Richard Bellamy

Lies, deception and democracy

1. Introduction

The belief that politicians and the media lie to the people and seek to deceive them for self-interested reasons long predates today's accusations of 'fake news' (Jay 2010). Though those levelling such accusations invariably contend the present political class to be more mendacious than politicians in the past (Oborne 2005), it is a recurrent complaint going back to antiquity. Yet, a distinguished and just as long tradition of political thought treats calls for truth and openness in politics with scepticism (Arendt 1967).

From Plato through Machiavelli to Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt, numerous political philosophers have seen politics as a realm in which lies and deception necessarily flourish (Jay 2010). Though their reasons for so arguing differ in a number of crucial respects, all agree with Arendt's claim that "Truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as justifiable tools in political dealings" (Arendt 1971, 4). These philosophers consider those who bemoan this state of affairs as either naïve fools or devious charlatans, likely to be even greater spreaders of falsehood and deceit themselves. Indeed, as we shall see, accusations of lying and deception, on the one hand, and the temptation to lie and deceive, on the other, often prove to be tied up with misplaced expectations, distorted beliefs and self-deception on the part of both politicians and the general public (Galeotti 2015). Disentangling and distinguishing the one from the other proves harder than one might think.

Lying and deception in politics extend from outright mendacity to deny or hide a misdemeanour that might harm a politician's personal reputation,

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such as adultery or a criminal act unrelated to the exercise or attainment of political office; through seeking to cover up some political offence, such as taking bribes or electoral fraud; to more accepted forms of being "economical with the truth"[1] that range from protecting state secrets, through dissembling to other politicians or the electorate, as when making them promises one knows one cannot or do not intend to keep; to casting unwarranted aspersions on one's rivals and spinning one's own abilities, achievements and policies (Mearsheimer 2011, 15-20). Most people would regard some of these lies and forms of deceit as more deserving of condemnation than others. Indeed, quite a few people would acknowledge that certain types of dissembling, such as misleading an enemy in war about one's military plans, might be fully justified (Mearsheimer 2011, 40).

This article explores these various forms of lying and deception in the context of the norms and practices typically associated with liberal democracy. According to such a system, politicians are considered to be the authorised and accountable representatives of the electorate, with an obligation to pursue the public interest rather than simply their personal interests or the private interests of a specific group of individuals. To the extent they do further their own interests and those of their friends or supporters, democratic norms suggest that, however hypocritically or implausibly, they must at least claim to be doing so for the common good. To this end, democratic politicians are constrained not only by the democratic process but also by liberal constitutional norms protecting certain individual civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech and association, that are orientated towards ensuring due process and the equal protection of the law for all.

No democratic system fully meets the standards of the liberal democratic ideal. Moreover, commentators divide over how far it can or should do. Some contend democratic politics necessarily involves, and can plausibly require, truth telling, with all lies and deceit consequently damaging democracy to some degree (Bok 1978, 172). If politicians are to rule for the people and be accountable to them, then they believe policy-making needs to be transparent and based on clearly articulated and openly avowed principles and policies.

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[1] Though earlier usages exist, this phrase gained notoriety when used by the British Cabinet Secretary Sir Robert Armstrong in the *Spycatcher* trial of 1986 to distinguish telling an outright lie from giving a misleading impression.

Politicians can only be counted on to rule in the public interest when they are obliged to do so in full view of the public, and under their equal influence and control. By contrast, I have noted already how others regard certain forms of deceit and lying as inherent to politics in general, and to democratic politics in particular (Jay 2010, ch. 3). They maintain democracy cannot but rest on a noble lie: that of pretending that people can rule themselves through free and fair agreements on those policies that best promote their collective welfare (Canovan 1990). However, people's values and concerns are too diverse, incompatible and incommensurable for either public reasons or shared interests to exist. As a result, the democratic ideal proves impossible. Instead, politicians must often employ rhetoric and half-truths to build coalitions between groups of people with conflicting views and interests so as to mobilise sufficient popular support to promote almost any collective enterprise. The falsehood, according to which governments can rule for the common good of citizens, that nevertheless remains so necessary to democratic legitimacy, thereby ends up as the source of all the other lies politicians unavoidably tell in politics (Bellamy 2010).

Given Glen Newey's political realism (Newey 2001a), it is unsurprising that he should have sided with those philosophers who regard democracy and truthfulness as not entirely reconcilable, and involving a trade-off to some degree (Newey 2003). As will emerge in the analysis that follows, while I share some of his misgivings, I consider his account to be too negative. His belief in the incompatibility of democracy and truthfulness derives from his regarding democracy as an expression of the collective autonomy of the people, and hence as resting on the consent of citizens (Newey 2001b). That poses an impossible and inappropriate standard for any democratic system to meet. Instead, I shall suggest that we should see democracy as a system of public equality. Such an account finds both lying and deception as an infringement of democratic norms, and agrees with Newey's view that deception poses a greater threat than lies. However, I shall argue that while persuasiveness and rhetoric form an intrinsic part of democratic reasoning that can shade into deception on occasion, the democratic process both encourages and requires truthfulness.

The following analysis of these competing views begins by exploring what counts as lying and deception, identifying why they might be viewed as normatively objectionable, and distinguishing the different kinds of lies and deceit democratic politicians are apt to commit, as well as their various motivations for doing so. I conclude with an examination of how truth and

truthfulness play out in the circumstances of politics. Although truthfulness in politics will be shown to rest on persuasiveness and opinion as much as logic and facts, it will be argued that distinctions can be drawn between private interests and public reasons; deception and delusion; honesty and dishonesty; if not between lies and truth *per se*. There may be no secure epistemological grounding of the objective truth and morality of most political opinions but that does not mean politicians can simply say and act as they please so long as the electorate are willing to believe and support them. Rather, we can expect them to offer a minimum of reasoned and evidence-based arguments for their views and actions that, even if not conclusive, can be assessed independently and freely by voters, opponents and the media with regard to their likely strengths and weaknesses.

2. Lies and deception. Definitions and democratic objections

This section starts by defining lying and deception before turning to what renders such practices objectionable within a democracy. Neither the first nor, as a consequence, the second proves entirely straightforward.

Lying and deception defined

Both lying and deception can be defined as a deliberate attempt by a person or persons to assert (Fallis 2009, 33), and possibly mislead another person or persons into believing (Bok 1978, 13-16), something that the liar(s) knows or thinks is false. However, although lying may often involve deception it need not always deceive, or at least not straightforwardly so (Fallis 2009, 41-43). Nor need all deception involve lying.

For example, a cancer patient may lie to his family about how he is doing by saying he's fine knowing full well they are aware he is lying and in fact is doing rather badly. But the lie and the family's acceptance of it may ease some of the emotional stress each feels about the situation. At best, it is a willed self-deception on all sides. Likewise, some forms of deception can comprise telling a misleading truth, such as a half-truth that does not reveal all one knows (Weissberg 2004, 169), or failing to correct another's misperceptions, misunderstandings or false assumptions, or even their lack of knowledge, rather than outright lying. Nevertheless, lying and deception are alike in involving an intention on the part of those who commit them to create, or sus-

tain, what they consider to be an erroneous opinion in others. To the extent the lying is objectionable, so it might be thought is deception.

However, perhaps that goes too far. Maybe lying is worse than deception. For example, in a criminal trial we think it reasonable and even appropriate that the defence lawyers should place the best possible gloss on their client's behaviour, leaving it to the prosecution to expose the flaws in their account. If the prosecution fail to do so, so that a guilty person goes free, the defence team may have succeeded in deceiving the jury but they have not lied to them. Many people will feel that in such a case the defence has simply done their job and blame the prosecution lawyers for failing to do their's. The line between deception and lying may be fuzzy, therefore, but it is right to distinguish the two nevertheless. Advocacy ought to stop short of lying but it may encompass, possibly unavoidably, elements of deception simply in highlighting certain facts and reasons rather than others. After all, limited time and knowledge, and an inevitable partiality to certain views deriving from our education and experience, mean that some degree of selectivity proves inescapable when presenting any argument.

Nevertheless, although the selectivity typical of any kind of advocacy may seem like deception, at least superficially, it need not involve any intent to deceive. Someone who *inadvertently* creates a false impression in the mind of another through unwittingly either holding mistaken views themselves, or possessing incomplete or flawed information, may mislead others but clearly does not lie to or deceive them. They may be open to criticism and censure for their stupidity, ignorance or culpability in failing to become better informed, but their fault is different to that of a liar or deceiver who intends to mislead. Likewise, we can distinguish between those defence lawyers who vigorously defend the innocence of their clients while knowing they are guilty and those lawyers who, as is generally the case, give their clients the benefit of the doubt and deliberately avoid raising the issue of their clients' possible guilt so as not to morally compromise their ability to advocate on their behalf. In the first case, the lawyer has wilfully deceived others in a way tantamount to lying, in the second the lawyer has at worst deceived him or herself. Yet, lawyers in this second category might regard the obligation to uncover the truth as resting as much with the prosecution and jury as themselves. They may feel upholding truthfulness cannot be achieved simply by trusting everyone to act without deception or lies but also involves being prepared to challenge and question what they say. It is a shared responsibility of the actors within the system.

Likewise, in politics truth and falsehood are not always entirely clear-cut. People may often reasonably interpret the significance of various facts differently when making a political or moral judgment about a particular policy. Of course, that does not mean that all views are equally well supported by either the evidence or by similarly coherent and relevant arguments. Nevertheless, in many areas of human life, both the known facts and practical reasoning can support a range of reasonable views. Naturally, politicians – no less than political philosophers debating such questions in a seminar – will seek to put the best gloss on their preferred view, choosing which facts and arguments to highlight accordingly. Yet, it is debateable whether in so doing they deceive or lie. Perhaps they do so if they fail to mention a fact or argument that provides a particularly strong objection to their own position – one to which they feel they have only a weak response. However, it might be argued that their duty is to advocate as well as they can the position that best serves the interests of the people they represent or the cause or position they consider most worthy or valuable. As with the example of the defense lawyer given above, though, there may be limits to how partial in the selection of evidence and arguments such advocacy can go before it involves deception and lying. Here too, we rely on the effectiveness of opposing politicians and philosophers to reveal the weaknesses of each other's arguments.

In the UK, the non governmental parties are termed Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in recognition of their legitimate and crucial role within the political system as licensed critics and challengers of the government, who play a key function in ensuring minister's are both competent and honest. And, of course, such opposition also appeals ultimately to voters and citizens, who perhaps have an obligation to become informed. From this perspective, truthfulness proves an attribute of the political (or, in the lawyers case, judicial) system as a whole, something not just individual politicians but also all citizens have a duty to uphold. I shall develop this argument further below. Before doing so, however, I wish to turn to the claim that lying and deception form an intrinsic aspect of politics.

Democratic objections

In Kantian manner, Glen Newey has argued the core consideration behind the normative objection to lies and deceptions rests on their taking away our capacity to consent or not to them as a principle of action (Newey 2001b, 1).

I shall suggest below that constitutes too high a standard. However, the importance we attribute to consent rests in its turn on regarding individuals as autonomous agents, entitled to equal concern and respect. The equal political status of all citizens, whether they are the head of state, a minister in the government, a famous scientist, singer or footballer, or an unemployed labourer, forms an important democratic norm, and its possible infringement when politicians and public servants lie or deceive their fellow citizens arguably explains the normative concerns underlying such actions (Christiano 2008). From this perspective, to lie to or deceive someone is objectionable when it involves exercising an illegitimate form of power over that person that undercuts their ability to think and act autonomously. As Bob Goodin notes (Goodin 1980, 62-63), it constitutes a form of manipulation that involves a duplicitous interference designed to lead those subject to it to act contrary to their putative will. Such behaviour fails to treat others with equal concern and respect as persons capable of making their own judgments and choices.

For example, suppose a political leader makes a deliberately false claim that the government has credible evidence that a neighbouring state not only possesses weapons of mass destruction but also is preparing to use them soon, his intention being to sway public opinion towards supporting a pre-emptive strike against that state.[2] To put the best gloss on the case, imagine that the politician believes the neighbouring regime does indeed possess such weapons and that a pre-emptive strike offers the most appropriate way of addressing the situation but simply has no firm evidence to back his conviction. Most citizens are as aware as the politician that their neighbour could be prone to such acts – it is after all an authoritarian military regime, ruled by an unstable dictatorial ruler. However, a majority read the situation differently to him. Many doubt their neighbour has been able to develop or acquire such weapons, and even more believe the questionable morality and likely consequences of starting a war make such a policy less justifiable than one of preparing for the worst while continuing to work towards reducing the capacity or probability of this regime using such weapons. In such a case, the politician's deception – however well intentioned – denies the right of his fel-

[2] What follows is a stylized account of the Blair government's policy towards Iraq between 1997-2002. For an account of the alleged lies and deception involved, see Oborne 2005, ch. 8.

low citizens to make their own judgment about the situation. After all, their interests are as much at stake in this collective decision as the politician's. By deceiving them, the politician undermines their ability to judge for themselves and manipulates them towards his preferred view.

Such cases are objectionable because they involve the liar regarding him or herself as having superior judgement to the deceived, and hence not as their equals. In the process, those who deceive diminish the freedom of the deceived by manipulating their choices in directions favoured by the deceiver and which the deceived might not have chosen for themselves had they possessed fuller information.

At best, such acts involve a degree of paternalism that the liar or deceiver considers to be warranted. Most people acknowledge that healthy adults can in specific circumstances justifiably claim to be better able to make choices that serve the interests of children or individuals afflicted by certain mentally or emotionally disabling conditions than they could themselves. Even so, how far anyone need or should engage in lies or deceit when doing so is less clear. Where rational argument has failed, or is unlikely to work, and a shift in behaviour is genuinely needful, then lying or deception may be preferable to coercion. If telling a small child that they may be eaten by a sea monster proves more effective at inhibiting them from bathing in a hazardous sea than explaining the dangers of tidal currents, then such deception may be a preferable alternative to preventing them physically from entering the water. Much depends on the context and the individuals concerned. However, a democratic system derives its rationale from assuming that citizens are for the most part better judges of their own interests than others are likely to be, with fairness requiring that what touches all should be decided by all. In which case, the paternalist justification surely cannot apply, suggesting honesty to be the only defensible policy.

John Mearsheimer (2011) has suggested that motivation can make a difference. He distinguishes selfish, or self-serving, from strategic motivations (Mearsheimer 2011, 11). By the former, he has in mind those lies and deceptions designed to preserve a politician's personal reputation, or to cover up a criminal act. These motivations, especially the second, provide the clearest case of an objectionable form of lying. Mearsheimer defines strategic lying as lying for reasons of state. For example, in wartime democratic politicians have occasionally deceived their own citizens but only in order to gain an advantage against the enemy, as when the British government and its allies

sought to mislead the Germans as to the location as well as the timing of the D Day landings during the Second World War. More problematically, democratic politicians have also denied negotiating with those they have hitherto condemned as "terrorists" or "enemies" in order not to arouse domestic opposition prior to obtaining a peace deal they believe will ultimately serve people's interest. For example, former British Prime Minister John Major repeatedly and vehemently denied speaking with the IRA when making the initial moves that eventually gave rise to the Good Friday Agreement. Likewise, a prominent politician might feel justified in hiding a terminal illness, say, when his or her leadership is believed crucial to maintaining domestic morale during an emergency or a crisis.

What renders a "strategic" lie justified (or at least acceptable) or not appears to depend on a number of not entirely congruent factors. On the one hand, there are moral considerations of different kinds. If the liar and deceiver is an honourable person, then the good intentions of their lie seem at least more trustworthy as not stemming from mere self-regarding interests (Walzer 1973, 166). These considerations echo earlier theological debates as to whether it was justified for a Christian to escape persecution for their religious beliefs by pretending to conform outwardly to the faith imposed by their potential oppressors while holding to their original beliefs "in their heart" (Oborne 2005, 116-122). The difficulty with this argument is that the conviction that one is "right" in one's "heart" is a self-legitimating reason, that could be deployed both honestly and dishonestly, and involve a high degree of self-deception (Oborne 2005, 135-137). Virtue may not always be able to wear its heart on its sleeve, but how can we trust it if it does not? The worry is that politicians who engage in what they regard as justified strategic lying may be simply self-deceived.[3] In these cases, the motivation makes little difference – their acts may have been well-intentioned but their unfounded and misguided lying will still be objectionable as involving unwarranted manipulation and paternalism.

Moral reasoning of a consequentialist character potentially enters at this point. Machiavelli can be read as arguing that lying may be a justified means if it can be shown to serve good ends (Machiavelli 1995 [1513], chs 15 and

[3] For example, such was the conclusion of Sir John Chilcot's *Iraq Inquiry* (2016) with regard to Tony Blair's belief in the Iraqi regime's possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

18), as most commentators believe was the case with the secret negotiations that ultimately brought peace to Northern Ireland. Some see such cases as instances of Machiavellian political *virtù*, in which a wrong action proves allowable when it is necessary to achieve a valid political goal such as peace and stability, from which all will benefit (Berlin 1971). Yet, as Machiavelli remarked, a tension between the good result and the wrong action remains even here – the one may partially excuse but it does not remove the other (Walzer 1973, 175-176).

Note, that paternalism is not involved in a scenario where citizens have delegated the making of a decision to the executive in specific circumstances. One can imagine a situation where the politician really does have reliable information regarding an imminent attack and needs to react immediately. Most democracies empower their executives to act without prior consultation in such circumstances, although they generally put systems in place aimed at verifying that such an emergency truly exists for which such action would be proportionate. For example, the agreement of senior members of the military and possibly the judiciary, both of whom should ideally have some independence from the government, is typically required for such actions.

Some commentators contend that democracy can be reconciled with deceit and lying by politicians in a parallel manner if it can be argued that voters have consented to the use of deceit and lies by governments, at least in exceptional circumstances such as these, where national security might be at stake (Bok 1978, 172, 181; Newey 2003 also advocates such an arrangement, although he notes its paradoxical character). Such consent obviously cannot be given to any particular lie or deception without being self-defeating. But it could be justified in general terms and consent given through the passing of legislation or a constitutional provision giving the executive certain emergency powers to act deceitfully (Thompson 1987, 22-23, 25-26). Indeed, as Mearsheimer (2011, 72-74) observes, precisely because democracy standardly requires transparency and allows for criticism, the need for deception and lies in democratic states might be greater than in autocratic states if governments are to act expeditiously.

However, granting politicians such powers depends on their being trusted to act according to their mandate. Even with controls, such as those described above, such trust may be open to abuse. Meanwhile, to use executive privilege to lie in these circumstances without the requisite evidence or justification would be deceitful and subject to the same strictures as apply to the original case.

3. Democratic lies

As we saw, some past thinkers have argued that democracy fosters lies. Here, I examine how far this is the case, looking first at whether democracy rests on a lie and then at how far it encourages lying.

Does democracy rest on a lie?

So far, we have assumed lying and deception to be generally incompatible with democracy. However, that assumption perhaps moves too fast. I noted above Newey's contention that key to the democratic critique is the notion of consent, with lying and deceiving by their very nature appearing to undercut the very possibility of someone giving their consent to them, albeit with the potential exception of a generalised consent to certain exceptional cases of necessary lies and deception. We accept some such standard in commercial transactions. Buyers are exhorted to beware but certain forms of deception amount to fraud and invalidate the contract nonetheless as being inconsistent with genuine consensual agreement by the purchaser. Yet, this standard seems impossibly high for politics. Most proponents of the social contract tradition have acknowledged difficulties in claiming any existing political community to be based on the actual consent of its founding members, let alone its current ones (Lessnoff 1986). Nor can the presence of a functioning democratic system be plausibly viewed as a mechanism that ensures all acts of government enjoy the tacit, let alone the explicit, consent of the people. At best, they may enjoy the support of only a majority or, more likely, a plurality of the population. Meanwhile, how far such support can be regarded as involving rational consent to every aspect of a government's programme remains dubious. A majority of voters may simply be persuaded that on balance the policies and personnel of a given party represent the least bad of the available alternatives.

Some political philosophers argue that political legitimacy only requires that the basic principles underlying a liberal democratic constitutional order should be such that one could imagine people hypothetically consenting to it, or at least having no reasonable grounds to dissent. Yet, even liberal democratically inclined philosophers disagree as to which constellation of principles ought to command our rational consent, and how they should be ordered and applied. If a freely arrived at rational consensus cannot be assumed even on the fundamentals of a liberal democratic society, does that mean that the very idea of a political community built on the free and equal consent of its

members must itself be deemed a big lie, with the policies settled on by liberal democracies themselves the product of numerous smaller lies? After all, if the possibility of all reasoning to the same conclusions is not possible, how else can agreement be reached among people except through some deceiving others into believing what they know cannot be proved and may well be false?

A number of philosophers have thought this to be so, with some regarding it as a pernicious and others as a "noble" lie (see Canovan 1990 for a discussion, especially 5-9). Much as parents collude in their children's false belief in the existence of Santa Claus because they regard this fantasy as part of the magic of childhood, and so as something of value that they wish their children to enjoy, so citizens and politicians within a liberal democratic society can be regarded as colluding in supporting the myth of a society of free and equal individuals. Indeed, one can plausibly see such a myth as one to which to some degree all parties consent. Like a magical childhood, a liberal democratic society has a genuine value for most citizens. Rights may not be "natural" but rather contingent and vulnerable historical achievements. But regarding them as if they did inhere in human beings as such, and that the legitimacy of any political society rests on it being possible for citizens to claim them, arguably serves as an important political myth, which usefully raises the expectations citizens have of their governments (Canovan 1990, 13-17).

However, liberals tend not to employ such fictions, while conservatives – who do use them – typically do so to criticise the liberal's reliance on appeals to reason alone, arguing that it can only result in an anarchy of conflicting individual assertions (Burke 2014 [1790], 35 and 95). Instead, conservatives appeal to the need to preserve the "mystery" of the historically contingent customs and traditions binding societies together and supporting existing social entitlements and obligations. On this account, viewing the aristocracy, say, as truly noble and entitled to rule not only encourages deference from the lower orders but also fosters a genuine nobility of spirit among the upper classes (Burke 2014 [1790], 78). By contrast, the standard liberal view holds that it is precisely such a social order that encourages deceit and lies, with the lower classes forced into adopting falsely flattering and fawning behaviour to curry favour among those with power over them and whose position and condescending behaviour rests on little more than fraud. Not only will honesty only flourish within an egalitarian society, where no one is owed deference on the basis of birth or position alone, but also, so they claim, such a society will be one that has no need for dishonesty to sustain it (Paine 2000 [1791], 97). Meanwhile, the worry arises

that if democracy was thought to be nothing but a 'big lie', designed to give a false veneer of legitimacy to the rule of the few over the many, then that would in its turn delegitimise all appeals to truth in democratic politics – suggesting all truth claims are 'fake news' (Hahl *et al.* 2018).

Is democratic rhetoric a form of lying or, worse, bullshit or even post-truth?

If, as I suggested above – and will argue more fully below, no rational consensus on which all reasonable and rational individuals could be expected to converge exists, so that we can always expect people to reasonably disagree, then how can collective agreements be legitimately concluded? In gaining support for any programme or proposal, politicians make as much – if not more – use of rhetoric as reason. Persuasion can take many forms. Clear, coherent, logical and evidence-based reasoning undoubtedly can and do play their part, but so do oratory and charisma that appeal to people's passions and emotions. Indeed, in situations where an appeal to reason and fact alone will only get so far as to suggest a range of views as reasonable, then rhetoric is likely to be necessary to garner support behind one of those views.

How far can lying and deception be seen as rhetorical devices? The Socratic condemnation of the rhetoric of the Sophists reported by Plato tends in that direction, and lives on in the standard definition of sophistry as specious and false reasoning, with the intention to deceive. The contemporary adoption of "spin" and advertising techniques by politicians has often been characterised in these terms. Whether a "sexed-up" or "dodgy" dossier, over selling the likelihood that a foreign power possesses WMD,[4] can be distinguished from an outright "lie" may itself seem an example of captious and sophistic reasoning. However, even if we envisage spinning and being "economical with the truth" as resting on a continuum between truthfulness, on the one side, and outright mendacity and duplicity, on the other, most would accept a valid distinction exists between presenting one's case effectively and in the best possible light and lying and deception. The difficulty resides in where to draw the line.

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[4] On 24 September 2002 the British Government of Prime Minister Tony Blair published a dossier on *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government.* The document included a claim that Iraq could deploy WMD against the UK within 45 minutes, which was widely criticised as at best exaggerated ('sexed-up') and at worst fallacious ('dodgy').

Part of this difficulty rests on practical judgments in the realm of human affairs not being capable of justification on the basis of either "rational" or "factual" truth alone. A distinction made by Arendt (1967, 226), the first refers to the logical and propositional reasoning typical of mathematics, the second to the empirical reasoning of the natural sciences. While both have their role, neither fully determines our political judgments.

In the areas of logic and mathematical reasoning, or what Arendt (1967) calls "rational" truth, these processes are more or less self-validating *a priori* as a means for generating correct answers in their respective domains. Two plus two equals four because maths as a coherent and consistent system of logical reasoning involves that necessarily being the case. The key features of such reasoning consist of its being public, in the broad senses of being in principle accessible to all with the mental ability and training to follow it, and hence transparent and demonstrable of "proof" in the technical sense.

Reasoning in other areas of human knowledge proves less certain. Within the natural sciences, the experimental method has allowed the testing of hypotheses and their provisional empirical validation, at least until later refinements in both reasoning and experimental technique lead to their being re-confirmed or falsified. As such, an epistemological basis exists in this domain for grounding what Arendt terms 'factual' truth. Once again, both the formulation of hypotheses and their experimental testing involve the characteristics of publicity noted above, with such processes possessing the same key feature of being replicable and capable of peer assessment.

That does not mean that there are no matters even in the domain of natural science that are not subject to controversy through being less than clear-cut. Some hypotheses may remain, provisionally at least, untestable yet necessary to fill gaps in our current understanding of certain phenomena – such was the case in the past for the general theory of relativity. There have also been instances of such theories later being shown to be misguided, as proved the case with theories of phlogiston prior to the discovery of oxygen in the eighteenth century and may well be true of what contemporary physicists term 'dark matter'. However, in these sorts of cases a public method for testing such claims exists, even if it may not be always immediately possible for it to be deployed.

Global warming has been seen as pointing to difficulties in objectively grounding 'factual truth' even in natural science. The multiple physical and social factors involved in anthropogenic climate change initially made the

complex causal dynamics hard to identify and assess in a way that could lay claim to general acceptance. Nevertheless, the steady accumulation of evidence through public methods has now made those who deny the existence of humanly caused global warming akin at best to those who continue to assert the earth to be flat. Their thinking is simply incomplete, be it through ignorance and an inability to follow what is nonetheless open to public reasoning, or willfully and for self-serving motives.

Although both logical and factual truth play an important part in political reasoning, they cannot fully determine it. As John Rawls noted, practical reasoning on political issues has a normative dimension and consequently labours under what he called the "burdens of judgment" (Rawls 1993, 55-56). The factual information required for deciding what policy we ought to adopt to best address any social and economic problem can be complex and its exact bearing on the matter at hand open to varying assessments. This proves especially the case given disagreement over the weight to be given to different normative considerations and how particular values are in any case to be understood and specified. What people consider the most plausible way of interpreting and balancing the relevant facts and normative considerations will tend to reflect their own experiences and knowledge, which not only are unavoidably limited and liable to be oriented towards their own concerns but also inevitably differ from those of people with different experiences and knowledge. For example, people hold very different views on the role of different social and moral factors in crime, and hence of the most appropriate forms of punishment and policy responses. If some emphasise individual responsibility and retributive concerns, others are inclined to adopt more complex assessments that diminish the salience of these factors.

None of this means that logical and empirical reasoning can be ignored or have no independent weight in political decision-making. Take the example of global warming and climate change denial. Reasonable disagreements of the Rawlsean kind can occur over issues such as who has responsibility for mitigating climate change – for example, should developed countries accept greater responsibility than developing countries – or which of a range of policies, such as carbon taxes and carbon off-setting, might be regarded as the most effective, or which policies might be fairest, both among current generations and towards future generations, and so on. These disagreements can give rise to a wide range of policy recommendations, some of which will be in conflict with others. However, none of them involve denying either the

fact of global warming or the need to provide a coherent and evidence based proposal as to how it might be most successfully and equitably tackled. By contrast, climate change denial seeks to either misrepresent or ignore rational and factual truth in this area. Some types of denial may take the form of lies or misleading half-truths that conceal or distort the import of pertinent arguments or facts. Companies may use such tactics to avoid costly and constraining regulations by seeking to diminish the risks of their activities, or politicians employ them to curry favour with voters by suggesting certain burdensome measures are neither urgent nor even necessary. However, such misrepresentation conceals the truth – it does not deny it, and as such is capable of being revealed as a distortion of the truth.

The most pernicious forms of climate change denial, though, take the form of what has been called bullshit and post-truth. Harry Frankfurt (2005) has famously defined bullshit as a disregard for truth, which takes the form of employing spurious and possibly meaningless arguments and simply making up the evidence. Post-truth goes further, and denies the very existence of truth – all views are simply a matter of opinion. Whereas the liar seeks to conceal the truth, the bullshitter sidelines it as irrelevant and the post-truth advocate disputes its very existence. These rhetorical strategies become possible the more inaccessible the relevant reasoning and facts are to most people. If these can only be fully understood by those with the relevant expertise and training, and cannot be easily or straightforwardly related to peoples' everyday experience – as is the case with some of the evidence for global warming – then people may be open to those who cast doubt on its value and validity. That becomes all the more likely if truth is of an inconvenient nature and has potentially costly consequences for people, especially if they feel these costs are not being fairly distributed, which is a matter of reasonable disagreement.

As a result, we need a way of distinguishing reasonable from unreasonable disagreements. Neither technocratic government nor rule by philosopher kings is possible because unlike the purely logical and natural scientific disagreements, no public epistemological processes are available to settle disputes between rival ontological claims about the just or even the most efficient society. Logical reasoning and empirical evidence can help clarify what is in dispute and offer important background information. A concern with truthfulness, in the sense identified by Williams (2002, 11) as a regard for the virtues of sincerity and accuracy, can encourage people to engage with each

other's arguments and concerns and to argue in less self-interested, narrow or myopic ways. But there is no guarantee that people will converge through the force of reason and the weight of evidence alone on a given position, or that if they did that such a consensus would necessarily be the correct position to take. Yet, on many of these issues a collective decision needs to be taken despite these disagreements. If outright coercion is to be avoided, then some process seems necessary for reaching agreements that the vast majority, if not all people, will accept as legitimate.

Democratic politics offers itself up as a legitimate process of this kind. A key issue, therefore, is how far the democratic process is capable of weeding out lies, bullshit and post-truth from legitimate attempts at persuasion. To return to the earlier example of a court of law and the opposing arguments of the prosecution and defence lawyers – just as these advocates attempt to persuade a jury of their case, in part by uncovering flaws in each other's arguments, can we see democratic politicians as likewise engaged in doing something similar with regard to the electorate? If not, what will prevent democratic decisions being based on lies and bullshit, and as such deeply flawed? The question, to which we now turn, therefore, is how effective is democracy in promoting truthfulness by encouraging a respect for it among politicians and citizens alike?

4. Truthfulness within the circumstances of democratic politics

Like logical reasoning and the experimental method, democracy is in many respects a public process. It is public in offering a form of collective decision-making that offers each person a single vote and conducting elections and the aggregation of votes under certain known and settled rules of the game. As we saw above, ideally such rules should allow all voters to be treated as free and equal, capable of making their own decisions and able to express their views, and to operate in a fair manner through not being biased towards any given view and treating all views equally, with majority rule an impartial means for settling a stand off among different views. However, democratic procedures possess epistemic qualities to only a limited degree.

Certainly, some epistemic gains can be attributed to such forms of collective decision-making. For example, both Condorcet's jury theorem (List, Goodin 2001) and the "wisdom of the crowds" thesis (Surowiecki 2004) sug-

gest that, given certain assumptions, the more people involved in making the decision, the more accurate it is likely to be. Democratic systems should also allow a plurality of different views to be aired and for advocates of each of them to challenge the factual and rational basis of the other views. More generally, democracy offers a mechanism for gathering information about people's needs and concerns. However, while the goal of an ideal democracy might be to offer an equal say to all involved and a fair mechanism for deciding differences, it cannot be claimed that a democratic process produces 'correct' answers in the manner of a logical proof or a confirmation of hypotheses in the manner of an experiment. It merely indicates the degree of support certain propositions can obtain among a relevant group of people, and provide a neutral and equitable way of resolving conflicts. There can even be reasonable disagreement on which electoral systems and rules best realise the democratic ideal, given that notions of fairness and equity are themselves open to a variety of interpretations.

Nevertheless, democracy operates as a public method that incentivises politicians and citizens to express their views openly and to engage with the opinions of others. Given the need for democratic politicians to gain the support of a plurality or even a majority of the electorate, depending on the voting system, and the acceptance by most of the rest of their right to rule, it becomes necessary for them to claim at least to govern in the public interest. However, the truth of that claim cannot be demonstrated unequivocally. Various forms of evidence may be recruited to defend it, but citizens can and will evaluate their relevance and bearing by different criteria. As we noted above, rhetoric and persuasiveness are therefore ineliminable aspects of politics, as they are of much argument in the humanities and social sciences. Yet, that need not mean that logic and evidence, on the one hand, and the virtues of sincerity and accuracy associated with truthfulness, on the other, count for nothing. Citizens will still have good reasons to want their politicians to be consistent in their principles, and to propose policies that are realistic and effective. How will they be able to trust them otherwise, and be able to select those they feel likely to pursue programmes that promote their interests and sanction them if they fail?

Some philosophers have worried truthfulness as well as truth has become ever harder to achieve in contemporary politics. Arendt believed that "rational" truth in particular had limited application to politics. In her account, the truth of political argumentation was necessarily a matter of public opin-

ion rather than of logic and depended on the debating skills of those involved. However, that did not mean politics had no use for truth of any kind. She felt that "factual" truth did hold an independent validity within political argument. However, she feared that facts were increasingly distorted in politics. Commenting on George Clemenceau's remark that, while he did not know how guilt for the start of the First World War would be apportioned by future historians, he did know for certain that "they will not say Belgium invaded Germany", Arendt observed that such re-writing of the facts was precisely what totalitarian regimes attempted (Arendt 1967, 234). Although the facts allowed for different historical interpretations, including a lively debate about the causes of the First World War in Germany and elsewhere, they also placed a constraint on allowable interpretations of a kind that totalitarian regimes will frequently seek to deny.

Indeed, her worry was that for slightly different reasons a parallel denial of "fact" was also occurring in democracies. Discussing the lessons to be learned from the Pentagon Papers (Arendt 1971), her argument once again was that they revealed a failure to engage with factual truth. On the one hand, she argued successive Presidents misled the American electorate about the conduct of the Vietnam War by believing that elections had more to do with advertising and spin than being honest. Worse, politicians and their advisors came to believe their own hype. As a result, they failed to acknowledge the manifest shortcomings of the military campaign. On the other hand, policy-makers based their policies on theoretical suppositions regarding human behaviour that were unsupported by any evidence, and in particular historical evidence about the region, its lack of strategic importance and its culture.

Nevertheless, in the case of both totalitarian and democratic regimes, Arendt contended that what she calls the contingency of historical fact ultimately wins out against all attempts to deny factual truth. Ultimately, neither citizens nor governments can consistently live a lie. The dramatic transformation of the public sphere by new media since the 1960s and 1970s, when Arendt wrote her essays on truth and politics, has led some commentators to fear we are now moving into a post-truth era (e.g. Davis 2017). They worry that facts about the world are no longer accessible to citizens, even with regard to their own lives. Jeremy Bentham famously defended democracy on the grounds that although the electorate might not be able to judge how best to make a shoe, they could judge when the shoe pinched and hence be capable of removing politicians whose policies left them worse off (Harri-

son 1983, 209). However, if politicians can always blame others for their failings, asserting that all criticism is simply "fake news", no such control can operate. As Arendt (1967) noted, within a democratic society one needs independent sources of both rational and factual truth to the politicians themselves and their supporters – including independent media and universities. When these come under political attack and get undermined, then the possibility for a democratic system to operate as a mechanism capable of promoting truthfulness gets correspondingly diminished.

5. Conclusion

In his study of lying in international politics, Mearsheimer (2011, 25-30) contends leaders rarely lie to each other, at least in peacetime, but frequently do so to their own citizens. He surmises that in the international sphere trust is paramount because no authority exists with a legitimate monopoly of coercive force capable of enforcing agreements between states. As a result, if agreements are to be long lasting, then they must be honestly made. By contrast, in the domestic sphere politicians can afford to be untrustworthy because they can rely on the apparatus of the state to secure their position.

While the point about the international sphere is well taken, the inference he draws with regard to domestic politics appears over determined. At least within democratic states, the foregoing analysis suggests that leaders have pragmatic as well as moral reasons to be truthful to some degree. Lies will find you out. Yet, politics is the realm of opinion, and truthfulness a systemic property rather than something any individual citizen or politician can be expected to possess alone. To this extent, Newey was perhaps not realist enough – real politics may be less open to lies and especially deception than an idealised politics based on the consent of autonomous individuals precisely because it sets its sights lower.

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