Freedom from Falsehood

The press is allowing a large amount of deception to occur in the political arena and elsewhere. This is taking its toll. A crisis is at hand, because successful deception causes irrational decisions at the citizen level, which leads to irrational decisions at the national and global level.

A possible solution is creation of the new right to Freedom from Falsehood. This is the foundational element to the three additional elements of the Truth Test, Truth Ratings, and Predictive Ratings. Working together, these elements inoculate a majority of the population against false arguments, which will hopefully solve the problem.

The press not only has the responsibility of providing the people with the information they need to make decisions. It must also provide them with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But it is not, and so many incorrect decisions are being made. This it is happening today for two main reasons.

One reason is that many issues are too complex for the average person to come to a sound conclusion. They cannot use the facts to determine what would be reasonably best to do. An expert can, but the average person cannot. For example, how many citizens can look at the facts and determine what national fiscal and monetary policy is sound?

The second reason is many players on the world stage, especially politicians, are using a large collection of advanced manipulative techniques, combined with the prolonged pushing of emotional hot buttons, to manipulate the masses into supporting terribly unsound positions. For example, one politician may repeat ad nauseum that Gross Domestic Product is growing, the recession is over, and things are fine now, when in reality their "cure" has caused a crippling, looming deficit that is a far bigger problem, although Not Right Now.

As another example, a politician might insist we declare war on Lilliput because tiny people are a mortal threat to the world. When after a costly and deadly invasion it is discovered that not only are tiny people not a threat, but there are positively no Lilliputians six inches tall to be found, they may go into denial and proclaim, "We know they're there, but we can't look under every rock and leaf in the country." They may then proceed to "change the goal posts" and declare that we still retain the high moral ground after all, because we have freed the world from a ruthless dictatorship.

The masses are hoodwinked, because they too easily forget that's not why we declared war. And no one is pointing out that we are not in the business of ridding the world of dictators. If we were, we would start on our own doorstep, with Lillicuba.

Then the politician may change the goal posts once again when it is discovered we cannot so easily disengage, because once an applecart is overturned it takes a long time to turn it upright and put all the apples back in. So while that's happening, they implore over the airwaves that we must "stay

the course" and "not waver." But if the course was a bad one to begin with, how sound can this new goal post be?

Arguments like this are too complex for the average person to follow. This is especially true if they have become numbed by a continual beating of the war drum. To that must be added attacks on all who are "unpatriotic," when what they have done is not disobedience, but disagreement. And then add the hundreds of other ways to manipulate the people, including Lenin's favorite: *"A lie told often enough becomes the truth."*

The buzzing, busy modern world is chock full of such false arguments and manipulative campaigns. This leaves the general population quivering in a constant state of fear, uncertainty, and doubt, smothered by a near total loss of ability to make rational decisions based on fact. Thus the average person has no choice except to make far too many irrational decisions based on little more than intuition and emotion. Multiply this by millions of citizens, and you have a country making irrational decisions. Multiple it by dozens of countries, and you have a world making irrational decisions more often than not. And all this happens while the press stands quietly by, forwarding all those unsound arguments from peddlers to persons, in the name of freedom of speech and objectivity.

But one person's freedom stops where another's begins. People also have:

The Right to Freedom from Falsehood

This is a new and long overdue right that is just as necessary as the many other rights that citizens have given themselves, when it became apparent that if a crucial right was not granted in writing, then it was held by someone else.

Freedom from falsehood is the fifth freedom, after Franklin Roosevelt's four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

If the people do not have the right to freedom from falsehood, that is the same as saying it is okay for those in positions of power to manipulate citizens by the use of lies, fallacies, the sin of omission, and all the forms of propaganda and thought control available. This of course is precisely how Stalin, Lenin, Hitler, Pol Pot, and thousands of other dictators or parties in power have controlled (and in many cases eventually destroyed) their populations. It is what George Orwell warned so darkly against in *Animal Farm* and *1984*. It is also how the population is being controlled right now by those who seek to further their own interests, rather than those of the people.

A "servant" is a life form created by *Homo sapiens* to do something useful, such as a government, an organization, or a robot. Those working for a servant are also a servant.

Falsehood from servants must be severely punished, because it is just as destructive to society as any other type of crime. In particular, falsehood from servants in positions of high power, such as politicians, the military, and industry, is more destructive than common street crime by a factor running into the millions.

If the people do not have freedom from falsehood, then falsehood in all its Machiavellian and Orwellian forms will continue to appear again and again, because it is the surest road to *get* to power, to *increase* your power, and to *stay* in power.

Therefore if the press does not provide the people with Freedom from Falsehood, then it is an accomplice to the crime. It stands idly by, hands deep in its pockets, while those who practice the dark philosophy of "the end justifies the means" win battle after battle after battle, until….

The press long ago became the communicator and conscience of humanity. A *free* press remains the defender of freedom of last resort. It is the one thing we can rely on if those we have elected start to fail us. A press which does not continually and vigorously defend all fundamental freedoms is a press that is writing its own obituary, page after page after page, until….

We now turn from pointing out the underlying cause of the problem to delving into a possible solution. How can the press and all those working with it provide the people with the Freedom from Falsehood they so urgently need?

One way is by adoption of the Deception Inoculation Package, which contains one foundational element, the right to Freedom from Falsehood, and three supporting elements. The goal of the package is to inoculate the people against unsound arguments, so that a large percentage of the population becomes immune to them. Think of each of the following solution elements as a strong type of vaccination in itself. Each element is a systemic medication that society must take immediately, before the plague of deception spreads further.

The three elements are described only briefly here. They are:

1. The Truth Test

The test consists of four simple questions that allow someone to tell sound arguments from unsound ones. In particular, if applied to political campaign statements it would lead to electing much better decision makers, and if applied to legislative debate it would cause infinitely better decisions, because people could in most cases tell what was true and what was a sham.

The four questions are:

✔ 1. What is the argument?

✔ 2. Are any common fallacies present?

✔ 3. Are the premises true, complete, and relevant?

✔ 4. Does each conclusion follow from its premises?

The Truth Test lets critical minds slash through the fog of rhetoric, complexity, lies, and irrelevance. It can handle over 90% of the arguments the average person receives in seconds or minutes. The rest take longer or an expert.

One fallacy to always look for when using the Truth Test is the *sin of omission*. This occurs when a premise or conclusion of importance is omitted.

An example of this is the argument used above that "Gross Domestic Product is growing, the recession is over, and things are fine now." This commits the sin of omission. It leaves out the much more important fact that looming ahead is a crippling deficit. Thus things are not fine after all.

The sin of omission is one of the strongest weapons available for promoting falsehood, because it works so well and does not involve an outright lie. Lies are not culturally acceptable. Sadly, the sin of omission is. We hope this will change.

The Truth Test comes first so people can more easily judge the truth of arguments themselves. It puts them in the driver's seat, so they can better judge and more quickly support the rest of the solution elements. Once people can no longer be fooled by unsound arguments, they will elect better leaders, who will make better decisions.

Universal use of the Truth Test is crucial, because the solution elements are designed to appeal to objective logic. Universal *truth literacy* is just as important to society as reading literacy, because if people cannot "read" the truth, then they are blind to what the truth really is.

The Truth Test can be written up in pamphlet form and read in a few hours. With a few more hours of practice, referring to the pamphlet as real arguments are encountered, the average person now has immunity to false everyday arguments, such as advertisements and political rhetoric. But more complex arguments would require the next two elements.

2. Truth Ratings

Credit ratings quantify the creditworthiness of a person, organization, or government. Product ratings, such as those by Consumer Reports, quantify the worthiness of products. Both are widely used. Truth Ratings would quantify the truthfulness of important arguments, such as those in political statements, articles, and so on.

A truth rating is the probability an argument is true. For example a few days after a presidential debate, its truth ratings would come out. They might say that candidate A averaged 45% true, while candidate B averaged 70%. Guess which candidate would probably win?

If the organization doing the rating was widely credible a race to the top would begin. *Politicians would compete to see who could be the most truthful and therefore the most helpful.* Campaigns would become based on reason rather than emotion. In a similar manner, a race to the top would begin in many areas of society where less than the truth has long prevailed, such as politics, advertising, the appeals of special interest groups, and to a growing degree, the news.

In a nutshell:

> *A Truth Rating is the probability an argument is true. Certified organizations would provide the public with truth ratings for important pubic arguments, such as key political speeches and statements. Citizens could then far more rationally pick the best leaders and support the best arguments. The consequence would be much better leadership results.*
>
> *The goal of Truth Ratings is the general rejection of unsound public arguments.*

No one can become an expert on many topics and spend hundreds and sometimes thousands of hours analyzing each important argument. Therefore the public has no choice but something like Truth Ratings.

Instead of individuals each taking on the difficult task of deciding the truth of an argument, organizations do. They even go one step further by *quantifying* the truthfulness of the argument, so that the public can make their own final judgment. For example, the argument "You're either for us or against us" [1] would receive a truth rating of zero, because it highly fallacious. You can also be undecided, neutral, or both for and against, as were many of the

---

[1] On September 20, 2001 President George W. Bush addressed a joint session of congress with these exact words: *"Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."* That sentence, in many forms, was widely repeated. This "false dilemma" fallacy carried the day and the United States went to a war that was later proven unjustified. But if the Truth Test and Truth Ratings had been present, the argument would not have succeeded, or would have never been offered.

countries that supported some of the Bush regime's Iraq "war" positions and rejected others.

If the organization doing the rating was credible and the public trusted the truth ratings, a race to the top would begin. Politicians would compete to see who could be the most truthful *and therefore the most helpful*. Campaigns would become based on reason rather than emotion. In a similar manner, so would many areas of decision making, leading to much better decision making at all levels of society: the individual, the home, the community, the nation, and the world.

Consumer's Union, an independent nonprofit organization established in 1936, is a highly successful similar mechanism. It releases thousands of product ratings a year to its millions of members. Consumer's Union publishes Consumer Reports Magazine and lately has an even greater outreach on www.ConsumerReports.org. The website has this to say:

> "Consumer Reports® and ConsumerReports.org® are published by Consumers Union, an expert, independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to work for a fair, just, and safe marketplace for all consumers and to empower consumers to protect them selves. To achieve this mission, we test, inform, and protect. To maintain our independence and impartiality, CU accepts no outside advertising, no free test samples, and has no agenda other than the interests of consumers. CU supports itself through the sale of our information products and services, individual contributions, and a few noncommercial grants. Consumers Union is governed by a board of 18 directors, who are elected by CU members and meet three times a year. CU's President, James Guest, oversees a staff of more than 450.

> "**How we test** – Our National Testing and Research Center, in Yonkers, N.Y., is the largest nonprofit educational and consumer product testing center in the world. We buy all the products we use as test samples. We receive no special treatment. We accept no free samples. If a manufacturer sends us a free product, we return it.

> "More than 100 testing experts work in seven major technical departments—appliances, auto test, baby & child, electronics, foods, health & family, and recreation & home improvement, while more than 25 research experts work in three departments—product acquisition, product information, and statistics & quality management. In addition, we have more than 150 anonymous shoppers throughout the country. We test cars and trucks at our fully equipped auto-test facility in East Haddam, Conn. We also survey our millions of readers to bring you information on the reliability of hundreds of auto models and of major products such as appliances and electronic gear. Reader-survey data also help us rate insurance and other consumer services.

> "**How we inform** – Consumer Reports magazine alone has about 4 million subscribers. We reach millions more consumers through ConsumerReports.org, our CR Money Adviser newsletter, our health newsletter and www.ConsumerReportsOnHealth.org, radio programs, television programs, auto price services, and New Car Buying Kit."

Judging by the success of the credit rating industry and Consumer's Union, Truth Ratings would be just as useful and successful. There are many more details to consider, such as startup, rater certification, and avoiding corruption. But these are tactical details that can be dealt with later.

3. Predictive Ratings

This is not easy to describe, so please bear with us. A Predictive Rating is a rating that accurately predicts how well a plan of action will achieve its objectives. For example, suppose a legislative bill had the objective of reducing the national debt to a certain amount by the year 2010. A *rater* would rate the proposed bill on its probability of success, which might be 50% to 70%. If it was total hogwash it might receive a rating of 0% to 10%. In both cases, back it would go to committee because the rule was no bills should go to the floor until they have at least a 90% chance of success. The result would be much better plans of action, especially on complex issues.

Raters are "calibrated" by *calibrators* who specialize in doing only that. A calibrator examines a rater's past history of ratings and outcomes, and does a statistical calculation of how well the rater did, on the average. That average becomes the rater's *predictive certification*, valid until it expires in a few years. For example, if their predictions were right 80% of the time, then they would get an official certification of 80%. Now that rater could say, "According to my analysis, this bill has a 50% to 70% chance of working. My predictive certification, which I worked very hard to get, almost guarantees this will be a correct prediction 80% of the time. Because of that you can trust me."

But the committee might decide to pay more and use another rater who was right 95% of the time, because this is a very important bill. In such a manner there would be a race to the top, as raters competed to see who could be right the most often. Their analyses would be meticulous and unbiased, because if not their rating would suffer the next time they came up for calibration. They would check their work for errors over and over. They would hire the best brains they could find. And so on.

The results would be enormously beneficial to all those affected by anything the raters rated. Bogus bills, such as those loaded with pork or doomed to failure, would be thrown out the door. Bills with fallacious arguments would meet the same fate. All in all, decision making bodies would at last be much harder to manipulate and control by special interests, such as corporations and their many allies.

Next we get into a more detailed definition of Predictive Ratings.

Truth Ratings are not enough to increase rejection of unsound public arguments to a high enough level to solve the problem. They do work well on many arguments stating a position. But they fail miserably on large proposals, such as congressional bills. This is because proposals try to predict the future. They say if we do A, then B will occur because of C, although one must consider the effect of D, and if E happens, then we must do F. And so on. This complexity and uncertainty puts large proposed solutions in a class of arguments that needs very special treatment.

This is what Predictive Ratings provides. It requires separation of responsibility into calibrators, solution raters, and solution builders. **Calibrators** determine how good raters are by calibrating them, using the rater's history of ratings. **Solution raters** rate how good solutions are. **Solution builders** build solutions and ask raters to rate them. A **predictive rating** is the probability and confidence a proposed solution will solve a problem.

Very briefly, Predictive Ratings works this way. Since we are most familiar with the US congressional system, it is used as an example.

1. Raters apply for calibration – An organization with a stable process and a history of predicting how well proposed solutions will work applies to be calibrated. An example of such an organization is the National Academy of Sciences (**NAS**), created in 1863 to advise the US government on scientific and technical matters. There are many other such review or advisory bodies.

2. The rater is calibrated – The organization's history of predictions is statistically analyzed to determine its past average accuracy and trend. Its process definition is also examined. Using this, they are given a *Certified Predictive Calibration* (**CPC**), valid until it expires in a few years. This applies only to similar problem domains. For example, NAS might receive a 70% CPC for general scientific problems. This means that 70% or more of the solution ratings they make in the immediate future will probably be correct. Calibration is a form of certification.

3. Raters make ratings – A calibrated organization then makes ratings of proposed solutions. Ratings must be in *calibration form*, which is solution A has a B to C percent chance of solving problem D with a confidence level of E. The problem and solution must be strictly defined in unambiguous terms.

For example, NAS might review a proposed congressional bill designed to solve the national wetlands loss problem by 2010. It might conclude the bill has only a 30% to 50% chance of working with a confidence level of 90%. This means that if they rated ten problems identical to this one, 90% of the time 3 to 5 of them would work.

Raters also always rate the "Do nothing" alternative. The standard solution form is "doing nothing (alternative A) has a B to C percent chance of solving problem D with a confidence level of E." This allows comparing proposed solutions to doing nothing. The results are often very sobering.

If a do nothing rating comes out *low*, such a 0% to 20% chance of solving the problem if nothing is done, then the existence of the problem has been proven. This is valuable knowledge.

4. Ratings cause solutions to be considered good enough or in need of improvement – Continuing the above example, since NAS has a certified CPC of 70%, which is pretty good, congress decides to go back to the drawing board and design a better bill. After awhile, congress sets a standard: all bills going to the floor must receive at least a 90% chance of success rating with a 95% confidence level from a rater with at least a 70% CPC.

5. Quality of solutions increases – Solution builders have a brand new positive feedback loop: how good a proposed solution is. Feedback on chance of success and why allows them to learn and improve their next proposed solution, which receives more feedback, which causes more learning, and so on, in a virtuous spiral. A similar positive feedback loop occurs for raters as they strive to improve their CPC in old or new domains. Even calibrators encounter a positive feedback loop, as they monitor the results of those they have rated and compare that to the CPCs they calculated.

6. Adoption resistance decreases – Adoption resistance occurs when an agent perceives a solution will probably leave the agent worse off, so they resist adopting the solution. This can be overcome with two steps: showing the problem must be solved and that the solution will solve the problem. This is the same as saying that doing nothing will leave the agent worse off and the solution will leave the agent better off than if nothing was done. The "do nothing resistance syndrome" is avoided.

For example, a congressional committee could ask the National Academy of Scientists (NAS) to pass judgment on how real the wetlands loss problem is, and hand them a definition of the problem. After study, NAS might conclude they are 95% certain the problem has an 80 to 100 percent chance of occurring if nothing is done.

The committee could then work on a solution until it passed the congressional standard mentioned above. At this point, the committee has reasonable proof the problem exists and their solution is a good one. If multiple solutions exist, they pick the one with the highest rating. If two have the same rating, they may select one with the toss of a coin, or consider combining them to get an even higher rating.

They can now refute any and all rationalizations against their position by carefully pointing to the problem definition, the solution definition, and NAS's certification of both. They can also very effectively counter stonewalling by arguing that if you are against this bill, then you are effectively saying that NAS has made a mistake. But in fact NAS is certified and it is you that have made a mistake, unless you too are certified or can present hard proof to make NAS change its mind. They can issue a fact based appeal (instead of using emotion or rationalization) to the public for support against such rationalizations and resistance, using ratings as proof their position is sound. In many or most cases, a groundswell of public support would result.

After a few such episodes, congress might settle down into an entirely new mode, one no longer characterized by gridlock, but a new one where all engaged in a virtuous cycle to see who could produce the bills with the highest ratings. This would be best done by cooperation. If it works for congress, it would work for the executive branch too. Solution rating bodies would become a new check and balance in the classical democratic system of government: an encourager of quality, an arbiter of solution conflict, and an extinguisher of adoption resistance.

Predictive Ratings is not cheap. It requires serious commitment. It works best on hard to solve problems that if not solved will cause huge losses or catastrophe. Its benefits are:

1. Improvement of the quality of solutions to complex problems by an order of magnitude. This occurs through the mechanism of **organizational learning**. This effect generally takes years to occur, so long term commitment is required.

2. Greatly reduced delay in solution design **feedback loops**. This increases the speed of solution building.

3. If a problem's do nothing alternative is rated low, its solution rating is high, and the rater's calibrated predictive accuracy is high, *there is now proof that a solution is needed and will work*. This can greatly **reduce adoption resistance**.

4. It works even if the problem is one that has **never been solved before.**

The chief reason for poor solutions to difficult, large, complex system problems is the long delay from solution design to outcome. By the time data showing how good the solution actually was becomes available, the solution designers may have moved on to another job, another problem, and so on. The organization itself may have moved on to new problems and opportunities. The very mood of the people and press may have quivered or transformed. By the time outcome feedback finally arrives for many solutions of national or international importance, few of the original solution designers may care or be present anymore. For some problems the delay is generations long.

Thus long delay makes organizational learning painfully slow or impossible. The magic of Predictive Ratings is achieved by nearly eliminating this delay. The solution designer finds out right away how good their solution probably is. Feedback that used to require years or decades is reduced to weeks or months. This accelerates organizational learning by an order of magnitude, which in turn promises to increase solution quality by an order of magnitude.

Predictive Ratings is similar to the credit rating industry, which predicts the probable future repayment ability of people, firms, and governments. Both make predictions of future outcomes using a rigorous, repeatable process. Just as credit ratings are successfully used to choose the best acceptable credit policy, so too can solution ratings be used to choose the best acceptable solution policy.

Predictive Ratings is a simple, elegant solution to an age-old problem. It can be used in many places: international organizations, national, state and local governments, business, academia, and anywhere the need for predicting how well a proposed solution to a difficult, important problem will work.

That's the problem and an example of a deep solution. It will hopefully give a few movers and shakers some new ideas.

The solution may appear extreme at first glance. But then again, how extreme is the problem? How long has it remained unsolved? Is it getting worse? We feel the answer to all three questions is yes, and so strong medicine is more than justified.

Taking our medicine won't be easy. But neither was the invention of democracy.