

**The Psychology of Deceit:
Implications for Record-Keeping by Organizations**
Owen Ambur, May 19, 2002

Lest there be any doubt about the pervasiveness of deceit, Charles Ford lays it to rest in asserting in the title of the first chapter of his book: “Everybody Lies.” Elucidating on that point in the introduction to *Lies! Lies! Lies! The Psychology of Deceit*, he proffers:

... lying is part of the interface between a person’s internal and external worlds ... there is an internal world composed of beliefs, fantasies, and perceived realities, and there is an external world of shared beliefs, or “reality”... we lie if we deceive others as to what we believe in our personal internal world, or we engage in self-deception if we distort or change information as it passes from the external world into the internal world... lying, self-deception, and the assessment of reality are closely related to one another. (p. xii)

Ford concludes his introduction to the topic of lying by suggesting *the most important lesson we can learn is how we use lies to deceive ourselves* (p. xiii). It seems strange that we would mislead even ourselves but self-deception is one of many paradoxes cited by Ford, who observes:

... lies are a ubiquitous phenomenon. Much of our psychic energy is spent sorting out the day-to-day, hour-to-hour information that bombards us... Everyone continuously shares and receives information and must simultaneously evaluate both the effect of the information transmitted and the accuracy of information received. Only the foolish and the naive accept as true everything that is said or written. (p. 3)

Addressing the impact of one type of exaggeration, commercial advertising, as an example of myriad forms of deceit, Ford notes:

Puffery suggests the superiority of [an] advertised product through implication rather than by literal claims... research indicates that puffery claims are effective and influence consumers [and] the consumer tends to keep believing the claims of puffery after purchasing the product, even if the claims are unjustified... People need to believe they made the right choice in buying the product, so they deceive themselves into believing that the product is superior! (pp. 8 & 9)

With further reference to the effectiveness of deceitful advertising, Ford avers:

Implications (including deceptive messages) about products are frequently delivered through nonverbal communication... Interestingly, but not surprisingly, these nonverbal cues are often more effective than just words because they evoke more associative thoughts and fantasies than words alone. Among the nonverbal messages found in advertisements are pictures and music. (p. 9) ... subtle advertising is not only very effective, but also, because of the lack of overt promises, almost impossible to regulate. (p. 10)

Turning to politics, where deceit is so commonly accepted as to be a major focus of humor, Ford says:

Although it is by no means certain that politicians lie more frequently than other people, there can be little doubt that politicians do deceive. Perhaps because of their high visibility and the fact that their actions are *recorded* by the media, they are caught in the act more frequently and thus appear to lie more frequently than to other persons... Why do politicians [and others] make false statements that are ultimately certain to do them more harm than good? ... To explain such lapses in truth-telling, one must search for psychological explanations rather than political motives. (p. 11, emphasis added)

Note that Ford suggests the key difference between politicians and the rest of us is that they are more likely to be caught in their lies because of the fact their words and deeds are “recorded”. Whereas politicians shade the truth to impress others, Ford suggests a different primary motivation for the rest of us:

Lying becomes an essential component of the process of individuation (i.e., establishment of personal autonomy and comfortable interpersonal relationships)... Perhaps the most important reason that people lie, however, is that the lie facilitates self-deception; people lie to others in order to lie to themselves. (p. 20)

Lying (pun intended) on the continuum between the masses, which are the target of the politician’s lies, and ourselves as individuals, who are the primary targets for all of us, are the smaller groups with which we associate. Likewise, lying on the continuum between lies and the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth are secrets “which may be true or false, but which are accepted as truth by the in-group with which they are shared. As Ford points out:

A secret is something known to one or more persons but deliberately hidden from one or more other persons... Secrets are often closely related to lies... By withholding information, the secret-holder may knowingly create false beliefs in others... Secrets serve to maintain privacy ... and also to support the functions of a group. Shared secrets increase bonding, maintain cohesiveness, and protect family or organizational structure... intimacy requires honest communication and a shared understanding of knowledge, which are obviously impaired by keeping secrets. (pp. 32 & 33)

With respect to self versus others, Ford notes:

Greenwald suggests that the individual has the cognitive bias of egocentricity; that is, one’s self is the focus of knowledge. An individual tends to see himself or herself as responsible for desired outcomes but not for undesired ones. Thus, there is resistance to new or different information, which may be selectively ignored (cognitive conservatism). (p. 35)

Needless to say, it is far easier to ignore information that is not clearly and explicitly recorded. In support of the requirements for secrecy and cognitive conservatism, Ford observes:

... many of our cognitive functions (information processing) are like a software program – devoid of content per se, but directing the input and use of new information. In addition, some of the information may be stored that is not readily accessible to conscious control... There is growing evidence that neuroanatomical or physiological factors may play an important role in the compartmentalizing of thoughts and feelings. Thus, in a very concrete fashion ... conflicting data may be stored in different “files” that do not interact with one another. (p. 37)

Compartmentalization is a common, if not necessary feature of large organizations. It serves to insulate individuals from complexities exceeding the capacity of human comprehension. Similarly, ego defense mechanisms serve to protect us from information that exceeds our personal capacities to accept failure. As described by Ford (pp. 38 - 43), a number of the personal ego defense mechanisms have obvious parallels in organizational behavior:

Denial represents a rejection of reality and of facts that are readily verified.

Delusional projection refers to frank delusions about external reality. Internal needs massively distort reality.

Distortion involves grossly reshaping external reality to meet one’s inner needs.

Projection is the process of attributing one’s own unacknowledged thoughts or feelings to another person.

Schizoid fantasy is a mechanism in which there is a denial and retreat from problems in the external world. It serves to provide partial gratification of unmet needs for interpersonal relationships or to bolster self-esteem.

Dissociation is the mechanism by which one compartmentalizes ideas, memories, or experiences that may elicit intolerable feelings, moving them out of conscious awareness.

Displacement describes the process of moving one’s fears and concerns from a highly conflictive and anxiety-provoking situation to one that is more comfortable.

Intellectualization, isolation, and rationalization are terms used to describe closely related and often interlocking ego mechanisms. Individuals are aware of the external facts of the situation but isolate emotion and often attempt to provide reasons to explain their behavior.

Repression refers to a process of blocking from consciousness those ideas or feelings that provoke anxiety or are painful to experience. Repression may include lapses of memory or the failure to acknowledge one’s feelings.

Suppression differs from repression in that one consciously or subconsciously excludes thoughts or feelings from the conscious but retrieves the memories and deals with them at

the appropriate time.

Humor is the ability to be playful and to laugh at oneself. It differs from wit, which may be a sadistic attack on another person. The person who has learned to use humor can accept personal failings (“nobody is perfect”) without devastating loss of self-esteem.

Ford cites Vaillant in explaining a theoretical four-level hierarchy of the maturity of ego defense mechanisms – ranging from Narcissistic as the least mature, to Immature, to Neurotic, and finally to Mature – with suppression and humor ranking among the most mature. (pp. 43 & 44).

Interestingly, he notes:

... the level of maturity ... appears highly correlated with the degree of self-deception. With level-one defenses (narcissistic), reality is distorted or disavowed. Self-deception at this level is so great that it interferes with reality testing. With level-two defenses (immature), the individual remains largely unaware of thoughts and feelings that are acted on with maladaptive behavior or that are disavowed and projected to another individual. With level-three defenses (neurotic), self-deception is largely manifested by the compartmentalization of mental activity. There is a considerable increase in one’s awareness, ideas, and emotions, but the ambivalence of a conflictive issue may be kept out of consciousness by “splitting.” Active self-deception is most readily identified at this level. Self-deception also occurs with defense mechanisms at level four (mature), but it is under more conscious control and is more adaptive. (p. 45)

Judged against this four-level hierarchy, it is evident that many large organizations might be described as “neurotic” – in that they have divided up responsibilities and workflows so as to “split” problematic issues in such a way as to effectively insulate individuals from having to engage in healthy, adaptive behavior to accommodate them. At the same time the bureaucracy effectively insulates the organization as a whole from even recognizing existence of the problems – until it is too late to do anything about them. Ford notes:

To some degree, self-deception is necessary for good mental health... However, deceiving oneself to the extent that basic reality testing is impaired is clearly detrimental. (p. 45)

That is true not only for individuals but for organizations as well. In addition, it is noteworthy that the uses of suppression and humor as “mature” forms of ego defense are equally applicable to organizations as to individuals. In other words, in support of the creativity and innovation required for organizational success in dynamic environments, individuals within organizations must be free to try and fail, without suffering career-limiting consequences. Of course, too, failures must not be so severe as to threaten the viability of the organization itself. However, the point in this context is that failure is not denied or hidden from sight. Instead, it is acknowledged and then suppressed, so as to avoid interfering with more productive pursuits, and/or “laughed off” in the tactful and good-natured processing of “lessons learned” for future benefit.

Turning to the biology of deceit, Ford notes: “... the presence of consciously determined deception is presumed evidence of a sense of self.” (p. 50) With respect to ego defenses, he

observes, “Face-saving tactics have also been noted among other primates, and ... it is tempting to regard these behaviors as collective lies because one party deceives and the other acts as if it has been deceived.” (p. 51) Doesn't that sound a lot like the way many individual human beings as well as many organizations interact with each other? It also seems to capture fairly well the essence of many commercial advertising and marketing efforts. Ford continues:

If deception and the detection of deception are effective survival strategies of an individual, there should be natural selection for increasingly better methods of deceit and its detection. These strategies for the individual appear to be in contrast to the evolution of social relationships of higher species and humans that are characterized by shared communications, trust, and altruistic behaviors. (p. 52)

In other words, our natural tendencies to be egocentric are tempered by the fact that we need each other to survive. As Ford puts it:

Reciprocal altruism can be viewed as a form of symbiosis, with each party helping the other parties while helping itself. An immediate payoff (reciprocation) is not needed if the potential for long-term benefit exists... several conditions must be met for such reciprocity to exist. These conditions include long life span, low dispersal rates, individual recognition, and a degree of mutual dependence. These factors increase the probability of multiple encounters with the same network of individuals. (p. 52 & 53)

It is interesting to reflect upon the fact that the networks of relationships supporting human existence have evolved over eons of natural selection, whereas the networks that comprise the Internet have arisen merely in the past decade or so. Thus, it comes as no surprise that computer-assisted networks are relatively immature. On the other hand, what is impressive, if not breath-taking, is how rapidly such networks are capable of evolving and maturing within the relatively unconstrained environment of cyber space. Technology combined with the creativity of the human spirit places the cycle of natural selection in a time warp, as well as a space warp. People, ideas, and kernels of knowledge come into contact, if not conflict, with each other far more easily and frequently than possible in the physical world. The results may be good or evil, and not merely on the basis of human intents and motivations. The law of unintended consequences comes into play as well.

With reference to the positive impacts of social networks, Ford notes that “A partial list of altruistic behaviors includes ... sharing knowledge.” (p. 53) In the parlance of “knowledge management,” knowledge may be tacit or explicit. Knowledge that is tacit exists only in the minds of people, while that which is explicit has been documented in records. Although it is amazing how fast rumors can spread and how persistent “urban legends” can be, there are natural limits on the sharing of tacit knowledge that do not exist with explicit knowledge. In the first place, since tacit knowledge depends upon a relative degree of secrecy, it is logically self-defeating – because knowledge that is widely shared ceases to be “secret.” Moreover, the more it is shared, the less the likelihood that it will avoid documentation, in which case it automatically becomes explicit, subject to further sharing and easier to scrutinize in the context of “reality” as documented in other records.

By definition, lying and deceit involve denial of reality with the hope, if not the expectation of “getting away with it,” i.e., not being held accountable for the impact on others. Accountability is about “keeping score,” and keeping score means creating and maintaining records that faithfully document reality. Speaking of the psychological and sociological dynamics of unbalanced exchanges of value, Ford notes:

On the surface, cheating – that is, taking without giving – benefits the one who cheats. One strategy is to learn to be a subtle cheater, repaying with less than what was received. However, when individuals become known as cheaters, resentment will probably cause others to reduce their assistance to those individuals. Thus, the social group ... develops methods to control cheaters. (p. 53)

By definition, “controlling” cheaters involves making explicit the actual values being exchanged and, to the extent that such exchanges are ongoing over longer periods of time, doing so in records that persist in unaltered form for equally long periods. One of the obvious yet often unrecognized consequences of information technology systems is that they create “traces” (records) of human activity. Thus, the potential and the challenge is to use information technology efficiently and effectively to create, manage, and maintain electronic records so as to facilitate the free and fair exchange of values among human beings over extended periods of time. Countervailing against realization of that potential, however, is a powerful psychological barrier. As Ford notes:

... self-deception may have evolved a mechanism to facilitate “other-deception.” People lie more effectively if they “believe” what they are saying. (p. 54)

Our ability to believe what we are saying and, thus, lie effectively to ourselves and others depends upon the lack of records clearly belying our self-serving false beliefs. In other words, reliable documentation of reality constrains our ability to be creative in our beliefs and, at least in the short run, that may be contrary to our psychological, if not our physical well-being. Delving more deeply into the neurological syndromes underlying deceit in some individuals, Ford points out:

... confabulation [is] the production of erroneous and fabricated verbal material caused by an inability to be self-critical rather than a deliberate effort to mislead... In its more common form ... it is a transient, limited, and unspectacular response to a direct question... The provoked response may be quite nonsensical, but the patient has little awareness of any absurdity. Confabulation is assumed to be an effort to fill memory gaps, and although it may be a prominent symptom in patients who have memory deficits ... it is very similar to the ways in which healthy persons compensate for memory gaps. (p. 58)

Spontaneous confabulation is a less common and more psycho-pathological phenomenon. Patients with this condition impulsively provide more spectacular and spontaneous false information... It has been suggested that the major difficulty for these patients is the ability to organize the context of their memories. In other words, memories from the past may be confused with memories of the present. (p. 59)

Mercer and his colleagues attributed confabulation to the coincidence of four factors: 1) the belief that a response is required, 2) an absence of memory for the answer, 3) the availability of and overlearned and affectively significant response, and 4) a defective ability to monitor and self-correct for inaccurate responses. (p. 59)

Joseph suggests that this phenomenon may occur in self-deception because of functional, rather than anatomical, disconnections. Thus, “gap filling” may provide an explanation for behaviors or impulses that seem reasonable, innocuous, and accurate but that are erroneous. (p. 60)

In other words, any plausible answer may be better than no answer, at least as far as the psychological comfort of the individual in question is concerned. Moreover, for some individuals, Ford suggests that visual information may play an especially important role: “... the person with borderline personality disorder may have difficulties separating essential from extraneous visual information and retrieving complex material from memory.” (p. 64)

Ford propounds that most people are not “born liars” and that there is a developmental process by which individuals learn to lie. With respect to the developmental process, he notes:

Some degree of reality testing must be present, and secondary thought processes must be sufficiently developed in order to distinguish between the inner world and the outer world. (p. 69)

... children cannot lie before age 4 years because they do not know the truth... after age 5 years, the concept of lying becomes clear, and the child has a greater ability to distinguish external reality from fantasy. (p. 71)

... in addition to being a developmental issue related to separation or autonomy, lying may play a developmental role in the growth of self-regulation. (p. 73)

Speaking of gender differences, Ford observes:

... women who are lying are more likely than men who are lying to make comments that are less judgmental and more neutral (more evasive and noncommittal) than when they are telling the truth. (p. 76)

In other words, women are more likely to shade the truth in favor of others so as to foster social unity. The result may be positive for the “in-group” but, depending upon the degree of denial of reality, may be negative for “outsiders” and/or for the success of the group as a whole. In any event, one point to be taken from this observation is that it is easier to tell the truth when the direct and immediate impact upon oneself and others is obviously positive. The other side of the coin is the degree to which the statement “what we don’t know can’t hurt us” may be false. In that respect, it is important to distinguish between psychological versus physical, economic, and social well-being, i.e., between internal (mental) and external (reality) results. Living in a fantasy world is commonly associated with immaturity. However, as Ford points out, so too is “brutal”

honesty:

Although uncensored truth telling in small children may be cute ... the latency-age child is often encouraged not to tell the truth in ... situations [that may be embarrassing to others] ... the concepts of social customs and “white lies” are introduced (often simultaneously with prescriptions against lying). The child is told not to say anything that will embarrass someone else ... even if it is true.¹ (p. 76)

... one of the turning points from adolescence to adulthood is learning that openness often is cruelty and saying what is in one’s mind is an indulgence that no adult can “afford”. (p 77)

As a consequence, latency-age children may be introduced to mental “double book-keeping” activities in order to keep part of their knowledge out of public view, even if it requires considerable deceit. (p. 77)

Similar behavior is common in organizations. Indeed, it has even been dictum in the records management profession that someone must “declare” documentation to be a “record” before it can be considered to be one. In fact, in classic double-speak, the term “nonrecord” has even been used to describe records considered not to be records. Moreover, “double book-keeping” is the classic way to commit fraud. When endorsed by the records management profession, it becomes a highly ironic form of groupthink, appropriately termed the “Capone Consultancy Method” of records management.²

It is not surprising that groups of people engage in collective deceit. Reiterating the theme established in the title of the first chapter of his book, Ford asserts: “... *everyone lies; the difference among people is the frequency, target, and degree of those lies.*” (p. 87, emphasis added) On the other hand, he notes:

A basic characteristic of human activity is that human relationships and civilization depend on shared accurate information. A person who possesses more information (knowledge) is usually more powerful in controlling both the environment and other persons... If information is associated with power, then one way to affect one’s power relationships with other people is to reduce their power by providing them with

¹ The taboo against truths that may embarrass others is stronger in some cultures than in others. For example, when it appeared that exposure of scandals associated with the Salt Lake Olympics might spill over to the previous winter games as well, Japanese officials simply destroyed the records associated with the Nagano Olympics. Saving face trumped knowing the truth, hands down.

² I first used the term “Capone Consultancy Method” in a presentation to the Northern Virginia chapter of ARMA on the Ides of March 2000. See slide and speaker’s notes <http://ambur.net/ARMA2/sld018.html>.

misinformation or by keeping aspects of one's own information a secret.³ (p. 90)

At the borderline between pathological and “normal” lying are the exaggerations frequently used in day-to-day conversations... such stories often develop the quality of a *personal myth* ... and, when frequently retold, begin to have the semblance of real memories... the fantasy lie provides some sense of gratification, even if only for a short time. Wish-fulfillment lying is often used by persons who lack the ability to sustain the effort required to create or produce accomplishments of their own. (p. 93, emphasis added)

Government agencies who are given impossible missions and/or inadequate resources and, thus, set up for scapegoating have strong incentives to engage in organizational myth-making. Such collective deceit is enabled by lack of systems and procedures to ensure adequate reality testing, which is to say that records explicitly documenting and linking agency goals, objectives, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes are unavailable to stakeholders. In market-driven environments, such groupthink may lead to extinction, as the organization fails in the “moments of truth,” where the qualities of its products and services are actually experienced by the customer.⁴ However, in socio-political environments, collective deception may endure indefinitely. For as Ford points out: “... lying (deception) is often a dynamic process. Both the person who perpetrates the lie (the liar) and the person who accepts it are in collusion to distort the truth.” (p. 98)

While the capability to sustain mutual self-deception is dependent upon the lack of readily available evidence (records) to the contrary, it is bolstered by manufacturing evidence that is embraced by others. Ford points out:

The borderline [personality disorder] person may also use fantasy as a way of soothing himself or herself, and the fantasy becomes more real if it is communicated to another person who responds as if it were true. (p. 118)

Interpersonally, splitting refers to the way in which people with borderline disorder play people against each other; this is often accomplished by lies and rumors... Splitting is also an intrapsychic mechanism. It is truly a form of self-deception because various ideas and feelings are “split” apart from one another and poorly integrated. Thus, the many internally contradictory aspects of these people's inner lives are kept separate to reduce psychological discomfort. (p. 119)

³ French and Raven identified seven bases of social power, including one termed “informational”. In addition, several others – referent, expert, and connectional – are closely related. For a discussion of the higher-order legitimacy of so-called “legitimate” power in the information age, see <http://ambur.net/French&Raven.htm>.

⁴ Jan Carlzon, president and CEO of Scandinavia Airlines, credited with popularizing the concept of interactions with customers as “Moments of Truth,” in a book by that title.

In organizations, bureaucratic structures serve a similar function in splitting complex and potentially conflicting issues. In large organizations dealing with highly complex issues, such splitting may be a requirement to compensate for the limits on the intellectual processing capacity of individual human beings. However, in the cyberage the need for the old bureaucratic structures and the reliance upon positional power, rather than the power of information, should be continually reassessed – not only for the good of the individuals involved but also the utility of the organizations themselves. Narcissistic organizations that are unwilling or unable to look “without” risk irrelevance. They suffer from the organizational equivalents of the attributes of individuals that Ford highlights as follows:

Narcissistic individuals tend to see the world only from their own perspective and are thus prone to lying. These lies are often fueled not so much by sociopathic motives as by the need to perceive and define the world according to their own internal states. (p. 123)

The narcissistic person often has poor reality testing; the outside world is perceived in very personal terms, and the internal world is contaminated with grandiosity... in times of stress, people may turn toward and look for narcissistic leaders. We should not be surprised by the “lies” of these politicians. They and their constituents are involved in mutual self-deception. The politician says what others want to hear or describes how things should be; neither half of the dyad wants to know the truth. (pp. 123 & 124)

... when the self-esteem of a narcissistic person is threatened, he or she may, in response to narcissistic injury, react with sadistic behaviors. The resulting tension can, in its milder forms, result in increased self-deception by group members; they will distort their own views of reality to placate the leader. When the tension becomes unbearable, “The group processes, in reaction to the rages of the leader, can worsen the situation, leading to ruination, blood baths, or mutiny.” (p. 125)

Ford’s focus is on the psychology of individual behavior when he points out that “... deceit ... may be facilitated by some difficulty in the temporal organization of memories (the past memory and present fantasy may become fused with current reality) ...” (p. 130) However, that observation is equally applicable to group and organizational psychology. Informal groups and formalized organizations may be no less subject to the tendency toward revisionist history than individual “pseudologues,” whose behavior Ford summarizes as follows:

The pseudologue spins tales that appear plausible on the surface but do not hang together over time. Fact and fiction are woven together in an interesting matrix until the two are virtually indistinguishable. Unlike a delusional psychotic person, the pseudologue will abandon the story or change it if confronted with contradictory evidence or sufficient disbelief. The stories do have an enduring quality and after repeating them enough times, even the pseudologue begins to believe them.⁵ (p. 135)

⁵ It is noteworthy that storytelling has been lauded by knowledge management theorists as a means of encapsulating and sharing corporate knowledge. However, in a chapter entitled “Good Stories,” Robyn Dawes argues in his book *Everyday Irrationality* that story-telling

Frequently, in those who do have cerebral dysfunction, verbal skills are disproportionately greater than brain functions, and verbal IQ is higher than performance IQ... It has been suggested that a contributing factor in the production of pseudologia fantastica is that there is a lack of “quality control” for the person’s verbal productions... The more logical and critical portions of the brain ... fail to monitor verbal output adequately. (p. 136)

Ford notes that *pseudologia fantastica* is “a dramatic form of pathological lying ... that consists of grandiose stories with a matrix of truth and fiction.” (p. 61) In layperson’s terms, individuals who engage in such behavior might be said to be “running off at the mouth” and it is doubtful that any mainstream organization could get away with such behavior for long. However, even among such “mainstream” organizations as agencies of the U.S. federal government the quality of informational output is subject to question. Indeed, Congress felt compelled to pass a law requiring the Office of Management and Budget to issue guidelines governing the quality of information disseminated by government agencies.⁶

As noted, the “truth” and lies lie on a continuum, which is to say that the quality of any statement is relative. In addition the utility of any statement lies along continua relating to short- versus longer-term results as well as benefits and costs to the individual making the statement versus others who may be affected by it. Short- versus long-term results come into particularly sharp focus with respect to addictive behaviors involving dangerous, controlled substances.⁷ As Ford points out, deceit is implicit:

Denial (self-deception) remains a key part of the addictive process. Addicted people lie to themselves and to others in an effort to avoid exposure, shame, and humiliation; they also lie to others (including physicians) to obtain the desired substance. Ultimately, the deceit involves the entire family and social system, which causes significant secondary effects on all. (pp. 145 & 146)

Turning to a form of deceit that involves playing an ongoing role, Ford suggests:

... imposture may be an attempt to define oneself and to create an identity and a sense of

leads to irrational conclusions. Perhaps his conclusion to that chapter provides a potential point of agreement with the KM theorists: “Unfortunately, good stories are so compelling ... that we do not realize that at best they constitute just a starting point for analysis.”

⁶ Those guidelines and my comments on an earlier draft are, respectively, at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg_final_information_quality_guidelines/ and <http://xml.gov/documents/completed/OMBinfoquality.htm>.

⁷ For a feeble attempt at humor focusing on the addiction of government agencies to paper, as an “uncontrolled” and uncontrollable substance, see my presentation entitled “Records Managers Anonymous” at <http://ambur.net/show/index.html>.

self. Some impostors describe a feeling of emptiness when they are themselves and a feeling of energy and vitality when they are successfully playing a role... The individual with low self-esteem, who envies those perceived as more competent, may achieve a feeling of superiority through successfully fooling others by devaluing those who have been taken in. Through successfully duping others, the one who is weak becomes strong and superior. (p. 153)

... in a certain sense, imposture can be seen as an artistic performance. Although there is certainly no single explanation for creativity, it does appear that the creative work of some artists ... has been motivated by the need to deny and overcome intense feelings of loss and emptiness. (p. 154)

Many successful people feel that they are frauds or impostors and not really as capable and competent as others may think... They feel like frauds or impostors, attributing their success to luck, physical attractiveness, likability, or compensatory hard work. (p. 155)

Ford discusses Munchausen syndrome, which has three major features: dramatic simulation of disease, pseudologia fantastica, and peregrination (wandering from hospital to hospital). (p. 160) He notes that “Many Munchausen patients, by virtue of traumatic childhoods and lack of mature coping mechanisms, are prone to acute anxiety that may overwhelm them and lead to a decline in reality testing.” (p. 165) He also points out, “Unfortunately, extensive evidence indicates that some people deceptively produce disease in other people” in a phenomenon that has become known as “*Munchausen syndrome by proxy* (MSBP).” (p. 169)

It is interesting to contemplate the organizational analogs of Munchausen syndrome and MSBP. For example, while there can be little doubt that organizations suffer from real maladies, it does seem that many tend to peregrinate, i.e., to wander from one consultant and/or management fad to another in search of “cures” that can only result in the minds of their own leaders and staff. Moreover, denial of reality and focus on trauma and urgency (as oppose to importance and regular order) seem all-too-common in organizations. To the degree that is true, it is not hard to envision collective MSBP, in which one organization, consciously or subconsciously, inflicts “disease” upon another in a twisted and ultimately futile effort to make itself look and/or feel better. Bureaucratic infighting and finger-pointing are common forms of organizational MSBP. With respect to the personal form of the disease, Ford notes:

Regardless of the various psychological motivations that may underlie MSBP, it is clear that the perpetrators are remarkably self-centered, nonempathetic, and unrespectful of the needs and rights of other persons. This pathological narcissism is also reflected in their use of deceit and lying. They make the world fit their own needs, even if blatant lying is required... These deceivers are notably insensitive to the needs of other people, taking others’ money, time, attention, and health, with little consideration or even awareness of the rights of other persons... we see traces of them in the people with whom we interact every day and even in ourselves. (pp. 170 & 171)

For those who lost their life savings, this might seem to be an apt description of the leadership of

Enron and their auditors, Arthur Anderson, for example. With respect to the nature of memory as it is common to all of us, Ford cites the following, highly instructive quotations (p. 173):

“I have done that,” says my memory. “I cannot have done that,” says my pride and remains adamant – at last memory yields. (Nietzsche)

Memory belongs to the imagination. Human memory is not like a computer which records things; it is part of the imaginative process, on the same terms as invention. (Robbe-Grillet)

Memory is more than merely something we “possess”. Indeed, as Ford says:

Memory is what we are; if we lose our memories, we lose our identity and sense of self... memory [involves] three discrete processes: perception or registration, storage, and retrieval. Factors such as arousal, relation of information to the self, emotional state, and the intelligent filter influence perception... The storage process is affected by the structural and physiological integrity of the brain... Retrieval of memories is affected by one’s emotional state, arousal, and current perceptions that stimulate associated memories. (p. 174, emphasis added)

Although most of the general public and even many psychologists view memory as something that is fixed in the brain (like a computer file), research has shown that memory is continuously being reconstructed... Old memories are updated with new perceptions, and prior memory traces are replaced. This process occurs outside of consciousness, and the individual does not perceive the new memory as new... The “old” memories that we so confidently treasure may, instead, be the recent suggestions of another person.⁸ (p. 175, emphasis added)

... inaccurate memories can replace original memories in a manner that is not recognized by the person involved. Our memories of past events are *not* like computer files but are *highly* malleable, fluid in time and space, and reflective of our current needs. Memories are being continuously reconstructed; the past is not fixed in memory. Rather, we remember the past in terms of our current emotions, experiences, and prejudices. (p. 176)

With respect to the implantation of false memories, Ford says some psychiatric patients: “... create an inaccurate narrative of their lives [which] may significantly, but temporarily, reduce distress and anxiety by offering seemingly logic explanations for ... unhappiness.” Moreover, he says, “The deliberate implantation of false memories appears to be much easier than one might think.” He also noted the importance of differentiating “between accepting a patient’s statements

⁸ Ford’s observations concerning the foibles and fallibility of human memory comport with the evidence Daniel Schacter has compiled in his book *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. My paper relating Schacter’s observations to the need for records management is available at <http://ambur.net/memorysins.pdf>.

as ‘narrative truth’ in psychotherapy and claiming ‘historical truth’ in the courtroom.’”⁹ (pp. 180 - 182)

Regarding memory and deception in psychotherapy, Ford observes:

How many persons, during and after psychotherapy, have accused parents and spouses of a variety of ... abuse? How many times has psychotherapy led to the decision to divorce a bewildered spouse? Statistics are not available, but, anecdotally, persons in the mental health field know that such an outcome is not uncommon. Frequently used explanations (rationalizations) include the contention that the abandoned spouse did not “grow” with the one in psychotherapy or that the psychotherapy helped a person gain the courage to get out of an unhappy marriage. These reasons may apply to some situations, but another explanation is that a person may develop misperceptions, which become his or her “truth,” during the process of psychotherapy. (pp. 184 & 185)

Moreover, he asserts:

There are automatic biases of retrospection, in that memory traces are influenced by beliefs and feelings in the present... we “literally ‘make up stories’ about our lives, the world, and reality in general ... and often ... it is our story that creates the memory, rather than vice versa... As the story is told and retold ... it becomes increasingly accepted as fact; the story *becomes* the patient’s memory and the patient’s reality.”¹⁰ (p. 185)

Ford concludes:

The traditional view that it is only the patient’s perceptions that are important (i.e., that historical accuracy is not important) must be reexamined... The importance of the malleability of memory cannot be overemphasized. (pp. 186 & 187)

He addresses “thought reform” (brainwashing) as a special case of the implantation of false memories that has led to false confessions. In particular, he notes that in the Soviet Union and communist Asia, “There was an apparent effort to change the beliefs (and memories) of [political prisoners], not just to punish them as was done with common criminals.” (p. 188) In order to do so, Ford notes:

The prisoner was made susceptible to thought reform by enforced isolation, degradation, and threats in order to cause fear, regression, and increased suggestibility. At the point of the prisoner’s loss of psychological equilibrium and need for rescue, there was a shift to a

⁹ “Personal narratives” are a form of storytelling, of the sort lauded by knowledge management theorists. As Dawes says, at best, they are a “starting point” for further analysis, particularly by comparison to explicit documentary evidence (i.e., records).

¹⁰ Note again in this context the implications of the positive spin the KM theorists place upon storytelling.

different approach: calculated leniency. The interrogator, perhaps a new person, was introduced to the victim, who at this time had an intense need for human contact and would therefore see the interrogator as a potential rescuer. An important component of thought reform was the alternating production of tension followed by release of tension through approval and acceptance... This process was repeated many times, and the history evolved... The Chinese and North Koreans made greater use of group processes as a means to effect thought reform... These groups generated enormous pressures for conformity ... Groupthink ... and thereby markedly reinforced the process of thought reform... “the ultimate achievement of a proper rationalization and group acceptance is associated with feelings of relief that are occasionally exhilarating, and sometimes show some of the features of a religious ‘conversion’”... Another reinforcement for thought reform was the use of selected reading materials. (pp. 188 & 189)

Ford notes that “false accusations are a vicious form of lie” and that “false allegations of sexual assault may be among the more common forms ...” He suggests:

One motivation of the individual reporting the assault may be to attack a man for perceived wrongs. This obvious motivation may, however, be relatively infrequent or less important than are the “victim’s” intrapsychic needs. The accusation may be a projection onto others of a woman’s own angry, aggressive, internally disordered psyche and ambivalence about her own sexuality... Another motivation may be the need to play the role of victim. In this situation, the accused perpetrator is just an ancillary prop. As a victim, the woman becomes the center of attention, concern, sympathy, and nurturing care. (pp. 190 & 191)

With respect to courtroom testimony, Ford observes, “Leading questions by investigators, police officers, attorneys, or even psychotherapists can ... markedly and permanently alter a person’s memory.” One study even found “an elaboration of memory that extended beyond the wording of the initial simple question.” Ford concludes, “Someone else’s ideas can easily become a part of an individual’s memory and testimony under oath.” Regarding the controversy over the reliability of testimony by children, he notes, “children as young as age 3 or 4 years do ‘lie’ or ‘misremember’ and ... they are more likely to do so in response to suggestions made by an authority figure with whom they are familiar.” (p. 193) He sums up, “The bottom line is that one person’s self-deceptions or overt lies can become another person’s firmly held memories and ‘truth’.” (p. 195)

Regarding the detection of deceit, Ford suggests “there appears to be an optimal range ... and some acceptance of information without too much question is regarded as socially appropriate.” (pp. 197 & 198) Expanding on that point, he notes:

We all expend a considerable amount of psychic energy evaluating the constant input of new information. This information is checked against previously acquired knowledge, and older information is reevaluated in light of new data. This process is so automatic that it usually goes unnoticed, reaching consciousness only when there are major discrepancies or when disturbing emotions are elicited. **Because of our need for**

self-deception, we frequently choose not to consciously challenge false information, either new or old. However, much of the new input and its evaluation may be registered unconsciously, having subsequent effect on our emotions and behaviors. (p. 198, emphasis added)

With respect to the conservation of cognitive capabilities, Ford says, “Deceit clearly seems to place greater intellectual demands on a person than does honesty.” (p. 202) That is only logical, because it takes more effort to maintain two sets of books (records) – the one that documents reality plus the one that documents the individual’s fantasies and egocentric wishes. In that respect, with the rapidly diminishing cost of computer memory and electronic file storage, a very real question is whether it might not be better simply to keep all electronic records than to try to sort out which are “worth” keeping and, thereby, inevitably interjecting systematic biases into the historical record of reality. (By definition, anything less is not “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”)

Turning to the interplay between verbal and nonverbal communications, Ford notes:

... as children grow older, they use both voice and body cues to decode a sender’s true intentions. Interestingly, however, as female children grow older, they tend not to use the information they gather to question the veracity of the person sending a message. (p. 208)

Perhaps doing so might be considered to be “unladylike.” Ford says, “Women are more perceptive than men about how people who are telling the truth are feeling, but they are not any better, and may be worse, at detecting feelings when people are lying.” (p. 208) He posits a potential explanation:

... women have been socialized to become accommodating. Thus, they tend to read and accept what the person is *trying* to communicate rather than what he or she is *actually* communicating. The need to please another person takes precedence over accuracy... women tell just as many lies as do men but women’s lies seem to support other people... women seem to achieve some of their supportiveness through deceit; men are less supportive in those ways but also more truthful. (p. 209)

With regard to the influence of interviewers upon lying behavior, Ford says, “giving positive feedback to a person who is making false statements will increase deceitfulness... In contrast, a person who is making truthful statements when receiving negative feedback is likely to become even more truthful in an effort to establish veracity.” (p. 211)

With respect to the question of why people are not better at perceiving deceit, Ford highlights the possibility that “many people unconsciously view lie detection as a liability rather than a skill.” (p. 212) Furthermore, he notes, “most groups, including law enforcement officers, have no special skills in detecting deceit.” (p. 219) In summary, he says, “Most people, from children through adults, have a bias toward assuming that what is said is the truth. This bias helps facilitate social interaction; being too cynical is a social liability.” (p. 219 & 220)

Turning to the ability of technology to detect deceit, Ford asserts that there are no specific physiological signs of deception or guilt. (p. 229) Moreover, he cites research findings suggesting that more experienced operators of polygraph (lie detection) machines may have higher false-positive rates than their less experienced colleagues. (p. 230) However, he suggests that a less frequently used technique – the guilty knowledge test (GKT) – has powerful potential to discriminate truth or identity in some situations.

Concerning therapeutic approaches to deceit, Ford suggests: “The very heart of insight-oriented psychotherapy lies in the therapist’s interpreting the patient’s self-deception in a way that the patient can understand.” (p. 237) Similarly, prior to public awareness of Arthur Anderson’s treatment of the Enron account, that might have been considered to be the role of outside auditors with respect to the financial management of organizations. However, Ford notes: “Overt lies are not the central problem for the psychotherapist; rather, the therapist must address selective memories, distortions, and self-deceptions that create misrepresentations.” (p. 242) Again, the problem for organizational stakeholders is highly analogous and the Enron/Anderson case is an exemplar.

Ford notes that “lies told during therapy may serve as ‘screens’ to disguise underlying secrets” (p. 242) and some “fragile persons have such severe ego defects that the lies serve a needed protective function.” (p. 244) He observes that “secrets are attended and protected by lies” and “the psychological environment of the dysfunctional family may promote the development of lying as a coping mechanism for its members.” Moreover, he notes: “Therapists differ on the degree to which secrets should be disclosed (in order to promote intimacy and communication) or respected (in order to protect privacy and individuation)” but that “Some secrets must be revealed – in particular those secrets that hurt the secret-keeper or other persons.” (p. 247)

In the case of psychotherapy patients, the clear implication is that therapists are empowered to make such determinations. With respect to organizations, presumably it is those installed in positions of authority who are routinely to decide when to reveal organizational secrets and when not to do so. However, many organizations have found it necessary to institute procedures and positions designed to guard against misdeeds by organizational leaders. For example, Congress passed the Inspector General Act of 1978 and Whistleblower Protection Act 1989, respectively, to establish an independent official and to protect from retribution employees who report wrong-doing by organizational leaders.

Although he is speaking of the parent-child relationship, there are interesting analogies to organizational behavior in the following observations by Ford:

... severe punishment may increase the probability of future lying... if parents wish to decrease the frequency of lies, they must be prepared to hear some things that they would rather not know! ... lying is often associated with absent parenting. Therefore, persistent lying can be an indication that more parental involvement is required. (p. 248)

It has been said the “it takes a village to raise a child” and the same might be said of organizations. While there is no substitute for good leadership, nor should the maturity and

success of organizations be left solely to leaders; all significant stakeholders should be actively engaged. Means to facilitate such involvement should be instituted, and foremost among them is a system by which the records created and received by the organization are managed and shared with stakeholders.

With respect to the effects of deception, Ford highlights a counterintuitive notion:

It sounds heretical to suggest that self-deception might help regulate self-esteem and promote mental health, yet the data that support this suggestion are robust. (p. 251) ... seeing oneself as responsible for good results but not for bad results ... may be an adaptive mechanism to maintain or enhance self-esteem ... “to feel good about ourselves we may have to judge ourselves more kindly than we are judged” by others. (p. 252) ... self-deception contributes more to invalid self-report measures than does lying... however ... self-delusions may have serious consequences ... including failure to prepare for a likely catastrophic event, failure to attend to important health habits, or attempts at tasks that are impossible to fulfill competently. (p. 253)

Moreover, Ford suggests:

The findings ... that suggest that self-deception and the tendency not to monitor inner emotional states may help protect against psychiatric illness ... should not ... be blindly accepted as a universal principle of good psychological or physical health. A repressive coping style has been shown to be associated with physiological or behavior dysfunction, as well as higher rates of certain systemic medical disorders. (p. 254)

He notes:

... self-deception can be used to raise or lower self-esteem in order to create a better fit for an individual’s social station, thereby reducing tension caused by a disparity between self-image and reality. (p. 254)

But he also points out that:

Self-deception can lead not only to the destruction of the individual but also the destruction of others. (p. 255)

... it is a human characteristic to wish to be forever healthy and to deny the possibility of serious disease. All physicians regularly encounter patients whose potentially treatable (even curable) diseases have been ignored until they have cause irreparable damage. (p. 256)

There are obvious parallels in the behavior of organizations and, at least for those subject to the forces of the marketplace, the result may be bankruptcy and corporate “death”. The parallels carry over into how organizations deal with employees internally. Ford notes:

... *pronoia* [may be considered] as the counterpart to paranoia. With pronoia, one has the delusion that others think well of oneself and that one's efforts are well received and praised... current business organizational policies tend to deemphasize the negative aspects of a person's evaluation (reducing the risk of litigation), suggesting that omission is one factor that may contribute to pronoia... the pronoic person may demonstrate poor judgment of his or her abilities and may make serious personal errors... (p. 256)

While being highly tolerant of deceit as a practical reality in the lives of all human beings, Ford asserts that it must not be taken lightly as the social power and influence of the individuals increase:

Considering the risks to countless other persons, it is certainly in the best interest of society to take steps to minimize the risks self-deception in those who are responsible for other people's lives. (p. 257)

History is filled with accounts of how the self-deception of one person holding great power – or the mutual self-deception of small groups of decision makers – can lead to mass destruction and a very great loss of life. (p. 258)

Groupthink is ... a particular form of defective group decision making... the group process can interfere with the consideration of potential errors or analysis of the risk assessments of a variety of options...

Ford notes several features of groupthink (p. 259):

- An illusion of invulnerability
- An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality
- Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings or other essential information contrary to the proposed plan
- Stereotyped views of the enemy ...
- Self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus
- A shared illusion of unanimity about judgments conforming to the majority rule
- Direct pressure on any member who expresses any strong arguments against any of the group's illusions
- Emergence of self-appointed mind-guards – members who protect the group from adverse information that might destroy the shared complacency about the decision

Ford observes:

... groupthink represents a dangerous form of self-delusion. To meet social needs (i.e., support, acceptance, and approval), an individual suspends his or her independent critical faculties and yields to the demands of the group... Groupthink is more likely to occur when the group is shielded from outside influences... Bureaucratic institutions, whether corporations or government agencies, promote self-deception that may result in disaster for many persons... this process [may be attributed] to the depersonalizing effects of a

large organization and to the compartmentalization of functions and decision making. Structural compartmentalization – in which means, ends, actions, and their consequences are divorced from one another – may result in psychic compartmentalization, in which personal responsibility for action is separated from corporate activity. Thus, the corporation or government agency collectively engages in behavior that very few individuals, if acting on their own, would find morally acceptable and compatible with ethical values... the people most likely to succeed in the bureaucratic or corporate environment are those who allow themselves to be manipulated. When people perceive themselves as objects to be molded to fit external criteria for organizational ends, they find it easier to see others as objects to be used. (pp. 260 & 261)

Unfortunately, as Ford points out:

... crime in general does pay, and ... crimes which are based primarily on deception ... have highly favorable odds of risk... Crimes of fraud were found to have a low risk of indictment, minimal penalties, and relatively high potential gain! (p. 262)

By definition, fraud depends upon the lack of clear, complete, and readily accessible records. To state the proposition in reverse, if clear and complete records are maintained and made readily accessible, fraud is impossible. Records make explicit information that may otherwise go unnoticed, be quickly forgotten, misinterpreted, or purposefully distorted. Obviously, just because information is recorded does not necessarily make it true, but without records, truth is impossible to establish and maintain. Since electronic information systems automatically record human behaviors – particularly keystrokes – they embody a powerful potential to establish the truth, as least as it is understood by individuals human beings and evidenced by their behaviors at any point in time. Logically speaking, that would seem to be a good thing. However, taking into account the dynamics of groupthink and egocentricity, it is not hard to understand why people may, consciously or unconsciously, resist the creating and use of records. For, as Ford notes:

Lies ... serve people's mutually self-deceptive needs to maintain illusions of beauty, well-being, and romance. Oscar Wilde ... emphasized this value and stated that "lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art." Without license to misrepresent, the art world, including much in literature, would not exist. (p. 264)

A personal myth is constructed in the selective memory process by which we "remember" that which fits and shapes our image of ourselves. (p. 268)

The regulation of self-esteem is closely related to the issues of deception. External events that reflect poorly on a person are altered for the internal world through self-deception, excuses, rationalization, and even total denial. Conversely, to feel good about how they appear to the external world, people may dissemble their emotions, provide false information, or play roles. (p. 275)

Thus, it is easy to see why people who suffer from low self-esteem would not want to leave records lying around that reinforce their negative images of themselves. On the other hand, Ford

observes:

A healthy person keeps illusions within reasonable bounds; at times of great stress, some people may lose contact with reality and may lose the ability to modulate their deceptions. (p. 276)

Moreover, he notes:

Psychological truth proves very elusive. The material world can be measured with a high degree of reliability. However, memories, feelings, and motivations prove to be remarkably subjective and fluid; they are in continuing dynamic interaction. Research clearly demonstrates that one's memories can be significantly contaminated by suggestion ... and a person's perception of an event colored by both past events and the emotions experienced at the time. Psychoanalysts have discovered that a person's narrative history, no matter how coherent and apparently intelligible, may have little relation to historical facts; or the facts that color the meaning of an event may have been selectively remembered. (p. 279)

Thus, even so-called "normal" and psychologically healthy people have incentives to avoid leaving traces of their behavior that may be too easily interpreted as exact representations of truth. In addition, consistent with the dynamics of groupthink, Ford observes:

... it is clear that trust and honesty toward members of one's social group are values that are widely endorsed ... Values for truthfulness diminish as one's relationships with others become more tenuous ... the weaker the relationship, the less beneficial the potential payoff for indirect reciprocation of altruism. (p. 281)

With reference to social power, Ford points out:

The moral imperatives of truth and prohibitions of deceit preserve the self-interests of power structures. Those in power do not wish to be deceived by those whom they control... it is the winners who write the history books and define the "truth" of the past... To some extent, underlings are controlled by careful management of the information they receive. Thus, governments, religious orders, corporations, and other authoritarian social structures establish a doctrine ("morality") for truthfulness that is motivated by the need and desire for truth from others but that is not willingly reciprocated. The corporate structure demands honesty and full disclosure from workers about their activities but does not provide them information from closed boardroom meetings and strategy planning sessions. Thus, the morality of truthfulness is promulgated for the general public because it serves to maintain the status quo of the power structure. Lies by those who are in power are rationalized as necessary for the good of the organization; lies by the common person are regarded as harmful to the organization. (p. 282)

It is worth taking a moment to reflect upon the truth and implications of these dynamics, particularly in a society that espouses freedom of choice and speech, which by definition requires

freedom of information and thought as well as action. Taking those requirements into account, one may have good reason to question the logical consistency of Ford's assertion:

Trust is not necessarily the belief that one will always be told the truth. In relationships, trust might be better described as the belief that the trusted person (or organization) will try to avoid inflicting harm... we do not expect that our government will always tell the truth, but we do expect that it will protect us. Trust is not destroyed by deceit but rather the loss of confidence that the offending party does not have our interests at heart. Of course, being lied to about some issues is likely to lead to a loss of trust. (p. 282)

In relationships where one person is deemed to have "superiority" over others, e.g., in any hierarchical relationship, the interests of the "superior" and the "inferior" persons differ, both in scope and substance. Thus, by definition, the superior cannot truly have the lesser person's interests foremost at heart. That is a logical impossibility. That is not to suggest that leaders cannot and do not "normally" have the interests of many, if not most of their subjects generally in mind in the actions they take. No doubt, in most cases they do try to act in the best interests of most of their subordinates, at least as they understand those interests. However, Ford observes: "... of great importance, social relationships influence our perceptions and memories and reinforce our self-deception." (p. 284) Since it is impossible for leaders to have close, personal relationships with all of their subjects, it is a logical certainty that they will demonstrate favoritism to a relatively select few, regardless of whether they realize they are doing so.

Moreover, as has oft been stated, information is the "lifeblood of democracy" and it is clear that disinformation is the staple of tyranny. While there are few absolutes in life, there is certainly a large measure of truth in the statement that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." That is not necessarily because those in positions of power are any more prone to deceit than the rest of us, but it does suggest that they should be held to a *higher* standard of truthfulness – since the consequences of their lies may be far more severe.

Ford suggests, "In the final analysis, it is not lying but mutually reinforced self-deception that poses the greatest danger to the individual, society, and humanity." (p. 285) He concludes, "It seems that we must continually rediscover the truth." (p. 287) However, if we are to avoid "mutually reinforced self-deception" and instead to "continually rediscover the truth," we must take full advantage of the capabilities of information technology to create, manage, maintain, sort, and retrieve electronic records, against which falsehood can be subjected to reality testing.

George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Let us hope that most of us would aspire to a higher purpose in life than living a series of self-serving lies, much less reliving the falsehoods of the past fabricated in the fantasies of the social in-crowd or the political power elite. In pursuit of a more rewarding state of existence, perhaps we might see the logic of seeking the truth as best it can be documented in reliable records. If we lack the self-respect to seek the truth for ourselves, how can we purport to value the truth for the benefit of others? How can we expect anyone else to reciprocate truth when it benefits us? Indeed, if everyone is living a lie anyway, what does it matter?

We should “speak truth to power” but we must do more than that. Talk is cheap. The highest purpose to which we might dedicate ourselves in this life is to create a record of which we can be truly and truthfully proud.