

Citizen Questions for Government Learning

He believed that truth had a natural superiority over error, if it could only be heard; that if once discovered, it must, being left to itself, soon spread and triumph; and that the art of printing would not only accelerate this effect, but would prevent those accidents which had rendered the moral and intellectual progress of mankind hitherto so slow, irregular and uncertain.

- William Hazlitt¹

For the future of democracy there is good news, bad news, and good news.

Concerning the (first) good news, let me begin with a story:

I. Introduction

A. Good news: a flood of information

One afternoon in the late 1970s, at MIT, two of our graduate students appeared in my doorway with enthusiastic grins. They had just used the ARPA-Net (a precursor of the Internet) to hack into a computer at RAND on the West Coast. From there, they discovered

¹ Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) 484. Hazlitt's tribute is to Thomas Holcroft.

Chapter 7

how to tap the AP and Reuters wire services, that were now linked to printers across the hall. They wanted me to see what they had accomplished.

Even two decades ago, subscribing to the AP or Reuters wire services was beyond the imagining of academic social scientists, even at research universities like MIT.

Today, everyone with an Internet connection can be well-informed about the news. When I log onto the Internet, my Yahoo startup page shows the World News headlines running on the AP and Reuters wires and The New York Times. (I can click to read the full stories). I also see headlines of the top five stories on specialized news wires that I follow: Science News from Reuters & from AP, Technology News from Reuters & from AP, and a special Reuters Internet wire. Lower on the page there is a special search feature that also scans many additional sources each day for key stories about Teledesic, health + Internet, fiber optic technology, and other entries for an electronic notebook.

Down the left side of the screen are customized click-throughs to online discount ordering for new (amazon.com) and used (alibris.com) books; the Financial Times archives (for the international telecommunications business) and The New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal; to BBC World Service radio online, and other high-use sites.

All of these are free.

But what has been the impact of all this newly-available and free information on American democracy? This brings us to be bad news.

Chapter 7

B. Bad News: No Interest in More Political News, or More Citizen Feedback

The bad news - for those with reformist hopes - is that Americans have an abundant supply of standard news. The flood of options that is available over the Internet is added to newspapers (about 55 million newspapers sold daily, 59 million on Sunday, and an average of 18 to 49 minutes/day of reading), PBS News Hour; CNN, national and local television news, radio (including all-news stations and talk radio), weekly magazines, etc.)² So far as mass markets are concerned, there is no evidence that most voters are interested in more standard political news or information than they now receive. And, as we will see (below) it seems unlikely that elected officials in Washington are interested to receive more citizen feedback than the flood that cyber-advocacy now directs to their offices.

1. Voters

The trouble with Socialism is that it takes so many
weekday evenings.

- Oscar Wilde³

² Newspaper subscription data from 2000: John W. Wright, ed., *The New York Times Almanac 2002* (New York: Penguin, 2001) 276. Baseline research of newspaper reading/day and related data for magazines, radio, and other sources: W. Russell Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 89.

³ Quoted in: Esther Dyson, *Release 2.1: A Design for Living in the Digital Age*, Upgraded ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 1998) 338.

Chapter 7

Looking back, there may have been a jump in interest in political news in the early 1960s, when the major television networks expanded from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Now, as Russell Neuman suggests in his *The Future of the Mass Audience*, most people may be selective and semi-attentive; and already have established routines to monitor the headlines and any areas of unique personal interest.⁴ The technologies of freedom principle suggests that we may be seeing the true, naturally-occurring percentage of serious and engaged interest in public affairs in America: about the 1.5% of viewing households (2.7 million) who watch PBS national news. If we include people who watch PBS national news part of the time, we might round this estimate upward to 5 million people.⁵ So far as local government is concerned, by one estimate there are at least 4,000 local access (cable) channels in the country, with an almost-zero viewership that does not suggest that most Americans want more conventional news or knowledge about their local government or to hear more views from their fellow citizens.⁶

It may help to understand these numbers, depending upon the reader's image of television viewing habits, to note the current

⁴Neuman, *The Future of the Mass Audience*. Timothy E. Cook, *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 170-73.

⁵ For a wider survey of evidence and estimates: W. Russell Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

⁶ Laura R. Linder, *Public Access Television: America's Electronic Soapbox* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

Chapter 7

choices for television viewing (Table 7 - 1).

Table 7-1
Most Popular Television Shows, 2000 - 2001⁷

1. Survivor: The Australian Outback
2. ER
3. Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Wednesday)
4. Who Wants to Be a Millionaire (Tuesday)
5. Friends
6. NFL Monday Night Football
7. Who Wants to be a Millionaire (Sunday)
7. Everybody Loves Raymond (tie)
9. Law and Order
10. The Practice

The 1.5% of households for PBS Evening News is about 1/10 of the people who watch these shows. In March 2002, compared with another round of Democrats v. Republicans, even Buffy the Vampire Slayer was winning, with more than double the audience (3.3 Nielsen) and (with only 2/3 of American households with cable) the top-drawing cable show, World Wrestling Federation Smackdown on Mondays at 10PM (TNN), was even further ahead, with 3.9% of households.⁸

⁷ People Weekly Almanac, *People Weekly Almanac 2002* (New York: Time, Inc., 2001) 114. There are 100.8 million television households.

⁸ Electronic Media, "Night-by-Night Nielsen Prime-Time Ratings for the Week of March 4-10," *Electronic Media 2002*, 22.

Chapter 7

Unless circumstances change, dreams of creating an Athenian agora or a national civic community in cyberspace seem unlikely.⁹

(By suggesting this inference, I do not mean that Americans are disinterested in news or public policy. Only that a great deal of political news and argument recycles - and perhaps that voters perceive there is little additional interesting depth to report. And not many additional people or ideas worth listening to: If academic phrases like democratic discourse mean loud, policy argument television, forever, the prospect is understandably unappealing. Monitoring the headlines - with a potential to become involved if there are sudden alarms or violations of core values - may be a rational delegation of civic attention for public affairs, especially if there are vigilant journalists and 5 million people, with a wide range of political views, to sound any necessary alarms.¹⁰

⁹ For a thoughtful discussion: William Galston, "(How) Does the Internet Affect Community? Some Speculations in Search of Evidence," in *Democracy.Com? Governance in a Networked World*, ed. Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph Nye, *Visions of Governance for the 21st Century* (Hollis, New Hampshire: Hollis Publishing Company, 1998). Also the visionary work: Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Revised ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). However, Wilhelm's empirical work suggests that citizens in early online political discussion groups were primarily interested to express their own opinions rather than be persuaded by others: Anthony G. Wilhelm, *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 86-104.

¹⁰ Critics may be right that changes in news reporting could promote social change. As Kindleberger notes, many naturally-

Chapter 7

It may not get any better: The initiative to shape American public policy may be, as a practical matter, in the hands of about five

occurring ways of thinking must be replaced to make good international economic policy; the same rule may hold domestically: Charles Kindleberger, "International Public Goods without International Government," *American Economic Review* 76, no. 1 (1986).

Yet, given the growth of technologies of freedom, it is difficult to maintain that citizens are entrapped, brainwashed, and manipulated when they are choosing among many competing alternatives.

For example, beginning in February 2000, WBBM (Chicago) tried an experiment to convert its 10PM local news show into a journalistically serious program. In three months it lost almost all of its market share (to 8% v. 41% for its two rivals) and by July it was below 6%, when the experiment was cancelled. Two recent critics, interpreting the five-month experiment, suggest a brainwashing explanation of the failure, that the viewing audience had become so accustomed to a diet of junk food journalism and its comforting but superficial picture of the world Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001) xii . However, the accustomed to the diet theory does not explain why engagement with serious journalism - to which people would have been accustomed in earlier decades - would decline in the first place. At the moment, technologies of freedom theory seems the superior explanation: given a clear choice and five-months exposure, only about 5% of the viewing audience in Chicago in 2000 wanted to spend their 10PM slot viewing serious hard-hitting local news.

Chapter 7

million self-selected people.¹¹ Although (discussed below) the number might become larger if there is a new dimension of opportunity for worthwhile engagement.¹²

2. Washington Politics and the Internet

Never write when you can call; never call when you can personally visit; never talk when you can whisper; and never whisper when you can wink.

- Senator Russell Long¹³

The same initial inferences can be made about elected representatives in Washington. Today, the new communication technologies are used competitively by professional astro-turf

¹¹ It may be enough. See: Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2000).

¹² One splendid example of a new idea, for the niche market of citizens and professionals interested in health policy, is the Kaiser Family Foundation's, www.kaisernetwork.org. Their project combines an online CSPAN for health policy, well-organized and targeted to health policy professionals, with overview and comparative databases for each state, permitting citizens to review local issues and performance in a way that is not easy for citizens to discover via local newspapers.

¹³ Quoted: Sheila Burke, "Some Cautionary Notes on the 'Virtual State'," in *Democracy.Com? Governance in a Networked World*, ed. Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph Nye, *Visions of Governance for the 21st Century* (Hollis, New Hampshire: Hollis Publishing Company, 1999), 168.

Chapter 7

lobbyists to generate a new and extraordinary volume of grassroots feedback messages about pending issues using email lists and traditional methods to generate letters, e-mail messages, telephone calls, Op-Ed pieces in local papers that can be faxed to Congressmen, etc. By normal lobbying standards, huge numbers of Americans are being alerted and contacting their representatives in Washington quickly and cheaply. In 1998, for example, members of the House of Representatives received 20 million e-mail messages; by 2000 they were receiving 48 million/year, climbing at about 1 million/month.¹⁴ Although (as Russell Long's observation, above, about effective lobbying suggests) it is not clear that the extraordinary volume and efficiency of low-cost democratic feedback has much political effect.

C. News Media

Finally, as we saw in chapter three (pp. xx - xx) the for-profit broadcast news media already have made a series of conscious choices about their declining civic role at the national, state, and local levels. There have been extensive, thoughtful, and impassioned critiques of these decisions by political theorists and journalists themselves, with no evidence that the arguments are

¹⁴ Michael Totty, "Get out the Vote," *Wall Street Journal*, April 15 2002. In the past, Senators and Congressmen could roughly gauge the extent and intensity of feeling about an issue by the number of people who took the trouble to contact them. Now, when tens of thousands of messages arrive and Op-Ed pieces about pending legislation suddenly appear in newspapers in the home district, it is difficult to know what is afoot. (A mixed blessing: Given the new tidal waves of communications, the benefits of campaign contributions to secure a personal hearing may be enhanced.)

Chapter 7

changing the choices.¹⁵ PBS's 1.5% market share aside, for the future of democracy the current watered-down, hyped-up, and commercial-dense evening national news; the infotainment non-news of local television journalism; and a democratic discourse via sound-bites and loud, policy argument television with opinionated people, forever - is about as good as it will get.

And it may get worse, in the US and other countries.

3.) Good News for Interested People

However, a final piece of good news is that, with new broadband technology, I think better options can be created specifically for democracy and a new role for citizens.¹⁶ They involve applying

¹⁵ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, Fifth ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
Robert M. Entman and W. Lance Bennett, eds., *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy, Communication, Society and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*, Paperback ed. (New York: Vintage, 1997).
Lawrence K. Grossman, *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age* (New York: Penguin, 1996).
Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*, ed. Benjamin I. Page, *American Politics and Political Economy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Robert Waterman McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (New York: New Press, 2000).

¹⁶ See Dahl's discussion of improved information systems for

Chapter 7

principles from earlier chapters: identifying niche markets; an outcome-oriented framework; creating a vision of a new role; using the Internet's interactive capacities; organizing new coalitions to accelerate public-policy discussions.¹⁷

II. Proposal

The questions today are not so much how the Internet will change political life, but rather, what might motivate more people to see themselves as citizens of a democracy . . .

- Peter Dahlgren¹⁸

democracy in: Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989) 338-41.

¹⁷ The originality of my proposal is to focus is on question-posing, empirical research, and thinking. Concerning other, more traditional, deliberative processes that also could be served, see: Daniel Yankelovich, *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991). Amy Guttman and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Peter Dahlgren, "The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication," in *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, ed. W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, *Communication, Society and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 53. See also: McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* 119-85. The problem is no longer, as Pool and Shulman suggested, newsmen's fantasies but the fantasies of the people managing the news media and Internet portals. See: Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Four Unnatural

Chapter 7

Proposal: A national network of Evidence-Based Policy Centers, to be established by the National Science Foundation through renewable competitive grants in each area of high priority for national progress. The Centers will receive questions from American citizens that can improve public policy, assign priorities, and develop research programs to answer them.

- These Centers will receive nominations of questions from Governors and mayors; city, state, and county agencies; and any other organization or citizen with civic interests - e.g., advocacy or beneficiary groups, parents, individuals. The only stipulation will be that the submitter have plans to use the answer.

- The questions can involve surveys of current research literature or original research.

- The Centers will, through advisory panels, prioritize this open list of questions. And they will organize the necessary resources and begin to answer them.

Here are several examples:

A. Examples

- Today, if a local school board wants to know how much reducing class size below $N=15$ will increase educational achievement in grades K-3, they do not have the resources to answer the question. But with the new on-line Centers, their

Institutions and the Road Ahead (1983)," in *Politics in Wired Nations: Selected Writings of Ithiel de Sola Pool*, ed. Lloyd S. Etheredge (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

Chapter 7

question will be linked automatically to a national coalition of agencies, officials, civic groups, and parents who also want an answer to this question; a focused research program will get underway.

- Suppose the local school Board also has heard that full-day (instead of half-day) kindergarten can increase educational attainment of disadvantaged students in K-3. It also can ask for a review of the evidence (and new research), compare costs, and decide whether it is better to invest money in all-day kindergarten, or whether it is better to put their money toward reducing the student/teacher ratio below 15.

- Many small towns, mid-size cities, and counties license cable television operators. But they have little expertise to understand the economics of the industry and their options for broadband upgrades. If leaders submit questions about what other locales are doing and being charged, an Evidence-Based Policy Center could create an online clearinghouse to benefit everyone.¹⁹

- Each year, US News & World Report uses federal Medicare statistics, computes risk adjusted survival rates, and evaluates the best hospitals in the country for treatment of different medical conditions. A state Senator can ask if low rankings for several hospitals in his state are scientifically reliable - and, if so, for a summary of research about high priority steps to provide the best health care in all areas of his

¹⁹ National Science and Telecommunications Board, *Broadband: Bringing Home the Bits* (Washington, DC: National Research Council, 2002) 206-15.

Chapter 7

state. If the question has a sufficiently high rank (by criteria discussed below) a research program will get underway and answer his question.

B. Civic Knowledge as a Public Goods Problem

Today, public policy research suffers from what is called a public goods problem. Traditionally, this has meant that certain kinds of activities that benefit many people in the long-run (e.g., research) will be under-funded in a market economy because any one actor could receive as income (and afford to pay for) only a fraction of the total value. There must be a collective actor - for example, government (using taxation) - to assure the higher level of public funding that, rationally, reflects the total benefits that can be obtained.²⁰

But this theory of public goods does not answer the political question: What level of government and specific agency should be responsible to pay the bill? The benefit of knowing the answers to many common questions in public policy (e.g., Should we reduce class size below $N=15$ in grades K-3, cited above) extends beyond the benefits to one local school district or one state. Our state and local governments will tend to under-fund public policy research, too. For rationality, and an optimum investment in progress, there has to be a political market mechanism to raise and organize these questions, and indicate to Congress the shared interests and political support within its national purview.

²⁰ Richard Cornes and Todd Sandler, *The Theory of Externalities, Public Goods and Club Goods*, Second ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Chapter 7

C. Criteria for Rankings

Centers will receive, organize, and rank the questions by five criteria. The questions and their rankings will be open and posted on the Internet:

- the commonality of the question;
- the potential benefits of knowing the answer;
- the existence of unexplained variations, new ideas and technologies, or theoretical disputes suggesting that research can be productive;
- the availability of existing research that can be drawn upon;
- the cost of answering the question that makes it prohibitive for local or state government to undertake the research themselves.

D. Annual and Measurable Progress

Annually, with their budget requests to Congress, the Centers will submit their prioritized lists. They also will submit quantitative measures of their rate of scientific progress, by categories similar to reporting the development and testing of new drugs: For example, the number of new questions received; the total number of questions awaiting research funds; the number of questions undergoing evidence review; the number that have moved to the next stage and are currently undergoing exploratory or large N definitive studies; the number of questions answered during the previous year.

Chapter 7

Congress will hear the questions, know their political constituencies, and have an estimate of how many years it will require to answer each question at current funding levels. And the public will know which questions are being answered, and the list of policy-relevant questions that Congress has decided to defer.

E. Benefits

The peer-reviewed analyses of evidence and new results will be available to the public through Web sites. Centers also will receive federal funds to organize research conferences and mini-channels, via Internet broadband, to present their answers, showcase best practices, and support the creative process.

We are a nation with many well-educated citizens. But minds that have mastered calculus have almost nothing to work with in public policy. With the decline of television journalism, being involved in public policy can seem to many citizens like an unappealing invitation to be involved a world of loud, policy-argument television. As a new role for citizens, an opportunity to ask good questions - and with an NSF science partner to do the work - can start to reduce alienation, increase participation, and get the cobwebs out.

As a nation, we probably under-utilize the brain-power and experience of our citizens at the level of state and local government. Many people have managerial and executive experience and are accustomed to ask good questions about hypotheses and evidence, or about the cost-benefit justifications for certain decisions. Governments agencies tend to act like geographic monopolies and are not subject to the Wal-Mart Effect: if California adopts new technology and eliminates long waiting lines for vehicle registrations and license renewals at its Department of Motor Vehicles, there is no competitive economic advantage that

Chapter 7

automatically will induce New York to the same upgrade. Thus, wherever citizens start to ask for the benchmarking of best practices, and how their local government compares, the answers may be a revelation and build an equivalent political mechanism for change.²¹

III. Seven Questions

1.) In your proposal, the cost to answer a question will not affect its priority. Why?

This is a judgment that should be left to Congress.

It is common, in the federal science budget, to appropriate a hundred million dollars or more to build particle accelerators that can answer high priority questions in theoretical physics or astronomy. If equally good questions can be answered about (for example) the best ways to teach reading skills to slow learners, or the evidence for environmental regulations, Congress may consider the money well-spent.

2.) Isn't it naive to think that research and thinking are going to solve political conflicts that are about ideology and self-interest?

I do not think we should prejudge the potential impact of good research and learning.²² In America, only a few people are

²¹ W. Dale Compton, "Benchmarking," in *Manufacturing Systems: Foundations of World-Class Practice*, ed. Joseph A. Heim and W. Dale Compton (Washington, DC: National Academy of Engineering, 1992).

²² For an overview re government learning rates: Lloyd S. Etheredge, "Government Learning: An Overview," in *Handbook of*

Chapter 7

ideologues - most are highly pragmatic. Historically, passionate ideological arguments have faded after there has been good empirical evidence to refine an understanding of the problem.

For example: The cause and prevention of the Plague engaged centuries of passionate, recycling, policy arguments. Conservatives argued that foreign influences brought the disease and they advocated quarantine. Liberals argued a miasmatic theory of bad and fetid air that was generated and accumulated in the low-lying areas of cities, without good sanitation, where the poor tended to live. Both schools, perhaps especially the liberal, produced social improvements (e.g., modern water and sanitation systems) but it was not until scientists carefully investigated the problem that a more refined understanding was possible, and the problem could be solved.²³

Political Behavior, ed. Samuel Long (New York: Plenum Press, 1981). A discussion of how liberal-conservative disagreements about economic policy might be usefully engaged by evidence: Lloyd S. Etheredge, "A Proposal for a Study of Leadership, Motivation, and Economic Growth. Discussion Paper Prepared for the Commission on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Education, National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council," (Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1990).

Lloyd S. Etheredge, "The Scientific Scandal of the 1980s," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994).

²³ Richard N. Cooper, "International Cooperation in Public Health as a Prologue to Macroeconomic Cooperation," in *Can Nations Agree? Issues in International Economic Cooperation*, ed. Richard N. Cooper, et al. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1989).

Chapter 7

- The independence of Evidence-Based Policy Centers should help to insulate the evaluation of hypotheses from partisan and interest-group pressures. The questions will also arise from (for example) state and local governments who want more workable and effective programs, and the answers will support a vigorous federalism. Thus, the project will avoid the implication that federally-funded research in social, behavioral, and economic sciences is linked to political agendas to expand the role of the federal government.

- The benchmarking of best practices also is a good, practical, non-ideological way to improve state and local governments that will have bipartisan support. To cite the example of Wal-Mart (~pp. , above): When a market-economy leader like Wal-Mart achieves a breakthrough in best practices, other companies also must improve or disappear. But governments are monopolies, and they do not have the signaling systems, rewards, and penalties of the market. Thus, citizens with management experience - who raise specific questions about benchmarking and best practices - are introducing an equivalent change mechanism for the public sector, that raises the bar, and organizes civic support for local upgrades.²⁴

3.) Why require that research questions be submitted by people with plans to use the results?

For the success of the project, it is important to show that it

²⁴ Elaine Ciulla Kamarck, "Globalization and Public Administration Reform," in *Governance in a Globalizing World*, ed. Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue, *Visions of Governance for the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000). Carla O'Dell, C. Jackson Grayson Jr., and Nilly Essaides, *If Only We Knew What We Know: The Transfer of Internal Knowledge and Best Practice* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

Chapter 7

produces usable results. (And the National Science Foundation already supports basic research.)

After the Centers are underway, it could be worthwhile to permit people to ask questions that they believe should have practical implications, even if they do not have plans to use the answer themselves. High school students are on the verge of becoming voters. It might be very interesting, for a high school civics class project, for students to develop a list of high-priority public policy questions that they could forward to the relevant Center.

4.) Why use the National Science Foundation?

If we are going to rely upon the answers, the Centers should operate with the highest standards of scientific integrity. And the research strategies to answer the high-priority questions should be the best we can devise.

5.) Who can apply for grants to operate Centers?

The application process should be open to for-profit research firms, as well as academic centers, state government research institutes, or inter-governmental organizations (like the National Governors Association). Centers can develop expertise and take an active role to solicit questions (i.e., and build their research budgets and programs by serving wider constituencies). So long as the quality of the science is first-rate, leveraging the incentives of the private sector might be a good idea.²⁵

²⁵ The experience of the National Science Foundation and the academic world across the past fifty years is that answers to practical policy questions are not the principal interests and rewards of most academic social scientists.

Chapter 7

6.) Are there working examples?

Yes. The federal government already has experience with an analog to these Evidence-Based Policy Centers in medical research. These twelve Evidence-Based Practice Centers, funded by the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research in the US and Canada. They began in 1997, have received requests for more than 250 topics, and are providing a steady stream of reports to inform choices, and the (empirically-based) effectiveness and quality of care for the Medicare and Medicaid populations.²⁶

7.) Do political leaders care about evidence-based policy?

There is obvious merit to the concern, voiced by William Hazlitt at the beginning of this chapter, to understand and correct the causes that have rendered the moral and intellectual progress of mankind hitherto so slow, irregular, and uncertain.

The basic requirement for political success is the consent of the governed. Current cynicism about politicians' commitment to moral and intellectual progress can misread their motives. For example, the great ethnographer Sir James Frazer studied the link of raindance ceremonies and kingship/political power in primitive tribes. He was fascinated because, from today's scientific perspective, we know there was nothing to raindance ceremonies. Yet they reflected the political psychology of leadership and

²⁶ Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, AHCPR Fact Sheet: AHCPR's Evidence-based Practice Centers. (Rockville, MD: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, 1999). AHCPR Pub. No. 98-P005. Revised January 11, 1999. I am indebted to Lynn Etheredge for bringing the AHCPR model to my attention. The criteria for establishing priorities, used in this paper, draw upon the AHCPR model.

Chapter 7

followership in a pure form:

[I]n Africa the king has often been developed out of the public magician, and especially out of the rain-maker. . . but if the career of a magician and especially of a rainmaker offers great rewards to the successful practitioner of the art, it is beset with many pitfalls. . . for where the people firmly believe that he has it in his power to make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, and the fruits of the earth to grow, they naturally impute drought and dearth to his culpable negligence or willful obstinacy, and they punish him accordingly. Hence in Africa, the chief who fails to procure rain is often exiled or killed. . .

While imposture is inherent in the (overly) self-assured proclamations of leaders about what to do next, Frazer was optimistic that smart, self-interested politician/con artists would find ways to encourage thinking and research:

Certainly no men ever had stronger incentives in the pursuit of truth than these savage sorcerers. To maintain at least a show of knowledge was absolutely necessary: a single mistake detected might cost them their life. This no doubt led them to practice imposture for the purpose of concealing their ignorance; but it also supplied them with the most powerful motive for substituting a real for a sham knowledge; since, if you would appear to know anything, by far the best way is actually to know it . . . However justly we may . . . condemn the deception which they have practiced on mankind, the original institution of this class of men has, take it all in all, been productive of incalculable good for humanity. ²⁷

²⁷ Sir James G. Fraser, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and*

Chapter 7

- Bagdikian, Ben H. *The Media Monopoly*. Fifth ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997.
- Burke, Sheila. "Some Cautionary Notes on the 'Virtual State'." In *Democracy.Com? Governance in a Networked World*, edited by Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph Nye, 163-68. Hollis, New Hampshire: Hollis Publishing Company, 1999.
- Compton, W. Dale. "Benchmarking." In *Manufacturing Systems: Foundations of World-Class Practice*, edited by Joseph A. Heim and W. Dale Compton, 100-06. Washington, DC: National Academy of Engineering, 1992.
- Cook, Timothy E. *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Cooper, Richard N. "International Cooperation in Public Health as a Prologue to Macroeconomic Cooperation." In *Can Nations Agree? Issues in International Economic Cooperation*, edited by Richard N. Cooper, Barry J. Eichengreen, C. Randall Henning, Gerald Holtham and Robert D. Putnam, 178-254. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1989.
- Cornes, Richard, and Todd Sandler. *The Theory of Externalities, Public Goods and Club Goods*. Second ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Dahl, Robert A. *Democracy and Its Critics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Dahlgren, Peter. "The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication." In *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, edited by W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, 33-55. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Religion, One-volume abridgement of the 1928 edition. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1969) 71-72,99-100.

Chapter 7

- Downie Jr., Leonard, and Robert G. Kaiser. *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- Dyson, Esther. *Release 2.1: A Design for Living in the Digital Age*. Upgraded ed. New York: Broadway Books, 1998.
- Electronic Media. "Night-by-Night Nielsen Prime-Time Ratings for the Week of March 4-10." *Electronic Media* 2002, 22.
- Entman, Robert M., and W. Lance Bennett, eds. *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. Edited by W. Lance Bennett and Robert M. Entman, *Communication, Society and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Entman, Robert M., and Andrew Rojecki. *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Etheredge, Lloyd S. "Government Learning: An Overview." In *Handbook of Political Behavior*, edited by Samuel Long, 73-161. New York: Plenum Press, 1981.
- . "A Proposal for a Study of Leadership, Motivation, and Economic Growth. Discussion Paper Prepared for the Commission on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Education, National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council." Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1990.
- . "The Scientific Scandal of the 1980s." *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 534-39.
- Fallows, James. *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. Paperback ed. New York: Vintage, 1997.
- Fraser, Sir James G. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. One-volume abridgement of the 1928 edition. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1969.
- Galston, William. "(How) Does the Internet Affect Community? Some Speculations in Search of Evidence." In *Democracy.Com? Governance in a Networked World*, edited by Elaine Ciulla

Chapter 7

- Kamarck and Joseph Nye, 45-61 . Hollis, New Hampshire: Hollis Publishing Company, 1998.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 2000.
- Grossman, Lawrence K. *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age*. New York: Penguin, 1996.
- Guttman, Amy, and Dennis Thompson. *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Iyengar, Shanto. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Edited by Benjamin I. Page, *American Politics and Political Economy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- Kamarck, Elaine Ciulla. "Globalization and Public Administration Reform." In *Governance in a Globalizing World*, edited by Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue, 229-52. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000.
- Kindleberger, Charles. "International Public Goods without International Government." *American Economic Review* 76, no. 1 (1986): 1-13.
- Linder, Laura R. *Public Access Television: America's Electronic Soapbox*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999.
- McChesney, Robert Waterman. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. New York: New Press, 2000.
- National Science and Telecommunications Board. *Broadband: Bringing Home the Bits*. Washington, DC: National Research Council, 2002.
- Neuman, W. Russell. *The Future of the Mass Audience*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- . *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Chapter 7

- O'Dell, Carla, C. Jackson Grayson Jr., and Nilly Essaides. *If Only We Knew What We Know: The Transfer of Internal Knowledge and Best Practice*. New York: Free Press, 1998.
- People Weekly Almanac. *People Weekly Almanac 2002*. New York: Time, Inc., 2001.
- Pool, Ithiel de Sola. "Four Unnatural Institutions and the Road Ahead (1983)." In *Politics in Wired Nations: Selected Writings of Ithiel de Sola Pool*, edited by Lloyd S. Etheredge, 227-37. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1998.
- Porter, Roy. *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.
- Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Revised ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.
- Totty, Michael. "Get out the Vote." *Wall Street Journal*, April 15 2002, Online.
- Wilhelm, Anthony G. *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Wright, John W., ed. *The New York Times Almanac 2002*. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- Yankelovich, Daniel. *Coming to Public Judgment: Making Democracy Work in a Complex World*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991.