulsion argument to be truly compelling, there would have to be massive social unrest whenever there are mass layoffs. If the workers had, en masse, the ability to see beyond the narrow band of elite discussion then the American Rust Belt would not exist, Reagan would never have been elected, and no one would be researching the question of ideology.

Gramsci's hegemony, a weaker version of the dominant ideology thesis, might seem a safe midpoint between banal economic compulsion and elite conspiracies (although it would need to develop an better description of the structural basis of ideas, as in [McCloskey and Zaller (and Chong), 1984], above). Here, elite campaigning obfuscates the knowledge constructed from organic, lived experience, causing confusion between values. Contradictory consciousness might be better identified as 'limited consciousness', with boundaries provided by elite discourse.

Some (Badly Needed) Qualifications

When one emphasizes, one always overemphasizes.
Derrida [in Eagleton, 2007, 36]

Organic experience continues to exist, and that which is knowable ranges beyond the limited elite discourse, especially outside of politics. As the discussion of Zaller's research demonstrates, however, it often gets quashed by the dominant considerations about available policy options which, over time, becoming lasting predispositions. Occasionally, organic experience plays a crucial role in resistance: the tangible possibility of getting drafted into an unjust and bloody war caused a minority to become vocally opposed to the Vietnam War. It is, however, irresponsible wishful thinking to overestimate power of organic experience in order to impute into the public an ability to see through the dominant ideology. Authentic experience is useful in this model, not in its own right, but only insofar as it brings individuals into proximity with elites that may advocate for their material interests. This is not intended to be pessimistic; it simply implies that, as a source of resistance, organic experience must be approached in a more intelligent way.
One of the major issues that makes this problem all the more interesting is the limits of Zaller's data, which is primarily drawn from a wide cross section of Americans between the 50s to the 90s. Do the implications apply to the British public, who are acknowledged as being more class conscious [Cheal, 1979], and from whom much of The Dominant Ideology Thesis argument was based? Similarly, can they be applied to other developed nations like the French, for whom a section of the population nearly engaged in civil war during the late 60s? Does this apply to these individual populations and subpopulations across time as well? Far from providing disconfirmation, the differences among the different groups at different times are likely to yield clues about how to best cultivate resistance to domination.

While strategic and other issues will be explored later in this paper, it is germane to address the reasons that we resist domination. From an ethical perspective, we are endowed with agency and are entitled to it. It cannot be overstated, however, that this agency is not easy to come by. From a practical perspective, humans have a historical tendency towards repressive and destructive behaviour, especially when their behaviour is controlled by a dominant force, on both a personal and institutional level. To resist this and retain some agency may mean that we can avoid some of the suffering and violence that have been part of our experience thus far.

**Towards an Integrated Model of Social Control**

Based on the research in Chapter 1 and 2, the function of ideology is legitimate sources of social construction and to provide a set of values used for the judgement of the social situation. This chapter has been an attempt to investigate the structure and processes of ideology on a social scale, where ideas and values interact with subjects to shape their context and, eventually, constitute their ideologies. Ideology, by these descriptions, ranges from elite treachery, integration into a structural system, or simply very limited or partial understandings of reality. Or perhaps it is a combination of these factors, starting with structural predispositions which are then developed into a hegemony by
elite opinions which, for the most part, works for people who would rather not be distracted by different policy options.

It is worth examining if other institutions – a school system, army, bureaucracy, or corporation – have similar dynamics of power and knowledge. To what extent do participants follow elite direction in forming their understanding of their institution and for guiding their values? How is information distributed relative to awareness? To what extent are elite ideas well-understood or coherent, or are roles limited to mechanical responses within a social order? How do we recognize and resist behaviour we cannot condone, especially if “belief has extremely low centrality for the believer [Converse, 2006, 47]?” The ideology theory research presented here can help map these dynamics if we decouple political economy and ideology long enough to see applications outside of capitalism and electoral democracy.

Several important trends stand out between the theories presented, emphasized or minimized depending on the goals of the theorist. For the purposes of this discussion, the role of ideas, structures, and elites are variables that determine individual subjectivities within given institutions. The relationship between structures and elites – in terms of influencing social construction and behaviour – has been the subject of the first two chapters, although it is in no way exhaustive. But within the powerful forces that structure existence, elite influence on ideas can – to a significant degree – affect the very institutions through which we live our lives.

Ideas grow and evolve within structures, but they are never something that exists in the ether; they are thoughts that people think in given contexts. Thus, ideas can be seen from the perspective of an individual subject or relative to an entire social context. From the point of view of the subject, every construction is the product of inference or communication, and it is based upon ideas that are either individually salient (i.e. memories, values) and situationally available and made legitimate by shortcuts and ideology. The roles we take also influence these constructions and ideas by forcing
dissonance resolution and by putting subjects in situations that tend to encourage these particular behaviours. Ideology develops as ideas and constructions change and evolve. But routines can cause ideas to fade into the background, to no longer have salience even though institutional behaviours may continue. Such is the personal architecture of power and knowledge.

Yet the origin and dynamics of ideas within institutions are often premised more on collective or elite priorities than on individual subjectivities. These provide the constructions (including values and social order) and behavioural expectations for the subject, which can motivate or attenuate oppression and injustice, making the ability to question and change ideas even more important. Elite values and ideas direct personal ideology as it is formed and reformed upon layers of previous opinion and construction. Although a “war of ideas” [George, 1997] sounds heavily idealist, it can have important consequences for the way institutions act in people's lives. This is not to overstate the power of ideas in the face of material reality, but to recognize that they have an effect on the individual behaviours which constitute institutions. In fact, it points to some fascinating discussions, such as the direction the Christian movement would have taken had Pelagius' humanism been more convincing than Augustine's depravity.

This approach, however valid it is, only addresses the form an institution takes, not the fact that it exists and controls behaviour. The goal of resistance is not just to make institutions less destructive, but to gain some agency over their tendency to structure our lives. It is to give individual actors a say in how institutions work. But the lived social structures that are, in part, constituted by cognitive structures have a heavy influence in favour of institutions determining agents, not the opposite. We haven't cut off the king's head because social power is part of who we are, and elite domination is one very easy and efficient way of organizing society. Resistance is possible but, as seen below, it is a considerable undertaking.
Chapter 4  

Resistance  
Operationalizing Agency

[He]... had asked Eichmann to stop “the death mills at Auschwitz,” and Eichmann had answered that he would do it “with the greatest pleasure” but that, alas, it was outside his competence and outside the competence of his superiors – as indeed it was.  
Hannah Arendt [1963, 117]

Y'all cover me! If these bastards open up on me  
or these people, you open up on them. Promise me!  
Hugh Thompson Jr.* [1968]

Power, for the purposes of this paper, is the ability to influence others' construal of a situation so that they will behave in a particular role. Far from being a bad thing, this ability to share ideas and act collaboratively is, likely, essential for the survival of a primate with no fur, claws, or fangs. The problem arises, however, when these vicarious realities beget behaviours that contravene the moral sentiments that the actors themselves recognize as ideal.

Whatever the importance of the situation on construal, it does not necessarily dictate our sense of right and wrong. Whether minimal, determining, or almost totalizing, social construction and role-taking can be plagued by slivers of doubt, which indicates that ethics are never situationally relative in their entirety. They are personal as well, relative to the actor, and influenced by social pressures to see

*Thompson flew low over My Lai on the morning of March 16, 1968, construing the situation as 'combat', attributing the numerous dead civilians to line of fire casualties or stray artillery [Hearts and Mind Film, 2003]. Upon witnessing the shooting an unarmed woman by an American soldier, however, he reconstructed the situation from 'engaging with the enemy' to 'mass murder'. It was this step that prevented him from being a powerless prisoner of his constructed social order. Ordering his men to fire upon their own soldiers if necessary, he exited his helicopter and confronted the officers, in effect ending the massacre. Reconstruction was what separated him from the ground forces, who were almost definitely aware of what was happening and found it objectionable [Kelman & Hamilton, 1989, 7] [Hearts and Minds Film, 2003], but were unable reconstrue the situation to break the social order and stop the killing.
and live the world in a specific – but not always desirable – way.

Doubt – be it episodic or persistent, tenuous or debilitating – is the seed of *agency*, which is the ability to recognize the process of social construction, critically challenge it, and reconstruct the situation from perspectives beyond the dominant. Doubt is the beginning of a process which can ameliorate some of the injustice related to institutional behaviour, by overcoming the pressures to keep behaving in ways that, in our own minds, might be unjust. Ceasing destructive behaviours might change the situation or institution enough to mitigate some of the brutality that characterizes the human experience. Foregoing utopian aspirations, this is simply an attempt to acknowledge that resistance happens everyday for many different reasons, but that more and more effective resistance may be possible if actors were better prepared. This is hardly a radical thought; many progressive narratives of critical education are based in similar ideals.

Before exploring how to support their development, it may be helpful to review the phenomenon that stands out as the most important element to institutional behaviour. The discussion of Zaller's American through the lenses of ideology theory and cognitive materialism can be, in the most general way possible, a model of *institution*. It is best described as a social system in which actors have roles that are prescribed by elites but are practiced into reality, and maintained largely by social proof. The interaction of shortcuts and ideology produce different constructions – values, ideas, expectations, status – that are generally based on a set of assumptions that were laid by an elite, and an elite continues to direct construction. Power can be maintained by its exercise – tangible proof – or by promoting constructs which identify the elite as a good source of consideration and opinion.

**Pluralistic Ignorance**

*Lord, let us stand for something, because a man [sic] who stands for nothing will fall for anything.*  
*Peter Marshall [1948]*
The disparate nature of socially constructed experience seems to imply some sort of 'need to believe', an inherent tendency to make sense of the world. Yet for all the discussion of essentialism, there is no explicit attempt here to reduce morals and values to certain elementary truths: given the arbitrary nature of construction, the model proposed here is a description of inherent difference in constructed reality. What is common, however, is a tendency towards normalization, the inclination for common constructions that was mapped in the first chapter.

This ability for vicarious understanding evolved because it is necessary for survival and, from the perspective of an optimist, can support a cooperative, pluralist co-existence. But even though the content of our thoughts is not determined by cognition, our constructed reality is both the product of the institutions that structure our daily lives and the hegemonic ideas that support them. This exercise of power has helped to create a complex and accomplished society, but it has also produced needless injustice. The problem is that groups, by way of deliberate or incidental social proof, tend towards common constructions that can undermine the doubt necessary to resist unjust institutions.

Since we are actors first, we need to behave in situations. We don't always have thorough grasp of our context; in fact, institutions are defined by minimal understanding. Power is more effective when actors have a fragmented or limited definition of the situation, when they must rely on others' for guidance in construction and behaviour. Even when a situation or institution is familiar, others are still referenced for considerations. This common theme is consistent across the research on social proof, Gramsci's version of hegemony, and John Zaller's Receive-Accept-Sample model.

This returns to the problem that much of the oppression and injustice referenced is not necessarily an issue of sin, slavish devotion to dogma, or simple compensation, although these could explain much about institutional behaviour. More often, the problem may be one of role-taking within a constructed situation, one in which the narrative is barely known, functionally concise, forgotten, rationalized, ignored, or resisted ineffectively. In all but the last of these, a lack of salience permits an
easier acceptance of constructions, hence an easier taking of roles.

Competing constructions exist within many social milieus and, as evidenced by ambivalence, within a single individual. Milgram's subjects felt this strain between the authority's construction that the experiment must continue, and the learner's competing view that it must cease. The construction that becomes accepted by the actor becomes the one that directs the role and the behaviour. The problem is that power affects the ability to construct reality autonomously or in a way that balances different perspectives. Power can work gradually, in a stepwise fashion, and the lived experience of behaviour makes constructions – functional, informative, normative, hierarchal (social order) – all the more real, hence powerful. In order to change a construction, it must be challenged effectively.

This seems to imply that a sophisticated appreciation of numerous social contexts is necessary to minimize reliance on others. Given the range and complexity of situations available in contemporary society, compounded by the difficulties in accessing constructions voluntarily, such a project seems daunting. A more realistic approach might be to refer to a salient moral understanding across different situations. Injustice is not always as obvious as blatant moral contravention (as it was for Hugh Thompson Jr. in My Lai), and social proof is more subtle and less direct than peer pressure, making it all the more convincing. But ambivalence, here the competition between constructions, can haunt institutional behaviour, if only fleetingly, and it is more easily identified and addressed with well-developed moral dispositions, discussed below. The point here is that doubt and dissonance start the process of deconstruction and promote a reconstruction balanced by definitions of the situation that were previously overlooked or dismissed.

Existence within structures is not all in our heads; simply reconstructing them in a non-dominant way or avoiding them through subculture doesn't necessarily change them. The reconstruction that plastic is needless does not negate the fact that buying wooden toys is really, really expensive. Simply acknowledging, as Eichmann did, that killing Jews is wrong did not extricate him
from his rigid social order. Similarly, many G.I.s in My Lai certainly felt that killing civilians was wrong, but did not break chain of command. Acting against the institution becomes, in part, an issue of savoir faire, of knowing how to make change and where to go for support. But it is also an issue of courage and tenacity to keep the doubt salient and avoid yielding to ineffective dissent. Cynicism is a natural reaction when institutions seem too strong, especially when strategies for resistance aren't forthcoming. It gives us an easy way out, which can be used the next time and the next, while providing reassurance that dissent, however meek, is an accomplishment of sorts. The goal here is to banish cynicism: not by martyring ourselves on the impregnable battlements of entrenched belief and routinized behaviour, but by knowing how to resist well.

Yet doubt is both a catalyst for resistance as well as a victim to cognitive pressures. The tendency to resolve this insecurity may motivate subjects to preserve their tenuous hold on beliefs; as indicated above [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 46], dissonance resolution is usually a binary operation, with adoption being more likely than assimilation. In the presence of uncertainty, situational pressures like social proof can provide a compelling rationale for accepting dominant constructions.

Pluralism, at least intuitively, enhances doubt by permitting alternatives to the logic of hegemony. Yet our cognitive baggage can take pluralism a step further, provoking a subtle conformity in which we tolerate injustice by acknowledging it as one of many valid options. If different values compete and conflict, then it may be tempting to go along with the consensus that one is as good as another, and that the status quo is justifiable. Pluralism needs to be a principled pluralism so that it can avoid the soft relativism that fails to challenge unjust constructions. The pluralistic ignorance of the bystander effect, referencing each other's inaction to make sense of the world, is no excuse for acquiescing to a fluid and expedient definition of reality, a world where the confusion about what's right is the dominant construction and behaviour is a matter of personal affectation. This uncritical submission to the dominant reality is a cynical abnegation of agency.
Moral self-relevance may help make us critical of situations while being able to respect doubt and plurality without being overwhelmed by them. Simply put, we can know where we stand in the face of contextual pressures, even if they are gradual or forceful. When we are more sensitive to doubt and can resist the suasions of institutional conformity, then reconstruction and resistance becomes possible. We may be willing to change, but this is ideally a matter of careful reflection and dialogue.

The importance of moral self-relevance becomes even more pronounced when the differences between normative and informative constructions are accounted for. Knowing is less abstract and more present than judgement, which requires an increase in cognitive effort that is not conducive to role-taking [Bloom in Byrnes, 1996, 65]. That thousands of readers read the same blatantly biased headline is a potent source of social proof: its mere existence may not establish truth, but it does lend it legitimacy. Satirical exposes of TV news may be thwarted by social proof: all of the others watching Fox can't be totally duped. Even buying coffee invites ambiguity, for surely millions of customers would not frequent cafes and shops that profit from the coercive and exploitative bean market. But unless it is clear and present, doubt can become the victim of routine, memory, or irony. Again, moral understandings that are personally salient and situationally accessible are an important source for creating and maintaining the productive doubt.

This morality is not meant as a transcendental doctrine, promulgated from on high and accepted without hesitation; rather, it is a collaborative construct developed from a variety of experiences and perspectives, including those that are incongruous with the dominant. But moral abstractions are not necessarily easy to learn or apply to all situations. Perhaps we assume that mental sponginess will take care of moral learning, and that institutional ambiguity can be resolved by social proof? Perhaps our technocratic society is so focussed on method that it ignores teaching moral self relevance, operationalizing a minimal few (e.g. collegiality) for functional purposes? Or perhaps ambiguity is fostered by lack of clear values, the shallow, shortcutting reflection of the plurality that is so central to
postmodernism, democracy, and even market liberalism?

It may not be possible to think in a perfectly balanced, moral, rational, autonomous, critical, and bias free way, but it certainly is possible to think better. Humans have been successful because of a cognitive tendency toward cooperation and collaboration, but it is also the root of catastrophe. Perhaps we can be even more cooperative and less disaster-prone if we are morally judicious in our social intercourse.

**Moral Type B**

...allowing an act to be dominated by its context, while neglecting its human consequences, is dangerous to the extreme.

*Stanley Milgram [1974, 9]*

...Moral Type B individuals are more likely to engage in prosocial activity because they are more able to discern a core injustice in a situation despite distort[ing], obscuring, or distracting influences from the social context...

*John Gibbs [2003 119]*

Social construction not only involves the transmission or inference of ideas, but of values with which to judge belief and behaviour. It is this reason that resistance begins with morality, the subject's implicit or explicit sense of right and wrong. As mentioned above, situations can foster doubt because they are so often incompletely understood and ambiguous, but they can also mitigate doubt for the same reasons. The difference comes down to the sensitivity to recognize a dilemma within a situation, the ability to make a judgement, and the tenacity to harness this doubt to reconstruct the situation without being overwhelmed by situational pressures. This reaction, as opposed to not recognizing or dismissing dilemmas, is premised on particular dispositions that are described by the rich literature on moral development.

But first, the disclaimer: this isn't intended to direct the thoughts of children towards a benign but ignorantly totalizing end. This argument follows upon the observation that children's thoughts and, as they become adults, actions are sometimes directed to nefarious and totalizing ends. The purpose
here is not to secure a dominant order, but to deepen the critical skills that can be used to disrupt a dominant and not very just order. The standard Foucauldian perspective – that of integrating children into the liberal order with disciplinary discourse – is, ironically, incomplete: it may take a disciplinary discourse to not be integrated so easily or willingly into any order. As always, however, discourses are situations that exert pressures, so humility and doubt are in order.

The discussion of an 'anti-institutional moral disposition', one that is premised on doubt and reconstruction, begins with such an admission of humility: that we may fall victim to the fundamental attribution error, which implies that we will be likely to engage in or tolerate more situational injustice than we are comfortable with. But this acknowledgement is followed by the assertion that the former is not an excuse for destructive behaviour. Such an admission can make us more sensitive and responsive to the doubt that begins the process of reconstruction.

Reformulation involves incorporating disparate constructions, beyond those that are dominant or immediately salient, and it involves prioritizing these with a balance of power that is different than that of the original social context. This ability to re-imagine the situation is often linked to a fundamental valuing of others [Gibbs, 2003, 118] so that power does not pressure the construction process to overlook non-dominant perspectives. This capacity and willingness is the difference between moral types A and B. According to Lawrence Kohlberg [in Gibbs, 2003, 118]:

At 4A, the subject decides in terms of the question, What does the system demand? At 4B the subject asks, What does the individual in the system demand as well as the system, and what is a solution that strikes a balance?

Type As draw their values from the “existing social arrangements” [Gibbs, 2003, 118], the dominant constructions that are facilitated by shortcuts, especially conformity. Although they may be aware of non-dominant constructions, they may incorporate them in an inequitable way that favours existing power relations. Type Bs, on the other hand, draw upon many constructions within the situation, as
reciprocity demands that all involved have their perspectives considered.

This willingness to reconstruct the situation in another, possibly more just way, is premised upon a cognitive style called field dependence-independence. This construct, also called psychological differentiation, measures the degree to which an individual perceives their environment holistically or analytically. Field dependent thinkers tend to perceive contexts across different domains, spatial or social, in a continuous, global manner [McNair, n.d.]. By contrast, field independent thinkers tend to identify components in a given context, and analyze the relationships between these different parts. Socially, field independence is the ability to separate context and behaviour and, in doing so, demonstrate “relative autonomy or independence from conformity influences [Gibbs, 2003, 119].”

Perceiving different actors as distinct enhances the ability to consider multiple perspectives beyond those made salient by shortcuts and existing ideology. A developed sense of reciprocity makes salient these perspectives, and in doing so allows Type Bs to be more sensitive to nonreciprocal “moral imbalances” [Gibbs, 2003, 118, emphasis in original]. Besides their sense of balance and fundamental valuing, this sensitivity induces conscience in Type Bs, the disposition to construct reality from a moral perspective; that is, a perspective that equitably incorporates the constructions of others.

Type Bs retain their moral judgement and are not at the mercy of situational pressures, although values can change through social construction. As Colby and Damon [in Gibbs, 2003, 122] observe, social construction can evolve into a transformative “co-construction” through participatory dialogue with others. Construction is not simply a matter of constructing the situation as it is presented: Type Bs display high moral self-relevance that “centr[es] more on their judgements of what ought to be [Kohlberg in Gibbs, 2003, 118].” Their values are important enough to dictate what the situation ought to look like, and this salience – itself based on a balanced construction of different perspectives – is the basis of moral courage: the willingness to act according to conscience in the face of pressures not to, such as the pluralistic ignorance of contemporary institutions.
Moral courage is also positively correlated with another personality construct: locus of control. This refers to the degree to which an individual feels that their behaviour is controlled internally by themselves, or externally by powerful others, luck, or divine intervention. The willingness to take responsibility and avoid displacing blame is a characteristic of those with an internal locus of control, whom Gibbs et al [1986] found to be higher in moral courage. When coupled with strong moral reasoning, a sense of accountability is congruent with a sense of agency [Gibbs, J. C., personal communication, April 12, 2009].

Finally, moral courage is based on mature moral judgement, what Kohlberg considered Level 4 or 'Systems' thinking [Gibbs, 2003, 75]. This is the ability to evaluate, cognitively and affectively, moral dilemmas that extend between two people into society at large. The Type A formulation considers social virtue to be based on adherence to the dominant values in society. 4Bs, on the other hand, “appeal to the values of an ideal society” [Gibbs, 2003, 75], one in which individually relevant values can be balanced within the social system. Mature moral judgement, it should be noted, contains both a rational (reciprocal) component, but is also affective in degrees, with empathy helping us to experience others' definition of the situation. Those with mature moral judgement who focus on reciprocity (or justice) tend towards reforming behaviour, while the more empathic tend towards helping behaviour [Gibbs, 2003, 116].

Far from being a fixed trait like eye colour, moral development is highly dependent on environmental and cultural factors, especially parenting. As the literature summary in Appendix I describes, an authoritative parenting style – high expectations, high support, and high warmth, as opposed to the authoritarian, permissive, or negligent styles – is often correlated with an internal locus of control, field independence, and, in the eyes of Martin Hoffman [Hoffman, 2000, 157], empathic understanding. These, in turn, support moral self-relevance and moral courage when supported by strong moral reasoning.
The concept of *ex situ* morality, mentioned in the first chapter, seems consistent with the description of Type B situational reconstruction. By referring to our moral understandings in the absence of immediate situational pressures, it may be possible to get a more 'veridical' [Gibbs, 2003, 123] construction of the situation that is based on others who lack power. Constructions that are based on a more equitable or inclusive range of perspectives may be the basis for situational ethics, a personally relative, and relevant, morality.

**Beyond the Dominant**

*The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,*  
*But in ourselves, that we are underlings.*  
*Julius Caesar I, ii [1939, 621]*

The research presents an institution as a social structure that organizes the behaviour of individuals into roles specified by elite constructions and gradually accepted by actors through social proof. The above discussion briefly outlined one of the major sources of resistance to institutional behaviour: personal morality. By highlighting correlations between development and moral courage, it becomes possible to imagine how individuals can be better 'equipped' to reconstruct dominant ideas that confine their actions to those they find undesirable. Although the discussion of parenting was largely left to Appendix I, it remains a promising area for investigation.

The other major site for resistance is the school, primarily by examining how education promotes certain constructions over others whether it supports greater institutionalization and role-taking. Schools focus primarily on functional reality-taking, like reading, but seem to direct little attention to the dynamics of power in construction. Although there have been speculations about the influence of schools in promoting docile acquiescence to the dominant order [Milgram, 1974, 137][Zimbardo, 2007, 142], there remains a possibility that education can actually enhance resistance to hegemonic construal. Specifically, is it possible to promote the humbling recognition that students can be easily led against their will, while maintaining the condition that this is not morally acceptable?
Building on Neil Postman's suggestion of a “Fallen Angel” curriculum, a course of human shortcomings, it may be possible to temper the inherent overoptimism that is responsible for the fundamental attribution error [Postman, 1995, 117]. Such an approach would mean expanding critical pedagogy by probing its assumption of the 'sponge model' of the brain, as demonstrated by Paolo Freire [1993, 47-48]:

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom... The oppressed are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.

Certainly Freire is not wrong, but the simplifications of 'internalization' and 'consciousness' remain largely unexplained, providing minimal footholds to resistance outside of the 'problem-posing'. A more useful approach, in conjunction with problem posing and dialogue, is to provide instruction on some of the biases and shortcuts of cognition and have students relate these to their own lives and to history. Developing the disposition towards reconstructing the situation takes knowing what submitting to the dominant feels like, and having the skills to avoid this as much as possible. Far from being a new suggestion, participants in equity training use reflection to identify their own bias.

The focus is not only on examining reality taking/role taking and knowing how our minds may function, it is an exercise of recognizing situational pressures. In fact, it is about stepping *ex situ*, to the limited degree that we can – not playing the 'god-trick' but by changing perspective enough to check our own heads. It might let us contextualize our behaviour, comparing it not to an idealized other, but to the self that we want to be regardless of the context. This means prioritizing moral self relevance, knowing how we want to be, being actively ethical so we know what consistency looks like, and understanding how post hoc consistency is often just dissonance. Realizing how cognition can change the arbitrary into the sacred might help us see how situations affect us: recognizing the fundamental attribution error at work and understanding the process of construction, without falling victim to
pluralistic ignorance.

Such 'inside' strategies have serious shortfalls, points out Trout [2009, 114], specifically because our cognition cannot police itself effectively. Bias is not a matter of true or false information or will as much as an issue of perception. Moreover, constant self-monitoring is an immense amount of work that is difficult under many situations. Moreover, awareness of such cognitive processes, especially related to social understanding, are inaccessible to deliberate conscious thought [Ross & Nisbett, 1991, 81]. Unfortunately, the discussion of outside strategies will have to wait for a later discussion.

Empathy, one possible inside strategy, has already been singled out as an example of a force that can be limited by the situation. It may not disrupt social construction effectively is because it is a reaction to distress within a pre-existing construction. It doesn't necessarily force us to re-evaluate and redefine the situation, but deal with the suffering then and there. It can facilitate doubt, but it does not necessarily succeed at identifying the situation as responsible (although Hoffman [2000, 80] provides counterexamples). Empathy has a strongly situational component; it mainly works to help people with whom we share context [Trout, 2009, 38]. Eichmann did display some small measures of empathy [Arendt 1963, 51, 81] and was probably sincere when he claimed that he would have stopped the killing "with the greatest pleasure" [Arendt, 1963, 117], but it seemed to have little impact on his job performance.

Although Trout acknowledges the paternalism of 'outside' strategies to mitigate bias [2009, 116], it can be argued that awareness of cognitive bias may add some humility, which is derived from the Latin *humus*, the good soil which brings forth life. Humility can help us to challenge our constructions and, in doing so, give us the confidence to step beyond the dominant when the need arises.

But situations construct subjects just as subjects construct situations: people may know the situation, but the structures may seem inevitable. Reconstrual without success can lead to cynicism.
and passivity, just as identifying the sacred as merely arbitrary could inspire nihilism. The stock answer is that structures are only as strong as the people operating them, and that the act of collaborative reconstruction is not only transformative for institutions but for individuals as well. Hopefully this is true. How to move beyond reconstruction to actually transforming structures – *savoir faire* – remains a topic for a later paper. Hopefully the preceding chapters may enhance it.

Other problems present themselves, the most obvious of which – integration into an emerging dominant order – has been discussed before. Am I just as guilty as the early “police scientists” discussed by Foucault [1991, 102], who attempt to establish pastoral care by promoting ethical conduct among the masses to ensure order? Do such attempts at solutions simply create more problems; after all, self-knowledge is hardly a new concept? Are theorists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, and Hoffman making absolutist assumptions about reciprocity and empathy as the basis of what is ‘right’ and 'good'? Alternatively, is this a form of rugged pluralism that could undermine social stability? Perhaps, however, this is merely the humble recognition that, given the chance, people can treat each other in ways that they themselves would like to be treated.
Conclusion

This paper sought to understand the problem of institutional behaviour, in which individuals adopt roles a particular social context and, often, commit or tolerate routine oppression or injustice. The actors often possess different degrees of interest and understanding of their roles, and execute directives from a centralized source. While these behaviours may be performed within a context that is minimally understood or salient, significant ambivalence can haunt the actors. This doubt can be the moral response a situation, and is the beginning of a process of resistance.

The ultimate object of this research is to support agency, the capacity to resist seeing the world according to single dominant interpretation of reality. Although moral doubt may be fleeting, inconsistent, or meagre, it can potentially force a subject to reconstruct their social situation to identify the world as others may see it. The fact that such agency exists is hope.

Although it is tempting to picture humans as possessing complete autonomy in their construal of reality, it seems more appropriate to admit that common constructions are shared within societies. The situations that structure our existence proffer particular ideas, with which we understand social reality and direct our behaviour. These ideas are typically produced by elites that propagate them through an institution, by way of power, the ability to influence another's construction of the situation towards one's own.

Power is exercised through ideology, a set of constructions which reminds subjects which sources to recognize and use when constructing a definition of the situation. Although it helps us to
construct situations, it is itself a product of previous situations. Ideology also provides a set of values with which to morally evaluate our situations and our behaviour within them. But ideologies are not necessarily coherent because fall victim to the vagaries of memory, recalled only as particular situations require. Unless a situation is salient, an ideology may lose what limited coherence it had.

Situations change and evolve, and actors move in between different situations, making it necessary to learn and relearn the 'definition of the situation' and its values in order to behave appropriately. This learning is a product of either direct acceptance by communication or indirect inference on others' behaviour. To reiterate, the relevance of others as sources, particularly elites, is in part specified by ideology.

This influence, referred to above as power, is not only mediated by existing ideologies, it is also a product of the immediate situation. Social variables can trigger cognitive shortcuts that emphasize certain constructions, especially those that are commonly accepted among a social group (social proof), also including those of an authority or those of a particular in-group. Similarly, these evolved, instinctual triggers are sensitive to the need to reciprocate and the understanding that more is usually better (scarcity). Shortcuts promote particular definitions of the situation by way of authority, conformity, in-grouping, reciprocity, and scarcity, but only so far as ideology recognizes the source of the construction as legitimate. This is not a simple binary relationship but a question of degree, with shortcuts and ideology variably contributing to a particular beliefs and behaviours within the situations we construe.

Situations can easily become institutions because the constructions we use to understand them usually contain prescriptions for acknowledging an elite, legitimating their ideas. Behaving within a social structure may reinforce the existing social order, with its values, concepts, and role expectations. Moreover, a process of internalization and routinization, supported by a whitewashing and context-dependent memory, promotes consistency trying to resolve dissonance from morally dubious
behaviour, possibly forgetting the original purpose of the behaviour.

Situational constructions can vary based on the development of a personal ideology, the salience of a situation, or the strength of the shortcutting stimuli. The variability in construal, as well as the inherent heterogeneity of social existence, implies that power is not the exclusive property of a particular elite, although their share may be disproportionately greater. Instead, power is both diffuse and contested: exercised in individual relationships, but subject to competing versions of reality, dominant or not.

Alternatively, there is the possibility that humans can be reciprocally amenable to the constructions of others, making injustice more obvious and assailable without pursuing elite aspirations. This possibility becomes our basis for situational ethics, inspiring humility in the knowledge that we can be easily led, but acknowledging our agency in reconstructing situations according to the perspectives of others, beyond the dominant understandings. It is the disposition and ability to step outside the situation, as best we can, to see it may be understood in other ways, while also examining our behaviour to see if it matches our *ex situ* moral understandings. When it doesn't, doubt can promote a more just reconstruction if it is not overwhelmed by the situation. In order to increase the frequency, intensity, and efficacy of such bouts of critical insight, specific personal variables can be developed by parenting, enhancing the likelihood of reconstruction.

The description summarized above and developed in greater detail in the previous chapters is not intended to be prescriptive of any particular behaviours or beliefs, and is instead highly general. There is no ultimate model of institution or institutional behaviour; these are some suggestions for concepts that may help understand the seemingly inexplicable things that humans do. More importantly, it is deemed necessary because most theories of social relations are inadequate for connecting the social dimensions of individual cognition to large-scale social relations, rendering them limited for the purposes of resistance. Nevertheless, this research remains woefully incomplete and
several important directions for further investigation are immediately intuitive.

This model has been built on observations from and abstractions of numerous lived situations and institutions, and it can only become more clear, coherent, and troubled when it is applied to specific examples of real injustice. It was developed into a thesis in order to better understand particular problems in human subjectivity and behaviour, not only the ongoing support for (or tolerance of) war, oppressive economic globalization, and ecological abuse, but the willingness of large groups to exist within systems – schools, governments, prisons – that often do little but reproduce the status quo in the interests of an elite. By examining how specific institutions maintain oppressive relationships, it may become possible to reconstruct them and effectively challenge their operations. For instance, an admission of elite domination the electorate could expose the structures that perpetuate elite hegemony, and could identify the conditions necessary for deepening democracy.

One potential use is the re-examination of history through the institution, not only by examining the discourses or social forces that informed events, but by reviewing the rather mundane operations of individuals within systems. As Jeffrey Friedman [2006, xxix] indicates in his review of Converse: “ignorance-abetted state autonomy could be the central organizing tool for rewriting the entire history of American politics.” While such an approach may necessarily prioritize elite constructions, it could – in the spirit of Abercrombie, Turner, and Hill [1980] – attempt to examine how these and non-dominant constructions were expressed in the lives of both dominant and dominated.

This point alludes to a significant oversight of this paper, which has assumed that constructions are mostly an issue of subjection, forgetting that the elite may experience a different form of subjectivity than the non-elite. For all their control and power, they may be trapped by the same constructions, forced along the same cognitive trajectory. Nevertheless, the notion of 'elite' has been a central part of this investigation from both the macroscopic and microscopic perspectives, because they set the boundaries for the institutional social relations, and their ideas operationalize many opinions.
and behaviours in attentive sections of the non-elite. These are based on predispositions that, with attention and judgement, can be used as a guide to accept further constructions of various elite. But is social construction a two-way street for dominant and subordinate, by way of social proof reinforcing their superior influence? In this case, how do factors like self-interest, an instinct for dominance, and a need for esteem affect the equation of social construction in both directions?

Belief may have self-sustaining tendencies – inherent in cognition but also in the recursive legitimation of elite values – and it may only need to be activated initially to perpetuate itself [Levine, 2003, 226]. What needs to be emphasized, but has not yet been, is the necessity of these beliefs for making sense of experience: reality needs to be interpreted, doubt resolved, conflicts explained, and pain understood. However arbitrary cognitive materialism may paint the process of reality and role taking, it cannot overlook how meaning is derived from what we do and how we understand our actions and our context. Life is lived in local situations that become institutions, not in grand ideological debates. While legitimation is a problem for philosophers, any attempt at promoting reconstruction must consider the possibility that beliefs are important for meaning even if they are not always salient. This is not to be misconstrued by admitting that people get the government they deserve or, more generally, that they are just as happy under some conditions as others. Far from it, as vouched by Barbara Epstein, [in Ehrenreich and McIntosh, 1997]:

If there is no human nature outside social construction, no needs or capacities other than those constructed by a particular discourse, then there is no basis for social criticism and no reason for protest or rebellion.

The problem of meaning deserves a much fuller treatment through the lens of institutions, but it starts with the humanist assumption that, given the chance, people will opt to treat each other as they themselves desire to be treated.

Finally, in its attempt at generality, this analysis has been skewed in favour of the situation,
neglecting the specificity of the subject. Exceptional heroism and mundane villainy are both dependent on a host of personal qualities, including those related to moral development, but also personality, relevant experience, intelligence and learning capacity, mood, and physical state. While these interact with the context in which the individual finds themselves, exploring them may provide another fecund area for situating resistance.

The point of this paper is hope, not just that humanity can be more humane, but that we – us, ourselves – can make it so, without creating more misery in the process. It asks, given our inherent limits and those that exist in our social structures, what kind of society we want to live in, what obstacles exist, and how these can be addressed.

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places -- and there are so many -- where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory.

Howard Zinn [2006, 170]

If you assume that there's no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope.

If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, there's a chance you may contribute to making a better world.

That's your choice.

Noam Chomsky [n.d.]
Appendix I

Locus of Control

The construct 'locus of control' was first developed by Julian Rotter in the 1950s, and is used to describe an “individual’s perception of his or her own efficacy in reference to the individual’s belief of where the control for their behaviors originates [McClun & Merrell, 1998].” An internal orientation is characterized by the perception that the origin and control of behaviour comes from within an individual, whereas an external orientation is decidedly more fatalist, perceiving control for one's actions as dependent upon an external force (luck, powerful other). An internal locus of control is associated with numerous positive outcomes, ranging from greater likelihood of academic success [Lynch, 2002] [Flouri & Hawkes, 2008], childhood intelligence [Ollendick, 1979], less substance abuse and delinquency [McClun, 1998], reduced anxiety [Muris et al., 2004][Ollendick, 1979], and greater happiness [Klonowicz, 2001].

The bulk of the literature encountered seemed to indicate that locus of control develops and changes across lifespan and is more significantly correlated to socio-developmental factors than biological ones. Parental personality and locus of control has an impact on their children. Morton [1997] suspected that children often developed the same locus of control orientation as a result of experienced parenting behaviours, although he did not provide a definite direction of causation (ie. child's difficult behaviour causing an external parental LC vs. parenting behaviour causing an external child LC vs. a dialectical relationship). Though dated, Ollendick's [1979] research also indicated a strong continuity between parent and child LC, noting, however, that a mixed internal-external couple is more likely to have an internal child. Like Flouri [2008], Ollendick found evidence that mothers' LC was more predictive of daughters' LC but not sons'. He did find that a mother's internal LC predicted a
son's higher intelligence and achievement, but lower behavioural adjustment. Similar to Morton, Ollendick called for more research into the direction of causality between both parent and child LC and parenting practices. Kokkinos and Panayiotou [2007] did establish some causality, finding that external parents were likely to use authoritarian methods to deal with aggressive children, and that children's behaviour was not predictive of parental LC.

Different aspects of parenting have been reported to predict locus of control in children. Flouri and Hawkes [2008] reports that a mother’s high expectations of daughters educational attainment at age 10 was a reliable predictor of an internal locus of control and career success at age 30. McClun and Merrell [1998] concluded that an authoritative parenting style was related to an internal locus of control for American junior high students. Lee, Daniels, and Kissinger [2006] supported this by examining specific parenting practices and found that those related to an authoritative, participatory style of parenting support the development of an internal locus of control. Morton and Mann [1998] agreed that an internal locus of control is predicted by parental acceptance and child-centeredness. They emphasized, however, that higher parental regulation and structure – predictive of an internal LC with young children – must switch to co-regulation with the onset of adolescence in order to retain an internal LC. Kulas [1996] notes that girls move slightly towards an external orientation in adolescence, although LC remains fairly stable for both sexes throughout this time. Lastly, Lynch, Hurford, and Cole [2002] identified honours students as having older, less enabling (ie. overprotective and interfering) parents, while at-risk children are more likely to have younger, enabling, and externally oriented parents. Lynch and her colleagues were also unwilling to hypothesize about causality. They did report the interesting result that enabling parents with graduate degrees have the most internally oriented children.

Education also has a relationship with locus of control although, again, causality is not explicitly clear. Given that an internal orientation is linked to greater intelligence, and then this sense
of competence from academic achievement reinforces an internal LC, it seems that the relationship between locus of control with academic and occupational success is mutually reinforcing [Schieman & Plinkert, 2008]. But educational success is linked to a sense of control, and (in this author's opinion, at least) educational success is often proportional to SES. It is thus significantly more difficult for those of lower SES to maintain a sense of control when they are fighting to keep up with living expenses [Schieman & Plinkert, 2008], and all the more difficult if their children are likely to inherit an external orientation and have this working against them in the school system. Schieman and Plickert extend their analysis by stating that trust leads to an internal LC, and education confers this confidence upon students through greater social problem-solving capacities. While there was limited literature detailing the the relationship between specific schooling techniques and locus of control, experiencing competence and planned risk-taking seem to be key variables to enhancing an internal orientation [Hans, 2000].

Field Independence

Field dependence-independence, also called psychological differentiation, is a construct that measures the degree to which an individual perceives their environment holistically or analytically. Field dependent thinkers tend to perceive contexts across different domains, spatial or social, in a continuous, global manner [McNair, n.d.]. By contrast, field independent thinkers tend to identify components in a given context, and analyze the relationships between these different parts. Unlike locus of control, where an internal orientation seemed, in North American literature, to be unanimously positive, both field dependence orientations have their own advantages within their different cultures. Field independence, however, has been consistently related to high intelligence [Martinez, 1984].

Some of the literature drew correlations (but not necessarily causations) from parenting style and field independence. As Kogan [1991] found, authoritative parents tend to foster field independence:
“Parents of field-independent children granted them autonomy in the task and helped with the cognitive aspects of the task. A positive emotional ambience characterized the teaching situation. Parents of field-dependent children were rigidly controlling and quite critical of their children's performance.”

Berry and Witkin [in Engelbrecht & Natzel, 1997] noted that high social conformity is likely to produce field dependence, while lenient and autonomous childrearing practices are linked to field independence. Although he cannot recall the specific citations, it was (and is) the opinion of Michael Meyerhoff that children who are given extensive time for self-directed play will engage deeply with intellectual challenges that promote field independence[2001][personal communication, April 7, 2009].

Pandey and Pandey [1985] noticed that this differentiation is heavily influenced by cultural milieu; as demonstrated by their findings that rural Indians were more field dependent:

“The field-dependent cognitive style is functionally related to cultural patterns, which emphasize the maintenance of a traditional order; preference for in-group oriented, particularistic relationships; family structures; and socialization practices emphasizing conformity, obedience, and respect for authority.”

Although group orientation is seen as a high predictor for field dependence, Bagley [1995] found that Japanese and Chinese children had relatively high differentiation scores despite their group-centred cultures. Although pictographic literacy of these cultures was seen as a possible reason for the high scores, this was not borne out by experimental data [Bagley, 1995].
Bibliography


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