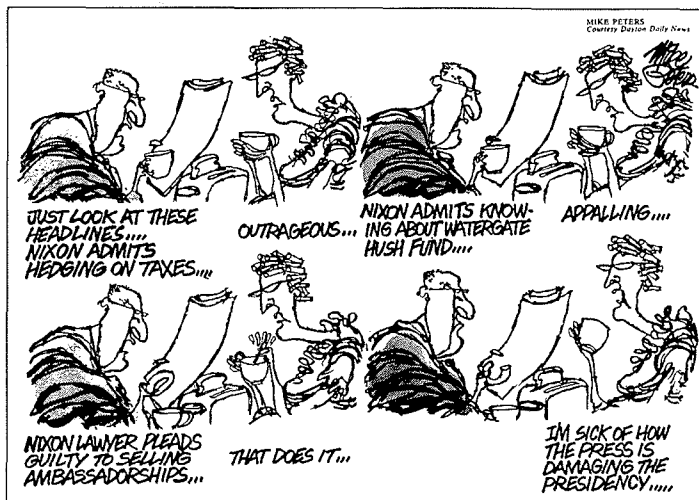


press as the enemy and on identifying it as a distinct power center in American life rather than as a representative of the public or a medium through which other power centers speak," Schudson says. In early 1970, Nixon's chief of staff H. R. Haldeman pushed to get out the story that his boss, the champion of the Silent Majority, had overcome the "great handicaps" he had on entering office, namely, in Haldeman's words, "the hostile press epitomized by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc., the hostile network commentators, the generally hostile White House press corps, the hostile Congress, etc."

As a result of the administration's attacks, Schudson argues, many Americans came to perceive the news media—whether admired or feared—as an independent source of power. And the perception of power is a form of power, especially "inside the Beltway." Journalists complained about the unfairness of attacks on the media but exulted in their newfound influence.

Today, the pumped-up image of the post-Wa-



The Nixon administration portrayed the news media as an independent and hostile power, and many Americans were persuaded.

tergate news media, Schudson says, serves the interests of both government and the news media. Political leaders can portray themselves as "unfairly besieged," and journalists are able to present themselves as "a brave and independent social force." Hidden from view, Schudson notes, is the mundane reality: "The relationship between public officials and the press in Washington is, for the most part, comfortable and cooperative."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

In Defense Of Objectivity

Objectivity seems an almost unimpeachable scholarly virtue, yet in recent years it has come under vehement attack in certain academic and intellectual circles. Postmodernist critics such as University of Illinois communications professor James Carey claim that the idea of objectivity rests on a false epistemology. Reality, they insist, is "socially constructed" and no "true" reality exists to which objective knowledge can correspond. Nonsense, says Judith Lichtenberg, a research scholar in the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy at the University of Maryland, College Park.

The postmodernist critics, she says, claim that "because different people and cultures em-

"Objectivity and Its Enemies" by Judith Lichtenberg, in *The Responsive Community* (Winter 1991-92), 714 Gelman Library, The George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. 20052.

ploy different categories and there is no way of deciding which framework better fits the world," objectivity is impossible. Yet the critics also claim that "particular stories or accounts of things perform an ideological function or represent the world in a partial or distorted way." These two claims are logically incompatible, Lichtenberg notes, since the charge of ideological bias implies "that other, better, more objective [views] are possible."

The assault on objectivity, she says, "threatens to discredit the possibility of knowledge by undermining even its most basic elements." Some questions, after all, do have definite right answers: "We ordinarily call these facts."

A Revival of Natural Law?

A Survey of Recent Articles

"There is in fact a true law—namely, right reason—which is in accordance with nature, applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal," declared Cicero (106–43 B.C.). Had the ancient orator—or Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas or John Locke or Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King, Jr.—testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, the concept of natural law that he shares with them might have received more respectful treatment from the senators and other critics.

Harvard's Laurence H. Tribe, writing in the *New York Times* (July 15, 1991), maintained that Thomas's "adherence to 'natural law' as a judicial philosophy could take the court in an even more troubling direction" than the rightward one in which it was headed. Yet a few years before, in criticizing Robert H. Bork, an earlier nominee to the Court, for his belief that constitutional interpretation must be based on the original intent of the Framers, Tribe had expressed pride in our "200-year-old tradition establishing that people retain certain unspecified fundamental rights that courts were supposed to discern and defend."

"When liberal justices still had a shot at five votes," notes recent Yale Law School graduate Jeff Rosen in the *New Republic* (Sept. 9, 1991), "liberals encouraged them to discover rights

not explicitly listed in the Constitution Now that the conservatives are in control, the prospect of judges pulling natural rights out of a hat suddenly has liberals scared." Earlier in this century, after all, conservative justices invoking natural rights restrained unions, struck down minimum-wage laws, and resisted FDR's New Deal.

Amherst's Hadley Arkes maintains in *Policy Review* (Spring 1992) that those "laissez-faire" jurists—including Rufus Peckham (1895–1909) and George Sutherland (1922–1938)—were "grand expounders of natural rights" in the great tradition of the American Founders. Despite their bad-guy image, Arkes says, the conservative judges seldom "failed to sustain regulations of business that were aimed at the safety of workers and the health of the public." Thus, although Peckham wrote the oft-derided opinion in *Lochner v. New York* (1905), wherein the court struck down a New York law that limited bakery employees to a 60-hour work week, he was nevertheless willing to act to protect workers in more hazardous occupations. In an 1898 case, he upheld regulations limiting working hours in underground mines to eight hours a day. "It was precisely because the judges understood the moral ground for the rights of property that they understood, with the same precision, the moral limits on the uses of property," Arkes says.

There are good reasons to question individuals' or institutions' claims of objectivity. Biases of various sorts do exist. "To believe in objectivity is not . . . to believe that anyone is

objective," Lichtenberg says. But we must assume "both the possibility and value of objectivity," if we have any hope of understanding the world.

Modern Islam

Often depicted as medieval, patriarchal, and unchanging, the Islamic world is beginning to experience dramatic cultural shifts.

Less than two decades ago, notes Fischer, director of Rice University's Center for Cultural Studies, music and sculpture and even chess were forbidden for Shi'ite believers in Iran; radio, television, and movies were considered instruments of corruption. Today, all those views have been swept away. Iran's Islamic government has supported classical Persian music

"Is Islam the Odd-Civilization Out?" by Michael M. J. Fischer, in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, (Spring 1992), 10951 W. Pico Blvd., 2nd Floor, Los Angeles, Calif. 90064.

and promoted public sculpture; chess is no longer condemned as a form of gambling. Film is an accepted and popular medium, and even Islamic fundamentalists are making use of modern communications technologies.

Fischer also sees signs of an emerging Muslim feminism. As literacy among women increases, more and more of them are coming to be able "to read the Koranic and *hadith* ('saying' that indicates authoritative precedent for Islamic law) literature for themselves and [to]