POLITICS AND DECEPTION

Ritual Deception:
A Window to the Hidden Determinants of Human Politics

John O. Beahrs   Oregon Health Sciences University, USA
                          Portland V.A. Medical Center, USA

Abstract. **Political leaders of all persuasions are known to make public statements of affiliative allegiance with more form than substance, and to disavow political motivations obvious to the public. Such "ritual deceptions" are better understood in the same light as social etiquette—as partly deceptive behaviors that help to bond individuals with conflicting interests. Those who are more open and honest are often punished, more for breaking unspoken rules and taboos than for the actual content revealed. The functions of ritual deception are explicated by sociobiological theory, and the process, by understanding hypnotic transactions. Political deceptions require the active collaboration of subjects, achieved through the same skills used by experienced hypnotists. Deceptive transactions are more likely to occur in internally traumatized societies, and occur along a continuum from ritual deception to overt disinformation. Examples are taken from recent American history. That the content of ritual deception is so close to full awareness suggests its value as a focal point, both for studying the hidden determinants within human politics, and for policy intervention when appropriate.**

John O. Beahrs is Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Oregon Health Sciences University and staff psychiatrist for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: 116A-OPC, Portland D.V.A. Medical Center, P.O. Box 1036, Portland, OR 97207, USA. His three books include *Limits of Scientific Psychiatry: The Role of Uncertainty in Mental Health* (Brunner/Mazel, 1986). Dr. Beahrs is a three-time recipient of the Milton H. Erickson Award for scientific writing in hypnosis, and has published extensively in strategic psychotherapy, evolutionary biology, forensic psychiatry, and political psychology. He is currently chairing the ad hoc Committee on Adult Delayed Recall, American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law.

DECEPTION IS TO DECEIVE or to mislead, causing others to accept as true or valid that which is false or invalid. Because the motives to deceive are so pressing, its practice so ubiquitous, and its effects on others so profound, punitive sanctions are needed to preserve accurate communication wherever social function requires it. Thus, we provide sanctions against scientific fraud, legal perjury, and clinical malingering (Rogers, 1988). At the same time, deception pervades the practice of human politics (Jamieson, 1992). A popular Russian saying is "Show me a politician, and I'll show you a liar."

Successful leaders and their subjects have long recognized the extent of political deception (Barnes, 1994), the strategic value of disinformation, and the humane value of "white lies" that shield others' feelings from harsh realities. Most contemporary scholars cast deception in a negative light, however, as an evil to be exposed, confronted, and interdicted (e.g., Bok, 1989; Ekman, 1992). The current American public, stung by elected leaders' recent betrayals of trust, tacitly accept this negative view.

Hence, it is disquieting to raise the possibility that *we, the people who are so often deceived, may be playing a role of active complicity in the process by which we feel so victimized*; so much so, that to practice deceit is probably required for a politician to achieve political success (Barnes, 1994). To explore this possibility, I will focus on a subgroup of political deceptions that are particularly interesting in two regards: one, the deceptions are so blatant that few if any are deceived; and two, at the same time, failure to enact them may nonetheless lead to major political damage. I refer to such transactions as "ritual deception."

Paradigmatic illustrations recently emerged from within each of America's major political parties. In the winter of

1990-91, Democratic senator George Mitchell launched a congressional investigation into alleged Republican skulduggery in an earlier campaign (1980), saying that he was pursuing this inquiry solely for objective interest, with no political motives whatsoever. A few months later, Republican president George Bush nominated Clarence Thomas, a comparatively inexperienced minority judge with conservative opinions, to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court—all the while saying with a straight face that the nominee was simply the "most qualified," denying either racial or political motives.

In neither instance were many people deceived, nor did they believe that others were; hence the ritualized quality of the claims and disclaimers. At the same time, however, we can easily imagine these leaders' fate had they been more open about what most could already presume. During the 1976 presidential campaign, for example, candidate Jimmy Carter had made only a casual passing reference to the desirability of "racial purity." This was taken widely to imply that he opposed interracial mixing, which in turn violated prevailing mores and taboos, touching off a maelstrom of charges like "racism" and "elitism" that nearly shipwrecked his campaign.

Carter immediately followed with a contrite apology, retraction, and denial of any racism. Why did this move succeed? If substantive content were what counts, given the wide acceptance of Freud's (1901) belief that parapraxes do reveal one's inner beliefs and motives, we would expect a subsequent retraction to mean little once the damage has been done. That it did appear to undo the damage, completely, suggests that ritualized elements may have been more important. Whatever one might now infer about Carter's worldview, his retraction had paid respect to those he had offended, and provided assurance that he would now "play by the rules." The purpose of this article is to understand what these rules are, how they arise, how they manifest themselves, and what functions they serve.

From such phenomena it is possible to presume, first, that a degree of deception may be essential to getting along in the social-political milieu; second, that the success of the deception will correlate only weakly with the degree to which others are actually deceived; and third, that the populace itself plays a major contributing role. Subtle but pervasive contractual elements may contribute to the process: that is, tacit agreements among the populace as to what can and cannot be discussed openly (e.g., what is "politically correct").

To elaborate these hypotheses requires a multidisciplinary study of the many, often-subtle roles that deception plays in human sociality. This is extraordinarily difficult, and for many reasons. One is confusion over what constitutes deception. In a "half truth," one deceives without conveying false information (as in cigarette ads that avoid such telling images as chronic emphysema and portray smokers enjoying the great outdoors). In ritual deception, on the other hand, one conveys false information without

deceiving. Some theorists, therefore, use the term "deception" only when its effect is willfully planned (although intentionality has proven difficult to identify reliably through behavioral indices—Hyman, 1989). Another reason is multidetermination. It is difficult to rule out alternative explanations, and when these alternative explanations are plausible, it is difficult to determine whether they are genuine alternatives to hypothesized deception or simply additional and complementary factors.

When *self*-deception is implicated, there is a third difficulty: the paradox that one person is simultaneously both the deceiving agent and the deceived target. Sartre (1953) argued that in order to render an idea "unconscious," one must first be aware of it, and Spanos (1986) presented strong evidence that to experience "involuntary" action requires willful strategic planning. It appears that in order to deceive oneself actively, one must be able to hold both the deceptive false belief and the disclaimed true belief simultaneously (Fingarette, 1969; Sackheim and Gur, 1985; Werth and Flaherty, 1986; Lockard and Paulhus, 1988; Mitchell, 1993).

Despite these difficulties, independent lines of data suggest that shared deceptions do occur, that they contribute to social cohesion and political process, and that they do not always require that the parties be deceived factually. These data include deceptive rituals in everyday living, findings from evolutionary biology, and the prevalence of hypnotic-like transactions in which the parties are both deceived and not deceived. I will discuss each of these in turn, and synthesize their common factors into a number of hypotheses about when ritual deceptions are likely to be used, and when they will or will not be effective in fulfilling their agents' particular agendas.

In politics, "ritual deception" occurs at one end of a broad continuum of deceptive behaviors, and can be understood only within this broader context. Through its transparency, ritual deception provides a window to glimpse those otherwise hidden determinants within our leaders, ourselves, and our political process—determinants that are usually off-limits or "taboo."

Ritual Deception in Everyday Living

Common experience corroborates the profound role of deceptive rituals in simply "getting along." Shaking hands with an adversary, for example, provides a reassuring denial of hostility. Even when aggressive intent is readily evident, failure to implement the ritual is nonetheless a flagrant social violation that warrants hostile retribution in its own right. If a suitor "tells all" to a prospective mate on their first date, she will probably reject him as a fool, and even wonder what he is hiding! If one replies too honestly to another's request for advice, one risks irreparable damage to the relationship for lack of tact, or inconsideration of the other's feelings.

To avoid such improprieties requires a considerable degree of deception, which often has a ritualized quality. While

its content varies between eras and between specific cultures, there are some inclusive rules—discussed widely in popular works like Carnegie's (1936) *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and in scholarly theses like Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

One should portray oneself as a leader, one who can make things happen—better for good than for ill. One should emphasize areas of content in which all the relevant parties can agree or agree to disagree (Goffman, 1959). This precept implies a need to utilize the unifying myths that bind people together, like scientific paradigms (Kuhn, 1970), religion (Wenegrat, 1990), or prevailing mores (e.g., political correctness). One should grant even higher priority to making others feel important: respected, appreciated, taken seriously as autonomous agents (Carnegie, 1936). One must avoid directly arguing with, confronting, or criticizing others. However, if confronting is unavoidable, its negative impact can be mitigated by employing indirectness and maximum respect, with provision for face-saving. Orwell (1946) notes that vague and euphemistic language styles also serve this purpose, and thus these are widely used and abused in politics.

Implicit in these precepts is a principle often taken for granted, but profoundly paradoxical: such instrumental behaviors as making others feel important by showing interest must be fully "sincere" or "genuine." This can be interpreted either cynically or positively (Goffman, 1959): either that interpersonal success requires exceptional skill at faking "genuineness," or that interpersonal success requires playing "good theatre" so effectively that one *actually experiences* what one is trying to project, and others respond in kind. In the latter case, one has actually created a new interpersonal reality.

It is possible that the very essence of interpersonal reality is deceptive. This hypothesis finds support from the burgeoning science of evolutionary biology. Contrary to common understanding, deception plays a profound role not only in furthering selfish interests at others' expense, but also in maintaining the social cooperation upon which all societies depend.

Deception and the Biology of Cooperation

Deception is ubiquitous in nature, with camouflage and mimicry widespread throughout the living kingdoms. Both survival and reproductive fitness may depend on an organism's ability to deceive a predator or prey; hence, animal signals are shaped by natural selection to include misleading as well as accurate information (Dawkins and Krebs, 1978). This ability involves the tripartite functions of military "intelligence": (1) to know others' actions and intentions, (2) to withhold comparable information about oneself, and sometimes, (3) to supplant these with counterfactual "disinformation" (Watzlawick, 1976). Selective pressures favor both the ability to deceive and the ability to detect deception

All individuals in a group share two opposing pressures: to cooperate overtly and to pursue self-serving goals covertly. If one can betray another's cover, one is equally vulnerable to meeting the same fate

by others. Co-evolutionary "arms races" between these complementary skills may have contributed to the evolution of complex mentation (Trivers, 1985).

By the advent of hominids, the primary force driving natural selection had shifted from external predation to competition from hostile groups of other hominids (Humphrey, 1976). Cooperation now had to arise in a milieu in which the material and genetic interests of its members conflicted, more than in any other species. This led to a fundamental tension between pressures to cooperate with others, and to seek maximum advantage for oneself and one's kin at others' relative expense. Presence of a common threat increases the relative domain of shared interest; hence, the well-known unifying effect of an external enemy (Volkan, 1985).

Within an in-group, cooperative behavior among unrelated individuals depends on reciprocity (Trivers, 1985), which can be either direct (Axelrod, 1984) or indirect (Alexander, 1987). In the latter, an individual provides benefits to another without any expected return; but in so doing, the individual is observed by third parties as a desirable interactant, and is thereby rendered more likely to be chosen for receipt of their own similar beneficence. One is also treated better in proportion to one's "status." This arises from others' perception of both efficacy and altruism (i.e., "good person"), a combination that Alexander (1987) terms "beneffectance."

Selective pressures to project a beneficent image become so potent that blatantly self-serving activities must be concealed from others. If hidden from oneself as well, they are less likely to be betrayed by nonverbal slips or incongruities. *A degree of self-deception is favored whenever this protects one's deceptions of others from detection by making them more internally consistent* (Trivers, 1985; Alexander, 1987). Self-deception is also enhanced by deceiving others (Baumeister, 1993), leading to a self-reinforcing interdependency between these processes.

Selective pressures for self-deceit will then coexist with ever-present pressures for accurate awareness (Trivers, 1985), leading to an adaptive compromise that is consistent with the paradox of self-deception described earlier: that one is deceiver and deceived both at once. This process is also consistent with Goffman's (1959) conclusion that self-presentation is "good theatre" in an interpersonal context,

and Mitchell's (1993) observation that "pretense" is closely associated with actively deceiving self and others.

Even more important, when partly deceptive self-presentations escape from awareness, the resulting nonvolition renders them more trustworthy. The agent is now perceived by both self and others as "genuine," a truly "good person" as opposed to "manipulator." When successful, many autonomous strivings now lie concealed within an "unconscious," whose yet-purposeful actions are now experienced and often respected by others as "involuntary" (Beahrs, 1991).

Why so many humans appear to be so gullible, or easily deceived, is not yet explained. With deceit having evolved to such prodigious levels of sophistication, we can expect that its complementary skill, detection, will have done likewise (Trivers, 1985). If that is so, *human gullibility may more likely be a surface phenomenon that conceals active complicity in the deceit*; that is, the target perceives the agent's machinations accurately, but *acts as if deceived*. This possibility is supported by the observed efficacy of ritual deception. Frans de Waal (1989) has observed what may be an evolutionary precursor of this dynamic in nonhuman primates: two warring chimpanzees were able to reconcile while "saving face" after one suddenly looked away and began hooting loudly at a presumably fictitious object or organism, and the other then joined in the demonstrating.

How this capacity evolved can be understood through appreciating the fact that all individuals in a group share two opposing pressures: to cooperate overtly and to pursue self-serving goals covertly. If one can betray another's cover, one is equally vulnerable to meeting the same fate. If one instead obeys the rules of direct reciprocity and respects others' deceptions, one's own are more likely to be respected in turn. These unspoken truths are reflected in the Golden Rule, in the proverb "people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," and in the well-known though covert ethic not to "rat on" one's buddies in the military. One grants others a limited domain for autonomous skulduggery in order that one's own skulduggery will also be held inviolate. This tacit contract creates a new common interest. Shared deceptions of self and others thereby contribute to social cooperation.

As tacit contracts extend to ever larger groups, unspoken rules emerge that specify what can be discussed openly, and what must be concealed. The former become a society's unifying ideals, manifested in prevailing mores like contemporary "political correctness"; the latter, discordant driving processes that are relatively off-limits or "taboo" (Beahrs, 1991, 1992b). "Idealism" and "realism" emerge, and stand in a variable tension with one another that parallels the evolved tension between the "conscious" and "unconscious" in individuals. Realism is often punished when prevailing images are threatened, putting a premium on deceptive communications that minimize such threat.

By virtue of their emotional force, resistance to change, and consensual validation, *collective self-deceptions actually become real*—a new type of "psychological reality" that obeys its own type of "causal rules," of motivated intentionality, rather than of physical substance (Dennett, 1988). Within this new reality, structures are highly context-dependent (Spanos, 1986) and can be altered profoundly by how they are defined, framed, or "reframed" (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974; Beahrs, 1991, 1992a).

Concurrent with these processes is the episodic occurrence of forceful action: for example, limit-setting for individual violators (Friedman, 1992), interdiction of an aggressor (Manchester, 1988), and the dominance struggles with manipulation of strategic alliances that are observed within all primate societies (de Waal, 1989). In addition, in-group cooperation is enhanced by scapegoating outsiders (Volkan, 1985), which may lead to deceptive devaluation of out-groups and increased potential for conflict.

How much of this splitting can be mitigated is simply not known. Among primates, reconciliation between combatants is likely to occur only if alliances shift (Harcourt, 1988), a new common threat emerges (Alexander, 1987), or one party attains clear dominance—with the victor then reaching out to earn the cooperative esteem of his or her new constituency (de Waal, 1989). At this point, there is a re-equilibration, in which shared self-deceptions readapt to support the new status quo.

Hypnotic Transactions and Their Analogues

The preceding observations and predictions from evolutionary biology suggest that (1) deception of others is often accompanied by deception of self and vice versa, (2) targets are willingly deceived and reciprocally deceive the agents, (3) agents gain in status through this process, (4) agents' and targets' responses are mutually self-reinforcing, (5) new psychosocial realities arise in this process, and (6) in all parties more accurate awareness is apt to remain present at levels that are hidden (unconscious, taboo) but still accessible. Data gathered from over two centuries of experimental research in hypnosis both substantiate and enhance understanding of these phenomena (Sheehan and Perry, 1976).

In hypnotic transactions, a "hypnotist" develops a heightened affiliative bonding or "rapport" with a "subject," and within this context, channels the subject's attention to the exclusion of other stimuli, to the point that the subject is likely to experience the hypnotist's suggestions as a powerful experiential reality (Gill and Brenman, 1959). For example, one may feel one's hand "just lifting" all by itself, see complex hallucinatory scenes, or undergo painless surgery.

The hypnotist enjoys an exhilarating sense of guiding and controlling, while the subject experiences a comparable sense of nonvolition that may be equally satisfying. Both are illusory, however. Hidden beneath the hypnotist's illusion of control is an utter dependency on the subject's response for what to do next; and hidden beneath the subject's nonvolition is fully intact awareness and intentionality. The subject purposefully lifts a hand, for example, but hides the

awareness and volition from him/herself; and at a hidden level that can be accessed, the surgery patient fully feels the pain and suffers (Hilgard, 1977). These illusions reinforce one another in both parties, like a *folie à deux* (Beahrs, 1992a). In a very real sense that can be experimentally demonstrated, each party is both hypnotizing and being hypnotized by the other (Erickson, 1980).

Effective hypnotists develop strategies to heighten the illusory perceptions. First, one "suggests" what the subject is likely to already experience, guides him or her to other easily experienced imaginations, and as the subject's response permits, progresses to more "difficult" suggestions that encompass almost the gamut of potential alterations in volition, perception, cognition, and recall. These are associated with the hypnotist's words, establishing a link that takes on its own momentum.

Close examination, however, shows that a hypnotic response requires the full collaboration of the subject, at least at hidden levels; that is, *it is still the subject who actually makes things happen.* Knowing this, an expert hypnotist accepts whatever resistant behavior a subject presents, redefines it as an acceptable response, thereby gaining rapport and ability to redirect or utilize it. Whenever possible, suggestions are made indirectly: for example, "don't go into too deep a trance" implies deep enough; "take as long as you need" implies no more time than is needed, and often abbreviates the procedure. So reframed, subjects find less to resist, and feel that their basic autonomy is more genuinely respected (Erickson, Rossi, and Rossi, 1976). When their hidden potentials are cast in new light, subjects feel safer from internal and external taboos.

To an observer, what transpires can seem so elegant that the hypnotist is often accorded the status of a "master." Through this enhanced status, *what began as illusory power can then become real power*—the ability to control social events. The subject can reap equally tangible gain, e.g., securing relief from punitive responsibility and affiliative support from a dominant other. When mutually legitimized, these deceptions have actually become real at the psychological and interpersonal level, and follow the quasi-causal rules of the "intentional idiom" (Dennett, 1988). The new "realities" can then become potent determinants of subsequent events.

"Skeptical" researchers present strong experimental evidence that hypnotic phenomena are not unique to a special state, but are inseparable from the influencing communications and illusory experiences that pervade everyday living (Barber, 1972; Spanos, 1986). This implies that shared self-deception, in the form of hypnotic-like transactions, pervades most interpersonal communication—as evolutionary theory predicts. Along these lines, Freud (1920) considered hypnosis to be inseparable from other mutual influence relationships like love, religious experience, and psychotherapeutic transference. All involve shared self-deceptions in an affiliative context, and lead to altered cognition and perception. Similar processes occur both in psychotherapy

(Haley, 1963) and in politics (Post, 1986). They are increased and rigidified when the actors have been heavily traumatized—individually and/or collectively.

Traumatized Societies

Adaptive deception of self and others is heightened by psychological traumatization (Beahrs, 1990). A beaten subordinate, for example, may secure nurturant support and avoid further retribution by convincing dominant organisms of illness. This is best accomplished by actually experiencing its symptoms; hence, natural selection for the capacity to become neurotic (Nesse, 1990). More broadly, this mechanism may help organisms cope with subordinate status (Hartung, 1988). Potential dominants often use a reciprocal strategy, legitimizing subordinates' illusory impairments and becoming caregivers. Even in some nonhuman primate groups, subordinates have gained protected status by feigning illness, and caregivers have enhanced their dominance status by protecting the ill and injured (Troisi and McGuire, 1990). Since willful lying is so heavily punished, the pressure for trauma-driven shared self-deceptions is pushed to the point that their content is heavily defended.

Formerly traumatized individuals demonstrate heightened capacity for deception of self and others, manifested by higher hypnotizability scores (Spiegel, Hunt, and Dondershine, 1988). When these people become psychiatric patients, legal, clinical, and scientific research data show that hidden beneath their symptomatic impairments are impressive competencies that are retained (Beahrs, 1994). When revealed as competent, however, they often punish the betrayer of illusions with intense feeling and traumatizing behavior (Eckstaedt, 1989). Avoidance of emotional assault, plus the increased status given to beneficent healers, pushes caregivers toward legitimizing illness behavior under guise of "treatment" (Beahrs, 1992a, 1994). Those who hold contrary views are likely to be branded as common enemies by both the traumatized individual and other caregivers.

This type of process can occur on a large scale in societies that have been collectively traumatized, and can lead to heightened intrasocietal polarization. According to Post, such groups are vulnerable to charismatic leader-follower relationships in which one "is reminded of the relationship between hypnotist and subject" (1986:682). Observers likened Hitler, for example, to "a hypnotist who placed his entire audience into a trance" during mass rallies; and who also appeared to be in a trance himself, "mesmerized by the enraptured responses of his mesmerized followers." Without needy followers who *actively seek* to be deceived, "the charismatic leader would be nothing but an empty shell" (Post, 1986:682-83).

Each party helps the other to avoid reopening psychological wounds (Post, 1986); one does so by buttressing an initially illusory grandiose self-image with very real power,

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and the other, by finding security in support and guidance from a dominant other (Fromm, 1941). As also occurs in self-reinforcing healing groups and cults, both parties further maintain their illusions by demonizing out-groups that can include external enemies, those who confront their myths, and other scapegoats.

Hypnotic-like leader-follower relationships can also be reparative, as opposed to destructive (Post, 1986). One example is Ataturk, who, like Hitler, took control of a nation traumatized by defeat in the First World War and subsequent turmoil, but who instead galvanized his nation into a new cohesive national identity (Volkan and Itzkowitz, 1984).

A model for how such positive relationships can evolve is provided by skilled therapists' methods for dealing with traumatized clients who are vulnerable to self-reinforcing healing cults. Instead of reinforcing clients' dependency needs, effective therapists access clients' hidden strengths and hold them increasingly accountable (Halleck, 1990). To avoid violating trauma-driven taboos requires that therapists use their hypnotic skills to shift the level of rapport away from clients' impairments to their more real but concealed strengths. Reframing is often the key: "resistances" can be defined as assertions of autonomy, for example, and reframed as vital but misdirected assets rather than liabilities (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974). When clients perceive their misdirected strengths more positively, they feel less need to deny them and are better able to utilize them (Beahrs et. al., 1992). When political leaders do likewise, their subjects become less dependent and more autonomous. Through mutual respect for one another's autonomous domains, society can become more cooperative and cohesive.

It is possible to make some predictions about how deceptions will be employed by political leaders and their subjects in collectively traumatized societies. Pure ritual deception is likely to be used more frequently in an internally conflicted society without a clear common enemy. In such a milieu, we can expect an increase in trauma-driven single-issue "grievance groups" (e.g., anti-abortion, gay rights, abused women, traumatized veterans, victimized minorities, and so forth). As these proliferate, it becomes increasingly difficult to support one without offending others. This influences leaders to use ritualistic euphemisms to avoid conflict. The cost of this avoidance is that it becomes increasingly difficult to address or to solve social problems. As this paralysis of

social action occurs more and more, grievance groups become a "new sovereignity" (Steele, 1992).

When people are able to agree on a common enemy against which to unite, hypnotic-like in-groups are more likely to acquire cohesive power. These can be destructive or reparative. Destructive leaders use overt disinformation to selectively reinforce their subjects' perceived weakness and resulting dependency. To sustain leaders' claims to absolute authority usually requires a common enemy. If not already present, one will be created. Subjects play an enabling role that is active but often covert.

Reparative leaders selectively elicit their subjects' formerly hidden autonomous strengths, using ritual deception to respect sensitivities, and selective attention with positive reframing to achieve consensus. Leaders' authority is enhanced by an external enemy, but does not require one. Subjects' vital role is openly acknowledged and their consent sought.

Internal conflicts nonetheless occur, and may become intractable when the parties cast the same issue in irreconcilable terms (Kriesberg, Northrup, and Thorson, 1989). Some seemingly intractable conflicts can be mitigated by pure reframing alone, even without any use of deception. During the Nazi occupation, for example, Danish authorities avoided either persecuting Jews or being punished for not doing so by the simple device of asking *all* citizens to wear the Star of David, thereby transforming the whole context. Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) give other historical examples.

When intractable conflicts cannot be reconciled, forceful action may become inevitable. As leaders move toward taking decisive action, their deceptive strategies move away from pure ritual deception or pure reframing, toward deliberate disinformation and the construction of specific false realities in one's competitors (Watzlawick, 1976). At the same time, it is often pivotal to overturn inhibitory deceptive mores among one's supporters; e.g., those that led to the Allies' tragic delay in forcefully confronting Hitler's Axis (Manchester, 1988). Johnson (in press) notes how war leaders use reframing to increase patriotic sentiment.

Deceptive Behavior within Human Politics

Deception in human politics occurs along a continuum from ritual deception, in which few if any are fooled, to the overt disinformation that is so often pivotal to the outcome of warfare (Watzlawick, 1976). Rarely, if ever, does either extreme exist in isolation. Ritual deception, although transparent, renders subjects more vulnerable to disinformation by impeding their ability to self-correct their own beliefs. This occurs through obfuscation of information flow, which also motivates politicians to use vague, sloppy language (Orwell, 1946). Many factors contribute to whether or not these actions are effective—that is, whether they succeed in furthering the agent's political status and agenda.

First, *successful political leaders are likely to use ritual deception to enhance their image of efficacy and beneficence, and to preserve a window of doubt in their favor.* Building on one's record of prior accomplishments, one can inflate others' perception of one's potency through such ritualistic maneuvers as redefining some ongoing change as if resulting from one's own efforts, or appointing a high-level committee to investigate a random tragedy or uncorrectable problem.

Building on prior good works, one also inflates one's image of beneficence by nonspecific positive self-attributions (e.g., one who can act decisively while keeping an open mind, who genuinely cares about one's constituency, is a cooperator, good family man, etc.). Even when known factual and historical data have already contradicted these attributions, to project the image effectively nonetheless often leads to a successful election outcome (Ekman, 1992; Jamieson, 1992).

Effective ritual deception also preserves a "window of doubt" in the agent's favor, and avoids planting seeds of negative doubt that might gradually undermine his or her image of efficacy and beneficence. To preserve this positive window, one avoids open conflict with contrary data whenever possible. Even though President Bush's motives for appointing Justice Thomas were transparent to almost anyone, for example, nobody knew *with certainty*. By avoiding the details, he respected prevailing sensitivities, avoided unnecessary conflict, and preserved enough room for speculation that others could fill in the gaps as they chose. Hence arises the political value of ritualized disclaimers.

Second, *successful leaders also use ritual deception in several ways that enhance subjects' perception of common interest.* To disavow obvious motives helps to avert direct challenge by protecting potential opponents' own autonomous domain and need to save face. When confronted, an effective political agent is likely to listen respectfully, and then shift the context to one in which he or she can agree with the opponent's assertion.

One also respects the terminology of prevailing mores and idealisms, such as the recent dominance of "political correctness." This care with language is enhanced by ritually deceptive declarations of affiliative allegiance with popular groups or causes (e.g., "I'm for the environment"—or family, children, defense, traditional values, etc.) and by comparable disidentifications with unpopular out-groups or trends (i.e., "I'm against communism"—or child abuse, crime, discrimination, corruption, etc.). Hypnotists refer to this type of process as "speaking subjects' 'language'" (Erickson, Rossi, and Rossi, 1976).

Like hypnotists, effective agents also speak to hidden motives that are widespread but suppressed by prevailing taboos. For ritual deception, this process includes identifying levels at which subjects *want* to be deceived, despite protestations otherwise. Motives for wanting to be deceived variably include avoidance of painful realities, discomfort with atypicality and uncertainty, identifying with those with

whom we wish to ally, avoiding retribution, and seeking relief from responsibility for making hard choices (Lockard and Paulhus, 1988). Specific shared interests also foster this acceptance.

Third, and finally, when needed, *successful politicians are able to shift the content of political discourse through distraction and positive reframing.* As in hypnosis (Gill and Brenman, 1959), one shifts attention away from discordant data or opposing interests toward the more ritualized identifications and disavowals already discussed, and then builds a new psychological reality by elaborating on areas in which the parties' interests are shared. Jamieson (1992:203-62) cites the 1988 presidential election as one in which both candidates used distraction tactics in a particularly ritualistic manner.

Discordant realities are also reframed as in fact *being* in the collective interest. If prevailing mores must be transgressed, one may still prevail by supporting other ideals that are equally correct and strivings that are widely shared but less widely expressed. As noted earlier, when a psychosocial reality is redefined, the underlying "reality" actually changes. In prospect theory, reframing is known as altering the "reference point" (Levy, 1992) or "framing" (McDermott, 1992). This skill may be a defining attribute of a truly great leader.

Historical Speculations

Effective political leaders modulate the dissemination of information along the continuum from ritual deception to overt disinformation, in order to win support and minimize internal conflict. I will illustrate how this can influence the outcome of a political campaign or social strategy with some speculations from recent American history, contrasting failed with successful political deception at three levels: ritual deception, mixed deceptions, and use of deception in crises that require strong action.

Ritual deception may have been pivotal in deciding two pairs of recent events. First, Robert Dole may have cost himself a 1988 presidential nomination when, in addition to giving top priority to control of the federal budget, he honestly recognized that a modest tax increase might be needed. If he had instead pledged "no new taxes" like his opponent, George Bush, he might then have resided in the White House.

Another interesting contrast is that of two recent conservative Supreme Court nominees who faced difficult confirmation hearings in an opposition-controlled Senate. Judge Bork, despite impeccable credentials and unquestioned integrity, was rejected. Judge Thomas, a less experienced candidate whose personal qualities were heavily in doubt, was nonetheless confirmed. Bork had been open about his opposition to abortion, putting himself in conflict with what was "politically correct" and on the short end of media coverage. He was perceived as a threat by a powerful

segment of society. *Because* of his honest openness, he left no window of doubt to mitigate this impression. Finally, he made little attempt to redefine facts in his own favor, until long after the event (Bork, 1990; Schoenfeld, 1991).

Judge Thomas's statements were "politically correct," and he carefully avoided direct confrontation with opposed interests. Ritual deception was probably pivotal at the level of personal image, where confirmation was most in danger. Withholding a position on abortion preserved a window of doubt in his favor, and turning to angrily confront the Senate itself for challenging his character, redirected attention from Anita Hill's testimony that had put him in the greatest danger (Ekman, 1992). Adamant denial of wrongdoing allowed him to weather a storm of accusations, and indirectly, he utilized contextual factors in his own favor.

In each case, the successful deceptions did constrain the free flow of information, illustrating the likelihood that pure ritual deception exists only in approximation. Especially in the second, it is hard to draw a clear line between this and deliberate concealment. In both cases, however, the deciding parties possessed enough data to make adequate counterinferences. Thus, it was the ritualized elements that proved decisive.

Everyday politics is typically more complex, including mixtures of ritual deception and overt disinformation. How such combinations can fail is exemplified by the tragedy of Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1964, Johnson was successful in being reelected as chief executive, in part through carefully identifying with his predecessor's more popular stands. At the same time, he used ritually deceptive tactics to obfuscate other issues, defame his opponent, and distract attention away from his own actions (Jamieson, 1992). While preparing for military escalation in Vietnam, he distracted attention away from this unpleasant fact, and instead identified with the increasingly egalitarian social mores and the electorate's terror of nuclear warfare. He was able to successfully define his opponent, not himself, as the serious danger to peace; and he avoided confrontation by shunning open dialogue.

Johnson is widely believed to have then willfully deceived the American people into believing that victory in the Vietnam War was near, while realizing that far greater tribulations lay ahead (Berman, 1982). This ran afoul of all of the hypothesized factors. First, as contrary data continued to accrue, doubts about presidential integrity grew ever more nagging. Second, the unpopular war diverged from a prevailing ethic that increasingly favored nonviolent modes of conflict resolution. Without obvious vital national interests, the corporal threat posed by the compulsory draft led to significant exodus. Labeling anti-war protesters as un-American assaulted many citizens' core identities, and often pitted formerly close family members against one another. Finally, Johnson failed to successfully redefine these contrary realities.

Skilled reframing might have helped to mitigate America's internal division, whatever choice had been made about whether to intervene in Vietnam. If the decision had been to abstain from armed conflict, the expected undesired result in a Vietnam free election could have been defined as support for free determination even when contrary to U.S. interests, thereby building moral credit for future crises. To intervene required more convincing evidence that the United States was fighting for vital interests shared by most citizens. In either case, reframing was needed to win public support and mitigate internal conflict.

According to Greenstein (1982), Johnson was also more open than necessary in "identifying his office with all manner of disasters" and unpopular policies. Eisenhower, by contrast, had "even simulated acts of delegation to avoid controversy"; that is, he made important decisions himself that the public was led to believe were made by subordinates, allowing the latter, rather than himself, to endure the public wrath. "By keeping the controversial political side of the presidency largely covert... [Eisenhower] maintained an extraordinary level of public support" (p. 92).

After the First World War, Woodrow Wilson's failure to win Senate ratification of the League of Nations tragically undermined the world community's ability to forestall another global conflict. Many factors favored success, including Wilson's popularity as a victorious leader and national pride in America's new image as a force for a better world. Wilson erred, however, by failing to gain rapport with significant isolationist sentiments (Churchill, 1929). His fatal move was to "pull rank," attempting to coerce the Senate by a direct appeal to the people, thus challenging Senate autonomy.

Franklin Roosevelt was in a somewhat parallel situation in 1941, facing escalating aggressions that required forceful limits, but constrained by prevailing isolationism. While actively planning for war, he campaigned in 1940 on a pledge that "I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars" (Bok, 1989:170). Following his reelection, he carefully maneuvered the nation into a *de facto* state of war with Hitler, while continuing to profess neutrality. After Pearl Harbor had led to war with Japan, Roosevelt also needed a declaration of war against Hitler. Rather than asking for this, he used espionage to deceive Hitler into declaring war first, avoiding a clash with Congress that he appropriately feared (Layton, Pineau, and Costello, 1985). Overall, Roosevelt built on his already strong image, respected opposing interests, and was able to redefine and redirect the prevailing sentiments to better meet the Axis threat. He had learned well from his predecessor's fate.

Conclusion

Few people want as much honest openness from their political leaders as they profess. When accurate information conflicts with what we like to believe, we often opt for the latter. As a result, leaders who reach high office are likely to be skilled in artful deception—the ability to respect the "rules

of the game" while pursuing their actual agendas more covertly—and are actively but covertly assisted by their subjects. That this process is often transparent, but still necessary for success, implies that leaders and subjects conspire both to deceive and to be deceived.

This process inevitably leads to benefits and detriments. On the positive side, ritual deceptions permit leaders to lead, increase the perception of shared interest and thereby in-group cooperation, and lessen within-group conflict. All of these effects are preconditions for a satisfactory working social order. At the same time, even benevolent deceptions can acquire their own momentum in unpredictable and undesirable directions. Roosevelt's deceptive strategies were helpful and perhaps necessary at the time, but they set the stage for the damaging lies of Johnson and Nixon (Bok, 1989). Shared deceptions also exclude data needed to solve complex social problems, and what is excluded may later return to yield untoward paradoxical effects (Beahrs, 1992b). Finally, the same processes that favor cohesion within specific societies may exaggerate conflict with other societies, undermining the global cooperation needed for the human species to survive (Alexander, 1987).

Ritual deception provides a window to the covert determinants in any political system that are otherwise inaccessible because of prevailing mores and taboos. Looking through this window, I have strived to identify their general features. Within specific groups, to observe what ritual deceptions occur, which succeed, and which do not, can help to clarify the contents of whatever deceptive elements underlie the prevailing mores, what aspects of reality are being filtered out, and the likely effects of this selective attention. Because their content is so transparent, ritual deceptions also may provide an easier focus for constructive dialogue on social and political issues that are otherwise too highly charged. When prevailing mores are problematic, this open scrutiny may also assist in defining focal points for policy intervention.

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