

Propaganda: Detailed Analysis: Visual & Audible Stimuli; Controlling the Masses: Socrates's "Noble Lie"; Brainwashing: People Change the Way They Think

II. Detailed Analysis:

Smith, Bruce L. "Propaganda." In *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*. 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979), 15:36-41:

Propaganda is the systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, banners, music). A relatively heavy emphasis on deliberateness and manipulateness distinguishes propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas. The propagandist has a specified goal or set of goals. To achieve these he deliberately presents a selection of facts, arguments, and displays of symbols in ways he thinks will have the most effects. To maximize effects, he may omit pertinent facts, and he may try to divert the attention of the reactors (the people whom he is trying to sway) from everything but his own propaganda. (p. 36)

To informed students of Communism, the term propaganda has yet another connotation, associated with the term agitation. The two terms were first used by the Marxist Georgy Plekhanov *plī-ka'-nof* and later elaborated upon by Lenin in a pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), in which he defined "propaganda" as the reasoned use of historical and scientific arguments to indoctrinate the educated and enlightened; he defined "agitation" as the use of slogans, parables, and half-truths to exploit the grievances of the uneducated and the unreasonable. Since he regarded both strategies as absolutely essential to political victory, he twinned them in the term agitprop.

Another related concept is that of brainwashing. This term usually means intensive political indoctrination. It may involve long political lectures or discussions, long compulsory reading assignments, sometimes in conjunction with efforts to reduce the reactor's resistance by exhausting him either physically through torture, overwork, or denial of sleep or psychologically through solitary confinement, threats, emotionally disturbing confrontations with interrogators or defected comrades, humiliation in front of fellow citizens, and the like.

The 20th-century propagandist with money and imagination can use a very wide range of signs, symbols, and media to convey his message. Signs are simply stimuli—"information bits" capable of stimulating, in some way, the human organism. These include sounds, such as words [peace, hope, change, etc.], music [campaign songs], posture [aristocratic bearing], visual signs (poster ["Yes We Can," "Change We Can Believe in," "Keeping America's Promise"]). (p. 37)

Among audiovisual media, television may be the most power. Television can convey a great many types of signs simultaneously; it can gain heavy impact from mutually reinforcing gestures, words, postures, and sounds and a background of symbolically significant leaders, celebrities, historic settings, flags, music, placards, staged assemblies or powerful people. (p. 38)

As far back as the early 1920s, there developed awareness among many social critics that the extension of the vote and of enlarged purchasing power to more and more of the ignorant or ill-educated meant larger and larger opportunities for demagogic propagandists to make headway by using fictions and myths, utopian appeals, and "the noble lie." (p. 39)

In the age of massive opinion researches, however, and with the aid of speech coaches and makeup artists and the magic impact of television, it has become increasingly possible for image makers to create front men who can affect the votes and other behavior of very large percentages of a national audience. (p. 40)

To appeal to the ego, the skilled propagandist will present the acts and thoughts that he desires to induce as if they were rational, advisable, wise, prudent, and expedient; in the same breath he says or implies that they are sure to produce pleasure and a sense of strength, that they are moral and righteous, and justifiable and humane.

A propagandist is wise if, in addition to reiterating his support of ideas and policies that he knows the reactors already believe in, he includes among his images a variety of symbols associated with parents and parent surrogates. Hence the appeal of such familistic symbolisms as “the fatherland” and “the mother country.” A talented and well-symbolized leader may achieve a parental or even godlike ascendancy (charisma) and magnify the impact of a message many times. (p. 41)

9. This article’s references to “the noble lie,” “familistic symbolisms,” and “godlike ascendancy” were developed by Socrates and reported by Plato in *The Republic*, book 3. The question being discussed between Socrates and Glaucon \glaw-con\ was how the disparate citizens of a society can be convinced to support those who are in power?
10. In the context of the twenty-first-century Zeitgeist of the United States, their populations made up of various personalities, ethnic backgrounds, languages, cultures, abilities, and IQs spread over 50 states comprised of 3,143 counties stretching from Alaska’s Aleutian Islands in the North Pacific to the Atlantic coast of Maine, much of what Socrates suggests has been adopted by its ruling elite.
11. Socrates determined that in order to control such a diverse group there was the need to establish “the noble lie.”
12. Here is a summary of what Socrates suggested as reported by Plato in book 3 of his *The Republic*:
13. Rulers of a city or nation must indoctrinate its citizens to believe a myth – “the noble lie” – about their collective origins. All citizens will be told from very early on they were born of the same mother: the earth.
14. Some have gold in their souls (the guardians), some have silver (the auxiliaries) and some have bronze or iron (the craftsmen). The type of metal that each person is made of determines the role that they will play in the society.
15. This is a complete lie but if the people can be led to believe that this is true then order will be maintained within the commonwealth and the guardians will retain their power.
16. If everyone’s origin can be traced back to mother earth, then loyalties to one’s immediate family will be weakened as it is gradually transferred over to every member of society – hence, “it takes a village.”
17. Since individuality is absorbed into the body politic, then ultimate loyalty must be directed to the state and its authority structure, the guardians, which has been predetermined by mother earth’s imputation of gold to their royal souls.
18. In this way the guardians will be recognized as those chosen by an irrefutable authority. The rest submit since their destiny has been predetermined by her as well. This is a fifth-century-B.C. version of evolution.

19. This is also a caste system, presently defined as “a rigid social stratification characterized by hereditary status, endogamy [marriage within one’s own class], and social barriers sanctioned by custom, law, or religion” (*M-WCD*, 11).
20. Socrates’s summation of these ideas has become known as “the noble lie,” a concept adopted in various ways by most ruling authorities over the centuries. Here is the text of his dialogue with Glaucon:

Plato. *The Republic*, book 3. In *The Dialogues of Plato*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett, *Great Books of the Western World*. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 7:340-41:

[414e] *Socrates*: I propose to communicate gradually, first to the rulers, then to the soldiers, and lastly to the people. They are to be told that their youth was a dream, and the education and training which they received from us, an appearance only; in reality during all that time they were being formed and fed in the womb of the earth, where they themselves and their arms and appurtenances were manufactured; when they were completed, the earth, their mother, sent them up; and so, their country being their mother and also their nurse, they are bound to advise for her good, and to defend her against attacks, and her citizens they are to regard as children of the earth and their own brothers.

[415] Citizens, we shall say to them in our tale, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold, wherefore also they have the greatest honour; others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron; and the species will generally be preserved in the children. But as all are the same original stock, a golden parent will sometimes have a silver son, or a silver parent a golden son. And God proclaims as a first principle to the rulers, and above all else, that there is nothing which they should so anxiously guard, or of which they are to be such good guardians, as of the purity of the race. (p. 340)

They should observe what elements mingle in their offspring; for if the son of a golden or silver parent has an admixture of brass and iron, then nature orders a transposition of ranks, and the eye of the ruler must not be pitiful towards the child because he has to descend in the scale and become a husbandman or artisan, just as there may be sons of artisans who having an admixture of gold or silver in them are raised to honour, and become guardians or auxiliaries. For an oracle says that when a man of brass or iron guards the State, it will be destroyed. Such is the tale; is there any possibility of making our citizens believe in it? (pp. 340-41)

Glaucon: Not in the present generation; there is no way of accomplishing this; but their sons may be made to believe in the tale, and their sons’ sons, and posterity after them.

Socrates: I see the difficulty; yet the fostering of such a belief will make them care more for the city and for one another. (p. 341)

21. The intended result of Socrates’s idea is that the elite of the city should be the ones to rule. So that neither the auxiliaries nor the craftsmen will revolt, they must be educated to accept the myth that their nonleadership abilities were determined by mother earth and their position in society is decided by those she has appointed as their guardians.
22. It is the contention of Socrates that such a lie must be told in order to maintain order in Athens. The lie is conveyed through propaganda. When the lie is believed by the reactors it results in brainwashing.
23. In order to change the way people think, the false teacher will use the following procedure: (1) Objective: get individuals, one by one, to believe the lie, (2) Means: Disinformation, (3) Result: They change the way they think, (4) Mechanics: they choose to believe the lie.

24. PRINCIPLE: Propaganda and disinformation are what they do to you; brainwashing is what you do to yourself.