



The Oxford Handbook of Lying

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198736578.001.0001>

Published: 2018

Online ISBN: 9780191800306

Print ISBN: 9780198736578

CHAPTER

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41 Lying and Deception in Politics

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198736578.013.42> Pages 529–540

Published: 11 December 2018

Abstract

The arts of lying and deception are perennials of politics, having been used and debated throughout history and in the contemporary era. Indeed, for those sceptical of democracy, deception is understood as a necessary and justifiable part of politics. For example, elitists argue that people need to sometimes be deceived by an enlightened elite whilst, for realists, the circumstances of international politics frequently demand deception by leaders. In contrast, democrats argue that political deception is corrosive to good, democratic governance other than in exceptional circumstances. Locating strategies of deception within an understanding of organized political communication (OPC) including propaganda extends our grasp and understanding of how lying and deception have become central to the exercise of power, even within contemporary liberal democracies. Today, enormous resources are devoted towards shaping the 'information environment' and OPC frequently employs deception, whether by lying, omission, distortion, or misdirection. Further research and theorizing are necessary in order to better understand the reach of various forms of deceptive OPC such as propaganda and their role in the exercise of power, when these strategies might or might not be justified, and the consequences for the health of democracy.

Keywords: [deception](#), [lying](#), [propaganda](#), [organized persuasive communication](#), [strategic communication](#), [political communication](#), [manipulation](#), [spin](#), [political marketing](#)

Subject: [Pragmatics](#), [Linguistics](#)

Series: [Oxford Handbooks](#)

41.1 Introduction

FROM the sophists of ancient Greece, chastised by Plato (360 BC) for their specious rhetoric, through to the sixteenth-century *realpolitik* of Machiavelli and the twentieth-century advocacy of the necessity of deception in politics by thinkers such as Leo Strauss (1958, 1975), the issues of lying and deception have been perennials of politics. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed numerous examples of political lying and deception: from the ‘big lie’ approach that Adolf Hitler (1939 [1924]: 184–5) attributed to the Jews but which is now seen as a staple of Nazi propaganda (Herf 2006); through to the *Pentagon Papers*, which exposed the secret enlargement of the US war in South-east Asia to Cambodia and Laos and the lies of US President Richard Nixon during the 1970s Watergate scandal (Sheehan 1971; Ellsberg 2003); and deception by US and UK political leaders about the certainty and threatening nature of the intelligence relating to Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the period before the invasion in 2003 (Mearsheimer 2011; Herring and Robinson 2014: 2014–15). Indeed, according to some analysts, lying and deception are pervasive elements of politics (Jamieson 1992; Alterman 2004; Osborne 2005). It is therefore no surprise that we live in times of profound distrust of politics and politicians, at least in much of the Western world, as evidenced by opinion polls spanning from the 1950s to the present day in the US, Australia, and Europe (Bakir and Barlow 2007).

p. 530 Drawing upon scholarship emerging in political communication studies, rhetoric studies, and related fields, this chapter provides an introduction to the issues of lying and deception in politics in three stages. Section 4.1.1 traces these phenomena back to ancient Greece. It identifies key interventions on the questions of the legitimacy and necessity of lying in politics, and assesses major contemporary contributions to this age-old debate. This section introduces central arguments as to when deception might be justified and associated concerns over its impact upon the democratic process. The second section links the concept of deception to abiding concerns in research on political communication, propaganda, and *organized persuasive communication*. Here, we discuss in more depth the politics of deception and the ways in which attempts are made to exercise political power through deceptive communications. The concluding section maps new directions for enquiry, including understanding the relationship between deception and coercion, and deception in the contemporary media environment.

Before continuing, it is necessary to briefly define our terms, ‘lying’ and ‘deception’. Mahon (2015) asserts that the most common of the very many definitions of lying is ‘to make a believed-false statement to another person with the intention that that other person believe that statement to be true’. Deception involves ‘intentionally causing others to have false beliefs that one believes to be false or does not believe to be true’ (Carson 2010: 49): as such deception does not necessarily involve lying, which requires a false statement to be made—although Mahon does suggest that it involves the deceiver ‘bringing about evidence on the basis of which the other person has or continues to have that false belief’. Although the particular definition of and relationships between lying and deception are subject to unending debate, this chapter reflects the tendency amongst the scholarship discussed in the chapter to treat lying as a subset of the broader phenomenon of deception. Accordingly, in this chapter, attempts at deception involve intentionally trying to cause others to have false beliefs with or without lying (see also Cliffe, Ramsay, and Bartlett 2000).

41.2 Debating the justifiability of deception in politics

p. 531 The literature on deception in politics can be traced to Ancient Athens. Most notably Plato (360 BC: Book 3: 414b–415d), in *The Republic*, relaying the thinking of Socrates, described the importance of the ‘noble lie’, whereby grand myths or untruths might be necessary in order to maintain social order. At the same time, Plato critiqued the rhetoric of both the Sophists and Aristotle for its deceptive and manipulative aspects. In turn, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (2010 [230 BC]) distinguished itself from sophistry on the grounds of moral purpose: sophistry involves winning an argument at all costs, whereas rhetoric has a moral purpose (Rawnsley 2005: 30). However, whilst Aristotle sought to counter harmful or damaging forms of rhetoric, his own articulation of the arts of persuasion often appears to advocate some level of deception (Corner 2007: 672). More generally, and as Hesk (2000: 4) argues, the emergence of ideas surrounding rhetoric and deceit ↵ ‘can be located in political, legal and cultural discourses which defined Athenian democracy itself’. In particular, thinkers such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Thucydides, and Plato distinguished ‘persuasion brought about by deceit (*dolos*), false logic, coercion, and other forms of chicanery from persuasion (*peitho*)’ (Lebow 2008: 28), achieved through sincere dialogue. In other words, the matter of lying and deception in politics has been there right from the start.

For the contemporary era, the clearest and most influential marker for starting discussion on lying in politics comes in the sixteenth-century text *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli (2003 [1532]). Through its warranting of the necessity of both force and deception as essential components of successful governance, Machiavelli’s treatise on how to govern has made his name a byword for what has become known as ‘political realism’. Rooted in a decidedly pessimistic reading of humanity, Machiavelli advised that, because men are bad, ‘and will not keep faith with you, you too are not bound to observe it with them’. Importantly, the ‘Prince’ (the person who governs) must and can:

be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are simple, and so subject to present necessities, that he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived.

(Machiavelli 2003 [1532]: ch. 18)

More broadly, *The Prince* is an endorsement of any means, including physical coercion and deception, providing they served useful ends, and the work is a touchstone for modern political realists. This can be seen in the publications of scholars such as Strauss (1958, 1975), Jay (2010), and Mearsheimer (2011) who, in different ways, make a virtue of mendacity in some circumstances, the key features of which are outlined in the following section.

41.2.1 Defenders of deception: elitism, realism, and scepticism about democracy

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The elitist writings of Leo Strauss represent a twentieth-century manifestation of Plato's critique of democracy and the associated claim that governance by the wise is preferable to rule by the majority (Strauss 1975; see also Strauss 1958). Plato's advocacy of 'the noble lie' was based upon the idea that, in order to maintain harmony in the context of a social hierarchy, myths needed to be created in order to help people accept their location in the hierarchy: God made some to rule (the golden race), others to build (iron and bronze workers) and still others to fight (soldiers). Many see in Strauss the continuation of the Platonic idea that democratic politics is too idealistic and that the greater good can only be achieved by deferring to wise and enlightened elites. Strauss's concern is that, at times, the truth would threaten political stability and, consequently, deception becomes essential to political order and stability. Strauss has come to be associated with, and deployed by, those making anti-democratic and elitist arguments, most recently regarding neoconservatism in the US (for analysis of this use see Norton 2005), though such use of his work has been disputed (Smith 1997; Zuckert and Zuckert 2006). Strauss-inspired neoconservatives are said to have manipulated US public fears over Iraq in order to advance their political objectives (Sniegowski 2008: 322).

Other contemporary advocates of deception do not necessarily imply an elitist mindset. For realists such as the international relations theorist John Mearsheimer (2011), the threatening realm of international politics demands that leaders sometimes lie for reasons of state. Specifically, he argues that, whilst lying between state leaders is comparatively rare, leaders do often deceive their own publics in order to further what they see as, or claim to be, the national interest. Specifically, leaders might fearmonger when they 'see a threat emerging but think that they cannot make the public see the wolf at the door without resorting to a deception campaign' (Mearsheimer 2011: 45). A good example of this form of deception, now often seen as justified, are Franklin Delano Roosevelt's lies to the American public to try to get the US involved in WWII (Dallek 1979). In addition, lies might be used to cover up strategic failures if they think that it would serve the national interest (Mearsheimer 2011: 67). Furthermore, Mearsheimer (2011: ch. 7) describes how leaders of liberal democratic states lie when their behaviour falls short of liberal ideological claims regarding the law-abiding and war-averse nature of liberal democracies. Harking back to Plato's 'Noble Lie', he also notes how nationalist myths, designed to foster social cohesion and support for the state, frequently involve lies and half-truths (Mearsheimer 2011: 75).

Whilst Strauss and Mearsheimer present the case for deception with respect to particular circumstances, i.e., deception when social stability demands it or with respect to the realm of international politics, Jay (2010) argues that mendacity is part and parcel of democratic politics, and necessarily so. In part this is because democracy itself is underpinned by lies regarding common interests, in part because excessive truth within the public sphere might lead to the thwarting of healthy and pluralistic debate, but also because of the aesthetic nature of politics which, for Jay, means that the art of politics naturally involves dramatic performance of which deception is an integral part.

Deception in politics, then, can be justified in different ways: For Strauss we see this in the elitist idea that the masses need to be deceived in order to ensure their compliance with the existing social order; for Mearsheimer it is the dangers of an international politics that demands that leaders lie so as to protect the interests of their people; for Jay it is based upon a belief that democracy, in its idealized form, is simply not achievable. Although underpinned by different rationales, these positions all gravitate towards a conservative and status quo orientation in which considerable power and trust are left to elites.

41.2.2 Critics of deception: idealism and the valuing of democracy

In contrast to the advocates of lying, there are few Kantian absolutists who maintain that deception is always problematic. There are, however, those who have attempted to think through more precisely when deception might be justified and what the limits to it should be (e.g., Bok 1999; Cliffe, Ramsay, and Bartlett 2000). These scholars are more sceptical of elite power and hold a greater commitment to democratic politics and the importance of public involvement in political decision-making.

For example, Ramsay (2000a, b) acknowledges the consequentialist arguments made by theorists such as Walzer (1973) that moral ends can justify immoral means. But she also maintains that defenders of consequentialism fail to put sufficiently clear limits on what is 'morally permissible' (Ramsay 2000a: 17). Much of Ramsay's case against deception is rooted in what she claims is its incompatibility with democratic politics. Specifically, she argues that deception and secrecy by definition inhibit the free flow of information about 'the decisions and actions of political leaders and hamper both public participation' and accountability (Ramsay 2000b: 36). In these circumstances democratic notions regarding consent and representation are inevitably undermined when political actors are untruthful. So, even if deception might achieve beneficial ends in some circumstances, the cost with respect to the erosion of the democratic process may be too high. Ramsay (2000b: 37) also challenges advocates of deception on their own ground by arguing that, even if one might subscribe to the idea that elites are best placed to decide on certain political issues, deception and secrecy may undermine effective decision-making:

Because information is only available to a small number of people, this limits debate and hinders communication between those who need to know the facts in order to ensure that sound decisions are made. It also narrows the range of perspectives and opinions brought to bear on solving problems, restricts consideration of all the implications of a course of action and prevents criticism and dissenting views from being heard.

Indeed, it is the idea of an elite cut off from reality owing to deceptive and self-deceptive groups of insulated 'professional problem solvers' that formed one aspect of Hannah Arendt's (1973: 9) seminal commentary on *The Pentagon Papers*. These official documents, commissioned by US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and leaked to the *New York Times* in 1971, revealed the disjuncture between the pessimistic intelligence assessments regarding the Vietnam War and official claims regarding both the course of the war and the reasons for US involvement (Sheehan 1971; Ellsberg 2003). For Arendt (1973: 12), whilst the raw intelligence reports were accurate, the professional problem-solvers sought to erase inconvenient facts to such an extent that their assessment became detached from reality. Arendt (1973: 8) concludes that, because a US President is so reliant upon advisers as a source of information as to what is going on, he or she may become the most vulnerable to 'complete manipulation'.

Critics of deception such as Ramsay (2000a, b) and Bok (1999) also tend to adopt a more questioning stance towards some of the assumptions made by defenders of deception. For example, Mearsheimer's appeal to the national interest in his defence of deception is disputed by Ramsay (2000b: 30–42) on the grounds that it is far too nebulous a concept, open to widely differing interpretations, to provide firm grounds for the justification of deception. She makes the same point about the idea of 'public interest'. She suggests the vagueness inherent to such concepts means that they are vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by Plato's supposedly wise and noble elite. Bok's (1999: 13) influential work on lying in public and private life is initially sympathetic towards the idea that crises, frequently encountered in the realm of international politics and involving threats to survival posed by enemies, may well demand deception. However, she is quick to highlight the dangers inherent in deciding that action must be conducted without due scrutiny. For example, she argues that policy can end up being underpinned by a group-think mentality which leads to a tendency to perceive enemies in oversimplified and exaggerated terms and to see them as much more dangerous than they are. She explains how 'governments build up enormous, self-perpetuating

machineries of deception in adversary contexts' (Bok 1999: 42), the consequence of which is that lies, 'whilst occasionally excusable, ... are weighted with very special dangers; dangers of bias, self-harm, proliferation, and severe injuries to trust' (Bok 1999: 143). Like Ramsay, Bok is unconvinced by political elites when they claim to be lying for the public good. In her final analysis, all acts of deception need to be tightly controlled via the test of public justification. Where deception has already occurred, this can obviously happen only after the event: but it should be applied in advance to deceptive practices. She concludes that 'only those deceptive practices which can be openly debated and consented to in advance are justifiable in a democracy' (Bok 1999: 181).

The debates discussed above reflect deep divisions over what is politically necessary, possible, and desirable when it comes to lying and deception. They also highlight recognition that communication, whether non-deceptive or deceptive, justified or unjustified, is integral to the exercise of power and influence. This brings us to the subject of *organized persuasive communication* and its various namesakes such as *propaganda*, *spin*, and *political marketing*.

41.3 Political power and deception: propaganda, spin, and political marketing

p. 535 Over the course of the twentieth century, the rise of mass society and mass communication has been accompanied by organized and systematic approaches to persuasion. In the early part of the twentieth century, these activities were frequently referred to as *propaganda* (Lippman 1922; Lasswell 1927). In the contemporary era euphemisms such as *public relations (PR)*, *political marketing*, *strategic communication*, and *public diplomacy* are frequently used. We see them as particular examples of a more general category that we label *organized persuasive communication (OPC)* (Bakir et al. 2015). Briefly, OPC refers to all organized activities aimed at influencing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour and includes all of the activities historically described as propaganda and those now described as PR, strategic communication, and so on. We further subcategorize OPC into consensual and non-consensual forms. Consensual OPC involves combinations of rational persuasion and/or appeals to emotion whereby the persuadee is persuaded in a free and informed manner. For example, anti-smoking campaigns fit the definition of consensual OPC. Non-consensual forms involve combinations of deception, incentivization, and coercion whereby persuasion operates through either misleading the persuadee or subjecting them to some kind of incentive or physical threat. The value of the category of OPC is that it helps avoid using the confusing array of often euphemistic and value-laden terms now in circulation and helps to illuminate the fact that OPC can sometimes be consensual and truthful, as well as at other times manipulative.

For commentators such as Arendt (1973) and Corner (2007), the ubiquity of deceptive OPC activities has elevated the problem of deception and politics to new levels for decades now. In discussing *The Pentagon Papers*, Arendt (1973: 7–12) argues that it was a combination of the deceptive 'problem-solvers', mentioned earlier, and the 'apparently innocuous' PR managers that worked to create such a fundamental mismatch between the factually accurate intelligence reports and the deceptive claims and beliefs of policy-makers during the Vietnam War (see also Arendt 1958: 74–6). For Corner (2007), picking up on Wernick's (1991) idea of *promotional culture* and Arendt's notions of *organized lying* and *bureaucratic deceit*, patterns of deception and manipulation have become integral to contemporary society such that 'almost all types of promotional behaviour slide—perhaps sometimes plunge—into forms of deceit' (Corner 2007: 57). In short, the issue of deception needs to be understood in the context of the extensive OPC activities, and their propensity for deceptiveness, that have now permeated politics for many years.

41.3.1 Organized persuasive communication, deception, and modern politics

p. 536 Whilst deceptive OPC has become integral to contemporary politics, as Arendt (1973) and Corner (2007) amongst others argue, much of the scholarship on OPC activities has failed to get to grips with the issue of how these practices can involve deception and lying. Part of the problem has been the tendency amongst a large body of scholars to perceive OPC activities as benign and non-deceptive. For example, Moloney argues that *Public Relations* scholarship has deceived itself into over-emphasizing 'PR as a practice ↴ of virtuous messaging, known as two-way communications between equal, listening, negotiating, mutually respectful message senders and receivers' (Moloney 2006: xiii). At the same time, some of the literature on propaganda has worked with a poorly developed conceptualization of what deceptive OPC looks like and frequently associates it only with blatant lying (e.g., Jowett and O'Donnell 2014: 17). Consequently, other forms of deception, such as omission (half-truths) and distortion (spin), are routinely ignored and, in line with much of the literature, deceptive and nefarious OPC is portrayed as occurring only in other contexts (conducted by official enemies of Western states) and times (e.g., wartime) or both, as in examples of Nazi or Soviet 'propaganda'. As discussed next, on the relatively rare occasions when scholars have engaged directly with the issue of deception, the conclusions have frequently suggested what Corner (2007: 674) refers to as a 'major and permanent adjustment or displacement of reality'. The critical point across these studies engaging with deceptive OPC is that it is a key component of how political and economic power is wielded in modern society (e.g., Miller and Dinan 2008). Moreover, the deceptive OPC campaigns described by these scholars are fundamentally anti-democratic because they tamper with the evidence base of information needed by the public to take meaningful democratic decisions.

To illustrate, the *propaganda model* advanced by Herman and Chomsky (1988), describes how mainstream US media relay the deceptive OPC of US political and business elites. The media are critical and adversarial, but mostly only within bounds that define the limits of legitimate, responsible criticism. Criticisms are frequently framed in terms of well-intentioned mistakes made in pursuit of legitimate goals. Questioning the motives of elites and the legitimacy of the system is rare, while the illegitimacy and nefarious motives of official enemies are regularly rehearsed. So, for example, US military action in Vietnam is described as a defensive *intervention* to protect democracy whilst Soviet military action in Afghanistan is described as an aggressive *invasion*. As a result the US public is left profoundly deceived as to the reality of US political and business activities. More recently, the 2003 invasion of Iraq has been accompanied by widespread debate over whether or not the US and UK governments engaged in deception with respect to intelligence on the alleged WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) threat from Iraq. Herring and Robinson demonstrate that UK officials intentionally deceived both by presenting available intelligence on Iraqi WMD as much more certain and threatening (Herring and Robinson 2014–15), and by claiming that diplomacy at the UN was motivated by a desire to avoid war when in fact it was aimed at smoothing the path to war (Herring and Robinson 2014). Similarly, Mearsheimer (2011) argues that the US and British governments lied to their publics and the world in this case. These major deceptions were all integral to the strategy of mobilizing publics to support war. Western involvement in torture has also been sustained through deceptive OPC. Following '9/11', the Bush administration proclaimed that Enhanced Interrogation Techniques (EITs) of al-Qa'eda suspects legally did not constitute torture while securing life-saving intelligence. To bolster their claim regarding torture, under the Bush administration the Office of Legal Counsel of the US Department of Justice created secret legal memoranda to advise the CIA, the US Department of Defense, and President Bush on the legality of ↴ the use of EITs: these memos redefined what constitutes torture, so that EITs would fall outside this definition. While these secret legal memos have since been exposed and rescinded and EITs recognized as constituting torture, the claim about EITs' effectiveness was at first left hanging, as the intelligence agencies and politicians kept secret the evidence on which their claims were based (Bakir 2013). Only in 2014 was this claim regarding effectiveness refuted by the long-awaited partial declassification of a US Senate Intelligence Committee study which concluded that the CIA lied to the White House, Congress,

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and media about EITs' efficacy and avoidance of brutality (US Senate Intelligence Committee 2012). Despite this, the CIA continues to try to dispute these conclusions (CIA 2013).

Deception in the context of OPC also raises the key issues of *self-deception* and modes of deception that avoid blatant, unambiguous lies. With respect to the former, whilst intentional deception may be the initial impulse of any given OPC strategy, the organized and extensive nature of campaigns also involves a high degree of internalization of the deceptive OPC whereby those involved may well come to believe the deceptions that they are involved in propagating. Of course, this can occur at the level of the individual when he or she elects to lie about something. But the organized and sustained nature of deception campaigns is likely to result in many officials coming to believe their deceptive messages. The other aspect of this dynamic is that multiple individuals, manipulating information in order to serve a particular political objective, can end up generating a profound degree of deception but without being fully aware of their part in it. As Arendt puts it: 'they will be tempted to fit their reality—which, after all, was man-made to begin with and thus could have been otherwise—into their theory, thereby mentally getting rid of its disconcerting contingency' (Arendt 1973: 12). Ellul (1965: 41) also draws attention to the importance of 'a general system of false claims' whereby falsehoods become so widely accepted that people believe in a general claim:

When the United States poses as the defender of liberty—of all—everywhere and always—it uses a system of false representation. When the Soviet Union poses as the defender of true democracy, it is also employing a system of false representation. But the lie is not always deliberately set up; it may be an expression of a belief, of good faith—which leads to a lie regarding intentions because the belief is only a rationalization, a veil drawn deliberately over a reality one wishes not to see.

Ellul highlights how "Propaganda feeds, develops, and spreads the system of false claims—lies aimed at the complete transformation of minds, judgements, values, and actions (and constituting a frame of reference for systematic falsification)" (Ellul 1965: 61). Indeed, in long-term political deceptions, deceptive OPC (or propaganda) narratives become part of the cultural memory of a society, as seen with the German stab-in-the-back legend of WW1. Here the myth emerged that the loss of WW1 was caused, not by military failure, but by lack of support on the 'home front' (Carson 2010: 232–40). Corner's (2007) invocation of the notion of *promotional culture* also implies that deception is so ingrained in Western consumerist societies that it has become naturalized and unnoticed. In many respects this takes us close to questions of ideology (as an interest-linked perspective) (Miller 2001).

Connected with this is the matter of what form deception takes. Deception through lying, where a political actor makes a statement that is known or suspected to be untrue in order to mislead, is comparatively rare. Communicators know that lies are costly to credibility if exposed and so have an incentive to find other ways to mislead. As such, lying is generally seen as a last resort: 'Every propagandist worth his mettle will use the truth in preference to lies whenever he can; ... "Lies have short legs," a German proverb says' (Friedrich 1943: 78–9; see also Ellul 1965: 53–7). However, lying is still used in order to deceive. To support lies, *misinformation* may be used, whereby forgeries and staged events are deployed in order to deceive (Martin 1982; Lashmar and Oliver 1998). For example, immediately before WWII, Germany staged a bogus attack on a German radio station to use as a pretext for invading Poland. More commonly in the political world, deception can be achieved through withholding information to make the viewpoint being promoted more persuasive: this can be labelled as deception through omission (Corner 2007; Mearsheimer 2011; Herring and Robinson 2014, 2014–15) or 'half-truths' (Carson 2010) (see also Chapter 13 'Lying and omissions' by Don Fallis). It is deceptive because those involved know people would not be persuaded if they knew the full picture. Deception can also occur through distortion (Corner 2007; Mearsheimer 2011; Herring and Robinson 2014, 2014–15) or 'spin' (Carson 2010). This involves presenting a statement in a deliberately misleading way to support the viewpoint being promoted. One form of distortion is *exaggeration* but it can

also involve de-emphasizing information, for example by releasing controversial information on busy news days. A further category is *deception through misdirection* (Bakir 2013), which entails producing and disseminating true information but which is intended to direct public attention away from problematic issues. To these categories might also be added the concept of 'bullshit', whereby persuasion is attempted by presenting a misleading impression of the persuader's knowledge of the facts but without any knowledge of, or regard to, the actual truth (Hardcastle and Reisch 2006; Seymour 2014).

p. 539 When looking at deception in these terms, i.e., as a part of deceptive OPC strategies designed to influence public support for major policies involving patterns of self-deception and multiple deceptive techniques, we start to understand the extent to which it is a substantial part of, and problem for, contemporary democracies that have become so accustomed to the ubiquity of promotional activities. A world in which information is systematically manipulated via omission, distortion, exaggeration, and misdirection, leading to high levels of deception and self-deception, is dysfunctional in democratic terms because it makes it very difficult for publics to hold to account those engaged in the deception and suggests that true *consent* has not been given. Importantly, these issues only intensify in importance given the rise of new and social media where the possibilities of deception both in the content of messages and in terms of the sources of messages have proliferated. The use of public relations techniques such as the 'front group', where vested interests are disguised by ostensibly independent groups has become more complex in the age of 'mass self-communication' (Castells 2009: 55). Online identities can be assumed and used deceptively—a phenomena known as the 'sock puppet'. Though they can be used playfully, they are also used in economic and political influence strategies by, for example, Stella Artois (Watson 2012) and the Special Operations Command of the US military (Fielding and Cobain 2011). Conversely, developments such as wearable technologies (e.g., Google Glass smart glasses), which provide biometric data and physiological signs, and apps which claim to enable detection of the mood and emotional state of a speaker, may provide new forms of lie detection, useful for assessing veracity in the hyperconnected digital world (McStay 2018), and perhaps even help counter deceptive OPC strategies.

41.4 Conclusion: future research agendas

Summing up the key points, political philosophers who debate the ethics of deception fall, broadly speaking, into two camps: defenders of deception and critics of deception. To its defenders, lying and other forms of deception are necessary parts of political life, whilst for critics they should be exceptional practices that are justifiable only in very limited circumstances. For defenders, elites can and must be trusted to decide the public or national interest and to determine when deception is necessary to defend it. For critics, this leads to abuse of power and poor decision-making. While defenders find it acceptable that democracy is compromised by permitting elites to deceive, critics argue that democracy must be strengthened in order to check what they see as this abuse of power so that democratic consent is valid and democratic accountability possible. Examination of the social scientific and historical literature on OPC reveals the extent to which both OPC and deceptive OPC have become part of the political environment and central to the exercise of power, even in contemporary democracies.

A number of concerns arise from this and suggest important research agendas for future work. First, the literature on politics and lying would benefit from greater cross-fertilization with relevant literatures. For example, the expansive philosophy and psychology literatures, some of which is documented in this handbook edition, provide detailed investigations of the nature of deception and lying, as well as the circumstances in which they might be justified. The literature on lying in politics and OPC could be enriched through a closer engagement with this literature. Such an engagement would further the development of more sophisticated conceptualizations of deception for those studying deceptive OPC and contribute to the ongoing normative arguments between the defenders and the critics of deception in politics. Second,

although the study of OPC is extensive, it was noted that engagement with deceptive OPC is comparatively rare and certainly underdeveloped. Given the gravity of those relatively few cases that have been explored from the point of view of deception, and the contemporary ubiquity of OPC activities, far greater empirical case-study analysis by academics is needed. This necessarily involves empirical exploration of OPC activities, major political issues, and the role that deception might be playing. There is no shortage of political issues demanding attention, including climate change and the organized strategies of denial, and current major conflicts including those in Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and their promotion. In doing so, increasing attention needs to be paid to the way in which OPC and deception work through the contemporary media environment characterized by digital communication, where the potential for transparency of institutions may be overridden by ever more targeted and personalized deceptive communications. Opportunities provided by new technology to counter deceptive OPC also need to be explored. Third, and finally, as we have argued, deception in politics frequently works through OPC and can involve a variety of deceptive practices, all of which raise the question of how much *consent* there is in contemporary democracies. Two matters arise here: the first concerns the need for fuller engagement with forms of OPC that go beyond deception to include more clearly incentivizing and coercive strategies. For example, propaganda has always been understood to involve *bribes* and *threats of physical coercion* as well as linguistic-based deceptions. A fuller understanding of coercive OPC, and how it might interplay with deception, is necessary in order to more fully grasp the ways in which power is being exercised in the political realm and the extent to which democracy is being undermined. The second concerns finding ways of thinking about political communication that avoid deception and, conversely, allow informed consent. Here, a critical ethics of communication, perhaps linking with Habermasian notions of undistorted and dialogical communication, would enable a fuller understanding of OPC that avoids deception and coercion and succeeds in persuading via a consensual process. Such a development might inform moves towards a more democratic and less deceptive mode of communication than the one which currently dominates.

In conclusion, there is a wide spectrum of positions on the nature of lying and deception and whether they are integral and unavoidable aspects of politics. Further conceptual development, including that of deceptive and non-deceptive OPC, and empirical case studies are necessary to advance further our understanding of these issues.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jörg Meibauer, the two anonymous reviewers, and Stefanie Haueis for feedback on earlier drafts.