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Propagandizing*: An Argument for Propagandizing as Speech Act

By

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine the status of propagandizing within speech act theory, challenge the assumption that persuasion itself is a speech act, and advance a minimal condition for propagandizing that I call Propagandizing*. Influential prior accounts such as Bernays, Marlin, and Stanley have focused on propaganda as a product rather than the act of generating propaganda, while existing accounts of persuasion like Austin and Walton treat persuasion as a speech act. I argue that a full analysis of propaganda qua propaganda must include a rigorous analysis of the act of propagandizing and particularly the act of intentional propagandizing. I make this argument by drawing on BDI psychology and a refined Gricean framework to argue that persuasion should be considered a perlocutionary aim rather than a perlocutionary object. Unlike a perlocutionary object, as a perlocutionary aim it is inherently strategic and thus can be retained over multiple successive persuasive attempts. Propagandizing* is then put forward as one of the possible discursive methods a person with the perlocutionary aim of persuasion might employ. The benefit of this account is that it shifts the focus of propaganda studies toward a more precise understanding of intentionality and discursive strategies without appealing to normative constraints. While this project is primarily aimed at providing greater conceptual clarity to the foundations of propaganda studies as opposed to providing an explicit normative evaluation of propaganda qua propaganda, it also provides a useful framework for future ethical and empirical analysis.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, the global media ecosystem has undergone a rapid transformation, most visibly through the rise of social media as a central channel for communication and influence. My interest in studying this topic originated in my observation that while this shift has been widely acknowledged, particularly in discourse surrounding the 2016 presidential election, there has not been equal attention paid to how this new media ecosystem responds to propagandistic influences. Social media not only exposes users to propagandistic content more frequently than was possible in previous centuries, but it also has democratized the production and dissemination of such content. This granted individuals substantially greater autonomy to rapidly deploy propagandistic content at scale. My view was that many of the contemporary analyses of both this media ecosystem shift and propaganda theory failed to properly link the two. What they missed was that propagandistic influence was one of, if not the, major driving engine of this media shift.

This realization led me to identify a deeper conceptual concern within the field. While much of the pre-existing literature has focused on propaganda as a *product*, such as artifacts or messages, my project is focused on examining *the act of propagandizing*, specifically in cases where intentional agency can be identified. I argue that there has been insufficient attention paid to the origin point of intentional propaganda; the discursive strategies employed by propagandists and the intentions behind those strategies. This

shifting of focus is the central motivation for this dissertation.

One case that made this especially apparent was the 2016 presidential election. At the time, many political observers believed Clinton's victory was a certainty. Even the polls showed her dominating the race and that her victory was all but a guarantee.¹ However, those assumptions and polls proved inaccurate, and she lost the race. In the lead up to and wake of the election there was considerable discussion regarding the increasing influence of social media in politics. For example, Wired put out an article titled "Social Media is Making the Debate on Guns – and Trump – Worse," on 12/16/2015. I argue that the underlying force driving this shift was the widespread use of propaganda through a new and accessible medium (social media).

This is not merely a contemporary concern. Propaganda is a difficult topic to discuss for a variety of reasons, in part because of its proximity to many of humanity's most horrific atrocities. The Holocaust, the Cambodian Genocide, the Rwandan Genocide, the Armenian Genocide, and countless other horrors were propelled, fueled, and ultimately retrospectively justified with propaganda. Due to this, the topic can appear taboo, unsettling, or even suspect to approach academically. However, that proximity is not a reason to avoid studying the concept: it is a reason to embrace the study of it. If propaganda is one of the great motivators of collective action, up to and including the worst and most devastating actions ever taken by humans, then understanding it is necessary to both

¹ Jackson et al., "2016 Us Pre-Election – Clinton Has a 90% chance of Winning (November 7)," *Ipsos*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/2016-us-pre-elections-clinton-has-90-chance-winning-november-7>, 1

combat it and, where ethically permissible, employ it.

To be clear, I am not presenting this as an isolated departure from the field or prior literature. Over the past 150 years there has been a small but influential body of propaganda theorists who have emerged. Philosophers like W.E.B. Du Bois, Edward Bernays, Harold Lasswell, Jacques Ellul, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, Randal Marlin, Jason Stanley, Anne Quaranto, and others have all made significant contributions to clarifying our understanding of propaganda qua propaganda. This dissertation builds upon that tradition while diverging from its primary focus.

Where my project fits into this tradition lies in shifting the focus of analysis from the product to the producer, at least in cases where a producer could be identified. The justification for this shift is that with the media ecosystem shifting to favor social media, the landscape for who could effectively propagandize has rapidly changed. The propagandists of the past nearly always had to work in groups and generally at the behest or on behalf of larger and wealthier organizations. While the production cost of any individual piece of propaganda is generally negligible, the cost of spreading that propaganda can be astronomical. However, the rise of social media networks gave the average person significantly greater ability to rapidly produce and deploy propaganda on a wide scale. We are currently still living through this process, and the long-term ramifications of this transformation remain uncertain. This project aims to clarify one core aspect of this phenomenon: the nature of intentional propagandizing and the theoretical groundwork required to analyze it within speech act theory.

To address this theoretical gap and provide a framework for analyzing the activity

of propagandizing, I propose a minimal condition for propagandizing that I call Propagandizing*. It is a model that aims to highlight what I take to be the three most critical components of intending to propagandize: the proposition includes a *political dimension*; it moves at least one member of the audience into a *deceived state*; and it is intended to generate *widespread adoption* within the relevantly intended audience. Each of these technical terms is explained in greater depth in Part 3. This model is grounded in a refined Gricean account of intention recognition in speech acts and the BDI psychology framework.

The structure of this dissertation proceeds as follows. Part 1 presents a survey of major historical and contemporary approaches to defining propaganda, identifies conceptual limitations within existing models, and motivates the need for an account of propagandizing. Part 2 addresses several critical technical concepts that Propagandizing* rests upon and explains why I locate my model under a modified version of the Gricean framework. Part 3 presents my model of Propagandizing* and provides justifications for the necessary conditions provided. Finally, Part 4 addresses anticipated conceptual challenges and responds to potential objections.

Part 1: Literature Review

1.1: Philosophical Foundations of Propaganda

The philosophic literature on propaganda has proceeded through a confusing and haphazard series of fits and starts primarily focused around two main goals. The first is the effort to build a definition that would find broad acceptance across various political and cultural perspectives. The second is a hodgepodge of case-studies and arguments about those case-studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines which are aimed at determining the ethical status or merits of utilizing propaganda. These two core aims within the literature necessarily bear on one another. Philosophers who are more concerned with establishing an acceptable definition tend to have their theories influenced by certain prior ethical beliefs while those more concerned with ethical determinations tend to choose definitions of propaganda which more naturally lend support to their ethical positions.

In this literature review, I will be primarily focusing on philosophers who have focused their efforts on developing definitions rather than ethical conclusions. I do this because my own project falls firmly under the umbrella of definition building and so definition building focused literature will be more critical to my overall aims. However, that literature is unfortunately sparser than the ethical literature and as such there are parts of the ethical literature that cannot be overlooked or ignored as they play a crucial role in informing the definitions that are developed.

1.2: Historical Origins of Propaganda

There is some difficulty in knowing exactly where the natural starting point for propaganda studies should be. On the one hand, we can look as far back as political figures like

Alexander the Great and through the lens of modern interpretation it is possible to view their actions as appearing to be inherently propagandistic or carrying out propagandistic functions. But such debates are best left for historians, because contemporary philosophers should resist applying contemporary concepts to historical figures who would not have conceived of them in the same way.

My project, however, is not aimed at trying to account for propaganda's role in human history or culture, but rather the specific role it plays in language. It is with this goal in mind that I will be presenting a roughly chronological analysis of the evolution of the concept starting from when the term was first coined to the contemporary philosophical debates on the topic.

We should thus begin with the coining of the term and its formal introduction to the English lexicon. The term itself is understood to trace back to the Catholic Church in 1622 by a decree titled *The Sacred Congregation De Propaganda Fide*, which translates to The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.² Though the Latin word *propaganda* was likely used informally to some degree before then. This usage of the term is not especially helpful for modern purposes, but it does help inform us of the original core meaning of the concept. Propaganda originally only referred to propagation, specifically the propagation of the Catholic faith. However, in this sense we can understand faith as being essentially the collection of

² Peter Guilday, "The Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide (1622-1922)" in *The Catholic Historical Review*, 478-494.

propositions which, when believed, make a person a believer in Catholicism. We therefore can say that the original definition of the word propaganda was roughly,

Original Propaganda: the intentional spreading of doctrinal Catholic beliefs for the purpose of encouraging others to adopt or endorse those beliefs or, minimally, adopt or endorse Catholic doctrine.

This definition would go essentially unchallenged for over four hundred years until evolutions in the technology of warfare would make persuading soldiers to fight a significantly more critical portion of military strategy.

1.3: Edward Bernays and Modern Propaganda

The modern conception of the term would arise from the rapid proliferation of propaganda during World War I (1914) and smaller lead-up wars like the Russo-Japanese War (1904). This occurred because of two simultaneous changes in the global landscape. The first was that trains and industrial shipping had proliferated around the world, particularly in Europe, and had allowed for a much wider and more rapid spreading of news and newspapers. The second was that the industrial revolution had spurred significant advancements in war machinery, notably weapons like the Maxim Gun. These weapons altered the face of war in the eyes of the public from a noble romantic adventure that one expected to return from, to a brutal grisly meat-grinder from which there was little hope of escape for the average soldier. Without making any specific claims about the merits of the reasoning, the general belief among the aristocratic classes of WWI Europe was that the solution to the soldier's morale problem was to get better at persuading them to go to war. Thus, the modern reliance on propaganda as part of the glue that holds together nations, was born.

In the wake of WWI, Edward Bernays wrote one of the two early seminal texts on the subject in his book *Propaganda* (1928). Bernays' perspective was not particularly novel in that he was basing his conclusions off the activities he observed others of his time already participating in, but his codification of the ideas behind those activities was revolutionary. Not only did his work significantly help to codify what propaganda was in the minds of most English-speaking people, he located propaganda within the pre-existing framework of all modern nations. In so doing he accomplishes what was perhaps his most enduring contribution to the field, the belief that propaganda is both an inevitable and unavoidable consequence of the standard functioning of nations.

Bernays argues that the *New Propagandists* are operating under a different name in society, they are what he refers to as *Public Relations Counsels* (PRC) or as we would more typically refer to them today, propagandists.² These PRCs oversee advertisers or advertising activities, though they may engage such practices themselves as well. It is worth noting here, however, that while our contemporary usage of these terms collapses them into one meaning, Bernays did not believe that a PRC was equivalent to an advertiser. He argues that the PRC operates at a level above the advertiser, as a kind of director of the advertisers' activities. The exact distinction between the work of the PRC and the advertiser is not spelled out clearly, but I infer that the distinction he is drawing is that the PRC oversees the overall persuasion campaign while the advertiser produces individual advertisements.³

³ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Ig Publishing, 1926) 65.

While these points are subtle, they help underscore what I take to be the primary substance of Bernays' account is that propaganda and advertising are linked in a nested relationship. Advertising is one tool the PRC (propagandist) uses as part of their campaign. What the PRC does for commercial interests, Bernays imagines analogous specialists doing for governmental and political interests; the same repertoire of techniques is applied across both domains. It is worth noting here that Bernays is not very specific about where a PRC ends and a propagandist begins nor does he clearly state whether advertising is fully collapsible with propaganda. However, what matters for Bernays above all else is that this is primarily a kind of messaging that is explicitly and intentionally aimed at altering the target audience's beliefs in a desired way.

The relationship between advertising and propaganda is one that any coherent theory of propaganda must be able to account for as the two phenomena are undeniably closely related. At the cognitive level for the receiving audience, they seem to be nearly identical in terms of how they manipulate and affect our perceptions and beliefs. An advertisement is intended to induce the viewer into shifting their belief state to one that is in favor of supporting the relevant commercial enterprise. Propaganda does the same thing, but Bernays thinks it has been unfairly marred due to its association with governmental messaging. Bernays overall goal was to assert propaganda as something that is neither positive nor negative, merely a necessary, albeit not necessarily inevitable, component of modern society. Therefore, while Bernays ultimately does not provide a perfectly clear picture through which we can understand exactly how the triangular relationship between Governments, Private Industry, and Propaganda/Advertising, is imagined working, we must still recognize his foundational contributions to the field of propaganda studies so that we can understand how his work has rippled through history.

I will close this section on Bernays own supplied definition.

Bernaysian Propaganda: a consistent enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise or group.⁴

The problem I find with this definition, and with Bernays more broadly, is that this account over-scopes the concept. If we take this definition as is, then any persuasive act that occurs more than once is necessarily propaganda. This interpretation may well be tempting, as it accords with the intuition that propaganda is more of a method or technique than a specific singular action. The most unsavory bullet this definition would force us to bite is that it means that even rational argumentation that is grounded in reliable and reproducible evidence will qualify as propaganda if the proponent makes more than one attempt to persuade their audience. In other words, my primary rejection of this definition that Bernays supplies is that it reduces propaganda down to mere repetition, and I do not believe that adequately captures the concept. However, to be fair to Bernays, his intended meaning was not literal repetition but coordinated, multi-dimensional shaping of public relations. Nonetheless, his wording is broad enough that one could plausibly interpret it as including much of ordinary persuasion.

That is aside from the fact that Bernays broader schema is quite vague as he fails to draw clear boundaries between propaganda and its closest conceptual cousins, advertising, misinformation, and disinformation. It appears that he views these other concepts as sub-kinds of propaganda, but he does not state this clearly or definitively.

⁴ Bernays *Propaganda* 24.

1.4: Harold Lasswell's Influence on Modern Propaganda

At the same time as Bernays, another younger philosopher was also hard at work in the earliest days of propaganda studies. Harold D. Lasswell's PhD dissertation *Propaganda Technique in the World War* was heavily influential in the 1930's and 1940's and his work is regularly cited by propaganda researchers throughout the decades. That said, while his contributions to communication studies are not to be understated, his contribution to the field of propaganda studies is more modest but still worthy of recognition. He states,

Propaganda does not even include the stiffening of moral by a cool and confident being. It refers solely to the control of opinion by significant symbols, or, to speak more concretely and less accurately, by stories, rumours, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication. Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism...But by far the most potent role of propaganda is to mobilize animosity of the community against the enemy, to maintain friendly relations with neutrals and allies, to arouse the neutrals against the enemy, and to break up the solid wall of enemy antagonism.⁵

What I believe he means by this is that propaganda appears to include several things but can be distilled down to two intended simultaneous effects: *control* of the opinion and the attitudes of the intended audience. In an article for *The American Political Science Review* (1927) Lasswell defined propaganda as:

⁵ Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War* (Ravenio Books, 2015), 8-9.

Lasswellian Propaganda: The management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.⁶

I find this definition useful because it speaks to one of the most common and enduring perceptions about propaganda among the public, that propaganda is presumed to be a kind of illegitimate or otherwise ethically undesirable rhetorical attack. Lasswell himself does not take this to be necessarily negative thing as he frames this as being a necessary component of modern military strategy and statecraft.⁷ Where this account is most relevant for this project is in comparing it with Bernays' account to see where they diverge, to what extent, and why.

The Bernaysian account focuses on the development, denigration, or reinforcement of beliefs; the Lasswellian account focuses on *control* through belief manipulation via significant symbols.⁸ What this makes clear is that at their core, these two accounts truly are discussing the same phenomena, albeit they choose to put the locus in different places. While linguistically the distinction between whether propaganda is primarily targeted at beliefs or controlling opinions and the attitudes that fall out of those opinions may appear banal, there is a substantive normative distinction. Where the two theories diverge is primarily in how they frame propaganda as a thing in the world. Lasswell argues that propaganda is one prong on the of trident modern

⁶ Harold D. Lasswell, "The Theory of Political Propaganda," in *The Sage Library of Military and Strategic Studies Vol 1: Historical Origins, Definitions, and the Changing Nature of Propaganda*, (Sage Publications, 2013), 83.

⁷ Lasswell *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, 9.

⁸ Lasswell is a bit vague in terms of what is fully entailed by the term 'significant symbols' but I take him to mean that propaganda operates through the use of shared cultural semantic touchstones which might include stereotypical things like posters or slogans, but could also be said to include smaller more subtle things like the way one holds their body while making a public address or adds emphasis or inflection on certain terms in a way that would be comprehensibly picked up by the audience.

military or governmental power projection. That trident is composed of propaganda, military pressure, and economic pressure to be wielded against what he calls a “belligerent enemy.”⁹ Contrast that with our prior analysis of Bernays who viewed propaganda more as a banal aspect of modern society that could be used for positive or negative ends.

In both accounts beliefs are central to understanding what propaganda is. The distinction comes down to the question of whether propaganda is primarily a form of belief alteration or a form of belief manipulation. What I mean by this distinction is that for Bernays the primary focus was that propaganda works by merely altering the audience’s beliefs to be in line with whatever beliefs the propagandist/PRC had in mind. For Bernays the relationship between belief and subsequent action is immaterial, all that matters is the beliefs themselves. For Lasswell the primary focus is on how beliefs impact actions.¹⁰ For him they play a highly deterministic role and thus to engage in intentional belief alteration is to engage in an explicit manipulation of the audience.

In conclusion, while I find both accounts to have merits and echoes of both models will be apparent in the various subsequent accounts I will discuss in the remainder of this Part, I find them both ultimately inadequate as definitions on their own. I find the Bernaysian account to be guilty of over-scoping to such a degree that unless we read Bernays as restricting his account to exclusively governmental communication, then it seems like nearly all forms of communication

⁹ Lasswell *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, 9.

¹⁰ Lasswell, “The Theory of Political Propaganda,” 83.

will qualify as propaganda.¹¹ Conversely, I find the Lasswellian account to be guilty of under-scoping by overly restricting the account to control. As we will see in subsequent accounts, there are plenty of examples of cases wherein we are inclined to call something propaganda, but it is untenable to assert it as also containing an explicit or implicit controlling function.

1.5: WWII and the Focus on Efficacy

We now move beyond the 1920's and into the 1930's and WWII, a period that holds a strong grip on the public's imagination and folk understanding of propaganda. It is from this period that some of the most famous propagandists of history emerged: Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, and Benito Mussolini. All three of these men are frequently imagined to be the exemplars of the danger and power of a regime employing propaganda. Their apparent successes and relative impacts on history may prompt us to believe that if we want to understand how propaganda works then we should see what these men said about it. However, that would be a mistake as these men not only did not openly discuss their theoretical views on propaganda, in some cases they opined their disdain for doing so. In a speech to an audience of Nazi party members, Joseph Goebbels stated the following.

There is really little point to discussing propaganda. It is a matter of practice, not of theory. One cannot determine theoretically whether one propaganda is better than another. Rather, that propaganda is good that has the desired results, and that propaganda is bad

¹¹ The reason I mention the potential restriction above is that I believe that the substance of Bernays work leads one to conclude that while he thinks non-governmental organizations could generate propaganda, it is only really propaganda if the content of the message relates to governmental, or minimally, political affairs. However, he does not explicitly state this restriction, it is merely an inference that can be drawn and as such should not be stated as his explicit opinion.

that does not lead to the desired results. It does not matter how clever it is, for the task of propaganda is not be clever, its task is to lead to success. I therefore avoid theoretical discussions about propaganda, for there is no point to it. Propaganda shows that it is good if over a certain period it can win over and fire up people for an idea. If it fails to do so, it is bad propaganda. If propaganda wins the people it wanted to win, it was presumably good, and if not, it was presumably bad. No one can say that your propaganda is too crude or low or brutal, or that it is not decent enough, for those are not the relevant criteria. Its purpose is not to be decent, gentle, or weak, or modest; it is to be successful. That is why I have intentionally chosen to discuss propaganda along with a second theme, knowledge. Otherwise, our discussion would be of little value.¹²

This quote might initially appear difficult to reconcile with Goebbels' own subsequent actions in WWII and his employment of propaganda therein, but not if we understand him correctly. He is not saying that he thinks propaganda is unimportant or trivial, rather that he thinks discussions about anything other than *efficacy* regarding propaganda are pointless. I chose this quote because I believe it is emblematic of not only the views of these three notorious propagandists, but because it is emblematic of the general attitudes of those in power at the time.

That attitude, broadly speaking, was that propaganda is something that not only exists but that no person or group has any justifiable authority to determine which propaganda was legitimate and which was not. That attitude underpins the belief that there would be no utility to

¹² Joseph Goebbels, "Erkenntnis und Propaganda," *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewählte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels*, trans. Randall L. Bytwerk, 28-52 (Calvin University Propaganda Archive, Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1934)

providing *any* kind of usable framework for understanding propaganda beyond its efficacy. It is also worth noting that Goebbels gave this speech in the same year that Bernays would go on to publish his own work. This temporal proximity highlights how differently figures like Goebbels approached propaganda compared to contemporaneous theorists such as Bernays or Lasswell, though there is no clear evidence Goebbels was responding directly to them.

It would be inaccurate to even describe Goebbels work, or the work of people like Hitler or Mussolini, as any kind of academic or theoretical analysis, it was mere practice. Shockingly effective practice, but mere practice, nonetheless. Leonard W. Doob describes Goebbels' ideas on propaganda as being focused on adhering to certain specific axioms. As you read, pay careful attention to how all these axioms are focused on practice and efficacy as opposed to theory or accuracy.

1. Propagandists must have access to intelligence concerning events and public opinion.
2. Propaganda must be planned and executed by only one authority
3. The propaganda consequences of an action must be considered in planning that action
4. Propaganda must affect the enemy's policy and action
5. Declassified, operational information must be available to implement a propaganda campaign.
6. To be perceived, propaganda must evoke the interest of an audience and must be transmitted through attention-getting communications medium.
7. Credibility alone must determine whether propaganda output should be true or false.

8. The purpose, content, and effectiveness of enemy propaganda; the strength and effects of an exposé; and the nature of current propaganda campaigns determine whether enemy propaganda should be ignored or refuted.
9. Credibility, intelligence, and the possible effects of communicating determine whether propaganda materials should be censored.
10. Material from enemy propaganda may be utilized in operations when it helps diminish that enemy's prestige or lends support to the propagandist's own objective.
11. Black rather than White propaganda must be employed when the latter is less credible or produces undesirable effects.
12. Propaganda may be facilitated by leaders with Prestige.
13. Propaganda must be Carefully Timed.
14. Propaganda must label events and people with distinctive phrases or slogans.
15. Propaganda to the home front must prevent the raising of false hopes which can be blasted by future events.
16. Propaganda to the home front must create an optimum anxiety level.
17. Propaganda to the home front must diminish the impact of frustration.
18. Propaganda must facilitate the displacement of aggression by specifying the target for hatred.

19. Propaganda cannot immediately affect strong counter-tendencies; instead, it must offer some form of action or diversion, or both.¹³

What I find notable about this list is that while it offers little additional clarity for theorists, it is a reasonably exhaustive list of maxims for maximizing the effectiveness of propaganda. This is in line with Goebbel's quote from 1928 and it is worth pointing out that Doob's primary source for these axioms is Goebbels own diary. Given that my project is focused exclusively on the domain of theory, work like Goebbels offers little additional insight.

Therefore, given that my project is *not* aimed at understanding what makes propaganda effective but is instead focused on how propaganda functions within language, there is little insight to be gained from this period or these men who offer little in the way of insight to begin with.

While this period represents one of the most critical periods of propaganda's use in practice, comparatively little effort was put into understanding the concept in theoretical terms. It is for this reason that despite the frequent assumption that any full analysis of propaganda must also include an analysis of this period and famous historical propagandist like Goebbels, Hitler, or Mussolini; there is little substance to be gained regarding understanding propaganda qua propaganda from doing so.

¹³ Leonard W. Doob, "Goebbels Principles of Propaganda," in *Propaganda Volume I: Historical Origins, Definitions, and the Changing Nature of Propaganda*, ed. Paul Baines and Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy (Sage Publications, 2013), 45-63

1.6: Jacques Ellul and Why Studying Propaganda is Necessary

That is why I will next pick up the story of the evolution of the definition of propaganda in 1965 with Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*. This book was remarkably influential in propaganda studies from when it was written through the early 2000's, though it has seen some hints of a resurgence in contemporary discussions. The passage below encapsulates both the core of Ellul's views and lays out some of the core problems that propaganda studies continue to run into today as well as the motivating force behind my project.

But whereas it is relatively easy to study a precise technique, whose scope can be defined, a study of propaganda runs into some extraordinary obstacles. From the outset it is obvious that there is great uncertainty about the phenomenon itself...Even when these obstacles have been removed, it is still very difficult to determine what constitutes propaganda in our world and what the nature of propaganda is. This is because it is a *secret* action. The temptation is then twofold: to agree with Jacques Driencourt that 'everything is propaganda' because everything in the political or economic spheres seems to be penetrated and molded by this force; or, as certain modern American social scientists have done, to abandon the term *propaganda* altogether because it cannot be defined with any degree of precision. Either course is inadmissible intellectual surrender. To adopt either attitude would lead us to abandon the study of the phenomenon that exists and needs to be defined.¹⁴

¹⁴ Jacques Ellul *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, (Vintage Books, 1985), Page X

In this passage Ellul sets up one of the foundational problems of propaganda studies, that identifying propaganda is exceptionally difficult because people tend to keep their personal engagement with propaganda secret. However, there is some difficulty here as it is not entirely clear what Ellul had in mind when he chose to emphasize the secretive nature of propaganda. In a footnote he writes,

The secret element can be a theoretically independent “faction,” a network of rumors, and so on. The same effect is obtained by contrasting the real methods of action, which are never acknowledged, with totally different overt propaganda proclamations. This is the most frequently used system in the Soviet Union. In this case, it is necessary to have an overt propaganda, in accordance with Goebbels: ‘We openly admit that we wish to influence our people. To admit this is the best method of attaining it.’ Hence the creation of an official propaganda ministry. In any case, as Goebbels also said, when the news to be disseminated is unbelievable it must be disseminated by secret, Black propaganda. As for censorship, it should be hidden and secret as possible. Moreover, all serious propagandists know that censorship should be used as little as possible.¹⁵

This sheds some light on the idea, albeit not fully. What he is saying is that the secretive nature is unspecific but that there is something inherently opaque about propaganda, or at least Black propaganda.¹⁶ Ellul is clear that Black propaganda is inherently secretive but is less specific about the nuances of White propaganda and its secretive element. White propaganda’s

¹⁵ Ellul *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, Page 87

¹⁶ The terms white and black propaganda are explained in more detail below in section 1.7.

secretiveness would be secrecy in the form of things like cover intelligence gathering, controlled information flow, or covert organizational strategy.

Between these two quotes I take him to mean that he does believe White propaganda has some degree of secretiveness inherent to it, but that Black propaganda is in some way more fundamentally or overtly deceitful. However, I find his invocation of Goebbels here telling and that is part of why I included the extended examination of Goebbels in the prior section. Goebbels' first axiom of propaganda was that it must utilize and in some way be based around intelligence and intelligence is typically either gathered or stored covertly.¹⁷ In other words, Ellul seems to be saying that a prerequisite for generating propaganda is possessing some special relevant insight into the public or the zeitgeist which can then be exploited via propaganda that is not necessarily openly stated or otherwise shared beyond the propagandist(s) themselves.

The second point that Ellul brings forward here is the question of scope. As we saw in the discussion in section 1.3, the Bernaysian model is problematic because it appears to over-scope the concept. By providing nearly no constraints on what kinds of persuasion could qualify as propaganda, his account falls victim to what Ellul describes as Driencourt's intellectual surrender. At a minimum, one could reasonably think that even if *most* political communication is propaganda, it is not necessarily the case that all political communication must be propaganda. Ellul frames this problem as being stuck between taking a Bernaysian/Driencourt approach which leaves us wondering what, if anything, *isn't* propaganda and completely abandoning the term as it is too difficult to provide a precise or mutually agreeable definition for. In so doing he

¹⁷ Intelligence in this sense refers to military or governmental intelligence, e.g., dossiers on people, regions, or organizations which are often obtained through covert operations, but can also include publicly available information.

provides for me the very motivation for this paper by accusing this dichotomy of being a false one and that to accept either of these outcomes is equivalent to giving up entirely.

This is where I am most strongly in agreement with Ellul. The concept of propaganda is one that is deeply embedded in our culture and social consciousness. It is not empty or devoid of clear meaning. When we say that something is propaganda or that a person is a propagandist, these are clear and content rich claims. Why then should we resist attempting to define it or otherwise wrestle with its meaning? If something even plausibly *could* be understood and we have reason to believe that understanding would provide positive value, then why not at least try to understand it. Propaganda is exactly that. We use the term easily enough and people understand our meaning when we do, so we have no reason to think that there is something especially mysterious or unusual about propaganda that should make us think it is best left under-defined and vague.

Therefore, in that same spirit any explanation of Ellul's contributions to propaganda studies would not be complete without also including the definition he posits:

Ellulian Propaganda: Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.¹⁸

While Ellul himself does not give a full-throated endorsement of this definition, he feels it is roughly close to correct. Ellul extends Lasswell's focus on psychological manipulation but

¹⁸ Ellul *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Pg 61

embeds it in a broader sociological and technological model. He aligns himself with Lasswell's prior comments but provides more rigorous explanation and defense for them by agreeing that propaganda is about the cultivation and projection of power, but he takes his several steps farther. It is not merely about controlling actions via manipulating belief as Lasswell argued. Ellul argues that propaganda psychologically unifies masses of individuals and in so doing brings about the desired action or inaction. This psychological unification is what we can think of as a shared belief set that propaganda assists or leads in forming. He is not saying that all of the people believe all of the same things and they are in ideological lockstep with one another, but rather that they share an overlapping set of beliefs which cohere in a way that compels each individual to act as part of the group.

1.7: Advancements in Propaganda Studies from the 1980's – 2000's

We can now move out of the 1960's and enter the last major wave of interest in propaganda research in philosophy before its contemporary resurgence in the mid-2010's. The 1980's-early 2000's was the last time that propaganda research was regularly published in philosophy adjacent scholarship, primarily communications, rhetoric, media studies, and political science. While none of these texts have managed to permeate the public consciousness to the degree that Bernays or Ellul's works did in their day or works like Jason Stanley's did in 2015, they have become critical texts within propaganda studies literature.

During this period, we start to see much broader consideration of propaganda and through much more critical lenses. Where in the fifties we saw a general obsession with maximizing the effectiveness of propaganda for a given ideology, by the 80's and 90's we start seeing more attention being paid to the ethics of propaganda and attempting to understand how it functions at

the cognitive level. In early periods famous propagandists like Goebbels and less controversial figures like Lasswell's work on the subject are most notable for the broad and bombastic pronouncements they made about the psychological impacts of propaganda. Yet they provide no real evidence to support their claims, and subsequent research has put many of their conclusions on dubious footing. In contrast, by the late 80's and early 90's we start seeing books like *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective* (1989) and *Propaganda and Persuasion* (1992). These books represent a movement in propaganda studies to start treating the subject more like other more common sub-fields of philosophy, as something worthy of rigorous and critical analysis.

Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective is a collection of essays from various authors attempting to analyze propaganda from unexplored angles with essays like: "Who Shot the Sheriff: The Rise and Fall of the Western Television," "Enduring Values: Women in Popular Culture," "Nervous Laughter: Television Situation Comedy and Liberal Democratic Ideology," among many others. I include these titles here to help impart the flavor of what kind of book this is. The book is not setting out to make any specific or singular point, rather it is allowing various authors to try and find examples of propaganda within popular culture and western media. What unifies these different papers is that they all seem to be roughly operating under the same definition of propaganda. As put forward by Ted J. Smith III, who is also the editor of the book, in his paper "Propaganda and the Techniques of Deception,"

Smithian Propaganda: Any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterized by the systematic use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion.¹⁹

What I find notable about this definition is both its focus on belief formation as well as its specification of propaganda as being characteristically irrational and typically unethical. While I am sympathetic to these inclinations as it is one that is commonly shared among laypersons, these are both points that later theorists will firmly reject.

The problem I find with this definition is that it is ultimately too vague. If we treat the clause, “irrational and often unethical techniques,” as merely being typical rather than necessary, which Smiths word choice of ‘often’ appears to permit, then the core of the definition collapses into over-scoping. It equates propaganda with any conscious goal-directed attempt to shift an audience’s, which again pushes us into the undesirable position of Driencourt. For example, suppose I believe that oranges are fundamentally superior to apples, and I decide that I want to convince everyone else of the same. If I try to persuade others of my views, no matter how respectfully or charitably, should I now be considered a propagandist for oranges? The problem here is that this appears to be all that Smith’s account amounts to as the second conjunct of the second clause equivocates by using the term characteristic. As such the qualities which follow it, irrationality and unethical techniques of persuasion, are not actually relevant to determinations of a things status as propaganda and can therefore be ignored entirely.

¹⁹ Ted J. Smith, “Propaganda and the Techniques of Deception,” *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective*, Praeger, 1989 1-4

What that leaves us with is an account of propaganda which merely equates propaganda with persuasion, a result that I find untenable. I will expand on my reasons why in Part 2 but for now I will say there are forms of persuasion that we do not traditionally think of as propaganda. Most notable of all, rational debate. If our definition of propaganda forces us to conclude that all rational debate should qualify as propaganda, then I fear we have fallen into the Driencourt problem that Ellul argued against. Either propaganda must be something specific that can be defined and identified, or it is wholly subsumed by some other greater concept like communication and has no unique characteristics of its own. The latter option does not accord with our lived experience of propaganda which we are able to use and discuss with relative ease.

The other text, *Propaganda and Persuasion* provide a complex account of propaganda that attempts to explicate and clarify the relationship between propaganda and persuasion. Some of the more notable features of this account are that Jowett and O'Donnell discuss and academically develop the concepts of White, Grey, and Black propaganda as sub-categories of kinds of propaganda. Recall that two of these terms we saw used decades earlier by Goebbels, however, according to historian Phillip M. Taylor while the terms were used loosely in the 1920's and 1930's, these terms were only formalized during WWII by the British Political Warfare Executive.²⁰ Notably, however, at the time they only used the terms black and white, the

²⁰ Phillip M. Taylor *Munitions of the Mind: a history of propaganda from the ancient to the present day*, (Manchester University Press, 2003), 224-226

concept of Grey propaganda emerged sometime after this to describe any propaganda that was neither clearly Black nor White,

These three categories became influential in propaganda studies and are now standard terminology in Western military and intelligence doctrine. While I find the definitions provided by Jowett and O'Donnell to be overly vague and underspecified, the introduction of these concepts has been heavily influential on later thinkers. What is most interesting about these three definitions is that they focus on two dimensions: truth and knowability of source. "Propaganda is also described as white, grey, or black in relationship to acknowledgement of its source and its accuracy of information."²¹

White propaganda is propaganda which originates in a source that has been correctly identified, and the content of information is minimally broadly accurate. Conversely Black propaganda is any propaganda which is credited to a false source and spreads lies, falsehoods, or deceptions.²² While these accounts are not incomprehensible, they are also surprisingly limited in scope and provide little guidance in how to determine whether a piece is White or Black. Grey propaganda, however, is the least clearly defined of all, "...is somewhere in between white and Black propaganda. The source may or may not be correctly identified, and the accuracy of the information is uncertain."²³ While I can at least broadly understand what the definitions of White and Black are aiming at, I find this definition of Grey to be nothing more than a necessary feature of this view that functions as a catch-all for anything that cannot be clearly determined as

²¹ Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (Sage Publications, 1992), 8

²² Jowett and O'Donnell *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 8-15

²³ Jowett and O'Donnell *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 13

White or Black. This is problematic as it suggests that not only is most of the propaganda rendered as Grey, the other two definitions fail to give us a tractable avenue through which we might begin sorting all Greys into Black or White.

While I do not wish to be uncharitable here, I have always found this White, Black, Grey trichotomy to be fundamentally inadequate as an account or definition of propaganda. The merit of this definition lies exclusively in that it provides an apparently more clear-cut means of differentiating acceptable propaganda from the unacceptable. However, if that is the only real benefit of this account then not only is this account exclusively useful to ethicists and provide nothing to the semanticists, but it does not provide much rhetorical cover for the ethicists. If we take a more circumspect view of the White and Black accounts, I argue that both accounts quickly reduce to little more than an elaboration of the standard ethical view that being open and honest regarding the source and basis of one's views is ethical, even when it would be unwanted. Conversely, lying, misleading, or deceiving regarding the source or basis for one's views are not, even when there is a desire or reason to do so. While I have no stance on the merits of that ethical view, I am merely pointing out here that this trichotomy seems to amount to little more than that.

There is a secondary problem as well regarding the exhaustiveness of this proposed trichotomy. On the one hand it appears that if something could be identified as propaganda then presumably, we would be able to locate it as white, black, or grey. However, neither Jowett and O'Donnell nor Taylor assert these categories as necessarily exhaustive. These terms are intended to give us relevant information about what we know regarding the provenance and reliability of

a piece of propaganda, but it fails to give us a clear method of identification of a thing as propaganda qua propaganda.

To address this question of exhaustiveness we can view this trichotomy as either being three distinct categories or as being a kind of spectrum with white on one end, black on the other, and everything in between as various shades of grey. However, I do not believe that either model provides additional clarity for analyses. Should we prefer the more discrete categorical model we will still be forced to accept that many pieces of propaganda will be typed as White-Grey, Grey-White, Black-Grey, or Grey-Black. In which case I don't believe any additional clarity has been provided, rather we have merely produced a color-coding system that I think obfuscates its meaning more than it illuminates. Which is a layperson more likely to understand clearly:

1. This piece of propaganda is from a reliable source, but we haven't verified if it's broadly accurate.
2. This piece of propaganda is White-Grey.

This is a case where a substitute encoding system could be comprehensible to someone who is inducted into it, but it is not providing any additional clarity. It is just adding an additional layer of obfuscation.

Alternatively, if we prefer a spectrum interpretation of the categories, we do not gain greater purchase. Being able to assert that a thing exists somewhere between black and White propaganda does not clarify anything. Again, which of the following propositions would be clearer:

1. This piece of propaganda is from a reliable source, but we haven't verified if it's broadly accurate.
2. This piece of propaganda is not fully white and definitely not black, so it's whitish-grey.

This is to me no clearer or better than the discrete category style. When the system is applied, we are still left with only being able to make a claim that is generally less clear than merely stating what the claim is standing in for.

That part of their account, put aside, there is another piece I want to include as I feel it bears relevantly on my own work and presents an interesting model and historical step forward. Below you will see Jowett and O'Donnell's model diagram for the relationship between propaganda and persuasion.

18

PROPAGANDA AND PERSUASION

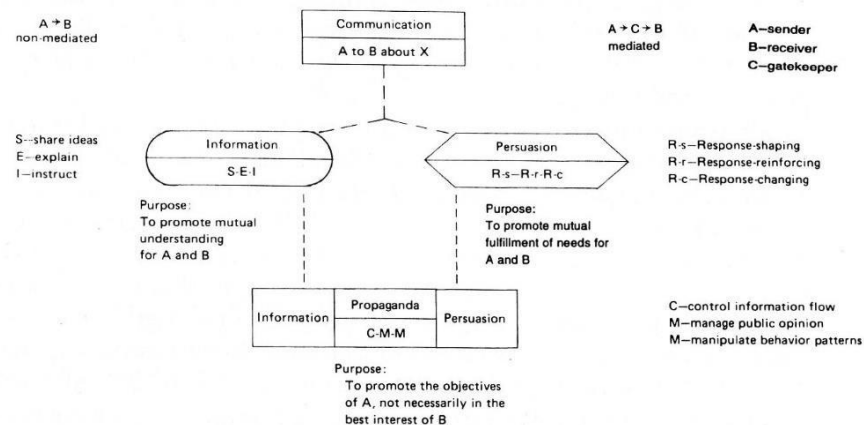


Figure 1.5. The Jowett-O'Donnell purpose model of propaganda.

Persuasion is a reciprocal process in which both parties are dependent upon one another.

It is a situation of interactive or transactive dependency. Interactive suggests turn-taking,

whereas, transactive suggests a more continuous and dynamic process of co-creating meaning. The persuader who understands that persuasion is interactive or a transaction in which both parties approach a message-event and use it to attempt to fulfill needs will never assume a passive audience. It is an active audience that seeks to have its needs fulfilled by the persuader, and it is an active persuader who knows that he or she must appeal to audiences needs in order to ask the audience to fill his or her needs by adopting the message-purpose.²⁴

This setup is the earliest diagrammatic model I can find of the relationship between persuasion and propaganda. This relationship is a critical one to clarify as it is *prima facie* that in at least some capacity propaganda is connected to the aim of persuasion. Propaganda is defined entirely in terms of furthering the propagandist's desired intent, with no requirement that this aligns with the audience's interests. Persuasion, on the other hand, is explicitly defined as mutually need-fulfilling. This makes it natural to treat propaganda as potentially, and perhaps paradigmatically, not in the audience's best interest.

One way to read Jowett and O'Donnell's framework is to see information, propaganda, and persuasion as roughly paralleling the white/grey/black trichotomy: propaganda as a hybrid that blends elements of informative and persuasive communication. They themselves do not spell out this mapping, but this is the most natural way to integrate their classification with their process model. Thus, my reasons for ultimately rejecting this model are the same reasons I stated above for my rejection of the White/Black/Grey framework.

²⁴ Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 21

While my overall opinion is that this method of carving the distinction between the two concepts is ultimately inadequate, it is worth pointing out some of the merits of this view. What I view as the strongest point in favor of this model is that it presents a way of understanding how persuasion, propaganda, and information are all kinds of communication, they merely aim at different outcomes. Additionally, this model makes no specific claims about the ethical status of propaganda, it instead frames propaganda as representing a kind of hybridization of information and persuasion. I consider both points to be important steppingstones in the evolution of propaganda studies. As we saw above, the history of propaganda studies up to this point was dominated by those who believed propaganda was merely a standard form of communication and those who wished to maximize its potency and efficacy.

Jowett and O'Donnell, like Smith, and Ellul, wanted to treat propaganda studies as its own legitimate sub-field that is worthy of careful attention and analysis. In so doing they shake up the traditional Bernaysian paradigm by arguing that while propaganda is a kind of communication, it is a genuinely unique form of communication that should be understood as related to but distinct from similar concepts like persuading or informing. This represents a critical step forward for philosophic propaganda studies as it presented propaganda as being a relevant feature of communication worthy of deep semantic investigation.

1.8: Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model

The next significant step forward for propaganda studies comes with what is likely the most popular and widely read account of propaganda from the last half century *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky.

They argue that propaganda is best understood as systematic in nature and they call their framework for this analysis the *Propaganda Model*. “A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.”²⁵

Their propaganda model presents propaganda as an inevitable byproduct of the interplay between governments and the media under a capitalist framework. They equate propaganda with systematic bias in mass communication and argue that it arises from the inevitable enmeshing of government interests with the financial and self-preserving interests of media organizations.²⁶ Propaganda produces effects like, and in some cases the equivalent to, censorship. They do not go so far as to formally assert equivalence between propaganda and censorship, but in my view, the PM effectively amounts to censorship. A common general assumption is that governments want their citizenry to accept the policies and laws it enacts without resistance as this state of total compliance is the ideal status quo for any government as it increases their chances of enacting policy with minimal or no resistance.²⁷ Herman and Chomsky argue essentially this by claiming that Governments or dominant private interests hold sufficient control over what constitutes common or acceptable discourse.

²⁵ Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. (Pantheon Books, 2002), 2

²⁶ This can occur in any nation as any media organization will require capital to function, however the influence of capital as a motivating factor will typically be more present in capitalist societies.

²⁷ Herman and Chomsky *Manufacturing Consent*, 1-35

This model is worthy of serious consideration, and not merely because this piece has been widely read. More importantly we can see this as being a natural extension and hybridization of both Lasswell and Ellul's views. Where Lasswell was concerned with control and Ellul was concerned with bringing about action, Herman and Chomsky see both as potential, if not necessary, outputs of their propaganda model. The PM asserts that intentional or unintentional exclusion of views, or any censorship which occurs via or because of any of the five filters, *is* propaganda.²⁸ Which is to say that while Herman and Chomsky prefer to use the term propaganda, the focus of the PM is on describing how propaganda comes into being. As such their account should really be considered a theory of *emergent* propagandizing rather than as wholly novel and separate theory of propaganda.

Herman and Chomsky's Emergent Propagandizing: The act of generating propaganda either intentionally or unintentionally via the five filters yielding censorship.²⁹

Emergent propagandizing refers to the phenomenon in which no one individual is necessarily actively or intentionally generating propaganda, but the propaganda arises regardless.

Emergent propagandizing models like Herman and Chomsky's focus on the ways in which

²⁸ The PM is built on five layers of filtration that all media content must pass through before it reaches the public. These five filters are: 1. the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; 2. advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; 3. the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; 4. "flak" as a means of disciplining the media; and 5. "anticommunism" as a national religion and control mechanism. See Herman and Chomsky *Manufacturing Consent* for a full explanation of these filters.

²⁹ The term 'emergent' is not one that Herman and Chomsky use. I choose that term as a way of describing how their model substantively differs from other accounts by locating propaganda generation at the systemic level rather than the individual or organizational level.

propaganda can arise non-intentionally or as a by-product of other factors within the system. Since propagandizing is merely the act of generating propaganda, we should not constrain it to only cases in which individuals or groups generate propaganda intentionally so long as we have reason to think it can arise unintentionally. As such emergent propagandizing models undeniably make up an important piece of the broader propaganda picture and should not be dismissed or disregarded in favor of purely intentionalist models. For the sake of clarity, here is a reasonable catch all definition of emergent propagandizing

Emergent Propagandizing: Propaganda that emerges as a by-product of other societal factors functioning without a specific identifiable source.

That said, while emergent models are useful for understanding how propaganda can be generated non-intentionally and without the involvement of individuals, they do not give a clear explanation of individual propagandizers who generate propaganda intentionally. Not everything that we typically consider to be propaganda can be said to arise as a direct result of censorship. If anything, the most quintessential examples of propaganda, e.g., posters, slogans, and flyers, are generated by individuals acting either at the behest of the state or purely of their own accord. This is why I believe that while emergent models are useful for understanding certain kinds of propagandizing, they cannot account for a holistic picture of the concept. The reason I choose to include this side of theorizing is two-fold: first, as we will see, this work was extremely influential in the 1990's through the 2000's and informed much of the literature that would come after it. Second is that although Herman and Chomsky's PM is typically considered wholly separate from earlier theories, I take it instead as advancing an undercurrent in Lasswell and Ellul. That undercurrent being that propaganda can be an emergent property of social, technological, and

institutional systems. I think what Lasswell, Ellul, Herman and Chomsky are highlighting is a key feature of propaganda that is often overlooked and left out of intentionalist models.

1.9: Does Propaganda Deserve to be its own sub-field?

The emergentist model was furthered in the late 90's and early 00's by an emergence of interest in case-study analysis. James Shanahan's *Propaganda without Propagandists* is an excellent example of this as the work is a collection of different case-study analyses of supposed instances of propaganda or propaganda campaigns. The aim of the book as a whole and the reason for the inclusion of these case studies is, according to Shanahan, serve as a return to critical analysis of propaganda through a focus on, "...how political and social aims are achieved in social systems that do not rely as heavily on the traditional direct or covert forms of political propaganda...The idea that we begin to develop in this book is that we can turn toward social context as a persuasive mechanism, even if we can't always recognize its technique."³⁰

The case studies themselves are interesting but of little relevance to my project. I bring this book in here for two primary reasons: 1. To demonstrate that the emergent theories of propaganda have continued to produce interesting and relevant insights into the field even though they are not currently de rigueur. 2. To underscore what I have above noted as one of the under-appreciated gulfs in propaganda studies between the semanticists (those concerned primarily with building a definition of propaganda) and the ethicists (those concerned primarily with ascertaining the merits of deploying propaganda).

³⁰ James Shanahan *Propaganda Without Propagandists*, (Hampton Press, 2001), 5-6

I do not have much to say about the first point beyond its content and the evidence presented by Shanahan's analysis and adoption of the Ellulian framework, and the recurrence of versions of that framework throughout the various case-studies.³¹ This is underscored by the over-arching theme of the book being the presumption that unstated factors may relevantly bear on our interpretations of propagandistic messages. They refer to this as a social context serving as a persuasive mechanism. We should recognize this as being a natural extension of Herman and Chomsky's theory of censorship which can be understood as one such kind of social context.

Regarding the second point I want to say a bit more. There is a common theme among texts within propaganda studies that I have resisted repeating up to this point on the grounds that my own research into the history of the field does not lead me to agree. The point in question is that propaganda studies has continually existed since Bernays original text, but most researchers intentionally resisted referring to it as such as it was perceived as being an embarrassing or negative term. As my own arguments will indicate, few, if any, people desire or are even comfortable being publicly known as a propagandist. However, does that really mean that when researchers over the last seventy years declared they were studying things like persuasion or rhetoric, they were really studying propaganda and just didn't want to admit it?

This is not a minor equivocation I am entertaining for no reason; it is critical to my overall project that I firmly stake out that I disagree with this assumption. First and foremost, one of the goals of this literature review is to show that despite the surprising prevalence of this view

³¹ Shanahan, *Propaganda Without Propagandists*, 3-4

among researchers, there is a continual line of thought and research that has been done on propaganda explicitly and without appeals to similar or related concepts like persuasion, rhetoric or mass communication. While the literature on propaganda is certainly sparser than work on those concepts, such research never truly disappeared. Its form and focus have changed over the century as we have seen, but to say that propaganda studies truly laid completely fallow for decades and was only reinvigorated in the 60's and 70's is not supported by the available evidence.³²

That said, Shanahan isn't completely wrong either. He is right that in terms of academia the broad social stigma surrounding the concept of propaganda certainly pushed the majority of researchers studying propaganda and related phenomena to describe their research as actually being under the field of communication or mass communication. This point was made more explicitly and clearly by J. Michael Sproule's *Propaganda Studies in American Social Science: The rise and fall of the critical paradigm*.

Bolstered by the utility of communication research in answering questions of relevance to wartime persuasive needs, sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton were arguing publicly, by 1943, that communication research should replace propaganda analysis as the paradigm for the academic study of persuasion. First, they claimed, that the 'impressionistic' propaganda studies pursued vague and overly general questions...Second, Lazarsfeld and

³² Shanahan, *Propaganda Without Propagandists*, 8

Merton claimed that communication research provided important information for society's policy makers in business and government and thus had greater pragmatic utility.³³

I want to be clear here that I do not dispute Sproule's historical recounting of the events, as near as I can tell I don't even substantively disagree with his overall argument. Rather I want to echo his challenge regarding the actual value and substance of the arguments in favor of the supposedly mere terminological shift from propaganda to communication.

Although propaganda scholars never pressed communication researchers to develop epistemically definitive justifications for their new paradigm, such an omission counted for little. During the post WW II period, communication scientists benefitted from ideological trends that helped make their paradigm the dominant perspective for social scientists interested in modern persuasion...But the gains of communication research, however impressive, required virtually the sacrifice of a previous generation of scholarship. Had the conflicting research problems, purposes, theories, concepts, methods, and curricula of the two paradigms been explicitly laid out and examined, then the progress of humanistic and social science research in communication would likely have been augmented.³⁴

Sproule's analysis is interesting, but I want to focus on what I take to be an assumption that is present in both his work and the work of those he was responding to. They are operating under the assumption that communication studies and propaganda studies are equivalent concepts, one has merely been the victim of pejoration and thus fell out of colloquial usage in favor of the

³³ J. Michael Sproule, "Propaganda studies in American social science: The rise and fall of the critical paradigm," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, (1987): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638709383794>

³⁴ Sproule, "Propaganda studies," 75

other. Sproule's objection is that because of this a great deal of useful research in the field of propaganda studies was abandoned when the two fields should have been hybridized.

It is on this point that I want to stake out my disagreement with Sproule and those who believe that propaganda equals communication. While Sproule is right that propaganda has many more negative connotations associated with it than communication does, it is inaccurate to assert the two concepts as equivalent. They are not, never have been, and the assumption that they are is the unfortunate consequence of a prior unstated necessary assumption. That assumption being that all communicative acts necessarily include the pushing or spreading of ideology. In other words, the assumption rests on the belief that all propaganda or communication amount to is the intentional spreading of ideology either directly or indirectly.

This is an untenable premise. While it may well be the case that we can and do regularly push or spread-out ideologies via our communicative efforts without explicitly intending to do so, that does not necessarily guarantee that all such efforts do so or could do so.

The irony is that the surrender to this assumption that thinkers like Shanahan make is that as shown above, Ellul himself whom Shanahan sets himself as in line with, *rejected* this very assumption as being unnecessary intellectual surrender. Propaganda is a concept and a phenomenon of its own that is worthy of serious and rigorous academic research. That is precisely because it is not merely communication, but rather it is a special *kind* of communication that is relevantly distinct from other similar phenomena. As I will argue later, I believe we should view communication as the broad category of all communicative acts under which phenomena fall like propaganda, mass communication, lying, misleading, persuading, and the vast constellation of other kinds of communicative efforts that people regularly engage in.

Communication is the base act, while the sub-kinds are the different means through which one might carry out that act.

1.10: Randall Marlin's Classical Sense of Propaganda

The next significant move by definitionists in propaganda studies comes with Randal Marlin's *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (2002) who presents what has been referred to as the *classical sense* of propaganda.³⁵

Classical Sense: The organized attempt through communication to affect belief or action or inculcate attitudes in a large audience in ways that circumvent or suppress an individual's adequately informed, rational, reflective judgement.³⁶

Marlin argues that his definition represents the best compromise between earlier competing accounts from those in the Bernaysian and Lasswellian/Ellulian traditions. According to Marlin the purpose of employing propaganda is out of pragmatic consideration. Marlin imagines propaganda as being persuasion aimed at groups that is necessarily incomplete. This incompleteness is an inevitable consequence of pragmatic decision making which prioritizes efficacy over ethical propriety. The propagandist is not necessarily doing this for intentionally negative, self-serving, or unethical ends; rather they may well fully perceive their actions as ethical, justifiable, and necessary.

Beyond the chronological and helpfully summative nature of Marlin's account, the definition itself is worthy of serious analysis. Marlin's account is particularly notable for two

³⁵ Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, Princeton University Press, 312

³⁶ Randall Marlin *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*, (Broadview Press, 2013), 12

reasons. The first is that his definition clearly locates his account in the Bernaysian/Intentionalist tradition. The second is the explicit inclusion of the clause that propaganda circumvents or suppresses rational judgement, and the elaboration that this is done deliberately. The insistence on propaganda being deliberate, which I understand as being equivalent to intention albeit plausibly more diffused among groups or organizations rather than a single individual's intentions, represents what I view as a critical move in propaganda studies.

That Marlin's account is intentionalist is important because it indicates that by this time within propaganda studies the intentionalist's had seized the rhetorical upper hand. While the Lasswellian/Ellulian emergentist model had been the primary model of propaganda from the fifties through the eighties, by the conclusion of the nineties Marlin was not only comfortable asserting intention as at the core of propaganda, but his book is still considered one of the pre-eminent texts within propaganda studies over twenty years later. These two points taken together indicate that the idea that intention was in some way fundamentally critical to understanding propaganda had become a commonly held and argued for belief by the early 2000's.

This point represents a shift in how propaganda was viewed generally and within academia. The reason I found it necessary above to specify that I interpret Marlin's usage of deliberate as an explicit invocation of intentionalism, is that I also believe it is an important move against the emergentists. The primary conflict that exists between the two traditions is regarding which more accurately captures the primary cause of propaganda. Emergentists will claim some version of the following: the reason that propaganda exists is that there are systemic forces at play that will invariably result in the emergence of propaganda within that system.

Contrast that with the general intentionalist claim: the reason that propaganda exists is that people intend to create it or intend to create situations which will allow for, facilitate, or otherwise necessitate the creation of propaganda.

While emergentist style propaganda and intentionalist style propaganda can both exist within any given society under the right conditions, there is an underlying question regarding which is causally prior. Do people's intentions to create propaganda emerge as an inevitable consequence of their existence within a given system; or do people's intentions to create propaganda result in the creation of the kinds of systems through which propaganda can emerge? What I take Marlin's account to be adding to the debate that is truly substantive is that his account makes the case that so long as there is any deliberate or organized effort to do so in the correct way, then propaganda has been created. Marlin's definition commits him to intentionalism in so far as propaganda requires a deliberate communicative act that circumvents rational judgment. While Marlin does not explicitly argue for intention as causally prior to emergence, one natural interpretation of his framework, particularly when contrasted with emergent models like Herman and Chomsky's, is that intentional propagandizing sits logically prior in explanatory analyses.

While this is hardly a knock-down counterargument against the emergentists, it is a strong rhetorical move as it asserts intention as prior to any potential emergence. Even under the Herman and Chomsky style censorial emergentist model, if we accept Marlin's definition then we would have to view the censorial account as being intentionalist-emergentist rather than purely emergentist.

This move is, I argue, the correct one. However, I also believe that it needs more substantive argumentation than mere assertion. The most straightforward reason in favor of

intention being causally prior to systemic emergence in this case, is that those systems which create the settings under which propaganda will invariably emerge do not happen without intention. Whether those systems are governments, private organizations, or some combination of the two; no organized system whose primary constitutive component is individual rational persons can come into existence without there having been some prior individual or organization who intends to make it happen. In other words, while it may be true that in our society censorial propaganda emerges because of capitalistic goal convergence; that is only the case because at some prior time individuals or groups organized those systems to operate in such a way as to make that the case.

If you are unsure if this is true, then I suggest the following rhetorical challenge: name a single modern media organization that is a legally recognized media organization in the United States that came into being *unintentionally* and is not also an individual person. The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, USA Today, Fox News, MSNBC, Local News Networks, Clear Channel, NPR, InfoWars, Documentaries, Netflix, Hulu, publishing houses, Film Production studios, etc... This is just a small and varied sample to demonstrate how this phenomenon reaches across mediums, political backgrounds, biases, commitment to truth-telling and every other plausible metric. While ideological influence is a recurring driver, either as initial motivation or eventual structured function, not all such organizations were necessarily founded for the primary purpose of ideological dissemination. My point is that all such institutions originate from deliberate human organization and decision-making, which supports the broader intentionalist claim. Nonetheless, this *prima facie* argument may be inadequately persuasive on its own.

For those who are unpersuaded by that argument, here is a more classically formed one.

P1: Media is anything produced for the purpose of entertaining or informing an audience.

P2: Media is a viable means of intentionally transmitting the beliefs of the creator to the audience.

P3: Media generated without communicative intent may have semantic content but lacks targeted semantic directionality, i.e., it may communicate but not necessarily propagandize.

P4: Only media that is intentionally created can have a specific tethered semantics.

P5: Only propositions with specifically intended semantics can be said to be spreading specific semantic contents.

P6: Emergent propaganda is necessarily non-intentionally generated.

P7: Intentional propaganda is necessarily intentionally generated.

C1: Per P1-P6, emergent propaganda cannot generate propaganda which is intended to carry specific semantic contents.

C2: Per P1-P5, P7 intentional propaganda can generate propaganda which carries specific semantic contents.

What C1 is meant to demonstrate is that while emergentist models can help us to understand propagandizing which occurs by unintentionally artificially restricting the space of discourse, it cannot provide a plausible account for how intentional propagandizing can occur alongside it. Conversely what C2 is meant to demonstrate is that intentionalist models can not only account for explicitly intentional propagandizing, but also how the systems which allow for emergent style propagandizing can come into being. While I do not see this as an unassailable argument, I

believe that when combined with the *prima facie* rhetorical argument above we have a strong intuitive reason to believe that while both models are explanatorily useful, intention should be considered causally prior to emergence regarding propagandizing.

The final and most nuanced argument in favor of the causal priority of intention over emergence for propaganda creation is that there is a recurring aspect of propaganda that goes back to Bernays and Lasswell that has been underappreciated; any reasonable account of propaganda needs to be able to apply as well to groups of individuals working together as it does to lone actors.

The Bernaysian account focused on agencies while Lasswell focused on the exertion of control. In both cases these accounts are attempting to build a definition of propaganda which can unify all cases regardless of the quantity or status of the generator(s) unless the account is going to in some way specify that quantity or status as significant.³⁷ Intentionalist models can account for this problem in a clearer and more coherent way than emergentist models. For the intentionalist the difference between an organized media company and a lone determined propagandist is immaterial. They engage in the same essential process to achieve the same

³⁷ I only include this point to account for definitions which frame propagandizing as only being possible by those certain minimum quantities or otherwise irrelevant statuses, e.g., one suggested definition suggests that a thing can only qualify as propaganda IFF the propagandizer is an oppressor. I treat these accounts as being ethical accounts rather than definition-building accounts. Their primary concern is not creating a definition of propaganda or propagandizing which strongly accords with a wide variety of disparate views but rather ensuring that certain ethical priorities are guaranteed by the chosen definition. In the case of the example given, the focus on the secondary status of oppressor as being the post-facto determinate of the proposition as propaganda is only necessary so long as you believe both: 1. Propaganda is inherently negative, 2. Oppression is necessarily negative. While those might not be obviously objectionable beliefs, both are first and foremost ethical concerns as both are assigning a value-judgement. While I fully believe that propaganda and propagandizing are worthy of serious ethical analysis, those analyses should not themselves be informing or determining the definition of the concept.

essential kinds of ends. As such, there is no substantive difference in the quantity of propagandizers in terms of whether the output qualifies as propaganda. This answer is not available to the emergentists.

Emergentists will have to respond by trying to move the analysis to a higher level of observation and claim something like, “it is a mistake to think about propaganda generation as the work of organizations or individuals as both represent equal extensions of the same systemic forces.” The problem I find with this, and similar kinds of explanations is that it fails to address what I take to be the most substantive question asked by the ethicists: when, if ever, can propaganda be utilized appropriately and justly? The emergentist model does not lend itself to a clear remedy short of radical social restructuring. Even then, if we accept Herman and Chomsky’s arguments, that wouldn’t escape the overarching problem as it would merely immediately replace one dominant ideology with another. This would then merely result in different propaganda emerging within society rather than any relevant reduction in the quantity produced. What it does not give is any reason to think there is or would be a significant ethical distinction between the kinds of propaganda produced. As this exact ethical problem has become the crux of most contemporary debates in propaganda studies, we only do a disservice to both definitionists and ethicists by adopting any version of the emergentist model as causally primary. Under an emergentist model we are forced to accept all ideologies as fundamentally ethically equivalent, and, at a minimum, I do not think that is a belief that is likely to be widely endorsed.

Returning now to the second key advancement of Marlin’s, the inclusion that propaganda circumvents or otherwise suppresses rational judgement, has become one of the critical

controversies within propaganda studies as we will see below in the analysis of Stanley (2015) and Quaranto and Stanley (2021). However, it is worth saying a bit about why Marlin includes this point.

As has been examined above, for the last seventy years there has been a common perception that propaganda is, if not inherently unethical, then it is at a minimum ethically dubious. While earlier thinkers like Bernays and Lasswell did not share this view, as evidenced by Sproule's analysis, it seems clear that by the sixties this view had become common among western thinkers.³⁸ Marlin's inclusion of this clause regarding rational judgements indicates that he was sensitive to these negative assumptions about propaganda. This clause is intended to make sense of why we might view propaganda negatively in most cases, without having to reduce all propagandists to moustache twirling villains. As Marlin himself describes, this practice is not necessarily done with any ill intent, it can be done purely in the service of easing communication of complex concepts. Here is an example to make this distinction clearer.

Anti-Smoking Advocate: Alex is an anti-smoking advocate who has a great deal of expertise on the subject. They know in detail the biological consequences of smoking and are fully convinced that smoking poses a substantial public health risk to both smokers and non- smokers. Alex decides to launch an anti-smoking campaign to persuade people to stop smoking. However, Alex knows that their expertise may cause them to struggle to explain the issues in a way that will make sense to laypeople. Thus, Alex decides to merely simplify their message. Rather than a detailed point by point causal explanation of how tobacco smoke causes lung damage while

³⁸ I specify western thinkers here only because I do not know the degree to which Bernays and Lasswell's work specifically has influenced views and beliefs among non-English speakers other than Jacques Ellul.

simultaneously causing the human brain to become addicted to the nicotine, Alex decides it will suffice to get point across by just printing out flyers with photographic evidence of the damage to a smoker's lungs and a caption below it that says, "This is what smoking will do to you!"

I have no intention of making an ethical evaluation of Alex's decision making in this case, as that is ultimately immaterial to my goals. Rather, what I believe this case demonstrates is that there can be wholly rational and, at least plausibly, ethically meritorious goals in mind when one chooses to engage in a propaganda campaign. This is the reason why modern theorists, and I suspect the earliest theorists like Bernays and Lasswell, have tried to step back from using definitions of propaganda which are inherently condemnatory or pejorative. For our ethical evaluations of propaganda to be robust and nuanced then we should prefer a definition of propagandizing which does not necessitate intentionally mal action unless one is prejudiced towards believing propaganda is necessarily unethical.

This is not a trivial point. There is a plausibly strong case to be made in favor of such accounts if one believes that any intentional employment of non-rational persuasion is inherently unethical, but that is a debate I leave to the ethicists. For my purposes it will suffice to say that the definition of propaganda we should adopt should be one which does not necessitate intentional mal action but may potentially allow for the propagandizing itself to be necessarily a mal action even when performed on behalf of meritorious causes.

1.11: Stanley (2015), Quaranto and Stanley (2021), and Where We Go from Here

This concludes my discussion of Marlin's critical contributions to propaganda studies, and that in turn leads to the work that has been credited with reinvigorating propaganda studies post Marlin. Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works* (2015) presents what I view as the most

compelling contemporary account of propaganda. My reasons for framing Stanley as an ethicist in this case are not only straight-forward, but they also come directly from the man himself. Stanley frames himself as engaged in definition building so far as he dedicates all of chapter two and quite a bit of the overall discussion in the book to defining propaganda and justifying his definitions of *Undermining Propaganda* and *Supporting Propaganda*. However, I take him to also be operating as an ethicist here for two reasons: 1. The bifurcated definition of propaganda he describes implies that determinations or identifications of propaganda can be divided into separate kinds based on the perceived relevant semantic contents as opposed to being limited to the specifically intended semantic contents of the originator. 2. The justification he provides on behalf of these definitions is ethically grounded rather than linguistically or logically grounded.

It is also worth noting that while Stanley (2015) reinvigorated the discussion and refocused some interest on propaganda studies in philosophy, his later writings on the topic back away from some of his strongest definitional claims. The biggest change is evidenced in the different provided definitions in Stanley (2015) and Quaranto and Stanley (2021). In the earlier work Stanley describes propaganda generally as,

Propaganda is in the service of either *supporting* or *eroding* ideals...*Supporting Propaganda*: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other nonrational means. *Undermining Propaganda*: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that

tends to erode these very ideals...propaganda of either variety is a method to bypass the rational will in service of some goal...³⁹

I take no specific stance on the merit of these two proposed definitions as I view them as minimally plausible sub-kinds of propaganda which do not necessarily alter or change my own account. What I find more notable, however, is the degree to which Stanley appears to pull back from this definition in Anne Quaranto and Jason Stanley (2021),

Let's define propaganda as an argument that bypasses reason in urging its audience towards a conclusion (the conclusion could either be a proposition, such as 'Germans are dangerous', or a command, 'join the cause!') Propaganda bypasses reason, in the sense that it appeals to various mechanisms – stereotypes, affect, and, more generally, flawed ideology, to mask from its audience reasons they ought to consider in an argument for the propagandists' desired conclusion.⁴⁰

The key to understanding Stanley (2015) and Quaranto and Stanley's (2021) accounts is in understanding both what it seems is meant by rational-will and the degree to which he and they leave this term underdefined. The only major modifications that Stanley makes to the classical sense of propaganda are: 1. to bifurcate discussions of propaganda into two connected but distinct kinds, supporting and undermining, 2. to simplify Marlin's definition by substituting the term rational will in for the clause, "that circumvent or suppress an individual's adequately

³⁹ Stanley *How Propaganda Works*, 53

⁴⁰ Anne Quaranto and Jason Stanley, "Propaganda," *The Routledge Handbook of Social and Political Philosophy of Language*, (Routledge, 2021) 124-125

informed, rational, reflective judgement.” As stated above, I have nothing to say specifically about 1. The fact that propaganda can come in an extreme variety of forms and perform a variety of functions is precisely what makes it so difficult to develop a coherent account of propaganda itself. Whether Stanley’s proposed categories are meritorious is a discussion for a later time.

Regarding the second point, while Stanley does not give an explicit definition of his use of the term rational-will he broadly aligns himself with Kant,

For Kant, the rational will is minimally one that operates independently of alien causes and is subject to rational principles. But propaganda runs counter to rational principles.

Insofar as a form of propaganda is a kind of manipulation of rational beings towards an end without engaging their rational will, it is a kind of deception.⁴¹

The difficulty here is that Stanley does not offer a fully detailed account of ‘rational will.’ My working interpretation is that rational will refers to our capacity to form and revise beliefs in a reason-responsive manner, is informed both by his reference to Kant and by his apparent continuity with Marlin’s Classical Sense model. I recognize that this is a more restrictive definition of rational will than Stanley seems to suggest with his invocation of Kant, however I believe then when paired with his employment of Marlin’s Classical Sense, which Stanley views himself as in line with but evolving beyond, this is at least roughly the definition he is aiming at. In which case, propaganda is any kind of communication that intentionally tries to alter an audience’s beliefs, actions, attitudes, or ideologies by suppressing this rational will. I take this to be what Stanley means when he describes propaganda as a manipulation to close off debate.

⁴¹ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 58

Stanley (2015) is further refined in Quaranto and Stanley (2021) where they argue that the manipulation inherent to propaganda is that it serves a masking function which, when successful, blinds or inhibits the audience from being able to fully appreciate or understand all the reasons relevant to a debate. What I find notable about this stipulated definition is that it adds in a few more details and removes the term rational will, which represents a substantial altering of the 2015 account.

The first alteration is that in this definition propaganda is explicitly an argument, not merely a proposition or propositional belief. Propaganda is not created in, nor does it exist in, a vacuum. While Stanley (2015) does not explicitly ground his account in intentionalist vs emergentist terms, his description of propaganda as a manipulation that bypasses the rational will presupposes intentionality. Quaranto and Stanley (2021) make that intentional structure more explicit, but it is already implicitly present in the 2015 framework. Propaganda is produced with a purpose; it is always generated with the intention of convincing its audience of something. What is notable about this shift is that it is essentially a return to Bernays in that it firmly locates the defining aspects of propaganda within its point of origination rather than in the resulting artifacts.

The second refinement is in focusing propaganda away from being a generalized effort into being a series of individual propositions that can be taken both individually as pieces of propaganda or collectively as a propaganda campaign. Note that unlike the prior refinement this is a clear departure from Bernays who believed that propaganda was necessarily a sustained effort. While propaganda can be generated in large quantities as part of a larger campaign, the campaign itself is not propaganda. The things that we typically call propaganda (political posters,

slogans, protests, etc.) are the artifacts generated by propagandists through their actions as propagandizers. Under this view anyone could be a propagandist at any time so long as they perform the function of propagandizing. This is a notable departure from earlier thinkers like Bernays. He would have agreed that anyone could become a propagandist, but only so long as they were professionally employed as a public relations council and working at the behest or on behalf of a secondary organization or person. This account is also a divergence from more colloquial understandings which reduce propaganda to the speech of ideological opponents. The key distinction from both alternatives being that propaganda is just an argument that anyone could make at any time. I will refer to this as *Propaganda as Argument*.

Propaganda as Argument: Propaganda is an argument intended to bypass the audience's normal reasoning capabilities by facilitating the adoption of conclusions through non-rational means.

Where I find this final account lacking is in its ability to meaningfully identify propaganda qua propaganda in specific cases. There is an inherent passivity in not only this definition, but nearly every definition post Bernays. While Bernays gave us a very broad definition which ultimately over-scoped what should count as propaganda, nearly every other definition has left such conclusions indeterminate. Definitions, in general, are aimed at allowing us to reliably and mutually identify things in our world. What are we then to make of a lineage of definitions that seem to tell us in a broad sense what a thing is but provide no usable criteria for identification. My suspicion is that the main reason this problem has been so recurrent throughout the literature is that propaganda has a fundamental political problem when it comes to identification. There is good reason to believe that the way bias functions at the cognitive level

means that bias is sufficiently influential in both our perceptions and reasoning that people have a difficult time identifying propaganda reliably, particularly in cases where the nominal propaganda supports, compliments, or flatters the individual's prior beliefs.

In other words, it seems to be generally true that people are good at pointing out propaganda produced by their ideological opponents as propaganda, but are unable, unwilling, or minimally more resistant to viewing propaganda produced by themselves or their ideological fellows as such. I will dive more into the details of this conundrum in Part 2, but I want to mention it here as the launch point for my minimal condition of Propagandizing*. The goal of which is not to exhaustively define propagandizing, but rather to establish a minimal condition for it from which a deeper and more ontologically useful definition could arise. The minimal condition I introduce is therefore intended not as a complete definition but as a starting constraint for definitional success, one that avoids both overbreadth (equating propagandizing with persuading) and excessive restriction (requiring ethical priors to inform the definition).⁴²

This concludes the literature review of this project. I have taken you on a tour of the most significant definitional advances in propaganda theory over the last one hundred years from Bernays (1928) to Quaranto and Stanley (2021). In so doing I have traced the evolution of the concept in philosophy, argued why we should prefer intentionalist models over emergentist models, argued in favor of the definition-building project over the ethicist project in the

⁴² In the process of writing this dissertation Stanley coauthored another book with David Beaver, *The Politics of Language*. I do provide an additional or extended analysis of their writings on propaganda here as they do not attempt to define propaganda. Their usage of propaganda is in terms of it being a tool of control and some extended discussion of the degree to which that is a legitimate interpretation of the function of propaganda. I neither agree nor disagree with their positions. I see them as distinct and separate from my own goals. I do not believe that any of my arguments for Propagandizing* will contradict or be problematic for their view, nor do I believe that any of their interpretations contradict my own.

literature, and presented a clear case for why I believe my own account will be substantively additive to this philosophical tradition. In Part 2 I will be looking deeper at some of the complex philosophical debates I have mentioned above to set up my justifications for my account in Part 3. Finally, in Part 4 I will address several criticisms of my view and why I believe my account can either overcome them or is a useful tool, nonetheless.

Part 2: Persuasion

2.1: Introduction

For my discussion of propagandizing to get off the ground there are several critical concepts that I need to first clarify to show how the contours of my view differ from those of my predecessors. I will begin by presenting my reasoning for why I am locating my model under BDI psychology. Then I will examine whether we should consider persuasion as its own kind of speech act by first looking at how Austin positioned the concept as a perlocutionary object. Then I present an alternative contemporary account by Douglas Walton which frames persuasion as a distinct speech act. I then use these as my basis to argue that we should instead think of persuasion as a perlocutionary aim. Then I present an account of persuasive softening to account for the apparent difficulty within the literature of distinguishing between propagandizing as a fully persuasive act and propagandizing as part of an ongoing persuasion campaign. I then look at how these two accounts can be viewed as following out of the Aristotelian tradition regarding the relationship between beliefs and actions to show that my views are both consistent with a long tradition of understanding the relationship in the way that I do as well as providing some specific refinements which I believe allow for a clearer and more distinct picture of propagandizing.

2.2.1: Persuasion and BDI Psychology

There is substantial debate regarding the nature of belief formation and the best way to model the relationship between mental states and action. Here I adopt the Belief, Desire, Intention model (BDI) as a heuristic model for the purposes of this dissertation. While the BDI structure has been developed through various strands of action theory and cognitive science, my formulation is

informed primarily by Jerry Fodor's (1975) representational view of belief, which treats beliefs as mental states with propositional content.⁴³ The model treats beliefs, desires, and intentions as the root causes of human action, but there are different ways of sketching out their exact relationships with one another. The model I prefer asserts that beliefs are propositional attitudes, i.e., an individual bears the attitude of acceptance toward a proposition like, "justice is good."⁴⁴ What I refer to here as 'confidence' can also be understood as the degree or a kind of meta-attitude one holds toward that proposition. As I move forward I will refer to this confidence as strength of commitment or credence. Desires may be experienced as internal sensations or impulses that incline individuals to prefer certain outcomes. While they can manifest propositionally, they may also operate sub- or pre-linguistically.

For example, I might see a delicious-looking pie on a windowsill and have my mouth start to water. I may or may not also think, "I want that pie," but in either case we would say that I desired the pie. Intentions are commitment-bearing motivational states that guide action and are distinct from desires.⁴⁵ They involve some level of agency or planning, even if not always consciously deliberate, and differentiate deliberate action from mere reaction.⁴⁶ This means that when one intends to do something one is acting by deliberate choice at some level rather than merely reacting impulsively to their environment. While this final category is the most difficult to define of the three, a few examples should help to clarify. For a clear-cut case let's look at murder

⁴³ Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, (Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975) 27-54

⁴⁴ Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *The Journal of Psychology*, Vol. LX No. 23 (1963): 2-3

⁴⁵ Michael Bratman, *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reasons*, (Harvard University Press, 1987), 15-16

⁴⁶ Bratman, *Intentions, Plans, and Practical Reasons*, 26

for an example.

Imagine a person who desires to see another person dead, develops a plan to kill them, and then does so. In this case we would most typically think this should qualify necessarily as murder. He wanted to kill them; he planned to kill them and then did. However, murder has a specific legal definition in the USA and so imagine if the scenario played out the same way except that when the person was en route to carry out the pre-planned murder they were driving but took their eyes off the road to look at their phone. As it so happened, the person they were planning to murder walked heedlessly into the street at that exact moment and was struck and killed by the would-be murderer's car. Now, the murderer had intended to kill that person and did so. However, the specific timing and method of killing were *unintentional*. In such a case we could say that the murderer had fulfilled their base or Ur intention, killing the target, but had not fulfilled their explicit intention of killing them in the pre-planned way. Intentions can be multi-layered or nested within one another, situations which can result in partial satisfaction of one's intentions.

The same is true for beliefs and desires in their own ways. Desires are as amorphous as intentions, possibly more so. Given that in their most rudimentary form desires are mere gut inclinations of preference, individuals are often not fully aware of the exact nature or extent of their desires. For example, it is one thing to desire wealth but that does not mean one knows preemptively how much wealth would be needed to fully satisfy that desire.

Beliefs, however, are a bit more explicit than desires or intentions. As fully realized propositional attitudes they minimally carry semantic content. Where a desire could be satisfied in plausibly numerous ways, there is no way to similarly satisfy a belief. Beliefs can be true or false, believed or not believed, held or rejected; but they can't be satisfied because they do not have an

unfulfilled component. An individual's full belief set is a complex web of interrelated propositions that is constantly shifting and updating. That belief set is typically an undefined set as the totality of our beliefs is generally unknown to us as individuals. While it is possible that some very self-aware people could be fully aware of their beliefs, it is certainly not the average state for a person.

The primary reason I will be using the model is I believe this model is the best available model for capturing persuasion as it is a model which allows for a clear and, most importantly, propositional model of thought. Persuasion happens, at least primarily, at the level of conscious thought.⁴⁷ While my actions could be manipulated without altering my beliefs about a given proposition, we would not typically think of such a case as being one of persuasion.

Relatedly, Bassili and Brown (2005) argue,

One perspective on the relation between implicit and explicit attitudes is that old attitudes do not fade away, but linger in implicit form (Wilson et al, 2000). According to the dual attitudes model, attitude change can result in a new evaluation that is explicit and consciously accessible, while the old evaluation lingers below awareness in an implicit attitude. When dual attitudes exist, the implicit attitude is more accessible and activated automatically, whereas the retrieval of an explicit attitude requires motivation and deliberate processing. Following this logic, the relative influence of implicit and explicit attitudes depends, therefore, upon the processing conditions under which a response is

⁴⁷ What I mean by this is that persuasion is not intended to merely alter action, but to alter one's strength of commitment to the truth of a given proposition. The distinction I am drawing is between persuading someone to act or permit action versus merely eliciting a physical response. I draw this distinction out in more detail below.

made.⁴⁸

While Bassili and Brown use the term attitude, I treat explicit attitudes as functionally equivalent to propositional beliefs insofar as they reflect conscious accessible evaluations. Implicit attitudes, however, may not be genuinely propositional, and therefore fall outside the scope of belief as modeled in BDI structure. The reason for bringing in this distinction is that even if implicit attitudes can influence behavior, changes occurring solely at that level do not satisfy the conceptual requirements of persuasion as I use the term, which presupposes conscious uptake of propositional content. Thus, while the dual-attitude models are crucial for understanding gestalt cognition, they presently provide little direct insight into the kind of conscious, propositional belief revision that concerns me here.

To imagine this distinction more clearly, consider the case of a doctor checking your reflexes by hitting your patellar tendon gently with a rubber mallet. Assuming your nervous system is functioning properly, your leg will kick slightly involuntarily. This is what is meant by an unconscious action in this sense. It is an action that is not brought about by any rational choice on the part of the actor but rather is an inevitable output of their neural processing system functioning normally. Now we must consider whether in such a case the doctor should be considered to have *persuaded* your leg to kick or did they merely successfully elicit that reaction?

Contrast that with conscious action. Imagine the same scenario but before tapping your knee the doctor says, “I am going to check your reflexes now. Don’t worry, this is an important and completely safe medical procedure to ensure that your nervous system is functioning normally.

⁴⁸ J. N Bassili and R. D. Brown (2005) “Implicit and Explicit Attitudes: Research, Challenges, and Theory,” *The handbook of attitudes*, (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2005), 550

May I proceed?” If you had been previously reticent or unwilling to allow the doctor to administer the procedure and now because of their statement you are willing to let them do so, we would say that the doctor persuaded you to let them elicit that reaction from you. This is why persuasion, as I use it here, targets conscious belief revision rather than unconscious affective triggers even when persuasion makes strategic use of the latter. Under the BDI framework, persuasion succeeds only insofar as the target actively comes to endorse the relevant content.

This distinction is why I will be using the BDI psychology model as the basis for my analysis in this paper. Because persuasion is aimed at conscious rational decisions, even when it is performed through methods that undercut conscious rational decision making. As such, using the BDI model will allow my project to stay focused on the kinds of persuasion we see as most relevant in society as well as give us a psychological model which can clearly and helpfully accommodate the processing of propositional knowledge as a relevant aspect of motivating behavior and belief formation.

2.2.2: Persuasion as Speech Act

The goal of this section is to present a slight modification of Austin’s framing of persuasion. Where Austin describes persuasion as a perlocutionary object I will argue that there is a closely related but distinct second kind of perlocution, a perlocutionary aim. I present the distinction here and will then justify why I draw this distinction below.

Perlocutionary Object: The effect on the audience of an individual utterance.

Perlocutionary Aim: The speaker’s ultimate intended effect on the audience by using an undefined set of utterances.

Austin himself does not offer such a category but given his own acknowledgement that

perlocutionary effects can be pursued over time, this extension is consistent with his view that perlocution is not strictly tied to conventional force. The distinction between the aim and object in these senses being that the perlocutionary object is the actual effect that any given utterance has on the audience, while the perlocutionary aim is the effect that is intended to be generated because of uttering. The key point being that while a perlocutionary object is limited to a single utterance, a perlocutionary aim is not. Any given utterance may fail to generate the intended effect on my audience, but that failure does not necessarily preclude me from continuing to try to generate that same effect via other utterances.

The exact nature of persuasion in speech act literature is debated. Austin asserts,

We must distinguish objects which have a perlocutionary object (convince, persuade) from those which merely produce a perlocutionary sequel. Thus, we may say I tried to warn him but only succeeded in alarming him...More important is the question of whether perlocutionary acts may always achieve their response or sequel by non-conventional means. Certainly, we can achieve some sequels of perlocutionary acts by entirely non-conventional means (or as we say 'unconventional' means), by acts which are not conventional at all or not for that purpose; thus, I may persuade some one [sic] by gently swinging a big stick or gently mentioning that his aged parents are still in the Third Reich.⁴⁹

What I find notable about Austin's account is that he tells us a great deal about the role he imagines persuasion playing in language but does not clearly spell out how it is meant to work. As a perlocutionary object it is the specifically intended effect upon the listener that is caused by the

⁴⁹ J.L. Austin *How to Do Things with Words*, (Martino Fine Book, 2018), 117

utterance of the would-be persuader, but it is almost never explicitly part of the locutionary act and is, at least frequently, carried out separately from the illocutionary act.⁵⁰

Additionally, Austin is clear that he considers persuasion as being something that can be achieved through a variety of potential means, e.g., swinging a bat menacingly or guiltling. Below in Table 2.1 I have provided an incomplete set of potential means of achieving the effect of persuasion. I include propagandizing here cautiously. While Part 1 demonstrates that propaganda is not reducible to persuasion, propagandistic speech acts often employ persuasion as one mechanism among many. Its presence in the below table is strictly to illustrate its functional overlap at the rhetorical strategy level.

Forms of persuasion (incomplete set)

Rational debate	An attempt to convince others to believe <i>P</i> using principled or reasoned arguments and evidence.
Force or Threat of Force	An attempt to motivate others to either believe or act as if they believe <i>P</i> due to the reality or possibility of physical, psychological, or emotional harm if they do not comply.
Misleading or Innuendo	An attempt to encourage others to believe <i>P</i> based on vague suggestion, implication, or otherwise misrepresenting the truth.

⁵⁰ See Cohen Discussion below.

Lying	An attempt to convince others to believe P while the speaker privately believes P to be false.
Propagandizing	See Part 1 for an in-depth analysis of the history of possible definitions for this.
Leading by Example	An attempt to alter the beliefs and behaviors of others by acting or speaking in certain ways publicly to demonstrate the virtues and merits of such behavior or beliefs.
Subliminal Messaging	The act of creating false or unsubstantiated beliefs by drawing, implying, or otherwise suggesting false or unsubstantiated relationships between things through non-explicit means.
Incentivization	Encouraging an audience to adopt P by the explicit or implicit presentation that the audience will or could be receiving benefit(s) from adopting or believing P .
Disincentivization	Encouraging an audience to reject P by the explicit or implicit presentation of costs or harms that the audience will or could receive because of adopting P .

Table 2.1

It is likely that one's responses to the different kinds of persuasion listed above varied.

Broadly speaking, rational debate is considered the ethically optimal method of persuasion as it

treats the target of persuasion as a fully rational person capable of making informed decisions. All the other listed methods are typically, though not in all contexts, considered to be either ethically dubious or outright unethical. Threats of violence and intimidation, for example, are typically considered to be *prima facie* unethical forms of persuasion as they rob individuals of the ability to follow their own understandings, reasons, intuitions, or ethical standards. Nonetheless, there are limited circumstances in which we think they are not merely warranted, but ethically necessary.

Example of Threats as Unethical Persuasion: Imagine you are walking down the street and see a man pull a gun on a family and he demands they hand over their valuables. This shake-down robbery is, at its core, a form of unethical persuasion on my broadened view. The man wielding the gun, broadly speaking, does not need to specify what the gun is intended to represent within the context of the interaction. The message is clear to those culturally sophisticated enough to receive it, “take me seriously and do what I say, or you will get shot.”

Example of Threats as Ethical Persuasion: Imagine you are in the same scenario described in the prior example. However, in this version when the robber pulls the gun on the family an on-duty police officer rounds a nearby corner and witnesses the scene. They pull their own firearm, aim it at the robber, and yell, “Drop the weapon and get on your knees with your hands behind your head, or I will open fire!”⁵¹

Aside from the fact that the police officer was more specific in defining what the presence of their gun was meant to indicate, these two scenarios are fundamentally parallel. In both cases a person with a gun uses the threat of violence that gun represents to persuade their intended targets to

⁵¹ For this example, to work as an example of ethical action, we should assume no other socially relevant ethical facts relating to policing, gun-ownership, or self-defense.

acquiesce to the gun holder's demands and desires. However, the inclusion of the explicit demand on the part of the officer is significant. Imagine the same scenario takes place again, but the officer says nothing, merely points their gun at the offender. We would not expect this action alone to carry the same force as it does when the officer explicitly says what threat the gun represents and how the offender can avoid it.

Returning to the point about whether unethical methods qualify as persuasion, what unifies these radically disparate forms of communication under the concept of persuasion is the function they fulfill in language and discourse. All of those listed in the chart, and others that are not listed, are various means of convincing other people to accept, adopt, or minimally privately endorse beliefs that they previously did not accept, adopt, or endorse.

However, this model has proven somewhat contentious. Austin's lack of a clear explanation for what a perlocutionary object and, by extension, persuasion within the context of Speech Act Theory have led different writers to build out the model in substantively different ways. For my argument that persuasion is best considered a perlocutionary aim to be fully persuasive, it is necessary to show both what the alternative model would look like and why I reject it.

Douglas Walton (2007) presents one such account of persuasion as a speech act.

Waltonian Persuasion: The proponent persuades the respondent to accept a designated proposition A as true if and only if the proponent puts forward a chain of argumentation meeting the following requirements. First, each step or single inference in the chain, is a structurally correct argument according to some appropriate requirements set out in the opening state of the dialogue. Second, the premises of the argument are all propositions that are already commitments of the respondent in the dialogue. Third, the ultimate conclusion

of the chain of argumentation, at the final step of inference, is the proposition *A*.⁵²

This definition may initially come across as incomplete but that is because it is resting on a few unstated premises. The first is that we need to be clear about what Walton means by ‘chain of argumentation.’

In persuasion dialogue, the speech act of persuasion is typically not a one-step process.

Instead, it starts out with one small step of argument, and then proceeds through a series of connected steps forming a chain of argumentation. The typical case can be represented by the example of Socrates *elenchus* in the earlier dialogues of Plato. At the start, Socrates gains some relatively small and apparently harmless concessions from his respondent. But then, as the chain of argumentation gets longer, even though the respondent is still making only small concessions, the direction of the argumentation ultimately moves toward a conclusion that is quite serious and dangerous for the respondent’s view. This step-by-step process is fundamental to the notion of persuasion in dialogue.⁵³

In other words, what I take Walton to be getting at is that persuasion is not something which occurs necessarily immediately or as the direct consequence of any single point or argument. Rather, persuasion is often the ultimate effect of a slow and methodical campaign of altering the respondents’ beliefs regarding the relevant premises in such a way that the conclusion becomes inescapable for a rational person.

The second is what Walton calls the Hypothesis of the Cognitive Component of Persuasion,

⁵² Douglas Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 89

⁵³ Walton *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 56-57

which states that when respondents find an argument persuasive, it is generally because they think that the argument is a reasonable one based on premises they are committed to.⁵⁴

The third is what Walton means by ‘commitment’. He describes the commitment model as a competing model separate from the BDI model described above.

It is only recently, in argumentation theory, and especially with the advent of Hamblin’s work on fallacies, that the commitment-based approach has even been articulated as a distinctive viewpoint or analytical tool...As applied to the simplest kind of case in which there are two parties in a dialogue, a proponent and respondent, argumentation can be defined as commitment-based in the following sense. The proponent has a claim to be proved, and he must use the respondent’s commitments as premises in an argument having his own (the proponent’s) claim as the conclusion. Similarly, the respondent, to prove his opposed claims, must use only the proponent’s commitments as premises. The principle of commitment-based argumentation represents a normative ideal that is present in all my previous writings on argumentation...An equivalent term is acceptance. Commitments in this sense...refers to what an arguer has gone on record accepting, as far as one can tell from the moves made in the dialogue. An arguer is committed to a proposition, in this special sense, when he has gone on public record as having asserted it...A participant in a dialogue can become committed to a proposition by putting forward any kind of speech act.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 86

⁵⁵ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 49-50

Walton's model is built on the assumption that if one is fully rational and one has, because of the chain of argumentation, come to accept all the premises of the argument being presented to them, "then by the standards of structural correctness, the respondent becomes committed to the conclusion."⁵⁶

It is on this point that my own model is forced to diverge from Walton's. His entire account rests on the assumption that for a communication to qualify as persuasion the respondent must be a person who is sufficiently rational that the only determinant for their beliefs is whether the premises cohere in a way that supports a given conclusion. Anything short of this would not be persuasion; it would necessarily be something else.

This in turn leads to one of the most substantive consequences of the divergence between our models. Walton's model requires him to reject the possibility that things like threats, coercion, or inducement should qualify as types of persuasion. He argues that they are each separate speech acts,

Now we come to the question of how the speech act of persuasion contrasts with these other two speech acts. This difference is a little hard to articulate, because persuasion seems so different in orientation from either of the other two speech acts. The main reason is that both threatening and offering an inducement are based on trade-offs of goods or services...The proponent is trying to get the respondent to do something by appealing to his interests."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 89

⁵⁷ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 72-73

Under this account persuasion seems unnecessarily limited to only the normatively ideal cases of persuasion like *rational* debate. Walton even underscores this specificity by saying, “To grasp this definition, one must come to understand the role of retraction in persuasion dialogue. It should be generally possible for the respondent to retract a commitment. Retracting a proposition, once the other party has shown it is false or indefensible, is an important part of rationality.”⁵⁸ What is notable about Walton’s account is that he does not explicitly state that he is only discussing rational persuasion, rather his claim is that something can only count as persuasion if both parties are fully reason responsive. However, he also does not assert clearly rationality as a necessary condition,

To make the point in a more concrete way, consider the type of persuasion dialogue that goes on in a forensic debate...In a forensic debate, each side has a thesis, and during the debate each side brings forward its best arguments to support that thesis. At the end, a judge, or perhaps an audience, makes a ruling on which side won the debate. The debate is not a case of what might be called rational persuasion for the opinion of the judge or the audience does not necessarily coincide with the reality of which side had the stronger argumentation. Judges and audiences can, after all, be deceived by fallacious arguments that look strong when they are not. But even so the purpose of argumentation in a debate can rightly be seen, on both sides, as one of persuasion.⁵⁹

Which is to say that while his own account of persuasion as speech act appears to only be plausible

⁵⁸ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 89

⁵⁹ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 43

if we presume it to be an idealized account of rational persuasion, and yet here he clearly asserts that persuasion can occur without being rational. As such, we are left with some vagueness regarding the full scope of Walton's definition. This tension indicates that Walton's account functions primarily as an idealized normative model of persuasion rather than a descriptive one. That is, he frames persuasion as it *ought* to occur under conditions of rational argumentation, even while acknowledging that persuasion can occur in practice without fully rational uptake. My model, by contrast, is descriptive. It seeks to account for how persuasion is enacted across communicative contexts, including through non-rational means such as coercion or inducement.

There is a case to be made that his account is really aiming at being an ameliorative account as he states, "But to understand how these work, it will be argued in subsequent Parts that applying normative models to them can help, beginning with a normative model of the speech act of persuasion."⁶⁰ However, his ameliorative account is not aimed at persuasion specifically, rather it is aimed at drawing out the aims of dialectical and rhetorical argumentation.

Where our accounts truly diverge is in how we position persuasion within communication. Here are two simplified diagrams to help show the differences in our models.

⁶⁰ Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 45

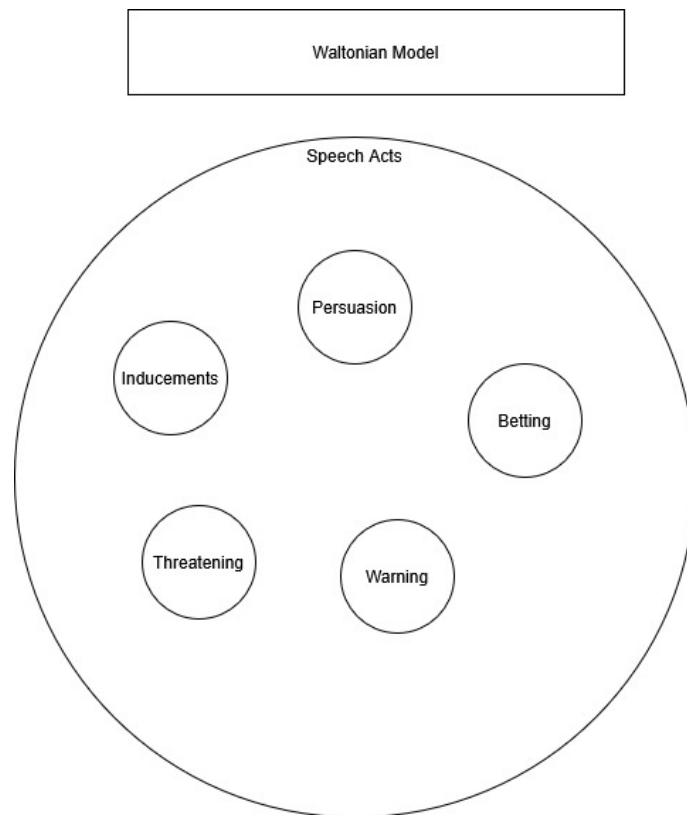


Figure 2.2.2

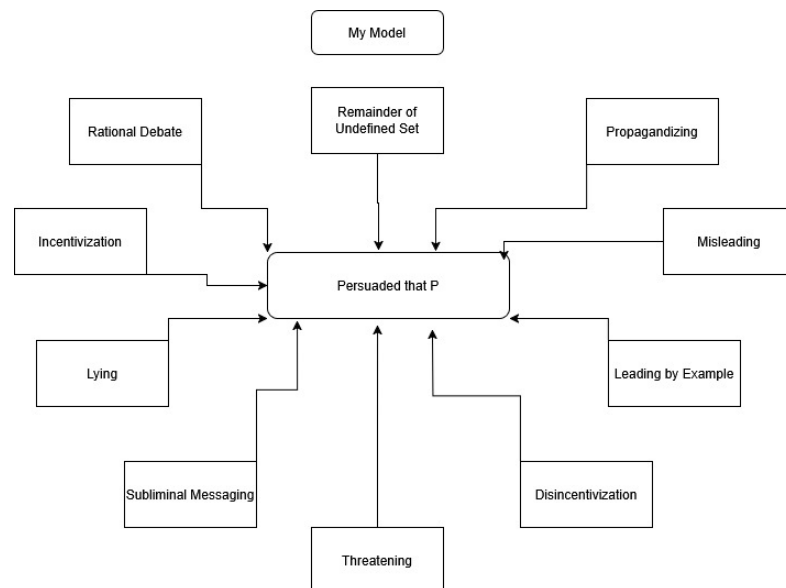


Figure 2.2.3

Figure 2.2.2 shows a visual representation of Walton's account, which asserts persuasion as one speech act among a set of many distinct speech acts like threatening or inducing. While speech acts like persuading, threatening, and inducing may appear to be highly related, they aren't necessarily. Each is its own speech act. However, as Figure 2.2.3 indicates, I argue that while they may all qualify as distinct illocutions, each with relevantly tethered perlocutionary objects, they are nonetheless unified. Figure 2.2.3 positions persuasion not as a standalone illocutionary speech act, but as an overarching perlocutionary aim achieved through the strategic deployment of multiple illocutionary acts. This structure clarifies why persuasion may continue as a multi-step discourse process, even when individual speech acts fail to generate their immediate perlocutionary object. What unifies them is that each of them is a kind of rhetorical move that can be employed independently, jointly, or successively to achieve the aim of persuasion.

The key benefit of my model over Walton is that it accords more strongly with our experience of persuading. The Waltonian model asserts persuading as simple binary of success or failure, the respondent is either persuaded or they are not. However, I do not think this aligns with how persuasion is frequently enacted. Under my model persuasion is the over-arching goal of employing any number of a variety of rhetorical moves, each of which has its own more specific and immediate goal which is realized by the satisfaction of the relevant felicity conditions, or what Austin calls a perlocutionary object. Any of the methods listed in Table 2.1, or others not listed, could be used as a move in my persuasion game and the failure of one method does not necessarily result in the failure of my campaign. Under Walton's model, persuasion success is assessed at the

utterance level; in my view, success is assessed at the campaign level.⁶¹ This is like how in games like chess a failure to capture a single piece does not guarantee that I have lost the game. That I failed to incentivize you to believe that *P* is not sufficient to rule out the possibility that I could disincentivize you into believing that *P*.

2.2.3: Perlocutionary Object vs Perlocutionary Aim

In this section I present my argument for persuasion as a *perlocutionary aim* as opposed to a *perlocutionary object*. I argue that persuasion is better thought of as a discursive strategy and as such operates as a guide for what methods could or should be chosen to further a given persuasion campaign.

2.2.3.1 Defining Perlocutionary Object and Perlocutionary Aim

I will begin this section by putting forward two definitions that I will then spend the rest of the section explaining and justifying my reasoning for. I will be doing this to set up my discussion of persuasion and why I view it as a perlocutionary aim rather than a perlocutionary object. A perlocutionary object is the intended effect of a single utterance that satisfies the following conditions:

Conditions for X to be a perlocutionary object of utterance U:

1. X is a cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or doxastic effect on the audience.
2. X is intended by the speaker as a consequence of uttering U.

⁶¹ This is in line with the Bernays-Marlin-Stanley tradition of viewing propaganda as an enduring effort or campaign. The one potential difference is that I explicitly assert that a campaign can be composed of a single instance of propagandizing while Bernays, Marlin, and Stanley do not.

3. X is not aroused accidentally by the uttering of U.
4. X is not part of the conventional illocutionary force of U but is a contingent effect that depends on audience uptake and reaction.
5. X need not occur for the utterance U to count as a successful illocution, but is what the speaker hopes will occur as a result of U.

I contrast that with a perlocutionary aim, which is the speaker's broader strategic goal pursued through one or more utterances that satisfies the following conditions:

Conditions for Y to be the perlocutionary aim of speaker S over utterance sequence $U_1...U_n$:

1. Y is an intended effect on the audience, held by S prior to the production of $U_1...U_n$.
2. Y is not necessarily tied to any particular utterance but may require a sequence of utterances for its realization.
3. Y guides the selection and revision of the speech acts $U_1...U_n$, such that each is chosen (or adjusted) for its utility in achieving Y.
4. Y may be achieved even if some individual perlocutionary objects fail to take effect, provided the cumulative discourse secures Y.
5. Y is not dependent on the audience recognizing the speaker's intention to achieve Y, but rather on the audience's reaction to the content of $U_1...U_n$.

In other words, for Y to be a perlocutionary aim, the audience must engage with the discourse but need not recognize that the speaker is attempting to bring about Y.

These two definitions are intended to allow us a more fine-grained distinction when discussing perlocutions. While the standard account of perlocutions is that they are merely the effects of

speech acts, I argue that they are not quite so unidimensional. Rather, perlocutions should be considered as being composed of two distinct parts that are frequently, albeit not necessarily, aligned. In short, the perlocutionary object is the intended actual effect, not mere effect of a locution or illocution upon the audience. The perlocutionary aim is the strategic intention moving the speaker to act in the first place. The core reason for drawing this distinction is to bring forward and highlight an aspect of communication that is commonplace but underanalyzed. That aspect being that the mere failure of a single rhetorical move does not guarantee the failure of my total rhetorical effort.

2.2.3.2 Examples of Perlocutionary Objects and Perlocutionary Aims

For example, suppose I place a bet. I can say, “I bet five dollars on the Sharks to win!” Once I have done so, the bet is live and open until it is either accepted or rejected by the relevant parties. If the person(s) I am speaking to decline my bet, then no bet has been made and my attempt at betting has failed. I have not secured my intended perlocutionary object, namely, successfully entering into a bet.

If I were to follow up their declination by saying, “I bet five dollars on the Sharks to win,” we would not say that my original bet is still in play. Rather I have made an entirely new bet, it just so happens to be for the same stakes as the previous bet. Each bet is a distinct utterance that will succeed or fail. Over these two instances I have attempted to secure two distinct perlocutionary objects, but I held a single perlocutionary aim.

However, when I make the offer of the second bet, given that my action is the same and the circumstances are almost identical, it makes intuitive sense to think that something from my

original bet is being retained.⁶² What remained from the first utterance to the second was not the speaker's illocutionary commitment (the bet), but the speaker's continuing aim to bring about the condition of being in a bet. The failure of the utterance does not equate to the failure of the speakers strategic intention which can continue to inform future utterances.

This is not a surprising or novel result, and if this were the only consequence of my view there would be little value in it. Whether we think of multiple successive bets as discrete instances or part of a sustained campaign of attempting to bet is largely immaterial. However, this point becomes more critical when applied to more contentious perlocutions like persuading and warning.

2.2.3.3 Background Literature of Perlocutions: Austin, Cohen, Bach and Harnish, and Grice

For this analysis to be fully clear I should justify why I am framing perlocutions in this way and show that it is in step with the literature. Austin describes perlocutions as,

Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them; we may then say, thinking of this, that the speaker has performed an act in the nomenclature of which reference is made either...only obliquely, or even...not at all, to the performance of the locutionary or illocutionary act. We shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of a perlocutionary act or perlocution.⁶³

A perlocution is therefore the effect the speaker has upon the audience as a direct consequence of

⁶² They are only almost identical because in this case the scenario has shifted to one in which a bet was previously offered, however this is a sufficiently minor shift that it will not necessarily impact the scenario.

⁶³ Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 101

the locutionary (semantic contents of what is said) or illocutionary act (the intended meaning of the speaker). Ted Cohen (1973) argues persuasively that we should think of perlocutions as serving a justificatory role for illocutions.

When I say that there is a relation between the illocution and perlocution *in general* [sic], I mean that the perlocution is something like the rationale for the illocution. It constitutes the general reason, a reason *überhaupt*, for performing the illocution. It gives the illocutionary act, considered as an act of a kind, a point. As Kant noted, if there is no acceptance of promises, then the act of promising becomes not merely a vain effort, but it ceases to be that kind of act – it ceases to be promising. This is not to say that there must be acceptance in every case, that there is no such thing as an unaccepted promise. Of course there is unaccepted promising, as there is arguing which doesn't persuade and threatening which doesn't intimidate. The perlocution is detachable from the illocution in any particular case.

So we cannot tell the perlocution if we only know the illocution.⁶⁴

In other words, the perlocution is not a necessary or passive byproduct of the locution or illocution. Rather it plays an integral role in the fulfillment of the speech act. Cohen treats perlocutions as offering reasons for illocutions in a normative, not psychological, sense. This is broadly consistent with Grice's rational structure but distinct from his intention-recognition model. However, Cohen's justification is public-facing and normative, not private or psychological. I say he is broadly consistent with Grice because his model is partially Gricean in structure, but non-Gricean in terms of the mechanisms.

⁶⁴ Ted Cohen, "Illocutions and Perlocutions," *Foundations of Language*, Vol. 9, No. 4(Mar., 1973), 500

By describing it as a “reason *überhaupt*,” Cohen is asserting something like my own claim. Perlocutions are not merely the effects of the speech act on the respondent, but they are also the underlying reason why the proponent acted in the first place. Where our views differ is that Cohen only addresses perlocutions as playing a public facing justificatory role for speaking. That justification is not regarding uptake or the realization of success conditions, but rather it is aimed at justifying why something is being said and is comprehensible within the communal communicative norms. This is structurally in line with the Gricean tradition my account broadly falls under.

Cohen’s point here concerns the normative rationale for performing an illocution, not the psychological mechanism whereby perlocutionary effects are achieved. In contrast, Bach and Harnish focus on restricting perlocutionary acts to intentional effects to maintain explanatory discipline. These views are compatible because they address different explanatory levels. Cohen explains why an illocution is worth performing, while Kent Bach and Robert M. Harnish explain which effects count as properly perlocutionary.

My framework follows Austin in maintaining a structural distinction between the illocutionary and perlocutionary act, while adopting the Gricean emphasis on intention to explain the strategic selection of utterances without reducing perlocution to implicatures.

Bach and Harnish argue that perlocutions should be limited to intentional effects as it is critical for limiting their scope.

Since there is virtually no limit to the sorts of things that can result from speech acts – almost anything is possible, from insulting someone to starting a war – it would seem reasonable to restrict the category of perlocutionary acts in whatever way seems theoretically appropriate. This is a matter of terminological stipulation, but that does not

make it arbitrary. We propose first to limit perlocutionary acts to the *intentional* [sic] production of effects on (or in) the hearer. Our reason is that only reference to intended effects is necessary to explain the overall rationale of a given speech act. Utterance, locutionary, and illocutionary acts are all intentional and generally performed with the primary intention of achieving some perlocutionary effect. To be sure, a speaker can insult, appease, disturb, or excite someone without intending to, but unless this is done intentionally, the fact that it is done does not help explain the speech act. In any case, the vocabulary of verbs of speech actions cannot be relied on to mark the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.⁶⁵

Which is to say that given that plausibly anything that happens after the utterance could technically qualify as a perlocutionary act if the category is left wholly unrestricted, we should feel empowered to provide some conceptual boundaries on what we mean by perlocutionary act. However, perlocutions are difficult to categorize and confine as they seem difficult or impossible to conventionalize.

Unlike illocutionary intentions, perlocutionary intentions need not be recognized or intended to be recognized. They can be intended to be recognized, although in some cases (such as misleading or impressing someone) the hearer is intended *not* to recognize them. Not only can perlocutionary intentions be overt, they can be reflexive; but even when they are reflexive, they are not communicative in the way that illocutionary intentions are, for their fulfillment consists not in their recognition but in the production of some further

⁶⁵ Kent Bach and Robert Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, (The MIT Press, 1979), 16-17

effect.⁶⁶

Bach and Harnish, furthering a point originally alluded to by Austin, argue that the problem with attempting to conventionalize perlocutionary acts is that their fulfillment conditions rest, at least in part, in the respondent. Their SAS framework asserts that the primary goal of a speech act is for the respondent to recognize the intentions of the proponent qua the intentions of the proponent.

However, perlocutions do not require that kind of meta recognition on the part of the respondent, rather they require an effect to be produced. Since there is no obvious or clear way to develop a convention or set of conventions that could plausibly account for any potential effect that could arise after the utterance, we must choose to restrict the effects of interest to those that are intended by the proponent.

2.2.3.4 Conditions for Perlocutionary Objects Examined

This brings us back to the definition above regarding the perlocutionary object.

Necessary Conditions for X to be a perlocutionary object of utterance U:

1. X is a cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or doxastic effect on the audience.
2. X is intended by the speaker as a consequence of uttering U.
3. X is linked to U such that if U were not uttered, X would not plausibly occur.
4. X is not part of the conventional illocutionary force of U; even if U conventionally aims at producing X, X remains a contingent effect whose fulfillment depends on audience uptake and reaction.

⁶⁶ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 81

5. X need not occur for the utterance U to count as a successful illocution, but is what the speaker hopes will occur as a result of U.

Necessary condition 1 asserts that for something to qualify as a perlocutionary object, Austin's preferred term and thus the one I am using as well, it must be a specific effect upon the audience. The effect can be cognitive (meaning rational or logical), emotional (meaning affective), behavioral (meaning the generation of further action by the audience), or doxastic (meaning belief related). NC2 asserts that the speaker explicitly intends for X to be brought about or caused by uttering U. NC 3 creates a necessary causal connection between the utterance and X, thus ensuring that X is an effect of the utterance not merely a coincidental occurrence. NC 4 ensures that the perlocutionary object X is kept separate and distinct from the illocutionary force of U. X is an effect caused by the illocutionary force of U, it is not the illocutionary force itself. Even in cases where an illocutionary act conventionally carries expectations of a certain effect, e.g., threats generally aim to intimidate, Bach and Harnish treat the effect as perlocutionary because its fulfillment depends on the audience's actual response, not merely on the conventional force of the utterance. Finally, NC 5 ensures that merely achieving uptake for the illocution is not itself sufficient to ensure the relevantly intended perlocutionary object is fulfilled.

This definition is intended to be a composite of the arguments of Austin, Cohen, and Bach and Harnish. It is not intended to conventionalize perlocutions qua perlocutions, but rather to extend the project of Bach and Harnish. Where they provided strong rhetorical reasons for restricting the scope of perlocutions to intention, this definition merely formalizes their arguments. My reason for including this discussion and this definition is that both are necessary to set up and justify my argument for what I am calling the perlocutionary aim.

2.2.3.5 Conditions for Perlocutionary Aims Examined

My definition for a perlocutionary aim is intended to capture a feature of speech acts in general, and particularly perlocutions that could be clearer. Bach and Harnish present the following examples: “L6: By predicting that Truman would win the election, *S* convinced *H* that he was clairvoyant.”⁶⁷ “L9: By (directly) demeaning *H*’s character and thereby (indirectly) challenging *H* to a fight, *S* both irritated *H* and amused *H* with his pretension.”

What I find notable about these two examples is that they make clear two salient points. The first is that L6 clearly shows how perlocutions can occur via indirect or unintentional means and are therefore distinct and detached from illocutions. While no additional context is given for these scenarios, we can imagine a plausible case for this. For example, suppose *S* had not been attempting to convince *H* that *S* is clairvoyant. Conversely, we can also imagine the cases wherein *S* did intend to convince *H* of their clairvoyance, but *S* either did or did not make that intention known to *H*. In any of these cases, what we clearly see is that the illocution and the perlocution not only come apart, but, as Bach and Harnish noted, no conventional relationship can be plausibly established between them.

The second salient point is brought forward by L9. That point is that utterances can have cumulative, but not necessarily additive, effects, i.e., effects that arise at the discourse level and are not determined by the effects of each individual utterance. This is an extension of the previous point, but a critical distinction. Given that perlocutions are resistant to any kind of reliable conventionalization, we should not assume that illocutions and perlocutions are directly tethered to

⁶⁷ Bach and Harnish *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 82

one another at all.⁶⁸ As Bach and Harnish noted, the success of an illocution does not guarantee the fulfillment of any perlocutions. What I find notable beyond that point, is that this also leaves open the possibility that certain perlocutions may be unfulfillable or at least characteristically unfulfillable via a single utterance.

What L9 states is that by demeaning *H*, *S* had also simultaneously challenged *H*. In other words, it was not merely the act of demeaning that yielded the relevant perlocutions, but it was the combination of the act being both demeaning *and* a challenge. In this case, one utterance managed to play both roles, but there is no reason to think that the same couldn't be true over multiple utterances. In other words, if (1) I intend to elicit a specific effect from my respondent, (2) I believe that no single utterance could elicit that effect on its own, and (3) believe that several distinct utterances used together might be able to elicit that effect, then is there any reason to think that this should be impossible? The following example of a defiant child is intended to precisely illustrate this case.

I argue no, not only is this possible, depending on the relevantly intended effect, it may be the standard method used to attempt to bring about that perlocutionary object. The two perlocutionary objects I find the most likely to fit this characterization are persuading and warning. The reason is that both represent situations in which a proponent may have reason to avoid making their own intentions known to their respondent.

For example, imagine the case of a parent and an oppositional-defiant but otherwise

⁶⁸ By 'reliable conventionalization,' I just mean the kind of convention governing illocutionary force, where successful performance is tied to uptake under shared norms. Perlocutionary effects do not possess the same stability, as they depend on audience response rather than conventional recognition.

rational child.⁶⁹ The parent knows that if they tell their child, “Don’t touch the stove,” the child will touch the stove due to their oppositional defiant nature. However, the parent wants to keep the child safe from harm and thus adapts their strategy. They instead say:

1. The stove is 451 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. 451 degrees Fahrenheit is hot enough to light paper on fire.
3. If you touch fire, you will burn your hand.
4. Therefore, if you touch the stove, you will burn your hand.

Whether this strategy will work is immaterial, what matters is that it plausibly could work. The parent asserted three facts to the child and never explicitly told the child not to touch the stove. However, if the child is sufficiently reason-responsive and their oppositional defiance is such that it only inverts do and do not, then it is at least plausible that the cumulative effect of these distinct utterances together is to warn the child that they should not touch the stove. If the child internally then decides, “I should not touch the stove,” then the intended perlocutionary object of warning the child not to touch the stove has been fulfilled.

It is for these reasons that I will now present and fully explain my definition of a perlocutionary aim.

Conditions for Y to be the perlocutionary aim of speaker S over utterance sequence

$U_1...U_n$:

1. Y is an intended effect on the audience, held by S prior to the production of $U_1...U_n$.

⁶⁹ Oppositional Defiance Disorder is a behavioral disorder characterized by extreme resistance to authority figures. It commonly presents in children as a child explicitly and intentionally doing the opposite of whatever an authority figure tells them to do or not do.

2. Y is not necessarily tied to any one utterance but may require a sequence of utterances to bring about.
3. The fulfillment of Y depends on the speaker's overarching strategic intention, not on any individual utterance possessing Y. Not all utterance sequences have a perlocutionary aim, only those produced under that guiding intention.
4. The speaker's intention to fulfill Y governs their selection and revision of the speech acts $U_1...U_n$, such that each is chosen in light of its utility in achieving Y.
5. Y may be fulfilled even if some individual perlocutionary objects fail to produce the intended effect in the audience provided the cumulative discourse achieves Y.
6. Y is extrinsic to the illocutionary success of any particular utterance and the speaker intends Y to be fulfilled by the expression of some portion of the sequence $U_1...U_n$.

Necessary condition 1 asserts that effect Y is not only intended by speaker S, but that it was intended prior to saying any of the utterances that will be used to bring about Y. This is critical as while it is possible that further intentions or aims could be developed in the process of eliciting Y, it is important to keep focused on only Y as the relevantly intended effect regardless of what other effects happen to be elicited as well. NC2 states that while Y could be brought about by a single utterance, it does not need to be and in fact may require multiple utterances to be fulfilled. NC3 provides some boundaries on what a perlocutionary aim can be. It first establishes that any individual utterance within the sequence does not necessarily contribute to the fulfillment of Y. It also asserts that no utterance within the sequence is necessarily the significant utterance, rather it allows for the possibility that it is the deployment of the utterances together that results in the fulfillment of Y. NC4 establishes that the speaker's intention to fulfill Y is prior and functionally

governing across $U_1 \dots U_n$, rather than reducible to whatever perlocutionary objects may result from any individual utterance. By serving this governing role, Y operates as a strategic aim at the level of discourse rather than at the level of a single utterance. NC5 ensures that it is not necessary for any single utterance to be responsible for the fulfillment of Y so long as Y is fulfilled by the conclusion of the discourse, which itself may not have a clear or predetermined end point. Finally, NC6 ensures that Y is a perlocution and not part of the illocutionary force of any of the utterances.

2.2.3.6 Communicative vs Strategic Aims

Additionally, aims can be either strategic or communicative. In the communicative aim the speaker desires the audience to recognize the speaker's intention, e.g., if I say, "look out for that pothole!" I want you to understand not merely that there is a pothole, but that the reason I am telling you that is that I intend for you to be warned. This is contrasted with a strategic aim, in which the speaker desires the audience to *not* recognize their intention (Bach and Harnish make a similar claim regarding misleading).⁷⁰ For example, suppose I tell you "my car is on the verge of breaking down, we should take yours," but the truth is that my car is merely low on gas. For this to qualify as misleading my intention must be for you not to recognize my intention that you reach a false conclusion as a direct result of my assertion.

Lastly, I argue that it is characteristic of perlocutionary objects that they have communicative aims, and perlocutionary aims are characteristically strategic. However, neither is necessarily the case as a single utterance could plausibly have both aims simultaneously. For

⁷⁰ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 83

example, in the pothole example it is at least plausible that my aim is to both warn you about the potential hazard while simultaneously persuading you to avoid it.

2.2.3.7 Diverging from Grice

The reason I want to carve out this point is in part to address the Gricean model of speaker meaning.

Perhaps we may sum up what is necessary for A to mean something by X as follows. A must intend to induce by X a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended. But these intentions are not independent; the recognition is intended by A to play its part in inducing the belief, and if it does not do so something will have gone wrong with the fulfillment of A's intentions...Shortly, perhaps, we may say that 'A meant_{nn} by x' is roughly equivalent to 'A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention.'⁷¹

The Gricean model asserts what I am calling the communicative aim as speaker meaning. My model is structurally Gricean in its treatment of intention but diverges in that it does not require recognition of that intention for perlocutionary success. I am aligned with Grice that communicative structure is intention driven. However, unlike Grice's account of speaker meaning, perlocutionary aims such as misleading or deceiving may not be intended to succeed even if, or perhaps precisely because, the audience does not recognize the intention. Thus, while my model remains Gricean in treating intentions as central, it diverges from Grice by decoupling intention from the success conditions of the perlocutionary effect. In perlocutionary aims such as

⁷¹ Paul Grice, "Meaning," *Study in The Way of Words*, (Harvard University Press, 1991), 219

misleading, successful fulfillment may depend precisely on the intention *not* being recognized.

2.2.3.8 The Utility of Perlocutionary Aims

Thus, taken together, what these two definitions are intended to show is that we can and should understand perlocutions as multi-layered in at least some cases. My definition of perlocutionary objects is merely attempting to formalize what is typically meant by the term, while my definition of perlocutionary aim is intended to show that perlocutions are sufficiently detached from illocutions that, in at least some cases, there is no single utterance that could plausibly bring them about. Rather, they may require the strategic deployment of multiple utterances at the discourse level to pursue and potentially secure the relevant perlocutionary effect.

2.2.4 Persuasion as Non-Necessarily Rational

It should be noted that I did not include Walton's thoughts on propaganda in Part 1 as I do not find his views have substantively shaped the evolution of the definition of propaganda over the last century. What I do find useful in this argumentation of Walton's is how his description of propaganda helps color in his account of persuasion and, I argue, underscores the weaknesses of that account.

The ultimate goal of propaganda is to get respondents to take a particular course of action. Many definitions of propaganda postulate that the goal of propaganda is to change the respondents beliefs or to persuade respondents to accept some proposition as true (or false). But these goals, although they are typically part of propaganda, are secondary to the ultimate goal, which is always (as a matter of practical politics) to get the respondents to do (or abstain from doing) something. These secondary goals are always means to the ultimate

end of propaganda, which is action or compliance with action... The process of persuading a respondent to accept some particular proposition as true is tied in with how propaganda is used. And therefore, many conclude that from a dialectical point of view, propaganda can be defined essentially as a type of persuasion dialogue. But it is certainly a peculiar type of persuasion dialogue. Many would say it is a degenerate or false (pseudo) persuasion dialogue used to try to influence a mass audience... Whether or not an audience really believes a particular viewpoint or accepts it as true, the aim of propaganda is to get them to go along with a policy or program in a more practical sense, by taking part in it and by allowing it to be implemented as a plan of social action.⁷²

Walton's base assertion regarding propaganda is that it is first and foremost concerned with controlling action and that belief alteration is secondary. To an extent this locates Walton's account as part of the Lasswellian tradition which focuses on propaganda's primary purpose being control. However, this emphasis places Walton's account at odds with most contemporary models which, even when acknowledging behavioral outcomes (Lasswell), treat belief formation as the primary target rather than a secondary means. Recall that Lasswell's concern was not merely control of action, but control of opinion. Few definitions place action over belief, and even those (like Lasswell) emphasize belief shaping as integral.⁷³ This is a fact that Walton seemingly acknowledges by referring to "many definitions" but he dismisses these views without supplying a corresponding theoretical foundation. Instead, he relies primarily on pragmatic judgment rather

⁷² Walton, *Media Argumentation Dialectic, Persuasion, and Rhetoric*, 106

⁷³ Lasswell, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, 9-10

than an argument that aligns with established propaganda models. This is also consistent with Walton's broader view of persuasion as action oriented rather than belief oriented, but it does not align with major theorists in propaganda studies who ground influence in belief transformation.

The reason I find this discussion of Walton's worth including here is that it underscores why I think his account of persuasion necessitates broadening. Walton may well be right that propaganda should be considered a *degenerate* form of persuasion in so far as its usage is rarely, if ever, ethically justifiable, but that does not also necessarily reduce it to pseudo-persuasion. We should be able to make a distinction between whether a communicative act is ethically undesirable and if it still meets the relevant criteria of the act. These two points can only be considered collapsible, even under Walton's account, by adding a necessary condition to our concept of propaganda that is to the effect of: "The interlocutors are engaged in a good-faith rational debate, are open to having their beliefs changed, and will honestly and accurately report any changes in their beliefs due to the exchange."

There is a plausible objection here from the Waltonian side which argues that if a potential kind of persuasion is sufficiently degenerate that we can presume it to be fundamentally unethical and therefore never justifiably employable, then why should we not merely disregard it as a legitimate kind? This is a normative point and a bullet I am forced to bite. If one does believe that a thing which meets the relevant categorical criteria to be a token of a given type, but is in some way a sufficiently repugnant or despicable token that it does not actually count as a token, then you may find the Waltonian model more attractive. However, I reject this claim thoroughly. That tokens exist across a spectrum of normative quality should not undermine classification. Whether unethical persuasion qualifies as persuasion is a taxonomic matter distinct from whether it should

be employed. That is why, for example, whether one gets an ‘A’ or a ‘C’ in med school, if you pass you still get called a doctor.

2.2.5 The Perlocutionary Aim of Persuasion Defined

Having examined both sides of the issue, I want to clearly summarize and assert my argument that persuasion should be considered a perlocutionary aim, rather than as a perlocutionary object or as a distinct speech act.

The foundational problem with accounting for persuasion under speech act theory is that Austin definitively asserted persuasion to be a perlocutionary object without laying out in clear terms what that entails and that if we try to declare it a speech act, we are forced to recontextualize every other speech act since persuasion appears to have a few quasi-unique features.⁷⁴

We must distinguish actions which have a perlocutionary object (convince, persuade) from those which merely produce a perlocutionary sequel. Thus, we may say, ‘I tried to warn him but only succeeded in alarming him’. What is the perlocutionary object of one illocution may be a sequel of another: for example, the perlocutionary object of warning, to alert someone, may be a sequel of a perlocutionary act which alarms someone...It is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or entirely by non-locutionary means: thus intimidation may be achieved by waving a stick or pointing a gun. Even in the cases of convincing, persuading,

⁷⁴ I say quasi-unique because Austin grouped it with warning but then didn’t clearly explain why. The only apparent connection he drew was that the states of being persuaded and being warned appear separate from other perlocutionary effects.

getting to obey, and getting to believe, we may achieve the response non-verbally.

However, this alone is not enough to distinguish illocutionary acts, since we can for example warn or order or appoint or protest or apologize by non-verbal means and these are illocutionary acts.⁷⁵

What Austin is saying is that there is a special class of perlocutions called perlocutionary objects that includes things like convincing and persuading. This difference between the kinds is exemplified in how we are conventionally able to use the terms. When I engage in persuasion I should only be satisfied with the outcome if at the end of my efforts I can truthfully assert, “I persuaded you that *P*.” Contrast that with other perlocutions like protesting. I can truthfully assert, “I protest *P*,” and, depending on the semantic contents of *P*, I can be truthfully said to have protested *P* merely through the original assertion. Alternatively, I can never coherently assert, “I persuade you that *P*,” because the truth of that assertion rests on me being able to know that you are or will be persuaded before I have completed my persuasion effort. This is obviously absurd because the very reason one engages in a persuasion effort is because one, minimally, does not know that their audience will come to believe that *P* is the case if one does not engage in that effort. To be clear, however, Austin is not mistaken to classify persuading as a perlocutionary object; rather, the category fails to capture the strategy based discourse level dimension of persuasion, which cannot be fully realized within a single speech act framework.

My alternative proposal to Austin’s view is one that I do not view as necessarily contradictory, rather I believe it merely highlights the relevant feature of the perlocutionary object

⁷⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 117

of persuading that I will be using in my overall project. However, my view does conflict with accounts like Walton's as it firmly asserts that persuasion is *not* itself a speech act. My reason for biting that bullet is that, as demonstrated above, there are simply too many additional bullets (e.g., those requiring recognition of intention, performative incoherence, or dependence on discourse level accumulation) to bite by forcing persuasion into being a speech act rather than a perlocution.

Persuasion as Perlocutionary Aim: If a speaker intends for their audience's belief set to alter in response to the speaker's speech act(s) such that at the conclusion of that/those speech act(s) the persuader will be able to truthfully assert, "I persuaded my audience that *P*," wherein *P* stands for the relevant propositional belief, then it can be said that the perlocutionary aim of the speaker was to persuade their audience that *P*.

Importantly, this aim may be present even if persuasion fails to occur. It attaches to the intention rather than the actual belief change.

2.2.6: Belief Acquisition

In the previous section I presented a general account of how a person can engage in the practice of persuasion. In that discussion I made it clear that there are a multitude of methods of persuasion that fall outside of traditional rational debating. I also argued that regardless of their desirability, these are undeniably forms of persuasion so long as they can be framed as participating correctly and successfully in the exchange of commitments outlined above.

In this section I want to present a specific version of persuasion that I will refer to as persuasive softening. The purpose of this analysis is twofold: first to demonstrate that part of the benefit of the account of persuasion I am employing is that it can give us significantly greater fine grained distinctions between cases that other accounts might struggle to differentiate; and second

to help set up the idea that part of what makes propagandizing a special case of persuasion is that it's success conditions may not necessarily rest on achieving full persuasion. Let's look at an example to make this clearer.

Intimidation: A person in a public place has become irate and is yelling at everyone in sight. Another person approaches them while holding a metal bat with one hand while slapping it into the palm of their other hand. They are smiling and say, "Seem's like a nice day for a stroll, don't you think?" The irate person interprets this combined statement and action as implying the threat that if the irate person does not leave the area the man with the bat will harm them. The irate person does not immediately acquiesce but is also intimidated and pauses their tirade as they consider their next move.

The above scenario is meant to act as an example of what we can call, 'persuasive softening'. This is a kind of persuasion wherein the persuader is able to weaken the target's commitment to the belief 'continuing to express anger is preferable to backing down,' even if they do not yet adopt the belief that 'backing down is the correct course of action.' In the above case we can say that the irate person had developed a belief that expressing their ire would aid them in achieving some desired end. We can also say that the implicit threat or menace exuded by the agent with the bat was sufficient to lower the strength of the irate person's commitment to their belief in the effectiveness of expressing their ire because it caused both the irate person to pause and interpret the action as a threat.

We can also reconstruct this in terms of the persuasion model I set up in the previous section and in so doing highlight some strengths and weaknesses of the available theories. In terms of their respective pre-existing commitment stores we can say that the irate person held a belief

that expressing their anger would either be beneficial or was necessary. The man with the bat could be said to have held the contradictory view within their own commitment store coupled with a desire for the irate person to stop expressing their anger. The man with the bat also can be said to hold some kind of belief like, “I have the right and ability to intimidate this other person into acquiescing to my preferences by intimidating them with my bat.” When these two collide they both engage in their pre-determined courses of action. The irate person continues to erupt and the man with the bat begins slapping the bat in their hand.

The second thing to note in this case is that as set up, neither side fully succeeds. The intimidator does successfully communicate their intended message, but it does not secure uptake in the desired way. Alternatively, the irate person has not been dissuaded from erupting, but they have also been given pause and are able to correctly interpret that the man with the bat is making a threat. In other words, this is an example of an intentional effort to persuade via intimidation that fails to succeed at its primary goal while still succeeding at a plausible secondary goal. The persuader’s aim in such cases may not be full belief conversion but attenuation of opposing commitment, consistent with my perlocutionary aim framework.

I argue that this case gives us a clear way to view and understand the spectrum of strength of commitment we can have regarding our propositional commitments.⁷⁶ It seems clear to me that

⁷⁶ I am introducing a distinction here between *credence* and *strength of commitment* for the purposes of this discussion. By credence I mean one’s self-assessed degree of belief in the truth of a proposition. Strength of commitment, by contrast, refers to the practical significance or motivational force that belief carries for the individual. These do not need to align. For instance, I may have very high credence that the sky is blue, yet little practical commitment to that belief since nothing meaningful hinges on it. Conversely, a policymaker might be only moderately confident that a proposed political intervention will succeed yet remain strongly committed to supporting it due to the high perceived cost of failure. This distinction helps explain why incremental reductions in credence (persuasive softening, see section 2.3 below) can impact behavior even before full revision occurs.

it is not only possible but commonplace for people to have a multitude of commitments but feel differing levels of strength of commitment regarding each individual commitment. For example, suppose you believe both of the following propositions: 1. “Chocolate is better than vanilla” 2. “The length of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.” Should we think that just because we are able or willing to say that we are committed to both of those propositions as beliefs, that we therefore are necessarily equally committed to them? The first proposition is a preference of personal taste while the second is a description of a fact in geometry. While one certainly could be equally committed to both, one need not be. My preference for chocolate over vanilla could plausibly change over time or based on the actual food being served, in which case my commitment to that proposition might be relatively weak compared to my belief in axioms of geometry. On the other hand, my grasp of mathematical and geometrical truths might be very weak or uncertain while my love of chocolate is something I perceive as a defining feature of my identity. Finally, I could of course also self-assess that I have roughly the same credence in both propositions.

Regardless of which ends up being the case, I think this case makes it clear why there is good reason to view our propositional commitments, understood here as self-ascribed belief states, as existing on a spectrum of strength of commitment. At one end of the spectrum is 0 strength which we can understand as being the self-assessed state of having no commitment at all to the given proposition a.k.a., total belief rejection. An individual with a 0 strength of commitment regarding A would say, “I do not believe A .” On the other end of the spectrum is a self-assessed strength of commitment score of 100, a.k.a., the state of full belief. An individual with a 100 strength of commitment regarding A would say, “I believe A .” Any commitment we hold that falls

between the ends of this spectrum is one of the ways in which we might self-assess ourselves as feeling some degree of commitment to *A*, but insufficient commitment to assess ourselves as believing it.⁷⁷ I take no stance here on whether beliefs must meet a fixed threshold or be gradable, this model is intended functionally.

For example, take following proposition: “The United States is overall a force for good in the world.” Each of us could privately self-assess the strength of our commitment to that specific proposition and thus determine whether that is something we hold as a belief, and if not, how plausible we think it could be. Leaving aside the far ends of the spectrum which were discussed above, how should we understand the difference between a self-assessed strength of commitment score of, for example, 40, 50, and 60? A person who self-assessed a strength of 40 would say that they think the proposition is plausibly true, but they are not strongly inclined to believe it. If anything, they are slightly more inclined to disbelieve. Equally a person who self-assesses a strength of 60 would say that they think the proposition is more likely to be true than false, but they are not fully convinced that it is. Most importantly, the person who self-assessed their strength at 50 would be truly undecided. They think it is equally plausible that the commitment is true or false and as such are unable to take a side.

In summation, we should understand belief as being a metaphorical line that we reach internally when the strength of our commitment to a given proposition has become such that we could now truthfully assert, “I believe *A*.” Equally and conversely we should then understand

⁷⁷ I broadly align myself here with Van Frassen (1989) *Laws and Symmetry* 201 and his argument that beliefs have both epistemic and pragmatic aspects. I do not commit to a full Bayesian framework here; the spectrum is used purely as a functional heuristic for self-assessed belief strength.

disbelief or non-belief as being a metaphorical line at the other end of that same spectrum. Which, if reached, would allow the individual to assert now truthfully, “I do not believe *A*.”

The reason I bring in this discussion of spectrums of belief here is that it is critical for my overall project to make clear the distinction between a slow-rolling persuasion campaign, as many propaganda campaigns often are, and the actual moment of persuasion. That moment being when the intended audience makes the internal shift such that they can now truthfully assert they are committed to *A* when they previously would not have or vice versa. This is what persuasive softening is all about. When *A* is something that people have an inherent resistance to, it may be necessary to engage in a protracted form of persuasion that is aimed at weakening or strengthening the target’s strength of credence regarding a pre-existing or potential commitment.

By ‘credence’ what I mean is merely the strength of belief that an individual is willing to attribute themselves as having regarding a specific proposition. It is not a hard or explicit measure and, despite my descriptions above, the individual in question may be unable to ascribe anything like a percentage or numerical value to their strength of credence. It is enough for my purposes here for it to simply act as a placeholder for whatever internal mechanism is imagined governing whether a person ‘believes’ or is merely ‘open to believing’. All that matters is that the person themselves has the wherewithal to accurately report their internal mental states and can self-assess whether they are truly committed or merely open to being so committed.

There is evidence to indicate that if someone strongly holds a given belief and perceives that they have strong reasons to hold that belief, a single piece of counterpropaganda targeting that

belief may not be sufficient to collapse that individual's belief entirely, regardless of its accuracy.⁷⁸ However, a failure to cause such a total belief collapse does not necessarily mean that the piece of propaganda in question or the broader campaign of which it is a part has failed. If the exposure to that propaganda caused even a minute reduction in the credence of the individual's strongly held beliefs, then, depending on the goals and intentions of the propagandizer, the propaganda in question could be considered successful. If the campaign is aimed at altering or eliminating strongly held or deeply entrenched beliefs, then minute reductions in credence over time may ultimately be significantly more effective than more aggressive methods.

2.3 Persuasive Softening

Here are my two proposed sufficient conditions for persuasive softening. I have separated them into positive and negative forms to make them clearer.

Persuasive Softening (Negative Form): When conditions NC1-NC2 have been met, the proponent can be said to have been engaging in persuasive softening. When NC1-NC3 have been met, the proponent can be said to have succeeded in the act of persuasive softening. Success in this sense is an open-ended term that is not determined by any specific quantity or quality of the belief reduction of the softened. So long as NC3 can be said to be true, then persuasive softening has occurred.

NC1: Prior to the interaction the respondent has a personal store of commitments which includes *A* and the respondent could truthfully assert that they believe *A* is true.

⁷⁸ B. Nyhan and J. Reifler, "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions.," *Political Behavior*, 32(2), (2010) 323-324

NC2: The proponent engages in some communicative effort to discourage the inclusion of A in the respondent's store of commitments.

NC3: As a consequence of the proponent's communicative effort, the strength of the respondent's credence in A is reduced.

Persuasive Softening (Positive Form): When conditions NC1-NC2 have been met, the proponent can be said to have been engaging in persuasive softening. When NC1-NC3 have been met, the proponent can be said to have succeeded in the act of persuasive softening.

The explanation above regarding success for the negative form applies here *mutatis mutandis*.

NC1: Prior to the interaction the respondent has a personal store of commitments which does not include A and the respondent could truthfully assert that they do not believe A is true.

NC2: The proponent engages in some communicative effort to encourage the inclusion of A in the respondent's store of commitments.

NC3: As a consequence of the proponent's communicative effort, the strength of the respondent's credence in A is increased.

Having laid out in the previous section what I believe to be the merits of this view I should also address some of the plausible concerns. First, I need to bite the most obvious bullet. There is inherent vagueness here that I cannot overcome with this model. For example, what about a case in which the propagandizer is in some sense removed from their intended audience? Imagine a case in which the propagandizer's goal is to alter the general public's opinion of A . Rather than a specific single target they are aiming at a multitude of unspecified individuals within a total set, e.g., the set

of American citizens. We can even stipulate here that the propagandizer desires to remain anonymous and wants as few people as possible to know that they were the originator of the given propaganda.

Propaganda Chain: Propagandizer (P) generates a new piece of propaganda and disseminates it anonymously to B, who then disseminates to C, who then disseminates to D, and so on. This chain continues all the way until the propaganda is disseminated to Z who has their strength of commitment in *A* weakened, but not wholly eliminated.

Due to the intentional anonymity of the propagandizer and the long causal chain from P to Z, is it really clear or correct to claim that P persuaded Z to weaken their strength of commitment to *A*? Wouldn't it be at least equally as plausible in such a case to assert that Y persuasively softened Z as a consequence of being persuasively softened by X?

My response is to acknowledge that while full causal tracing is often epistemically inaccessible or unavailable, this does not undermine our ability to perform analysis. In perlocutionary terms, what matters is not whether we can definitively track culpability through every intermediate vector. Rather, what matters is whether P's communicative strategy was intentionally aimed at influencing targets like Z and plausibly functioned as part of the causal chain. My model is therefore agnostic regarding total causal traceability and is instead anchored in intentional initiation of influence. I have a strong intuition that regardless of Y's status, the primary locus of analysis in such a case should be focused on P as the originator of the chain itself. Unfortunately, this in turn opens me up to another bullet I am forced to bite on the other side of this problem. It is implausible to suggest that the majority of propaganda that is generated is wholly original and not itself a direct causal consequence of some other prior propagandizing. Can

we really say that P is the originator of the chain if *A* is something that existed prior to P's decision to propagandize about it?

To this concern I am once again forced to bite the bullet and I do not have a clear intuition about what is the correct way to understand the spreading of knowledge and beliefs over whole societies over long periods of time. What I can say to this concern is that I do not think it is a significant one as regardless of what one believes about the origination of beliefs, it is minimally *prima facie* that individuals can, under at least some circumstances, take whatever prior beliefs they may hold and mold those into a new piece of propaganda through the act of propagandizing.

2.4 Aristotelian Dispositions Applied to Propagandizing and Persuasive Softening

Aristotle argues that our actions are governed by our dispositions to behave in certain ways or '*hexis*'. When functioning properly these dispositions are what allow and encourage us to reach correct outcomes by means of appropriate emotional responses.⁷⁹ While Aristotle was applying this to ethical decision making and virtues, I want to contextualize my above account within this framework as a way of demonstrating that my account of propagandizing is in line with a long tradition of attempting to elucidate the relationship between beliefs and actions. I argue that my accounts of persuasive softening can be illuminated by the Aristotelian framework on dispositions, albeit applied in a more ends-neutral way. Richard Kraut explains Aristotle's position as,

Some agents, having reached a decision about what to do on a particular occasion, experience some counter-pressure brought on by an appetite for pleasure, or anger, or some

⁷⁹ Richard Kraut "Aristotle's Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (eds.), 14

other emotion; and this countervailing influence is not completely under the control of reason. (1) Within this category, some are typically better able to resist these counter-rational pressures than is the average person. Such people are not virtuous, although they generally do what a virtuous person does. Aristotle calls them “continent” (*enkratês*). But (2) others are less successful than the average person in resisting these counter-pressures. They are “incontinent” (*akratês*)...In addition, (B) there is a type of agent who refuses even to try to do what an ethically virtuous agent would do, because he has become convinced that justice, temperance, generosity and the like are of little or no value. Such people Aristotle calls evil (*kakos, phaulos*).⁸⁰

I see this explanation as directly parallel to my above model, albeit aimed at something less specific. First, I want to note how Aristotle accounts for the differences between individuals in terms of why people have differing dispositions regarding the same facts. The continent people are, in propagandizer terms, those who have a kind of natural resistance from non-rational persuasion. The incontinent people are those whom for whatever reason are more susceptible to having the strength of their commitments moved as a consequence of non-rational persuasion. That said, susceptibility to non-rational influence, as defined here, does not imply irrationality. Rather, it reflects proportional sensitivity to persuasive stimuli relative to the issue at hand. Finally, those that Aristotle deems evil under my model would be either, depending on how you choose to look at it, all propagandizers or propagandizers whose primary motivation is anything other than a genuine desire to improve society.

⁸⁰ Kraut, “Aristotle’s Ethics,” 13

Given that I do not wish to stake out any specific political positions as more correct than others in this project, if we were to try and caveat out what we might call ‘good propagandizers’ and ‘evil propagandizers’ we will have to rely solely on evaluations of the propagandizers motivations, intentions, and actions.⁸¹ That said I find this distinction largely immaterial as I am personally inclined to argue that most, if not necessarily all, intentional propagandizers would fall under the Aristotelean conception of evil. If nothing else, such propagandizers are willing to set aside personal compunctions regarding the merits of their methods in the service of furthering their desired goal through non-rational means. To be clear, however, this is merely a personal intuition and not a component of a formal taxonomy I am advancing here.

Under this Aristotelean model persuasive softening fills the role of being the so-called counter-rational pressures that are exerting influence on the audience. The degree to which one is able to resist these pressures is what would determine if one is continent or incontinent, but not whether one is evil. What I want to point out specifically here however, is where I want to depart from the full Aristotelean model. Where Aristotle sets up the continent, incontinent, and evil categories as being related to things that are in some way inherent to the person, I would argue that any given person could enter or exit any of those categories depending on the issue at hand or propaganda in question. We all have issues that we care about more deeply than others and issues that we are better informed on than others. These relative relationships with the issue in question

⁸¹ In case my reasons for not staking a specific political position as ethically superior to others here are not self-evident, I will defend this by saying that in my experience as a propaganda researcher once you start asserting any given political position as inherently more ethically virtuous than another, you lose half of your audience. In particular, you lose the half you were likely most interested in persuading to change their mind. In other words, if my goal is to persuade my reader that I am correct, then I need to make my argument as broadly palatable as possible and hope that the ethical superiority of my own ideological positions will fall out of coming to understand and agree with my non-ideological views.

are, in my view, the most likely determinant for the degree to which you will be susceptible to certain types of propaganda regarding certain issues and there is some, albeit limited, empirical evidence to support this claim.

2.4.1: Aristotelian Dispositions Applied to Contemporary Research

These dispositions to behave are not, I argue, mere conceptual shorthand. Rather there is empirical evidence to suggest that Aristotle was essentially right, albeit perhaps insufficiently precise, regarding the existence of such dispositions and their apparent impact on how likely an individual's beliefs are to be susceptible to update when confronted with new evidence. The only inadequacy I find is that it does not appear in the literature that Aristotle considered this continent/incontinent/evil distinction to be one which any individual could exist in regarding any given belief, but rather he took each category as an essential quality of the individual to whom it was applied. Meaning a person was either continent, incontinent, or evil as a person; whereas I argue that contemporary empirical research appears more consistent with the hypothesis that which of these dispositions we exhibit is likely more directly tied to the specific propositional belief in question.

Nyhan and Reifler (2010) attempted to study belief transformation in individuals faced with countervailing evidence.

Our results thus contribute to the literature on correcting misperceptions in three important respects. First, we provide a direct test of corrections on factual beliefs about politics and show that responses to corrections about controversial political issues vary systematically by ideology. Second, we show that corrective information in news reports may fail to reduce misperceptions and can sometimes increase them for the ideological group most

likely to hold those misperceptions.⁸²

This study tasked participants with evaluating corrective information by reading mock news articles which contained a statement from a political figure that reinforces a widespread misperception, e.g., a statement by President George W. Bush that the Iraqi government was building and hiding WMD's, despite that later being proven to have been an explicit lie by the Bush Whitehouse.⁸³ The studies results support the idea that humans have a tendency to engage in *motivated reasoning* when confronted with facts which contradict or challenge their prior beliefs. Motivated reasoning is the phenomenon whereby an individual generates justifications for a desired conclusion rather than merely determining the most reason supported conclusion and adopting it. This in turn helps to explain why false beliefs tend to persist in societies regardless of the presence of corrective information. However, as the researchers themselves note, the evidence for this is limited and it is still not clear what contexts are necessary or even assistive in promoting or preventing such motivated reasoning. Further research may help in developing the depth of these views, but that is a concern for later work.

My personal supposition based on this research is that if people have become in some way *dependent* or otherwise affectively invested in a given propositional belief's truth, then they will be more likely to engage in motivated reasoning to defend it. For example, consider the following two examples and, upon internal self-reflection, try to determine if you respond to them differently.

Uncontroversial Belief Example: There is a planet in the galaxy which has exactly

⁸² Nyhan and Reifler, "When corrections fail," 323

⁸³ Nyhan and Reifler, "When corrections fail," 310, 326

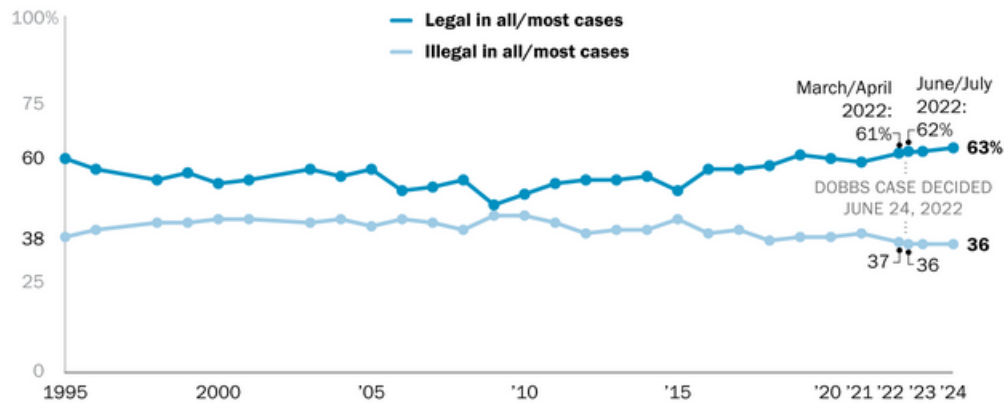
1,586,489,486,432 grains of sand on it.

Controversial Belief Example: Abortion is not murder.

The Uncontroversial Belief Example is inherently uncontroversial not because no one could plausibly disagree with it, but because it is most likely that when you read it your reaction was one of indifference. It is exceedingly unlikely that any person on Earth has an affective response in any direction regarding that assertion as it has not and, assuming they are rational people, could not plausibly have a meaningful impact on their lives. As such there is no reason to engage in motivated reasoning regarding the proposition. You are free to *accept or reject* without consequence. Contrast that with the Controversial Belief Example.

It is beyond the purview of this work to delve into the ethics of abortion, but it is almost certain that you had an affective reaction to that belief when you read it. Abortion is something that every living person has some connection to and tends to have a feeling about one way or the other. Consider the following chart from the PEW research center published on May 13th, 2024.

% of U.S. adults who say abortion should be ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 8-14, 2024. Data since 2019 is from the Center's online American Trends Panel; prior data is from telephone surveys. Data for 1995-2005 is from ABC News/Washington Post polls; for 2006, an AP-Ipsos poll.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This chart tracks public opinion on the legality of abortion in the USA between 1995 and 2024. While the lines have moved up and down over the years, we should also note that they have been relatively stable over the past 14 years. Additionally, looking at the percentages and the question asked we can see that there really is not a middle or undecided position. As of 2024, 63% supported legal abortion while 36% were against it. That leaves only 1% of surveyed Americans as falling under any other category of relation to the given belief. To me, this is indicative of a belief that is highly affectively charged. People believe in the legality of Abortion strongly and, at least in the aggregate, they don't tend to shift their positions on it much regardless of the shifting political and information landscapes. The world of 1995 is colloquially considered worlds apart from the world of 2025, and yet the percentages of belief regarding the legality of abortion are nearly the same as they were 30 years ago.

2.4.2: Aristotelian Dispositions Applied to Contemporary Propaganda Studies

Now with this empirical data supporting my assertion that the legality of abortion is a highly affectively charged belief of the kind that seems likely to result in people engaging motivated reasoning in light of counter-evidence or arguments, I should explain why the Aristotelian model of dispositions is helpful here and why it should be understood as belief specific rather than person specific. The Aristotelian Model of continent/incontinent/evil can be understood as follows.

Aristotelian Continence: One who resists affective motivations or other non-rational reasons for belief alteration but will act virtuously.

Aristotelian Incontinence: One who is susceptible to affective motivations or other non-rational reasons for belief alteration and their ability to act virtuously is uncertain.

Aristotelian Evil: One who sees no value and thus never attempts to embody or realize justice, temperance, generosity, or the like.

While I don't view these categories as directly applicable, I do think with some slight modifications to phrasing that should not substantively alter their meaning we will see how this trichotomy is quite beneficial to understanding the complexity of propagandizing. If we take propagandizing to be at its core a form of persuasion aimed at the alteration or reinforcement of propositional beliefs via the addition of non-rational means, then we can view this trichotomy as representing the three human vectors of any given propaganda campaign.

The three types of people relevant to a propaganda campaign:

The Continent aka The Unpersuadable: These are people for whom the relevant issue is already so fundamentally determined that they are essentially incapable of or at least very

unlikely to have their position altered by rational *or* non-rational means.

The Incontinent aka The Persuadable: These are people for whom the relevant issue is considered live. They do not necessarily view the issue as fundamentally determined and are therefore capable of having their beliefs altered. This is the group most likely to be susceptible to affective or non-rational forms of persuasion.

The Evil aka The Propagandist: These are people who themselves may be continent or incontinent, though the former seems more likely, who have abandoned the normative ideal of rational persuasion in favor of a ‘by any means necessary’ approach to ideological dominance.

It is unfortunate that in this case the propagandist is necessarily relegated to a category which Aristotle chose to apply such a normatively laden label for, but that is part of why for my arguments I will be using the supplemental labels rather than Aristotle’s given options.

Nonetheless, my hope is that the tethering between the Aristotelian categories and my own labels and rewordings is sufficiently straightforward, but it is worth saying a bit about the changes I have made and why. Aristotle’s categories appear aimed at accounting for the apparent phenomenon of why some people are more able to be persuaded than others, and why some people seem to be fundamentally unwilling or unable to even try to be good people. While that analysis does speak to a profound appearance of human existence, I think it is also one which betrays a somewhat limited worldview of other people as whole complex beings. It is essentially reductive. No human is defined entirely by a singular belief about the world as even apparently simple beliefs are typically the reasoned conclusions of collections of other beliefs. To believe the proposition, ‘Abortion is not murder’ as even a coherent statement, let alone make a truth-evaluation thereof,

one must have clear prior beliefs about, for example, the nature of murder. Which in turn requires one to have a clear prior belief about things like the relevant laws, the difference between murder and other related concepts like merely killing, etc. At a minimum, all beliefs which are formed a posteriori necessarily do not exist in an intellectual vacuum as our understandings of them are filled in and articulated by our prior beliefs.

It is with this understanding in mind that I chose my re-wording of the Aristotelian categories. The most important parts of the Aristotelian definition to be retained in the rewording are: 1. It must explain in relevantly comparable terms the phenomenon of resistance to belief alteration not being equally shared by all peoples, 2. It must keep the three definitions in relevant opposition to one another so that the purpose and clarity of the original categories is retained. The Continent and The Incontinent are opposing categories which are meant to capture the broad categories of people who could receive a given message. Given that the core of both definitions is the degree to which they can be swayed by external factors, I have merely relabeled them as The Unpersuadable and The Persuadable.

The definitions of these categories themselves have been altered, but in a way that I believe retains the core of both concepts while merely adding more relevant contemporary explanations for how we understand belief exchange. At this stage there is no reason to define these categories as being limited to either rational or non-rational persuasive techniques as someone who is truly committed to a given propositional belief is not necessarily any more likely to alter that belief via rational discourse alone.

The final category is the most out of step with the others, in both Aristotle's account and my own modification thereof. However, this is a critical category to include as we must have a

categorical way of accounting for people who refuse or otherwise are not engaging in discourse in a standard way. Aristotle thought of these people as evil because they were uninterested in pursuing things like generosity, justice, temperance, or any other virtues. They are, essentially, contrarian mal actors. In terms of modern discourse, it seems only natural that this is the category of the propagandist. As I said above, Walton may well be right that propaganda is necessarily a degenerate form of persuasion regardless of whether that impacts propaganda's status as a kind of persuasion. We also saw in Part 1 how the evolution of propaganda's definition over the last century moved the definition from being mere governmental communication to a special form of communication that tends to prey on affective response. With these understandings in mind, it makes intuitive sense to frame this third part of the trichotomy in this way.

The most important aspect of the Aristotelian definition to retain was that this kind of person is themselves degenerate or acts in a degenerate fashion. As I am trying to pull away from these categories being definitive intrinsic qualities of the individual, my account sticks to the latter. My rewording for The Propagandist does this while also keeping the category in direct relation to the other two. What unites them under this framework is not their intrinsic character but a tactical commitment to achieving belief change through non-rational means when deemed strategically effective.

Part 3: Propagandizing*

3.1: Introduction

Having laid the foundation for my framework for propagandizing, I can now proceed with laying out my minimal account of propagandizing, explain in detail how and why it differs from prior accounts, and argue in favor of the benefits I believe it offers. In sum, my argument is to propose a special kind of propagandizing that can and should be considered one of the means of persuasion listed in table 2.2.1. I want to also stipulate that my argument is not about propaganda *qua* propaganda. My goal is to fill in what I perceive as a small gap in the literature on propaganda by focusing on the act of propagandizing by providing an account of a special kind of propaganda generation that I will call Propagandizing*.

The purpose of this account is to allow for a baseline concept of propagandizing that a strong majority of rational adults who are proficient in English would clearly qualify as being the intentional creation of propaganda. As shown in Parts 1 and 2, numerous definitions of propaganda have been proposed over the last century. However, due to attempts to create a single definition applicable to all forms of propaganda, none of these provide the clear, coherent, and precise account of propagandizing that I propose. My goal is to argue that adopting such an account will provide downstream benefits for propaganda researchers and ethicists as it will allow for a definitive baseline for determining what kinds of speech are unequivocally propaganda regardless of the views or beliefs of the person originating the propaganda.

In this Part I first present Propagandizing*, then defend several of its key conditions (intention, political dimension, deceptive state, and widespread adoption), and finally situate it as a special case of persuasion.

3.2: The act of Propagandizing*

Without further preamble, here is my account of Propagandizing*. I am laying it out here to set the stage for the subsequent explanations and justifications, though not everything that follows in this Part will be directly justifying or defending this account.

Propagandizing* Simplified: A minimal intention-based sufficient condition for propagandizing that, when met, permits participants or observers of a dialogue to assert that a speaker has engaged in propagandizing.

Propagandizing*

Necessary Condition 1: X's utterance of SA₁ is a speech act.

Necessary Condition 2: SA₁ explicitly or implicitly possesses a political dimension.

Necessary Condition 3: X intends that, through the intended semantic contents of SA₁, the intended contextual positions of the relevant interlocutors, or some other communicative feature intended by X, the uttering of SA₁ will move at least one member of the audience into a deceived state.

Necessary Condition 4: X intends that if audience member A₁...A_N will be moved into a deceived state (as described in NC3), then the utterance of SA₁ by X will either increase the probability of the content of SA₁ gaining widespread adoption or result in the alteration of the audience's strength of credence in the content of SA₁ in accordance with X's intentions.

If all the above are true when the speaker utters speech act SA₁, then we can say that the speaker has succeeded in *propagandizing* SA₁. Meaning that after this occurs, whether in a single temporal moment or as part of a drawn-out process, any artifacts generated by the speaker which carry, embody, communicate, or otherwise signal an invocation of SA₁ are constitutive of propaganda.

3.3: Overview of Justifications for Propagandizing*

The central concept I will be analyzing is the act of intentional propagandizing. In Part 1 I presented the history of how the concept has developed within philosophy over the last century, and in Part 2 I presented the conceptual framework that my account will rest on. In this section I want to present some justifications for why I have chosen to set up Propagandizing* as I have. The goal is to forestall some of the more obvious questions and criticisms that are likely to arise from the account. I will discuss intention vs emergence in terms of causal priority, vagueness, sloganeering, and social position.

3.3.1: Justification for Intention Being Causally Prior to Emergence in Propagandizing

My account and all that follows from it is exclusively aimed at discussing what I call Intentional Propagandizing. However, there is a competing model that must be addressed given the degree to which it has permeated the common understanding of the concept. This is the theory of propaganda as being something which necessarily *emerges* from society.

These Emergent Propagandizing (EP) models are any which follow the tradition of Herman and Chomsky (1988) by locating propaganda in some capacity as a necessary by-product of societal functioning. Under the Herman and Chomsky account propaganda is a thing which is not necessarily intentionally produced by individuals, but rather necessarily emerges because of politicians and information brokers mutually supporting one another's interests. For example, imagine that the state-run news media frames a given issue as being caught between positions X and Y, when there are actually a variety of other possible positions as well (A, B, C, etc...). If the available information sources only provide information on X and Y, it becomes exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for the average citizen to become adequately informed on positions A,

B, or C. This is the heart of EP models. Whether through selective information restriction, overrepresentation of the institutionally preferred positions, or merely as a by-product of capitalism enmeshing with media; Emergent Propagandizing occurs when propaganda generation is non-specifically located as being a by-product of a socio-cultural system.

That model contrasts with what I call Intentional Propagandizing (IP). Under IP models it is assumed that propaganda is the product of the work of propagandists who intentionally carry out the act of generating propaganda.⁸⁴ Whether they are officially instituted in a propaganda ministry or rogue individuals attempting to engage in mass persuasion, most IP models require individuals acting with the intention of making propaganda.

I should caveat here that I say, “most,” of these models require this because there is at least one IP model that does not. That model is what I call the Pejorative Model (PM). This model asserts that propaganda is nothing more than a pejorative way of referring to positions we disagree with or don’t believe in. Imagine a case where two people on different sides of a political issue are having a debate and one attempts to introduce a novel piece of evidence. Without evaluating the evidence on its merits their interlocutor dismisses the evidence out of hand by responding, “That’s just propaganda.” While this model is highly intuitive for many people, I believe it to be inadequate for capturing the most critical features of propagandizing. I think it is reasonable to leave this model available as part of folk understandings of propaganda itself and perhaps even use it as a kind of predictive model for determining the kinds of things people are likely to call

⁸⁴ I am explicitly limiting this discussion to the generation of propaganda and not including the mere spreading of propaganda. I do this merely because my account is solely focused on the former, and whatever conclusions are reached will then impact how we evaluate the latter.

propagandizing. However, if we were to adopt it as our primary account of what is substantive about propagandizing it would sufficiently dilute the concept as to render it useless in language. Which is to say that I agree with Ellul's rejection of Driencourt that to accept this model as our full definition of the concept would amount to intellectual surrender.⁸⁵

Returning to the primary discussion at hand, I draw this distinction between EP and IP models to forestall any criticisms which advocate for or prefer EP models of propagandizing. More broadly speaking, however, I do not see these two models as necessarily existing in opposition to one another, rather that they exist in a hierarchical or nested relationship. As both models clearly describe real and relevant facts about our world, we cannot easily dismiss either as superfluous. Propaganda *does* emerge through processes like censorship in the way that Herman and Chomsky describe, but propaganda is also intentionally created by individuals who explicitly state the production of propaganda as their intent. This suggests that the models must either exist in parallel, with both merely being true, albeit partial, descriptions of how propagandizing occurs; or, one must be causally prior to the other.

The problem with placing the models in parallel is that they don't seem to be wholly discrete. An intentional propagandist can create a piece of propaganda or a propaganda campaign that long outlasts their own life or influence, which in turn could easily yield various forms of emergent propaganda that the original propagandist could not have predicted and may even disapprove of or reject. Conversely, in any society in which emergent propagandizing is observed as occurring, it seems minimally true that intentional propagandizing will still occur. Thus, given

⁸⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, page X

that both seemingly exist in any given society and their only direct relationship with each other is contingent; I argue that these facts indicate that the two concepts should be considered as linked hierarchically. It is either the case that propaganda emerges because of the intentions of propagandists, or the intention to propagandize emerges as an inevitable consequence of unclear socio-cultural factors.

The question then is which model should we consider causally prior to the other? I argue that the IP model should be considered causally prior to EP models. My reasoning for this is that we can more easily explain the appearance of emergent propagandizing occurring because of intentional propagandizing than we can explain the same phenomena going the other direction. If EP models are causally prior then we will need to come up with a way of explaining why IP occurs at all, and in particular, why would people choose to engage in it? If the EP model is right, that propaganda is merely an emergent property of societies, then that provides little clear insight or explanation into why a person might explicitly choose to become a propagandist.⁸⁶ EP models would need to appeal to an explanation like, “Even though we observe intentional propagandizing occurring in this society, those intentions are an emergent property.” The problem with explanations like this is that they rest on unsteady rhetorical footing. This explanation is inadequate as it does not naturally conform to our experience of intentional action. If all intentional propagandizing is nothing more than a necessary emergent property of society, then why does our experience tell us that we act on our intentions to do something? For example, take something

⁸⁶ There are many famous examples of explicit and intentional propagandists but the most current and openly unabashed in my opinion is Steve Bannon. Though we can also look to famous examples from history like Joseph Goebbels or Leni Riefenstahl.

banal like drinking a glass of water. Is it more precise and clearer to assert that my doing so was an emergent by-product of my internal need for water, or that I felt I was thirsty and decided to remedy that problem by intending and carrying out the action of drinking water?

Conversely, if IP models are considered causally prior to EP models, this problem dissolves. Under the IP model independent intentional propagandists are an expected and built-in part of the model, so they need no additional accounting. However, the IP model can also cleanly account for the rhetorical problem by providing a clear explanation for why and how EP exists in societies. Societies don't come into being accidentally, their governments aren't formed by happenstance, their media ecosystems didn't fall from a tree, and their ideologies aren't just a random hodge-podge collection of propositions. Every single one of these things which underpin and inform every modern nation or state exist because of intentional actions. The creation of a society from which propaganda emerges was not an inevitability, it was a long slow process of combining the intentions and efforts of large groups of people who invariably disagreed on various beliefs. Meaning that the IP model can cleanly and easily account for the existence of EP, while the EP model struggles to clearly or coherently account for the appearance of IP. As for why EP appears at all in these systems, the primary explanation falls out of the fact that those in power tend to desire to stay in power. They do not need to explicitly intend that outcome for all their cumulative actions and efforts to amount to the same as if they did so intend. At least no more so than a monarch needs to explicitly command the murder of a troublesome priest.

In sum, my claim is not that IP is metaphysically prior to EP in some deep sense, rather it is that for the purpose of a speech-act based account, IP offers more explanatory power and diagnostic traction. EP models help us to understand propaganda in forms where the propagandizer

is either not apparent or diffused across a group, while IP models help us to understand propaganda in forms where some person(s) chose to create it. Propagandizing* is particularly helpful here in that it allows us to identify cases of IP even when the agent does not self-conceptualize themselves as a propagandizer or their actions as propagandizing.

All of this is to say that while both models provide useful and relevant insight into the concept of propagandizing and both describe real phenomena, we should consider IP as causally prior to EP, which is to say that EP occurs because IP exists in society. The IP model can more clearly and effectively explain how EP can occur under it, than the EP model can explain how IP can occur under it. This is why I frame my model as not merely being grounded in the intention of the speaker, but why it is imperative that we understand propagandizing as first and foremost an intentional act rather than as an inevitable byproduct of systemic forces.

3.3.2: Responding to Concerns of Vagueness

As we saw in Parts 1 and 2, developing a general account for propaganda or propagandizing has proven difficult. This is in no small part due to the seemingly limitless number of mediums and methods through which propaganda can be expressed or created. It is quite difficult to think of any kinds of expression or communication that necessarily *couldn't* potentially qualify as either propagandizing or a component thereof given the right relevant contexts. At the very least, within the context of the English language this problem seems inescapable. However, the fact that there is a certain amount of vagueness baked into the concept does not mean that the concept itself does not do useful work in English.

When we accuse a person of propagandizing or a thing of being propaganda, we are saying something relevantly meaningful about that person or thing that extends beyond a mere evaluation

of the semantic contents of the utterance. As such I do not believe this baked-in vagueness poses any serious problems for my arguments here. As Aristotle said, “But our discussion will be adequate if we make things perspicuous enough to accord with the subject matter; for we should not seek the same degree of exactness in all sorts of arguments alike, any more than in the products of different crafts.”⁸⁷ In this same spirit I am willing to bite the bullet that my account may not be as precise as some would prefer it to be. While a perfect account would always be ideal, propagandizing seems likely to be a concept for which new means of expression or realization are likely to be continually discovered. As such we must leave our account of the concept equally flexible so that it can continue to help us to appreciate the true utility of the concept.⁸⁸

3.3.3: Propagandizing* as a Distinct Concept from Sloganeering

Given that intentional propaganda can be performed multi-variously, one might be tempted to think that as I have laid it out Propagandizing* is merely sloganeering by another name. Charles J. Stewart et al. says, “Slogans, with us for centuries, act as social symbols and symbolic justifications...Slogans tend to be a highly personal form of protest because individuals wear them, carry them, shout them and place them on possessions such as automobiles.”⁸⁹ In other words, they

⁸⁷ Aristotle, “Book 1,” *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Terence Irwin, (Hackett Publishing Company, 2019), Chapter 3, ln. 13-15

⁸⁸ For a real-world example of this just look at social media companies like Facebook, X, and Tik Tok. It was within the last twenty years that all three of these companies went from being viewed as fringe media companies that were used only by the young and for casual entertainment to being considered major media companies. At their outset, few political commentators considered them viable avenues for effective political messaging or propagandizing. Yet in 2025 all three have become significant, if not the primary, media sources for many Americans. Their actual direct causal impacts on society are still heavily debated, but the general perception is that they have had a significant warping factor on public perception regarding controversial issues.

⁸⁹ Charles J. Stewart, Craig Smith Allen, and Robert Denton Jr., *The Persuasive Functions of Slogans*, (Waveland Press, 2003), 420-421

are a kind of memetic communication which is used as a form of self-identification with a given idea as opposed to mere communication of that idea. This is where I draw the distinction between Propagandizing* and sloganeering. Where slogans are a type of catchphrase that has added social or political meaning tethered to its semantic contents, Propagandizing* represents a minimal condition for identifying when someone is engaging in the act of propagandizing intentionally.

There could, and in many cases likely will be, substantial overlap between the two categories. However, that overlap is not total, and thus the categories cannot collapse into one. The reason for this is that not all slogans are clearly or necessarily propaganda. Advertising slogans, for example, are an example of a case wherein it is at the very least unclear whether they should qualify as propaganda. Some philosophers, like Stanley, have argued that advertising and propaganda are fundamentally linked, but nonetheless distinct. He argues that what sets advertisements apart is that they are, “A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, but in the service of a goal that is irrelevant to those very ideals.”⁹⁰ If this idea is even broadly true, that propaganda and advertising are highly related phenomena but nonetheless coherently distinct, then slogans and propaganda, by definition, cannot collapse into one. There would have to be some slogans that are not propaganda, advertising slogans. Conversely there would have to be some propaganda that isn’t grounded in a slogan, but that is trivially true as there are countless examples including some mentioned in Part 1 such as the Boer War paintings.

However, if we prefer a more Bernaysian account of the relationship between propaganda

⁹⁰ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 56

and advertising, that they are essentially one and the same, the distinction is still equally clear.

Under such an account sloganeering would be a sub-category of propagandizing as it would be one possible method of propagandizing. This still does not render sloganeering and Propagandizing* as equivalent, as they are not carrying out the same function. Sloganeering is aimed at providing people with concepts they can self-identify with and rally around in a memetic way. The core of a slogan is that it is repeatable and static. For example, the slogan, “Lock Her Up!” loses its meaning and potency if it is changed to, “Lock Them Up!”. This is because the former is a slogan that was explicitly aimed at evoking a single individual, Hillary Rodham Clinton, without explicitly naming her. By altering the pronoun to, “Them” the hearer loses the ability to detect if the speaker is invoking the slogan or saying something else entirely.

Contrast this with my above account of Propagandizing* which by NC4 is explicitly aimed at shifting the audience’s credence, not encouraging the adoption or memetic spreading of a slogan. Of course, the reason one chooses to develop or deploy a slogan may well be for propagandistic purposes, but that does not mean that therefore all propaganda is equivalent to slogans. It would mean that Propaganda is the super-category and Sloganeering and Propagandizing* are parallel sub-categories under it. As such they can exist cleanly in concert with one another while also clearly being terms which identify and highlight distinct features of the statement. Thus, while many instances of sloganeering will be instances of Propagandizing*, the reverse is not also true.

3.3.4: The Intuition That Propagandizing is Determined by the Social Position of the Speaker.

There is a common intuition, an extension of the PM really, that must be addressed clearly. To what extent, if any, does a person’s relative position in society dictate whether their speech is propaganda? When a person holds a high-level position of power and authority, like heads of state,

the collective assessment of their speech tends to change. There is a critical difference between a random person on the street asserting, “Immigrants are dirty,” and the President of the United States saying it. Heads of state carry the power to potentially enforce their will upon the masses and thus their speech is afforded substantially more weight. The question, then, is whether the increased rhetorical force of such speech stems merely from the speaker’s social position, or from the implications that their speech may carry because of that position. If the President repeats a common phrase that is not understood as propaganda is that phrase necessarily propagandized because the President said it? I argue that on pain of incoherence we must think they can retain their ability to speak non-propagandistically in at least some contexts. We cannot equate propaganda with the social position of the speaker, nor should we include social position as a condition for Propagandizing*.

As an example, I take the President of the United States as the quintessential case of an individual who, by virtue of the highly politicized role they inhabit, is often interpreted as incapable of engaging in speech that is not also propagandizing. The key here is that it is not the content of their speech that is rendering it propaganda nor is it their intentions or the reasons behind their speech, but rather it is merely the fact that they inhabit a specific role in society.

This is not an implausible view by any means, but it is essentially a more neutral version of the PM. Where the PM explicitly writes off our interlocutors by accusing them of rhetorical malfeasance, this view is more blasé in merely asserting that propaganda is just what we call the speech of certain actors in society.

You can even test this on yourself: depending on one’s own political affiliation, imagine the most recent President who was on the opposite side of the political spectrum from yourself.

Think of some famous statements or claims they made, did you then or still now immediately classify those statements as propaganda? If you did, can you be certain whether you made that determination because of the semantic contents of what they said, what you assumed their intentions behind or reasons for saying it were, or was it merely because *that* person said it. The point of this exercise being that it is very difficult to accurately and honestly ascertain why we choose to assign the status of propaganda to one person's speech and not another person's.

I argue that while it may be true that holding certain relevant positions within a social context may make it more difficult to speak without propagandizing or speak in a way that will not result in accusations of propagandizing, we should not think that it is therefore impossible for a person so situated to speak without propagandizing. The fact that, for example, being the President of the United States means that many people will be inclined to presume anything the President says is propaganda, does not render it a fact. The reason for this is that we can imagine trivial cases in which it seems intuitively incoherent to think that the person is propagandizing purely because they hold a given position while they speak.

To demonstrate this, let's take a tautology like 'A=A,' and imagine that is said by the President of the United States. However, they do not say it publicly, they just say it quietly and privately to themselves while alone in the Oval Office. They didn't intend anything by saying it other than a desire to assert something true and not propagandistic. After saying it, the President felt neither better nor worse than they did before, their credence did not shift on any position, and they have not altered any of their beliefs in any way.

In this example we have one of the most politically controversial positions in the world, the President of the United States, in their most official location, the Oval Office, and making a

statement. If it is the case that all that is required for something to be propaganda is that the speaker fills the right position, then the President's assertion of, "A=A," is necessarily propaganda.

However, I argue that this does not make intuitive sense. When we say that someone is propagandizing, we are not saying they merely said something trivial or privately to themselves, we are minimally saying they said something publicly. Moreover, we are saying that they engaged in a specific type of communicative effort, not just any random speech. If the aim of propagandizing is persuasion, then it must also be true that for the speech in question to qualify as such it must in some way be aimed at persuading someone of something. As such the position of the speaker alone cannot be sufficient for determinations of propagandizing or propaganda.

If you find the above example too artificially constructed to seem plausible, here is a more naturalistic case to demonstrate that the point holds even in less clear-cut cases. Imagine the President is bored in their office and looks out the window. An aide stands nearby listening intently, but the president merely mutters, "It's sunny out." The aide does not interpret this as anything more than a mere true observation about the state of the weather. Even in this case where the President is saying something with clear semantic meaning and there is an audience present to hear it, it does not make intuitive sense to think of that statement as a form of propagandizing.

This clarification is essential because it enables us to distinguish between actual propagandizing and mere attribution grounded in social heuristics. It is imperative that we have a clear-cut means of being able to say what it is exactly that makes a proposition propaganda that extends beyond a superficial status associated with the speaker. For example, if we accept the presupposition that position determines propagandistic speech, what happens when the person vacates that position? Do ex-Presidents somehow mystically regain the ability to speak non-

propagandistically the second they step down merely because they stepped down? Conversely, is being a propagandist of any stripe a permanent mark on one's record that cannot be expunged and thus rendering them forever incapable of non-propagandistic speech?

What complicates this point is that from the perspective of the average person this does tend to be a common belief. For example, here is a headline from Reason.com from October 19, 2022: *Netflix Teams up With the Obamas to Produce Big Government Propaganda*. This is not to say that I view this source as reputable or even particularly serious, I do not. In fact, it is for that reason that I think this is a good example of why we should consider the PM and its related offshoots like positional models as *folk* understandings and potentially as predictive of the kinds of things laypersons would call propaganda. I can reliably predict that nearly anything Barack Obama produces today will be called propaganda by some commentators regardless of the content or his intentions or his reasons behind what he says in or through the production. That, however, does not therefore mean that everything the former president produces *is* propaganda, merely that some people, many of whom are politically or ideologically opposed to the former president, will call it such.

There is one final point to mention and that is that it is true that one's position *can* influence whether a proposition is propaganda, but it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for that determination. For example, there is a relevant difference between the President going on the nightly news and saying, "I prefer the use of Coal to Green energy," and an average citizen saying the same thing to a group of friends at a party. In the former case, the fact that the President said it and that they said it in such a highly publicly visible way *does* seem to increase our intuition that we should qualify that statement as propaganda. Compare that with the case of the average person

at a party. We can imagine that in a group of friends who like and respect one another, one member could assert an unpopular opinion and not be accused of propagandizing. In part this is because a friend at a party simply does not carry the same social weight as the President giving a public address. Therefore, while it is true that position *can* influence whether a given proposition should be considered propaganda, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for such.

It is for these reasons that I think we must dispense with the possibility of social or professional positioning as being a necessary or sufficient condition for rendering all speech produced by those occupying that position to be propaganda. In my view, social position is best considered as a heuristic indicator that certain felicity conditions for propaganda or Propagandizing* are more likely to obtain, e.g., via increased public visibility, the power of institutional authority, etc..., but not as a necessary or definitional condition of the concept. This is also why I have not included it among the conditions for Propagandizing*.

3.4 Explaining Propagandizing*

In this section I will be providing my explanations for Propagandizing* with the goal of explicating the most contentious aspects of the conditions. In so doing I hope to answer many of the immediate questions and challenges that I believe are most likely to arise. I will begin by laying out my overarching goal for Propagandizing*. Then I will explain several stipulations that are foundational for the account and why they are necessary. Then finally I will provide clarification for what I intend by the terms political dimension, deceived state, and widespread adoption. The purpose of this section is to provide my reader with a clearer understanding of how Propagandizing* functions and why I believe the specific language I have chosen for the conditions is useful for philosophers and academics.

3.4.1 My Goal for Propagandizing*

The first point to clarify is the explicit goal of Propagandizing*. I am not intending to lay out a holistic account of propagandizing qua propagandizing that can account for all possible forms. My goal is to present a minimum account that is sufficiently intuitively robust such that for any speech which allows NC1-NC4 to all be true, then any rational and reasonable adult who can competently speak English would agree that the speaker can be said to have propagandized.

3.4.2 Stipulations Underpinning Propagandizing*

The second point is to lay out several critical stipulations. Stipulation one is that these criteria for propagandizing are not intended to be exhaustive, rather this is merely one set of criteria which I believe could find widespread adoption as a minimal condition. It is for this reason that I have chosen to refer to my account as Propagandizing*.

Stipulation two is that I am not asserting that only speech acts can be propagandized, but that they are one of the more common kinds of communication that is regularly propagandized. My reason for focusing on them here is that assertions are one of the most common and easily identified tokens of propaganda., e.g., “Stop the steal!,” “We Want You!,” “Black Lives Matter!” Given that I agree that assertions are best thought of as kinds of speech acts and that my goal is to develop a minimal condition that could find widespread acceptance, it is intuitively stronger to build my account around them.

The final stipulation is also a clarification, I intend this minimal account to follow Grice’s (1987) account of meaning and intention. Specifically, I view this as falling under his explanation of meaning type (a), “Utterances for which the utterer thinks there may (now or later) be an

audience. *U* may think that some particular person, for example himself at a future date in the case of a diary entry, may (but also may not) encounter *U*'s utterance; or *U* may think that there may or may not be some person or other who is or will be an auditor of his utterance.”⁹¹

One of the complexities of developing propagandizing accounts is reconciling accounts of speaking one-to-one with accounts of speaking one-to-many. Additionally, there is the problem that propaganda does not necessarily only have effect in the moment it is spoken, it can, depending on medium, persist and continue to impact anyone who perceives it. Any reasonable account of propagandizing must be able to reconcile these two separate sides of the concept as propagandists regularly take advantage of both. The distinction between the two being that of the propagandizer who tries to persuade others through direct communication, like a public speech or debate, and the propagandizer who tries to persuade by generating sustaining artifacts that could continue to impact the target audience indefinitely into the future. In some cases, these propagandizers are one and the same, and sometimes they are separate.

Grice's theory of occasion meaning is a helpful solution to this problem. In the case of propaganda this account makes it clear that so long as the occasion meaning can be sufficiently clearly imbued into the relevant proposition such that it can be understood in conjunction with or separate from the semantic contents of the proposition then the piece of propaganda in question can both plausibly work in the immediate or over the long term. The core of Grice's theory is that the speaker imbues the proposition with a kind of recognizable communicable intention for the audience. In one-to-one communication we aim to have the audience recognize not merely the

⁹¹ Grice, "Meaning," 113

semantic contents of our speech, but the communicative intention we have for speaking.

For example, when the President calls the country, “The greatest nation in the history of the world,” they are not merely intending their audience to understand and agree with that proposition as true. The President is also intending for the audience to understand that he intends for them to think that. The recognition of such intentions is critical because it is what allows for the possibility of occasion meaning in the Gricean sense. For example, imagine you have a drink on a hot day, and your close friend is standing next to you. They say, “I’m thirsty!” While it is possible your friend is merely reporting their internal status, it is more likely that they are intending the addition of an occasion meaning to their statement. That meaning being something like, “I really wish you would offer me a sip of your drink.” In other words, when the President says they think the country is great, they are intending for you to understand both that they think the country is great and that they intend for you to think that.

Having laid out Propagandizing* and the necessary stipulations for it to get off the ground, I will now spend the remainder of this Part defending and explaining why I have chosen certain technical terms to be part of Propagandizing*. These terms are political, deceived state, and widespread adoption. Each of these terms not only inform critical aspects of Propagandizing* but they are also concepts which intersect with other significant areas of philosophy and thus my reasoning for choosing to frame them in the ways that I do must be justified.

3.4.3: Political Dimension

A central feature of my account is that Propagandizing* is limited to political speech. In this section I will provide a short sketch of what it means for something to be said to be possessing a political dimension for Propagandizing*. This will in turn inform what I mean by political speech

as it will be any speech that employs, refers to, or otherwise can be said to possess a political dimension.

The reason for referring to it as a political dimension rather than merely political is that what constitutes the realm of the political is as contentious as determinations of propaganda. I argue that this is not mere coincidence, but rather an inevitable consequence of the fact that when we describe things as propaganda we are explicitly or implicitly accusing the claim or speaker of having relevant cultural or societal level implications. By reframing this as a political dimension I expand the concept of the term such that if *any* observer could accuse a thing of being political, then it carries a political dimension even if it may not be truly political in some deeper metaphysical sense.

The Aristotelean notion of politics is that it is anything relating to the state or the affairs of the state, and this is essentially the sense I will be applying as well.⁹² However I consider it as a heuristic rather than a hard definition. As a heuristic it is not intended to supplant the Aristotelian definition, but rather act as a helpful guide for allowing us to identify certain kinds of things as possessing a political dimension:

Heuristic for Identifying Political Dimensions in a Speech Act: If, when uttered felicitously, the relevant content of an utterance non-trivially impacts, alters, affects, or relates to the state or affairs of the state, then it possesses a political dimension.⁹³

⁹² Fred Miller, "Aristotle's Political Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2022 Edition)*, Zalta, Edward N. and Uri Nodelman (eds.), 1

⁹³ I include 'felicitously' here simply to restrict attention to utterances that can genuinely function as speech acts within a communicative context.

I choose to frame it this way due to the potentially limitless different tokens that can be qualified as propaganda. As a result of the potential for substantial variety in form and presentation there is a significant difficulty in providing a single rule or even comprehensive rule set that could capture every potential way in which propagandizing could occur. However, there are certain tokens that exist in our world today that we typically understand as quintessential propaganda, e.g. WWII posters and slogans. This heuristic is intended to help us identify and pull out the specific components of them that lead us to consider them as propaganda.

3.4.4 Deceptive State as Affective Misalignment

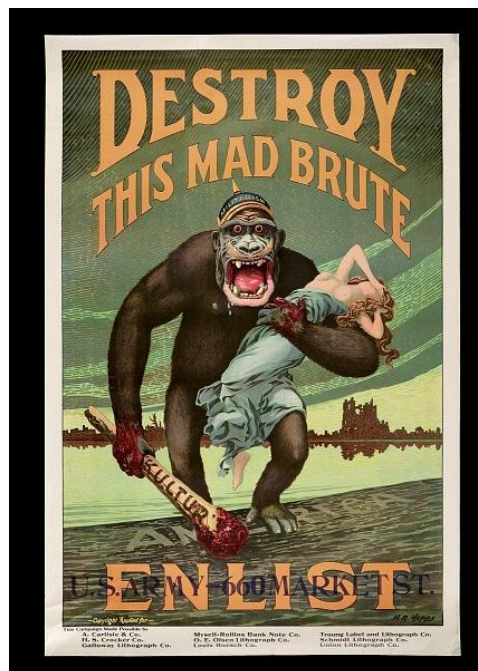
Stanley (2015) makes the strong claim that propaganda is not necessarily deceptive because it is neither necessarily false nor insincere.⁹⁴ For example, positive propaganda, propaganda that is purely supportive of the ideology or belief being advanced, is neither obviously deceptive nor insincere since it plausibly does not lose any of its force or effectiveness as propaganda merely because one knows that it is propaganda. Why then should I include any kind of deceptiveness as a criterion for Propagandizing*?

The reason is a purely pragmatic concern. Even Stanley (2015) acknowledges that there is a tendency to assume propaganda is both necessarily false or necessarily insincere because the most stereotypical versions of propaganda (the ones likely to be evoked in people's minds when they think of the concept, aka the folk understanding) are either false or insincere.⁹⁵

However, there is another possibility regarding the kind of deception that could be

⁹⁴ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 112

involved, intentional misrepresentation for the explicit purpose of non-rational affective persuasion. While the most typical kinds of deception are lies, misleading, and bullshit, there exists a contextual mode of deception wherein no individual proposition is false, but the overall communicative act intentionally promotes a misleading affective or evaluative stance. For reference, see the WW1 poster below.



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In the poster Kaiser Wilhelm is portrayed as a rampaging gorilla and he is described in the text as a, “mad brute.” While we might be inclined to view this as deceptive on its face since the Kaiser was not literally a gorilla, there is a deeper and potentially more potent form of deception being invoked. Rather than seeing the representation of the Kaiser as a gorilla itself as a falsehood, we could instead view it as intentional misrepresentation. One that was intended to make you view

⁹⁶ “Destroy this Mad Brute,” *National Museum of American History*, I.D. AF.74258M, Cat. 74258M, Rec. ID. Nmah_443592, 1917-1918, 74258M https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/object/nmah_443592

the Kaiser as a more brutal, unreasonable, and dangerous threat than he really was. In such a case it seems more intuitive to say that the contents of the poster are not actually deceptive, but for any viewer who is affected in the desired way they may be left in what I define below as a *deceived state*, a condition in which their belief or affective response has been shaped primarily by non-rational influence rather than evaluative reasoning.

They didn't come to believe that the Kaiser was a gorilla, if so then the poster lied and they believed that lie. What I argue really happened is that any person who saw that poster had previously held a certain opinion of the Kaiser or had no opinion at all. After seeing that poster, which makes only affective appeals and no explicit rational ones, if their strength of commitment to the proposition, 'The Kaiser is a threat' (or some other semantically similar proposition) was increased and that proposition does not align with the objective facts about the Kaiser, then those people have been pushed by the poster into a deceived state.

By 'deceived state' I mean that the primary reason that one has for adopting a proposition or moving their self-assessed strength of commitment is due to an affective response generated by the piece of propaganda in question rather than one's assessment of the rhetorical merits and semantic contents of that propaganda and in a way that results in either an epistemically unwarranted level of confidence or an affective orientation that does not fit the underlying facts.⁹⁷ This is an important caveat for solving the rational/non-rational dichotomy as it allows us to see how even propaganda that appears fully rational in presentation can qualify as propaganda as a consequence of its primary rhetorical force arising from its affective potency rather than rhetorical

⁹⁷ I say 'propositions' here as I believe it is plausible to interpret the Kaiser poster as either being a set of propositions or a single proposition depending on how one chooses to frame the messaging.

or semantic potency. While a piece of propaganda may present facts and figures that are all true, the effect of their employment is to render the audience into a deceived state in which they might know true facts but have inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate affective responses to those facts.

I will close this sub-section by saying that I am not wholly convinced by Stanley's (2015) arguments that in dispensing a falsity and insincerity condition for propaganda, he has also dispensed with any possibility for a deceptiveness condition. I argue that Stanley's consideration of the bounds of deception are artificially narrow and conflate explicit deception (intentional lying, misleading) with a kind of *deception by means* by manipulating the salience of facts, selectively framing information, or eliciting affective response disproportionate to the evidence. When a person uses one of these latter methods as a means of persuasion then they have led their audience into what I call a deceived state. Not because they have come to believe something false, but because their affective motivation, level of confidence, or behavioral disposition toward a given proposition no longer fits the available evidence.

This kind of deception might also be conceptualized as a misrepresentation of relevance or normative distortion as opposed to mere error or mistake. Stanley (2015) uses the example of Ronald Reagan's usage of the term 'welfare queen' to make the case that propaganda is sufficiently illiberal as to render democratic deliberation impossible.⁹⁸ What I want to underscore here is a claim he makes in this discussion, "In the United States, the language that names federal aid programs has acquired a social meaning that expresses disdain for Black American citizens. It

⁹⁸ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 160-161

communicates that Blacks are lazy.”⁹⁹ Although Stanley is not using this example to make the same argument as me, he helps make my point in this subsection clearer. Stanley argues correctly that through an intentional propaganda campaign colloquially known as the ‘Southern Strategy’ racists in and outside of congress were able to establish an implicit connection between the concepts of welfare, laziness, and being a Black American. This in turn served a two-fold purpose of both weakening support among White Americans for social welfare programs as well as demonizing Black Americans as leeches on society.

For any readers who doubt these claims, Lee Atwater was a close Political Consultant to Ronald Reagan and was famously quoted in an interview with Alexander P. Lamis from 1981 (I have substituted Atwater’s slurs for readability),

Y’all don’t quote me on this. You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘N-word’, ‘N-word’, ‘N-word’. By 1968, you can’t say ‘n-word’ – that hurts you. Backfires. So, you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstracted now you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I’m not saying that. But I’m saying that if it is getting abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me – because obviously sitting around saying, ‘We want to cut this,’ is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than, “N-word, n-

⁹⁹ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 160

word.’ So, any way you look at it, race is coming on the back-burner.¹⁰⁰

In other words, as political realities shift certain ideas, words, phrases, etc., become politically toxic. In this case Atwater is using the n-word as an example of this phenomenon. According to Atwater, at some point between 1954 and 1968 the n-word went from a common expression to a politically toxic one.

However, the fact that the word itself was toxic did not mean that there had been significant loss of support for the ideology the word had been used to represent and advance. The country was still full of racist people who held racist beliefs, it just had shifted enough so that saying a specific racist word had become a personal liability. Thus, rather than altering the ideology, they altered their own language, not to change the underlying ideological content, but to change the mode of delivery so that the ideology could persist without being contested. This method had two primary benefits. First, it gave racists a way to continue to express and advance their racist ideology in a more politically acceptable form. Second, it allowed them to soften the edge of their message in a way that allowed it to continue to be appealing to the people who had been turned off using the n-word. In this case they intentionally abstracted and obfuscated their true intentions in such a way that committed racists would still identify themselves with the ideology and committed non-racists would have significantly difficulty proving the committed racists were racist.

What both Atwater and Stanley, albeit in his case unintentionally, illuminate here is exactly what my deceptive state criteria is aimed at isolating. That the speaker does not have to be

¹⁰⁰ Lee Atwater, “originally unpublished audio,” interview by Alexander P. Lamis, *Southern Politics*, 1981, Re-published by Rick Perlstein, *The Nation*, November, 13, 2012, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>

explicitly intending *to deceive* rather they merely intend to abstract, obfuscate, or otherwise shield the full depth of their intentions. Thus, anyone who is taken in by that speech has not necessarily been meaningfully deceived, rather they have been rendered into a deceived state. A state in which they have come to either explicitly believe or minimally had their strength of commitment to those beliefs altered as a consequence of the speaker's intention to abstract, obfuscate, or otherwise shield the full depth of their intentions.

A person unaware of the relevant campaign, like the Southern Strategy, may well be taken in by the neutered language and begin to parrot it despite having no knowledge of the secret entailments that are tethered to it. In such a case a person honestly can claim that when they say, "Just because I support cutting public funding of bus lines doesn't make me racist, I just have other economic priorities!" However, the fact that their expression is honest does not therefore render the claim free of its original intended propagandistic function. In other words, that person parroting the talking point they don't fully understand is primarily doing so because they have been rendered in a deceived state.

At the very least I take it to be an open possibility that there is something inherently deceptive about the intentional employment of propaganda in any given case. Even in cases where no implicature is needed and no explicit deception occurs; it remains possible for an audience to enter a deceived state through purely affective rationalization. Given that *ceteris paribus* any position that is true should be one that should be acceptable as true to the broadest number of evaluators, it is dubious to suggest that intentionally employing methods designed to subvert rational processing is not, in some sense, inherently deceptive.

3.4.5 The Scope of Widespread Adoption

In this subsection I want to clarify to the extent that I can what I mean by the term widespread adoption and how it relates to the relevant population size. Two questions worth considering: 1. Can propaganda be created in an ideological vacuum? 2. How many people and divergences of belief need to exist within a given population for it to be possible to generate propaganda?

My answer to these questions is bifurcated between the actions of the propagandist and the chances of the propaganda succeeding in spreading the propagandized message. These arguments are designed to pump your intuitions and if they fail to do so, then some aspects of the overall account are unlikely to be persuasive. However, even if one rejects these specific intuitions, I think Propagandizing* has useful applicability as a minimal condition for identifying when propagandizing occurs in at least some cases.

The primary argument I have heard against my intuition is that in the absence of other people to attempt to persuade, it can't count as true propaganda. Under this assumption one believes that persuasion is necessarily, minimally, a two-person game, e.g., Grice can persuade Stanley, but Grice cannot meaningfully persuade Grice. In this understanding the idea is that Grice could, through internal reasoning, come to believe something they did not previously, but we would not say they *persuaded* themselves to believe it.

I argue that this assumption is faulty. I believe we have every reason to think it is possible to persuade ourselves of things for the same reason that any self-talk is possible. Imagine the case of “psyching oneself-up,” or utilizing positive affirmations to change one’s mindset and belief states. These are practices that many people engage into some greater or lesser degree and among

those people they tend to self-report that the experience does make them feel different than they did before. There is even empirical research that supports this. Kim et al. assert, “Self-talk is the systematic use of cue words in a silent or vocalized dialogue with oneself...Since self-talk has beneficial effects on attention and emotion regulation it is widely used for performance enhancement in sports, academic engagement, and regulating anxiety or depression in a clinic...Our finding show that positive self-talk and negative self-talk differently modulate brain states concerning cognitive performance.”¹⁰¹ In other words, empirical evidence indicates it is minimally plausible that when a person engages in self-talk they can actually increase or decrease their strength of commitment for a relevant belief.

The final question for the Gricean then is to ask, does self-persuasion require the ability to imply things to oneself? The standard model of Gricean implicature requires that the semantic meaning of proposition (p) is recognizably distinct from the intended inferred meaning of the proposition (q). The listener picks up on (q) by noticing that some part of (p) or the presentation of (p) intentionally violates one of Grice’s four maxims. In so recognizing this intended violation of the maxims, the listener recognizes that the cooperation principle has not actually been violated, but rather that an intentional implication has been made by the speaker.

This picture becomes quite complicated for the case of self-talk. It is, at a minimum, not clear that it is possible for one to violate any of the four maxims in the relevant way during self-talk. For example, imagine that I want to go practice tennis by my-self outdoors. I look outside and

¹⁰¹ J. Kim, J. Kwon, J.H. Kim, et al., “The effects of positive or negative self-talk on the alteration of brain function connectivity by performing cognitive tasks,” *Sci Rep*, July 2021, 11(1):14873. doi: 10.1038/s41598-021-94328-9. PMID: 34290300; PMCID, 1

see that it is raining. I then decided not to practice tennis outdoors because of the rain. Even if we add to this story that I talked my way through my reasoning it does not seem like I implied anything in the Gricean sense. However, this is where I think the nuances of persuasion specifically become important. Persuasion most typically occurs when we are attempting to pull someone out of an entrenched position or push them into adopting a different position.

Suppose I am an amateur doubles tennis player. My partner and I both practice together and independently. I know that my partner is very driven and will practice consistently and regularly. I know that I am less driven and only practice consistently when the weather is nice. I always want to, and sometimes do, refuse if the weather is poor. However, I also feel pressured not to let down my partner in tennis matches, so I feel compelled to practice even when I otherwise wouldn't want to. On a day I am supposed to practice I am feeling particularly lazy and check the weather. There is a 10% chance of rain and it is very overcast outside. I say to myself, "I'm supposed to practice today, and I should practice today because it is not raining currently. However, it is overcast and there is a chance of rain, so maybe I shouldn't."

What I am trying to isolate in this setup is the case in which a person feels internally conflicted between two choices and lacks an outside governing factor to determine their action. In such cases we use self-talk as our means of reasoning through our actions. In this particular case it seems equally plausible that I could end up practicing or not, what matters is that my self-assessed reason for either choice will be something like, "based on the available evidence I will do X." Which itself indicates that I went from a position of uncertainty to a position of certainty (taking action). In other words, whichever outcome I chose I persuaded myself to choose it and I never needed to imply anything to myself.

Now let's apply this same reasoning to a person self-propagandizing. Suppose I took myself as believing that "Citizens should have the right to vote." However, after witnessing several elections not go my way I start to reflect on that belief. I am internally torn because I don't want to abandon that ideological commitment as that would have too many knock-on effects for other beliefs I hold, such as the belief that, "Democracy is the best form of Government." Yet, I also feel compelled to update my beliefs in a way that will increase my chances of creating societal level change. Thus, having never put much thought into it before, I ask myself, "Who really should count as a citizen anyway?"

In this case I have now set myself up to self-propagandize. I have a specific belief that I hold, that is suddenly in need of either re-affirmation or repudiation, but no clear or predetermined conclusion. To be clear, I am not trying to convince myself that certain people shouldn't count as citizens. I am trying to convince myself that only certain people should count as citizens. The difference between the two views being that citizenship is shifted from the bare-minimum default state to a prized, reserved, or select state that is only available to those who meet the right criteria.

As I internally wrestle with this issue and try to decide whether I will abandon my original proposition or not I am engaging in self-persuasion. Internally I am divided. I feel compelled to agree with both sides of the issue for different reasons, but inevitably I will have to either pick a side or try and find a third compromise path. Whichever one I choose, it is at least plausible, if not essentially the default method, that the way I came to reach that choice was through persuading myself that it was the optimal choice at the time.

Bear in mind that in this sense, persuading oneself is essentially indistinguishable from: propagandizing oneself, convincing oneself, debating oneself, or any other way of characterizing

the process of reconciling internal uncertainty. My goal here is merely to demonstrate that self-propagandizing is common or normatively significant, but merely that it is conceptually possible. Importantly, this does not pose a problem from the Gricean model, because self-talk does not require implicature as the speaker and hearer are identical. Thus, Grice's intention recognition condition is trivially met.

The very reason implicature is necessary in standard communication collapses when the hearer is oneself. This is because there is no need for the hearer to interpret what the speaker intends beyond the literal meaning as speaker and hearer are one and the same. This demonstrates that propagandizing can occur without implicature when full intention transparency is present, which aligns with my broader argument that propagandizing's effectiveness does not require implicature. Therefore, so long as self-talk is possible, then self-propagandizing is minimally not ruled out and may even be possible. Thus, my model is consistent with Gricean constraints.

This presents a minor conundrum, if one can propagandize themselves then does 'widespread adoption' mean nothing more than at least yourself? If so, then one might reasonably question why I should include that concept in the conditions for Propagandizing* at all. However, there is a reason for including it that I think is important and should not be overlooked. In what follows I treat self-propagandizing as a limiting case that shows the conceptual coherence of the framework; my primary interest, however, remains propagandizing aimed at groups, where 'widespread adoption' tracks the propagandizers intended uptake rather than the mere fact that at least one person was influenced.

Propagandizing* is a success term. Meaning that it is an action that one attempts to carry out and can be subsequently evaluated in terms of whether they succeeded in doing so, like placing

a bet. However, unlike betting the success of Propagandizing* is *not* determined by the impact the propaganda has on its audience as might be assumed. In our contemporary world we are exposed to more propaganda than any human in history daily. However, most of the propaganda that is generated fails to catch-on or achieve broad cultural penetration. Thus, any account of propagandizing needs to be able to plausibly account for why some propaganda succeeds while other highly similar propaganda fails. Propagandizing* does not provide an explicit answer to this problem, it provides an implicit one.

My belief is that anyone who intentionally generates propaganda has a certain audience in mind: their family, their neighbors, their local community, the country, or even the entire world. This is why when I say ‘widespread adoption’ I mean the scope of that term as being determined by the propagandizer and as part of their intentions. They *could* be exclusively aiming at themselves, and in such a case ‘widespread adoption’ would be limited to themselves as they are the entire intended audience. However, as that is an extreme case, it is unlikely that it occurs often if it ever has. What is much more common, and I argue the primary intention of propagandists, is to persuade as many people as they possibly can. In other words, they likely intend their propagandizing to be aimed at a specific sub-set of the population, but if it gets an uptake beyond that sub-set then that is, generally, only to the propagandist’s benefit.

Propagandizing is inherently strategic: it targets both individuals and groups with the aim of securing dominance within the available discursive space by reshaping the broader ideological landscape. Propagandizers rarely direct their efforts solely at a single isolated agent, even ones with significant power or authority. Instead, they aim to shift the Overton window of their political environment so that their own priorities become normatively dominant while those of their

opponents come to appear suspicious or illegitimate. This intention to scale an ideology, to overcome, dominate, or effectively eliminate opposition, is what aligns propagandists with the Aristotelian evil and also grounds the deceptiveness involved in the deceptive state.

Propagandizing is thus a strategic attempt to restructure the discursive space to reorient which propositions are treated as socially acceptable or reasonable. This emphasis on reshaping the ideological space helps clarify why I treat widespread adoption as centrally linked to propagandizing and therefore include it as a necessary condition of Propagandizing*

Given that the qualification of success I am most interested in is the transformation of something into propaganda, specifically whether an artifact of propaganda was generated, my goal is not for Propagandizing* to guarantee or predict if propaganda will be generated. Rather, Propagandizing* is intended to serve as a tool that allows third parties to determine if someone can be said to have generated a token of propaganda. It is a diagnostic model, but not a predictive one.

It may end up being the case that whatever token of propaganda was generated may utterly fail to convince anyone of its content or even mildly shift their commitments, but the fact that the artifact now exists is evidence that the propagandizer succeeded in the act of generating propaganda. Which is to say that if person X succeeds in propagandizing proposition SA_1 , then SA_1 or any recreation re-embodiment of SA_1 that is recognizable as a re-embodiment of SA_1 will be propaganda. Additionally, if person X propagandizes SA_1 and then person Y is subsequently exposed to the propagandized SA_1 and is not persuaded by it, SA_1 retains its status as propaganda.

In conclusion, by widespread adoption what I really mean is that the propagandizer has some intended audience for their propaganda, but whether the token they create resonates with that audience, or any audience, has no bearing on that tokens status as propaganda. That the depiction

of the Kaiser as a gorilla fails to increase my fear of the Kaiser or Germany, does not mean that iconic poster has lost its status as propaganda. The primary reason for including the term at all, is that it speaks to the underlying intention of propagandizers, that even if their propaganda fails to strike a chord with their immediate intended audience it could still find an audience and receive uptake later or with a different audience.

3.5: Propagandizing* as a Special Case of Persuasion

At the beginning of Part 2 I presented Table 2.1 of types of persuasion and listed propagandizing as one of them. In this short section I will argue why I want to add Propagandizing* to that table as a special case of persuasion, specifically as a minimal condition for propagandizing. In that table I did not provide a clear definition for propagandizing as I did the others on the table as I wanted to save that discussion for after I introduced Propagandizing*.

As I argued in Part 2, we should resist the impulse to assume that all unethical methods of encouraging the shifting of commitments or beliefs should not be considered persuasion. I argued, it doesn't help clarify our understanding of the relevant concepts if we limit persuasion only to normatively ideal cases of rational debate. However, there may still be those who feel this move is illegitimate.

My response to this argument is that regardless of whether one thinks of propagandizing in general is a form of persuasion, I argue that Propagandizing*, should be thought of as a special case of persuasion. Specifically, it is a speech act through which one transforms a thing into propaganda with the express intent of that propaganda having the capability of persuading others. The reason for classifying this as a special case of persuasion is that it fits the category of persuasion more cleanly than the available alternative option of coercion.

Walton argued that anything less than rational debate should not qualify as persuasion because the audience is not coming to believe it based on the evidence, but on other secondary reasons e.g., intimidation, threats, inducements. As such anything that looks like persuasion but utilizes these secondary reasons would be *coercive* rather than *persuasive*. At a certain level this is something of a preference of terminology based on the degree to which one wants to build normative assumptions into their terms. If that is the only distinction that appears significant here then it is ultimately immaterial whether one views propaganda as persuasive or coercive, but I argue that there is more to it.

Where I disagree with this point is that I am inclined to think that coercion is itself a sub-category of persuasion and it is merely a label we apply to certain kinds of unethical persuasion. When we coerce someone, we encourage them to go against their will or intentions. That we need to coerce them in the first place suggests that they wouldn't have done it otherwise and that either they were/were presumed to be resistant to rational debate. Propaganda, however, doesn't clearly fit with this model. Particularly low stakes propaganda and positive propaganda.

Imagine a case where I put out a poster that is full of bright and positive imagery that says, "Peace Now, Peace Forever." Let's even stipulate that my intention here is to produce a piece of propaganda that will encourage people to push for peace or resist war. We can even stipulate that the imagery of this poster is affectively potent for many people and will likely elicit a substantial affective response from at least some people who view it. In other words, I am propagandizing on behalf of a cause that most people in most circumstances would view as banal. We must then ask, is this poster coercive?

In the strict Waltonian sense, yes. The mere fact that I included affectively charging

imagery to reinforce my message would qualify as coercion. However, this classification does not reflect the intuitive difference at play. Crucially, neither persuasion nor coercion requires that the audience ultimately be persuaded or coerced, both are success-neutral with respect to outcome. What matters is the kind of communicative strategy being used. In cases of positive, low stakes propagandizing like the “Peace Now, Peace Forever,” poster, the use of affective imagery does not seek to override the audience’s will or impose beliefs contrary to their rational deliberative capacities. Rather, it functions by drawing attention to a pre-existing belief or preference (e.g., a general preference for peace over war) which the audience is free to affirm or ignore.

This is quite different from standard coercion which attempts to secure uptake via means that violate, ignore, or suppress autonomy (e.g., threats, pressure, force, etc.) The poster operates through *salience enhancement*; it makes certain things more noticeable to the viewer but does not restrict or limit the audience’s capacity or ability to reject its message.

Therefore, while Propagandizing* is a form of non-rational persuasion, it does not require the volitional suppression that is generally characteristic of coercion. Unlike paradigmatic coercion, Propagandizing* may rely solely on affective salience without overriding the audience’s capacity to reject the message. That said, coercive strategies can still be employed within the broader propagandizing campaigns; my claim is only that coercion is not necessary for propagandizing, and thus the two concepts are not collapsible.

As such, I argue that propagandizing, or at least Propagandizing*, should be thought of as a special case of persuasion that warrants separate consideration from other forms of persuasion. While the norms surrounding persuasion will bear relevantly on this discussion, I believe that the addition of the criteria in Propagandizing* forces us to consider propagandizing as more complex

interaction between an individual, other individuals, and their shared community.

To summarize, Propagandizing* should be thought of as being the special case of persuasion in which one utilizes non-rational persuasion, as argued above, to further a political aim. While any normative conclusions drawn regarding the general use of non-rational persuasion will bear significant weight in this discussion, I believe the additional constraints imposed by Propagandizing* sufficiently isolate it as being worthy of separate normative evaluations. The reason I think this should be considered a special case is that by understanding it as such it will allow us a more nuanced and specific answer to the following question: What constraints would need to be imposed on Propagandizing* for it to be considered an ethical enterprise?

Part 4: Responding to Potential Challenges

4.1 Introduction

I have now presented my full account and justifications for Propagandizing*, the broader literature underpinning it, and a robust analysis of the key technical terms in the account. In this final Part I want to address what I imagine are some of the over-arching or larger concerns that my readers may have as a result of the prior argumentation. This section proceeds in a question/answer format, with the questions relating to some broader issues I want to clarify. The first section presents a broad justification for what Propagandizing* could offer over competing accounts like those of Stanley or Marlin. The second section presents a deeper dive into why I have chosen to locate my account under intention models.

4.2 Why Propagandizing* Over Other Models?

Question: Let's assume that everything you say in this paper is correct and Propagandizing* fits into the literature in the way you argue. Why does it matter? In other words, what does your account provide that other competing pre-existing accounts do not? Why should I choose to adopt or utilize Propagandizing* as a metric of evaluation when there are so many broadly accepted alternatives to choose from?

4.2.1 The Goal of Propagandizing* Explained

The first point to clarify is what my project is really aimed at doing. The pre-existing literature, as seen in Parts 1 and 2, focuses on *propaganda*. Bernays, Lasswell, Marlin, Stanley, Quaranto and Stanley, and Beaver and Stanley all focus their discussions on propaganda qua propaganda. Where my account is fundamentally different is that it is an account of

propagandizing. This distinction is important because the two forms do not co-refer. One refers to the things in the world we call propaganda, and the other is the active form of engaging in the process of producing propaganda. In the case of Propagandizing*, I am accounting for cases in which someone intentionally chooses to engage in that process.

4.2.2 Four Considerations in Favor of Propagandizing*

I will first lay out four considerations that undergird my argument and then argue for why I think they present a compelling case for Propagandizing*

1. Empirical evidence shows people believe that propaganda exists and is a threat.
2. Empirical evidence shows that propaganda is not consistently or reliably labeled as such by individuals within a society.
3. There is both practical and moral utility in being able to reliably identify at least some things as propagandizing regardless of medium, contents, mode of presentation, or originator.
4. If empirical evidence shows that propaganda isn't reliably labeled as such and there is utility in being able to label things as such, then we should have an account that reliably does so.

To be clear, these do not cohere into a valid formal argument. Rather, these are a set of considerations that are intended to persuade one into believing that Propagandizing* has unique utility. This is both because prior accounts tend not to theorize on the act itself and because Propagandizing* is able to provide clarity that accounts of propaganda cannot.

4.2.3 Empirical Evidence That Propaganda is A Public Concern

That propaganda exists is not controversial. There is substantial evidence, both anecdotal and empirical, that people believe propaganda exists. While empirical studies regarding the specific question, “Does propaganda exist?” do not clearly come up, many studies in recent years have asked about people’s perceptions of closely related facts. For example, the PEW Research Center asserts: “A median of 72% of adults across 25 nations say the spread of false information online is a major threat to their country.”¹⁰² Additionally, Gallup and The Knight Foundation found: “Fifty percent of Americans feel most national news organizations intend to mislead, misinform, or persuade the public.”¹⁰³ The OECD Truth Quest Survey found: “Across all countries surveyed, satire (71%) is the easiest type of content to identify as false followed by disinformation (64%) and Propaganda (58%)...”¹⁰⁴

These studies tell an important story, both on their own and collectively. The PEW Research Center’s findings make it clear that the threat of propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation is something that people are both attuned to and wary of. The Gallup and Knight Foundation Survey indicates that, at least among Americans, there is a strong perception that at least some major media organizations are more propaganda networks than reliable media. Finally, the OECD survey makes it clear that people’s ability to correctly identify propaganda when

¹⁰² Jacob Poushter, Moira Fagan, and Andrew Prozorovsky Smerkovich, *International Opinion on Global Threats*, Pew Research Center August 19, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2025/08/19/international-opinion-on-global-threats/>, 1

¹⁰³ Gallup and The Knight Foundation, *American Views 2022: Part 2 Trust, Media, Democracy*, January 2023, 3

¹⁰⁴ Molly Leshner, Hanna Pawelec, and Mercedes Forgarassy, *The OECD Truth Quest Survey Methodology and Findings*, OECD, No. 369, June 2024, 5

presented with it is poor. A 58% successful identification rate indicates that even though you might be more likely to correctly identify propaganda as propaganda than not, there is still a nearly even chance that you will fail to properly identify it.

4.2.4 Empirical Evidence Shows Propaganda Identification by The Public is Unreliable

The OECD study also provides empirical backing for the second claim. It asserts that when tested, 42% of Americans failed to properly identify propaganda as propaganda. While that is slightly better odds than pure luck, it should not be considered as reliable identification. This is itself problematic. That propaganda could not be identified as such 42% of the time indicates that this is a concept that people do not grasp reliably. This also supports my argument from Part 1 regarding the pejorative model as a folk understanding of the concept. The study doesn't tell us the degree of confidence individuals had in their responses; their overall accuracy at least indicates that people's intuitive understandings of the concept can vary sufficiently that correct identification happens only slightly more than half of the time.

However, this point would be resting on shaky ground if this were the only empirical evidence supporting the claim. Unfortunately, the study of propaganda is relatively impoverished in terms of published work. That doesn't mean there is no relevant literature. However, it does mean that the existent literature is limited in terms of the scope of the projects and most of it has only been produced in the last decade.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ See Figure 1 below

4.2.5 An Argument for Advertising Research as a Proxy for Propagandizing Research

There is a fundamental problem when it comes to making empirically grounded assertions regarding propaganda or propagandizing. It is viewed ignominiously. This is a problem that has been mentioned and discussed by various scholars over the last century.¹⁰⁶ The problem this raises is that not only has this likely had a depressing effect on interest among theorists, it appears to have also depressed interest among empiricists. However, for reasons that are not easily identified, there has been a massive spike in interest in the topic since roughly 2016.

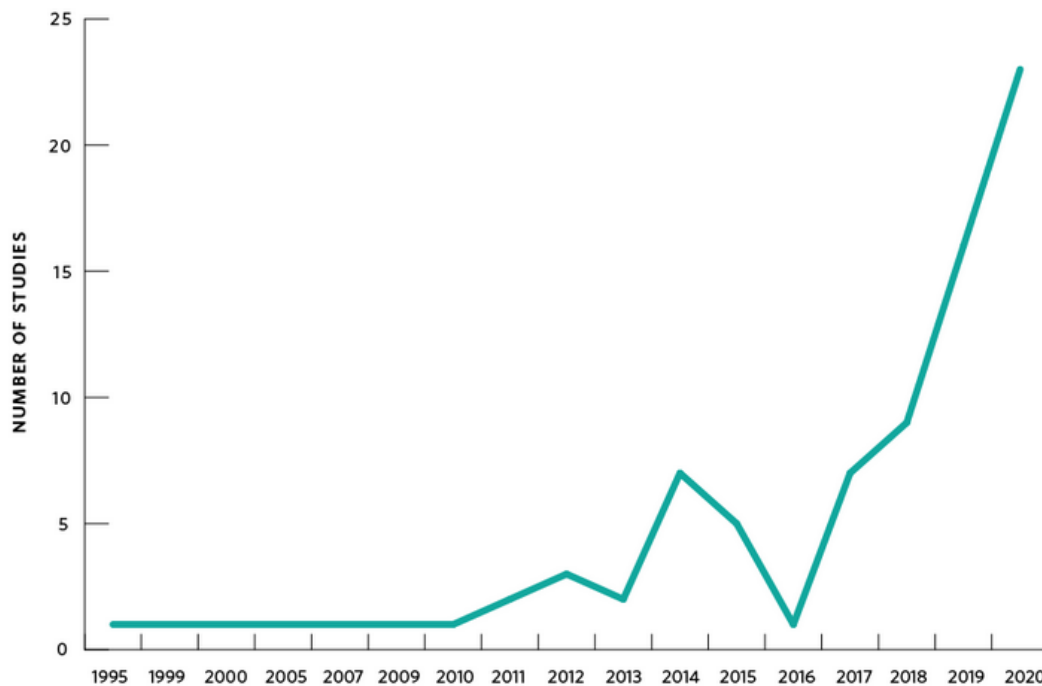
Over the last decade there has been a rapid spike in such studies. For example, Courchesne, Thange, and Shapiro looked at eighty-two different studies published between 1995 and 2020. These studies were selected based on the following criteria, “(1) examined a specific population targeted by an influence operation; (2) compared measurable outcomes (behaviors or beliefs) of people exposed versus those who were not; and (3) used a research design that provides credible evidence on the causal effect of the influence operation. These selected studies covered a range of influence operations, from political disinformation, state propaganda, and health misinformation.”¹⁰⁷ A second study by Bateman, Hickock, Courchesne, Thange, and Shapiro even

¹⁰⁶ The following authors have all made similar claims: Ellul, Stanley (2015), Jowett and O'Donnell, Herman and Chomsky. This is a minor point, but one that persists throughout the literature. There is little empirical data to support the claim in terms of whether the public views propaganda theorists and researchers negatively. However, that does not mean that theorists themselves do not perceive it as true and anecdotally I am forced to agree. While I have not met much outright hostility when discussing my work with others, I have often received what I perceived as stronger pushback and less acceptance for propaganda studies as an avenue of research compared to other less controversial or more common areas of philosophic research. There is an interesting question to be asked regarding whether this feeling arises more from an actual perception of public attitude, if it arises from an internalized sense of guilt associated with studying a somewhat taboo subject matter, some combination, or some other factors entirely.

¹⁰⁷ Laura Courchesne, Isra M. Thange, and Jacob Shapiro, *Review of Social Science Research on the effects of Influence Operations*, Empirical Studies of Conflict Project, July 12, 2021, 2

provides a handy chart, which helps visually show the rapid increase research on these topics.¹⁰⁸

FIGURE 1
Rapid Increase in High-Quality Empirical Studies on the Effects of Influence Operations



This may appear to be a compelling body of contemporary evidence to pull from. However, the picture is more complicated than the above graph suggests. Out of the studies cited in the overview only ten were specifically regarding propaganda. Among those ten, all of them were published after 2013, and six were published after 2018. There is also considerable overlap in the specific contexts of what is being studied. For example, *Erasing Ethnicity? Propaganda, Nation Building and Identity in Rwanda* draws heavily from the conclusions and methods of Yanagizawa-

¹⁰⁸ Jon Bateman, Elonnai Hickock, Laura Courchesne, Isra Thange, and Jacob N. Shapiro, *Measuring the Effects of Influence Operations: Key Findings and Gaps from Empirical Research*, Carnegie Endowment for International peace, June 28, 2021, para. 19-20

Drott (2014) and both studies are focused on the same political situation.¹⁰⁹

Even more relevant to my own project is that the Bateman et al. study limits what qualifies as propaganda to what the authors refer to as, “state propaganda.”¹¹⁰ This is a legitimate move for research purposes, but as was shown in Part 1, state-sponsored propaganda only accounts for a fraction of the total amount of propaganda that exists. This means that we need to be cautious when using empirical studies on propaganda to inform our understanding of the concept. This is problematic, however, as the research pool is so relatively small that we cannot afford to simply ignore or dismiss what propaganda research there is.

However, we can shed some light on this problem by coupling what research we have on propaganda with the research on propaganda’s closest conceptual cousin, ads. To be clear, the relation is as follows: ads are to propaganda what advertising is to propagandizing. The distinction between these two conceptual pairings being that ads and propaganda are both things in the world, while advertising and propagandizing are actions taken by individuals, groups, institutions, or systems. The reason I think this comparison is legitimate is that ads, propaganda, advertising, and propagandizing have always been, since the earliest theories, considered as fundamentally related but also definitively distinct concepts.

Bernays, for example, asserted that propaganda is a tool of the public relations counsel or advertisers, “I believe that competition in the future will not be only an advertising competition between individual products or between big associations, but that it will in addition be a

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that both research teams performed their own analytical studies on the same subject, anti-Tutsi radio broadcasts in Rwanda during the lead up to and period known as the Rwandan Genocide.

¹¹⁰ Bateman et al., *Measuring the Effects of Influence Operations*, Para. 2

competition of propaganda. The businessman and advertising man is realizing he must not discard entirely the methods of Barnum in reaching the public.”¹¹¹ What is interesting about this phrasing is that he is framing propaganda, or what I would call propagandizing, as he appears to be talking about it in the active sense, as running in parallel with advertising and yet still fully distinct from it. Thus, we can see that the intuition that ads, propaganda, advertising, and propagandizing have all been understood as deeply related in the earliest writings on the topic. That intuition does not go away or collapse over the following century. The works of both Stanley (2015) and Marlin (2013) align with Bernays’ intuition and give us good reasons to resist collapsing ads and propaganda into equivalence.

4.2.6 Pulling Apart Ads, Advertising, Propaganda, and Propagandizing

I want to now explain why we should also reject either collapsing the concepts or locating propagandizing conceptually under advertising. Stanley (2015) puts advertising as filling in a middle space between supporting and undermining propaganda.

Stanley’s Advertising: A contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, but in the service of a goal that is irrelevant to those very ideals.¹¹²

Marlin (2013) puts it plainly,

We tend to think of propaganda more in terms of ideology or political power, but the commercial world carries with it some ideological baggage that can sometimes – as with

¹¹¹ Bernays, *Propaganda*, 84

¹¹² Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 56

the case of Amway (short for American Way) – be very prominent, at other times out of sight but present in some degree. For instance, I would include the massive promotion of the McDonald’s fast-food chain in the United States and Canada under my definition of propaganda...More recently Naomi Klein has shown how many items are marketed through a ‘branding’ process, which tries to associate the product, through its logo, with a lifestyle or world view, so that the buyer is buying an identity along with the product. It seems worthwhile to include such pervasive forms of influence under the rubric ‘propaganda,’ ...The question of the definition of propaganda continues to be an open one, given the existence of such diversity in the interpretation of the concept.¹¹³

Stanley’s model is built around the same concern I am addressing and that Marlin presaged. By locating advertising as the third wheel of his tri-partite account of propaganda, Stanley is asserting the two concepts as so fundamentally related that they overlap in nearly all relevant ways. Marlin, on the other hand, takes a more circumspect approach by never clearly drawing a boundary between propaganda and advertising. He clearly asserts that in some cases the two are one and the same but also leaves it an open question to what extent they are distinct. While hardly exhaustive, these are two of the more influential contemporary accounts of propaganda and taken together they give us good reason to think that in at least some cases whatever is true of advertising will also be true of propagandizing.

Thus, while we cannot necessarily take any given advertising study and fully claim that its findings will hold for any apparently similar propagandizing, we can say that the two fulfill similar

¹¹³ Marlin, *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion*, 13

functional roles. Any study that focuses on the persuasive function of advertising (the function shared by both advertising and propagandizing), can be reasonably as holding for either concept. Not because persuasion is in some way universal, but because they share the ways in which they are persuasive. As Stanley's tri-partite model suggests, the two differ in goal but not necessarily in appearance.

4.2.7 Evidence Drawn from Empirical Research on Advertising Applied to Propagandizing

The available empirical evidence strongly indicates that advertising is effective at achieving the goals of those who produce it, but with some caveats. For example, that effectiveness can be heavily influenced by whether the individual recognizes they are being advertised to. Soontae An, Gayle Kerr, and Hyun Seung Jin's study *Recognizing Native Ads as Advertising: Attitudinal and Behavioral Consequences* asserts: "In the case of in-feed native advertising, if consumers do not realize it is advertising until they reach the 'buy now' they will feel manipulated; in turn, they will not only disengage but hold negative attitudes toward the brand and their propensity to buy. We observed greater perceived manipulative intent, decreased engagement, less positive brand attitudes, and lower sharing intention."¹¹⁴ In other words, if the consumer perceives that they have been manipulated by an advertisement, particularly because they did not recognize it as such, then that perceived manipulation will decrease their likelihood of purchasing.

Eisend, van Reijmersdal, Boerman, and Tarrahi's study *A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Disclosing Sponsored Content* found, among other things, the following:

¹¹⁴Soontae An, Gayle Kerr, and Hyun Seung Jin, "Recognizing Native Ads as Advertising: Attitudinal and Behavioral Consequences," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Winter 2019, 1436

1. Disclosures presented after the sponsored content decreased brand evaluation and credibility, while disclosures presented before or during the sponsored content led to less negative brand evaluations.
2. Respondents who are aware of the disclosure show higher recognition of advertising.

They conclude,

Regarding advertisers, disclosure has both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, disclosures emphasize the presence of the brand, which draws attention to it and increases the likelihood of remembering it. Thus, the transparency of sponsored content increases brand awareness. On the other hand, disclosures increase the likelihood of criticism of the brand, message, and source. Hence, advertisers should use sponsored content that requires disclosure only of brands and products of which awareness needs to be generated such as brand and products that are new. To improve the image of a brand or product, other advertising formats that do not require disclosure would be more appropriate.¹¹⁵

Meaning that there is a cost-benefit analysis that advertisers must run for every ad. If the purpose of the ad is to introduce something or to make a brand more present in people's minds, then you should make it as obvious as possible that the advertisement is an advertisement. However, if your primary goal is anything other than increased awareness, it is more effective to use advertisements which are not required to be disclosed as ads.

This is not a mere digression. While these advertising studies are not obviously or clearly

¹¹⁵ M. Eisend, E. A. van Reijmersdal, S. C. Boerman, and F. Tarrahi, "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Disclosing Sponsored Content," *Journal of Advertising*, 49(3), 2020, 363

about propaganda or propagandizing, if we look at the specifics of these studies, we can see exactly the conceptual overlap that Bernays, Stanley, and Marlin are all sensitive to. We can even see this by rephrasing the quotes by substituting in propaganda or propagandizing where appropriate.

What is interesting about this simple word swap is that if we agree with Bernays, Stanley, and Marlin that the relationship between advertising and propagandizing is so sufficiently close that they are, in at least some cases, one and the same thing; then in this case nothing about the substance of the study has been changed. Propaganda and propagandizing sometimes must be disclosed as such in some capacity, e.g. a television spot promoting a specific political candidate must identify verbally that it is paid for by a specific PAC affiliated with a specific cause or candidate. In such cases, it is at least plausible that the more aware the audience is that the spot in question is propaganda, the less likely they may be to be swayed by it. Finally, the ultimate realization is that if the goal is to improve the image of the thing being propagandized for, then it may be more effective to only engage with propaganda which does not have to be explicitly identified as such. This itself accords with the common intuition that the most insidious and dangerous forms of propaganda are those which are not recognized reliably as such.

Keep in mind that the study didn't prove any of this, as it was not about propaganda or propagandizing. Nonetheless, I argue that the conclusions asserted in the above paragraph remain intuitively robust as conclusions we could draw about propagandizing if we re-ran the same study with that as our specific target of inquiry.

Conversely, if you feel that despite their intuition this swap *does* substantively change the meaning of the quote and thus alters the study itself, then you agree that propagandizing and advertising are, at least in some cases, *not* the same thing.

As for empirical research specifically on propagandizing, there have been various retrospective studies which attempt to draw correlations between the presence of certain specific propaganda vectors and changes in regional population attitudes and behavior over time. Adena et al., *Radio and the Rise of The Nazis in Prewar Germany** argues that there is a demonstrable correlative effect between the frequency of certain political radio broadcasts and attitudinal shifts in the German populace. Similarly, Yanagizawa-Drott's *Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence From The Rwandan Genocide* (2014) argues that there is a demonstrable correlation between the broadcasts of an anti-Tutsi radio station and increases in anti-Tutsi violence within the regional coverage of the broadcast zone. Krishnarajan and Tolstrup's *Pre-war Experimental Evidence that Putin's Propaganda Elicited Strong Support for Military Invasion Among Russians* (2022) asserts that,

As the differences between our control and treatment groups show, Russians correctly evaluate degrees of threat and discriminate between different threat types, clearly responding more strongly to security threats than to what we term cultural threats. In this sense, the Russian public reacts 'predictably' and 'prudently,' as public opinion research in democracies has also found...Only 9% of the respondents in our experiment support military use of force against a neighboring country that does not engage in threatening actions...However, our study also highlights a second point: Prudence has its limits. Deprived of both supplementary information concerning neighboring countries in question and alternative perspectives on the credibility of the events on the ground and their implications, many Russians are fairly easily convinced that a military response is indeed

necessary.¹¹⁶

Their study claims that even relatively mild exposure to propaganda was sufficient to shift the attitudes among the Russian populace from ~8% in favor of war against their neighbors to ~48%.¹¹⁷

While I make no claims regarding the broad legitimacy, strength, or reproducibility of these studies, at a minimum the frequency with which some of them are cited makes them notable.¹¹⁸ These studies, or at least studies like these, are critical for expanding and deepening our knowledge of propagandizing and propaganda as forces for change in our world, but they tell us relatively little about propaganda qua propaganda or propagandizing.

There is a smaller but still critical pool of other non-efficacy focused studies. King, Pan, and Roberts' *How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument* (2017) presents an argument that a major propaganda arm of the Chinese government known as the 50c uses propaganda as a distraction rather than an overt or explicit argument.¹¹⁹ Haifeng Huang's *The Pathology of Hard Propaganda* (2018) presents a study which the author argues shows that 'hard propaganda,' or "crude and heavy-handed propaganda" can produce a backfire effect and lower citizens' opinion of the state, while simultaneously

¹¹⁶ Suthan Krishnarajan and Jakob Tolstrup, "Pre-war Experimental Evidence That Putin's Propaganda Elicited Strong Support for Military Invasion Among Russians," *Sci Adv.*, November 2023, 6-7

¹¹⁷ Krishnarajan and Tolstrups, "Pre-war Experimental Evidence," 1

¹¹⁸ The Yanagizawa-Drott study has been cited over 1000 times in various literature.

¹¹⁹ Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret E. Roberts, "How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged Argument," *American Political Science Review*, 111, d, 484-501

signaling the regime's power.¹²⁰

All of this is to say that propaganda is being studied both empirically and conceptually, albeit sporadically, and nowhere near as commonly as advertising. However, if we are willing to accept that advertising research can functionally serve as a proxy for propagandizing research in at least some cases, then the amount of research we can draw upon expands substantially. However, this is not a perfect solution. As was shown in the word substitution case above, it is *not* an undeniable fact that propagandizing is equivalent to advertising. That intuition pump is intended to force us to confront what Bernays, Stanley, and Marlin all concluded that ads and propaganda as well as advertising and propagandizing are either fundamentally linked in some way or at least so conceptually close to one another that we must talk about them in relation to one another.

4.2.8 Where Propagandizing* Fits In

However, there is a problem with these propaganda studies. They do not share a single definition of the term 'propaganda' and in many cases barely attempt to define it at all, despite it being one of the core concepts being assessed. Here is a table showing how the above studies each defined propaganda for their purposes

OECD Report	[Propaganda] Refers to the activity or content adopted and propagated by governments, private firms, non-
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¹²⁰ Haifeng Huang, "The Pathology of Hard Propaganda," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 80, Issue 3, July 2018, 1034-1038

	profits and individuals to manage collective attitudes, values, narratives, and opinions. While propaganda can contain both true and untrue elements, it is often used to appeal to an individual or social group's sentiments and emotions rather than being informative.
RADIO AND THE RISE OF THE NAZIS IN PRE-WAR GERMANY	No explicit definition given, appears to equate it with either the speech of the nazi party or the explicit effort of Goebbels propaganda machine.
Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide*	No explicit definition given, appears to broadly align with Lasswell.
Pre-War Experimental Evidence that Putin's Propaganda Elicited Strong Support for Military Invasion Among Russians	No explicit definition given, appears to frame all speech of the Russian government as propaganda.
How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, Not Engaged	Does not define the term, but bases its findings on leaked emails from the Internet Propaganda Office of

Argument	Zhanggong whose jobs are described as facilitators of state propaganda and defusing crises.
<i>The Pathology of Hard Propaganda</i>	Divides propaganda into two categories ‘hard’ and ‘soft’, which are differentiated by their overtness.

What we see here is a clear divide between the empirical work being done on propaganda in fields like Communication Studies and Political Science on one side and the conceptual theorizing of propaganda by philosophers like Bernays, Chomsky, and Stanley. While we saw in Part 1 that philosophers of propaganda have spent a great deal of time and effort arguing how best to characterize propaganda, empirical researchers have largely ignored that work. The definitions the empiricists are using are either stuck in the Bernaysian/Lasswellian era or don’t bother to define it at all.

This presents a fundamental problem for propaganda researchers and theorists. While divergence of opinion regarding the bounds and characterization of the relevant concept is inevitable, there is utility in having a mutually agreed upon method of identifying at least some things as propaganda or propagandizing.

There is an important complication that must be addressed, however. There is a special class of advertisements that must clearly fit into my picture: political ads. These are, nominally, advertisements that are aimed at political issues. The question that must be asked is, are political ads merely propaganda by another name? If so, why do we refer to them as ‘ads’ rather than

‘propaganda’?

Baines and O’Shaughnessy (2014) argue: “American negative political advertising is an example of the operation of propaganda today in an ostensibly more sophisticated age...”¹²¹ On the other hand, O’Shaughnessy (1996) attempts to draw out a distinction between the concepts by dividing them into *social propaganda* and *social marketing*. The difference being, “...social marketing – at least if its exponents are fully educated in the marketing concept, which is not always the case – is based on some research defined conception of what the audience wants... In contrast, propaganda is didactic. The propagandist is less concerned to moderate his/her message in light of market research – he is convinced of its essential rightness and is in fact an evangelist.”¹²²

These quotes indicate a lack of clarity on the topic, albeit with some strong intuitions already in place. On the one hand the overarching intuition is that political advertising = propaganda, but there may be legitimate reasons to resist that intuition. While the evolution in O’Shaughnessy’s definition from 1996 to 2014 is substantial, I believe he makes an important point in his 1996 explanation. The advertiser, and by extension the ads they produce, are engaging in a reciprocal relationship with the audience wherein the advertiser tries to identify what the audience wants and to deliver it to them or to generate a new want in the audience. By ‘reciprocal’ I mean that the advertiser and audience are in an iterative feedback process which seeks to align audience desire with the advertiser’s available or potentially available products or services. The

¹²¹ P. Baines and N. J. O’Shaughnessy, “Political marketing and propaganda: Uses, abuses, misuses,” *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol. 13, No. 1/2, 2014, 2

¹²² Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, “Social Propaganda and Social Marketing: a critical difference?” *European Journal of Marketing*, 30,10\11, 1996, 7

propagandist on the other hand appears to invert this setup. They are demagogues who develop and refine their political speech over time for the purpose of sharpening their message and increasing their persuasiveness.¹²³ The goal of the propagandist is not to ascertain what the audience wants and deliver; it is to alter the audience's beliefs to be in line with the propagandist's preferred ideology.

Thus, we have a complex but not incoherent ontological framework, albeit one that is likely to be contentious at the borders.

Advertising (Broadly): The practice of identifying what is desired within a marketplace or generating a new desire within the marketplace and using persuasive messaging to present a given product or service as being capable of partially or wholly satisfying those desires.

Political Advertising: The practice of identifying what is desired within a political marketplace or generating a new desire within a political marketplace and using persuasive messaging to present a given candidate, referendum, or political issue as being aligned with or capable of acting on behalf of those desires.

Propagandizing*

Necessary Condition 1: X's utterance of SA₁ is a speech act.

Necessary Condition 2: SA₁ explicitly or implicitly possesses a political dimension.

Necessary Condition 3: X intends that, through the intended semantic contents of SA₁, the intended contextual positions of the relevant interlocutors, or some other communicative feature intended by X, the uttering of SA₁ will move at least one member of the audience

¹²³ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 27, 41-42

into a deceived state.

Necessary Condition 4: X intends that if audience member $A_1 \dots A_N$ is moved into a deceived state (as described in NC3), then the utterance of SA_1 by X will either increase the probability of the content of SA_1 gaining widespread adoption or result in the alteration of the audience's strength of credence in the content of SA_1 in accordance with X's intentions.

When combined with Propagandizing* we see a plausible framework for distinguishing these three concepts clearly. As argued in Part 2, NC2 of Propagandizing* rests on the presence of a political dimension explicitly or implicitly being carried by SA_1 . This means that either by virtue of the semantic contents of SA_1 or through the presentation of SA_1 , a person could reasonably infer or come to believe that SA_1 itself is political or bears on relevant political realities.

However, as we can see from the substantive difference in the conditions that must be satisfied to realize Propagandizing*, it is not clearly collapsible into advertising or even political advertising. While NC2 is roughly shared by both accounts, NC3 and NC4 of Propagandizing* are not.

Advertising and political advertising are ways of describing the practice of trying to persuade a given audience that a specific thing will satisfy or fulfill their desires. Propagandizing*, however, is the practice of trying to shift the audience's beliefs regarding political issues by moving them into a deceived state. The only intended goal of Propagandizing* is the shifting of some quantity of the audiences' beliefs in the direction the propagandizer prefers. The core difference between the two being that the advertiser is concerned with shifting the audience's beliefs or generating new beliefs regarding the compatibility of the audience's desire to purchase with the product or service being sold. The Propagandizer*, however, is concerned with shifting

the audience's beliefs so that they are compatible with the propagandizer's intentions.

This distinction is quite narrow, but that is by design. The lines between advertising, political advertising, and Propagandizing* are small, but the concepts are distinct. The accounts presented above for advertising and political advertising are not intended as hard definitions, but rather as general guides for understanding how Propagandizing* can plausibly fit alongside our contemporary understandings of advertising.

The ultimate point I am making here is that Propagandizing* is not intended to give us a definitive grasp on what propaganda is any more than understanding the practice of advertising can help us understand what ads are. However, as indicated by the massive quantity of advertising research that occurs annually, I believe that advertising is worthy of deeper study, clarification, and understanding. I argue that we should equally believe that if there is a relevant relation between the intentional commission of the act of propagandizing and the subsequent generation of propaganda from that act, then Propagandizing* can give us a useful entry point for studying that relationship.

4.2.9 Conclusion

In this essay, I have explained where I see Propagandizing* fitting into the broader propaganda literature as well as empirical research. In so doing I have argued that Propagandizing* is intended to serve as a bridge between conceptual analyses and empirical research by allowing for a consistent and reliable method of identifying things as propaganda without relying on unstable or contestable factors like social position, ideology, or personal status. I have shown that the current conceptual frameworks, regardless of their merits, do not seem to be influencing or helping to inform empirical research on the topic and that a model that could do so has demonstrable value. I have also shown how advertising research can serve as a functional proxy for

research on propagandizing, but primarily as evidence for why there should be greater research into propaganda separated from advertising, disinformation, or misinformation studies. In so doing I have argued why Propagandizing* could be a helpful analytical tool for studying the broader propaganda puzzle.

4.3 Justifying Locating My Model Under Intention

Question: Gricean semantics appears to fit your model only in the general sense and its only benefit for your view is that it allows you to appeal to intention. No other theorists that you cite suggest intention as a necessary component of propagandizing, so why include it as part of Propagandizing*? Does tying yourself to Grice in this way provide any substantive benefits to your account?

4.3.1 The Benefits of Tying Propagandizing* to Intention Semantics

The objection is broadly correct. The primary reason for tying Propagandizing* into something like Gricean semantics is to center intention within this account. However, the problems with Gricean semantics are well known, which is why I prefer the Bach and Harnish SAS model. This model uses mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs) as the basis for understanding speaker intention.¹²⁴

Bach and Harnish describe this model as,

The SAS represents the pattern of inference a hearer follows in identifying the speaker's illocutionary intent. We have claimed that linguistic communication essentially involves

¹²⁴ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 5

the speaker's issuing an utterance with an R-intention whose fulfillment consists in its recognition. Our analysis of linguistic communication does not require that this R-intention include the intention that the hearer make a detailed inference in exactly the form of the SAS.¹²⁵

An R-intention is a *reflexive intention*,

...produced by the hearer's recognizing that the speaker's intention to produce a certain effect (and thereby have produced in him) partly by recognizing S's intention to produce an identifiable effect. The hearer has to figure out what that intention – the intended effect – is, on the basis primarily of the speaker's utterance, along the lines of the SAS.¹²⁶

Meaning that their major evolution from Gricean semantics is their model limits the scope of the intention recognition game that underpins Grice's account. They do so by using mutual contextual beliefs as a limiting factor on which kinds of R-intentions must be recognized to count as fulfilled. To be clear, the success condition in this model of linguistic communication is R-intention *recognition*, not mere *possession*. MCBs do not constrain what can be intended by the speaker, rather, they act as constraints on what can possibly be successfully communicated. If I intend to communicate something that falls outside what the relevant MCBs make recognizable, then my audience will fail to recognize that intention.

This model of intention fits well with Propagandizing* because it gives a clear and plausible mechanism through which we can understand how propagandizing can communicate

¹²⁵ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 8

¹²⁶ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 5

both one-to-one and one-to-many at the same time, by allowing the speaker to have different R-intentions that the speaker intends to have recognized by different members of the audience. I will expand on this below in section 4.3.4. Their model also gives a coherent way of understanding this by showing how a secondary meaning can be coupled to the proposition via other salient contextual information without requiring the full mutual recognition of speaker intent required by traditional Gricean semantics.

4.3.2 Mutual Contextual Beliefs as Means for Propagandizing*

While the SAS model broadly fits with Propagandizing*, the primary benefit of the model for my account is its use of mutual contextual beliefs to explain how meaning is constrained by context.

...mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), as we call such salient contextual information... We call such items of information ‘beliefs’ rather than ‘knowledge’ because they need not be true in order to figure in the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s inference. We call them ‘contextual’ because they are both relevant to and activated by the context of the utterance (or by the utterance itself). And we call them “mutual” because *S* and *H* not only both have them, they both believe they both have them and believe the other to believe they have them.¹²⁷

Here is an example they use to demonstrate this.

Statement: I love you like my brother.

The semantic contents of this claim are easy to understand, but the R-intention is not fixed. If, for

¹²⁷ Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 5

example, a woman says this to a man who has just asked her on a date, then the man would be intended to understand that regardless of personal fondness, she does not have romantic interest in the man. The invitation to go on a date sets the mutual context between the two parties. There is an explicitly romantic invitation being offered, and true acceptance of the R-intention must be understood as acceptance of that romantic context. However, the response, stating that the woman loves the man like a brother, is meant to draw on a presumed standard mutual belief about the love shared between siblings. Specifically, that it is affectionate but asexual. She is declining the romantic context while attempting or offering to maintain a close and affectionate relationship in a way that she believes he will mutually understand.

However, the R-intention of the phrase changes with the context. Suppose she says this to a close male friend, one who harbors no romantic interest in her, but is doubting the strength of their relationship. In such a case the mutual context would indicate the R-intention as being that she is not setting a hard boundary in their relationship. She is affirming the strength of her feelings and assuring her friend of his importance to her.

The reason I think this scheme fits well for Propagandizing* is that it allows us to make sense of the unpredictability of any given act of propagandizing's chance of achieving maximized widespread adoption. The problem arises because propagandizers rarely intend for their message to be aimed exclusively at a single person. Rather they desire that their propagandizing be appealing and persuasive to as many people as possible within the relevantly intended audience as that maximizes the chance of widespread adoption. However, propagandizing, at least that which is realized via Propagandizing*, is crafted such that for it to appeal to the many it must also appeal to the individual. Here is an example to help make this clearer.

Propagandizer: I want every member of the public to believe or increase their belief in belief X.

Audience Member 1: I do not believe X and whenever I hear someone advocate for X I infer that means they believe Y, and I find Y morally repugnant. I will only support someone who doesn't believe Y.

Audience Member 2: I believe X weakly but strongly believe Y. I will only support the ideas of someone advocating for X if I know they believe in Y.

In this example we have a propagandizer who is faced with a tricky but common problem in persuasion campaigns. They want their audience to believe X, but there is a secondary belief, Y, that has been commonly associated with X. For some in the audience such an association is negative and if the association is reinforced or those people perceive the speaker as advocating for or aligning with Y, they will be more likely to reject X. For others, such an association is positive, and they would only support a believer in X who also believes in Y. Thus, the propagandizer who wants to succeed in advocating X will have to take into consideration both perceptions to maximize their chance of success.

To put this in the Bach and Harnish framework, the propagandizer has two distinct R-intentions they wish to be picked up by the audience, but they do not wish all members of the audience to pick up both. For Audience Member 1 the R-intention is something like, “recognize that I intend for you to believe that I only support X and not Y,” while the R-intention for Audience Member 2 is something like, “recognize that I intend for you to believe that I support both X and Y.”

One of the more confounding aspects of modelling propagandizing is that it can function in

both one-to-one and one-to-many contexts equally well and simultaneously. The differences in one-to-one vs one-to-many communication come forward clearly in a case like the one above. In exclusively one-to-one persuasive efforts one aims to craft their message in a way that will be maximally persuasive to a single individual. In one-to-many persuasive efforts one aims to craft their message in a way that will be maximally persuasive to the broadest number of people in the relevant audience. In some cases, there is no apparent difference in messaging. For example, a slogan like, ‘vote blue no matter who’ could be deployed directly to a single person that one wishes to persuade or it could be part of a speech to a large crowd, or broadcast openly over mass media. So long as one is aware of the relevant mutual contextual beliefs being invoked, then the slogan works regardless of the target audience. Given that the association between the color blue and the Democratic National Committee is one that a vast majority of American voters are familiar with, most of the relevantly intended population who hears it will understand what is meant by the message.

However, the larger the available audience is or the more controversial or niche the relevant belief being advanced is, the less likely it becomes that the audience will share a complete or even partial set of MCBs regarding that belief. That is why MCBs are helpful for cases like these. A propagandizer needs to use or invoke symbols and ideas that are not merely semantically comprehensible, but specifically comprehensible in the way the propagandizer wants them to be. Thus, in the case of the example above the propagandizer needs to advocate for X in a way that signals to one portion of the audience, “my advocacy for X does not imply my belief in Y,” while simultaneously signaling to another portion of the audience, “my advocacy for X does imply my belief in Y.”

4.3.3 Dog Whistling as an Example of Propagandizing* via R-Intentions and MCBs

I want to open this subsection by clearly stipulating that I am not claiming that all cases of dog whistling are necessarily forms of Propagandizing*. However, the two do overlap in several ways and if it turns out to be the case that dog whistling is a sub-category of Propagandizing* then I have no objection to that. Whether that is the case is a question for a later project. What I find useful about dog whistling as an example of Propagandizing* is that it gives a clear and familiar way of seeing how clever propagandizers can deploy and utilize multiple R-intentions simultaneously through a single piece of propaganda. What is undeniable, however, is that not all cases of Propagandizing* are reducible to dog whistling; thus, the two concepts are not collapsible.¹²⁸

Returning to the example from the previous section, Audience Member 1 perceives Y as incongruous with their belief set. Audience Member 2 fully embraces Y and would be put out by believing the propagandizer doesn't also believe Y. The clever propagandizer will overcome this gap by figuring out a way to express their R-intention for X in a way that explicitly denies or advocates additional support for Y, but that also in some unspoken way publicly signals a private R-intention of opposition to the stated position on Y. In other words, *dog whistling*.

Dog whistling involves employing speech that appears on the surface to be transparent, but, when married to a hearer's background frame and value systems, communicates a message

¹²⁸ For example, in the case of the Charlottesville march there were documented chants of, "Jews will not replace us!" This does not meet the Beaver and Stanley definition of dog whistling as there is no gained plausible deniability regarding the meaning of the phrase once uttered. Their R-intention merely reduces to the semantic contents of the statement.

not obvious to those without that background (i.e., it functions non-transparently). Dog whistling is a mechanism specifically designed to allow plausible deniability.¹²⁹

R-intentions and MCBs are useful ways of understanding how phenomena like dog whistling can mechanistically occur in language. If, as stated in Part 2, ideology is taken as an undefined set of beliefs which cohere under a given label, then MCB's are what we assume to be the beliefs that are shared between our individual belief sets and the belief sets of those in our relevantly intended audience. Each interlocutor has their own personal belief set and makes assumptions about what beliefs are shared by the other interlocutors. The dog whistler, and for my purposes also the Propagandizer*, takes advantage of this by being aware of at least some or all the contentious beliefs that are not shared by all members of the audience. The dog whistler then crafts their message such that Audience Member 1 comes to believe, "the speaker supports X but not Y", while Audience Member 2 comes to believe, "the speaker supports X and Y."

4.3.4 Intention in Propagandizing* as a Basis for Ethical Analysis

The reason for this explanation of dog whistling is to make clear why I feel intention is a critical component for Propagandizing*. The benefit of the comparison is to show that Propagandizing* is, like dog whistling, an intentional communicative act. If a secondary meaning that one was previously unaware of (or has previously been unaware of) is invoked unintentionally, then it alters the nature of that communicative act. It ceases to be a dog whistle. By not being an intentional dog whistle, or at least intentionally carrying out the characteristic features of a dog whistle regardless of whether one conceptualizes it as such, it's not actually a dog whistle.

¹²⁹ David Beaver and Jason Stanley, *The Politics of Language*, Princeton University Press, 2023, 5

As noted by Beaver and Stanley, dog whistling's purpose is to generate plausible deniability such that the speaker can claim they didn't mean to include the secondary meaning as part of their speech. That deniability is critical, as we do not generally judge people for speaking inappropriately when the basis for their inappropriate speech is grounded in ignorance of the covert associative meaning. The dog whistler intentionally crafts their message so that they can gain the benefits of saying both the explicit message and the attached covert secondary message while maintaining the veneer of plausible deniability of only claiming they intended whichever message(s) benefits them in that moment.

Propagandizing* and the propagandizers who engage in it are perpetrating the same linguistic maneuver, albeit on a broader scale and generally less individually targeted. As discussed in Part 1, one of the major challenges of propaganda literature is the pejorative model, i.e., the belief that propaganda is merely the speech in favor of ideology you disagree with. This problem has been a stumbling block for the literature as there are presently no models of propaganda which can both successfully escape the pejorative model while also providing a reliable and coherent method of identifying things as propaganda. However, I argue that by tying propaganda more closely to dog whistling literature, and by locating it under the SAS and MCB framework presented by Bach and Harnish we can address both concerns. Propagandizing* provides a clear and reliable framework for identifying things as propaganda without being reducible to the pejorative model.

Thus, the reason for building intention into Propagandizing*, and in large part the reason for creating a special kind of propagandizing and not applying this to propagandizing qua propagandizing, is to ensure that the thing being analyzed is propagandizing and that the person

who is engaging in it is choosing to do it. Here I treat Propagandizing* as the intentional subclass of a broader phenomenon of propagandizing. The ‘qua propagandizing’ cases include functional or systemic cases that do not involve deliberate deceptive intent. This in turn gives us significantly finer-grained distinctions we can use for subsequent ethical analysis. If we want to move beyond attempting to justify the ethics of propaganda exclusively in terms of the ideology it is advancing, then we need a model that allows us to look at cases wherein a person actively chooses to engage in the behavior. This added context provides a more robust basis for looking at the actions of individual actors rather than merely being forced to evaluate entire ideologies.

Conclusion

This dissertation has shown that propagandizing can be understood as a distinct discursive act within speech act theory. It posited that propaganda can be studied as not merely a product of a campaign, but as its own kind of speech act. This was done by advancing a minimal condition for propagandizing, that I called Propagandizing* and arguing that contra Austin, persuasion should not be considered a perlocutionary object or speech act of its own, but a perlocutionary aim. Thus, Propagandizing* is a single discursive strategy that can be employed in the effort to fulfill the perlocutionary aim of persuasion.

Part 1 traced the historical evolution of the concept through modern academic analysis. Doing so illuminated the fact that earlier accounts treat propaganda exclusively as a product or a campaign, without addressing the individual act of intentionally propagandizing. Part 2 provided accounts for some of the conceptual challenges facing theorists and contemporary accounts. Part 3 presented Propagandizing* in full and then justified my specific choices for its necessary conditions. Finally, in Part 4 I argued why I believe my model is sufficiently distinct from prior models and why I built out my intention framework as a compromise between the Gricean framework and the Bach and Harnish framework.

I should also acknowledge some of the fundamental limitations of my model. My model is a minimal condition. It is neither predictive of whether a propagandizer will succeed nor normative (but is political). As such, it may prove somewhat limited in scope. However, that is not a significant concern as its primary intended function is to serve as an intersubjective baseline.

The second limitation is that, as examined by Herman and Chomsky, not all propaganda requires intent. As such, my model provides no traction for analyzing cases wherein there is no

single propagandizer or organization of propagandizers. The third limitation is that the incredible variety of propaganda will inevitably exceed my model's level of precision. This is acceptable, however, as this was intended by design. New methods for developing and deploying propaganda will invariably arise and, as the historical overview shows, it is exceedingly difficult to build theories that are future-proofed against unknown future technology or cultural standards.

Fourth, the argument regarding perlocutionary aims is contentious. Austin's explanation of perlocutionary objects is infamously unclear, and thus it is not guaranteed that my reframing of persuasion as a perlocutionary aim sufficiently alters his original conception. However, I think that is a valuable question to be addressed by future research rather than a fundamentally limiting problem for my project.

The final limitation is that my model specifies an intentional form of propagandizing, and as such I have not yet demonstrated that Propagandizing* successfully captures the paradigmatic or even characteristic cases of *propaganda*. Further research, likely both empirical and theoretical, will be needed to test whether Propagandizing* aligns with core examples from across history, media, and culture. If Propagandizing* turns out to capture only a subset of propaganda, then that would necessarily reshape and limit how the model can be applied.

With that in mind, I believe this project not only allows but necessitates further research. First and foremost, I believe there is a high potential for Propagandizing* to present relevant or novel insights for ethical evaluations. By placing the propagandizer front and center in the analysis, we gain additional nuance in understanding the relative culpability of all the human links in the chain of a propaganda campaign.

Second, there could be interesting insights to be gained from a greater and more nuanced

understanding of speech act theory. These insights would be gained through a deeper analysis of my proposed distinction between perlocutionary objects and perlocutionary aims. If this distinction is one that holds, then it could be broadly beneficial to philosophers of language to examine how it could play out over other kinds of speech acts besides assertions.

Third, as demonstrated in Part 4 there is a substantially increasing body of empirical research being done on propaganda and related topics. Thus, it would be beneficial to attempt to study whether different models of propaganda yield different empirical or normative results, e.g., if you define propaganda using Marlin's, Stanley's (2015), or Propagandizing*, then does that meaningfully shift either the evidence itself or how we interpret that evidence.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, the primary reason for further analysis in general and for gaining a deeper understanding of the nuances of propagandizing and how it has shifted in the modern media ecosystem is that it could have long-term ramifications for societal norms regarding standards of communication. Whether Propagandizing* gains significant traction or not, there is high potential benefit in developing an account of propagandizing that clarifies the complex structure and function of propagandizing within the modern media landscape.

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