

Penetrating the veil of appearances  
Perceiving Directly What Is True

Mattias Desmet

When it comes to determining whether someone can be trusted or not, rational thinking leads into a hall of mirrors where it is impossible to discern between imaginary and real images. This is the fundamental problem: the more something can be considered an indicator of trustworthiness, the more it might be used as a cover by someone who is not trustworthy.

How can we actually discern the Real from the False? How can we discern Truth from Lies? That's a good question. And it seems science has no answer to it. At least we know that the machines science developed to detect lies – so called 'polygraphs' – don't work.

Can a human being do what a machine can't do? I guess so. But not through rational thinking. The capacity to discern the Real from the False has more to do with what is called *kokoro* in Japanese Shinto tradition. *Kokoro* refers to the heart as the place where Truth is born. '*Makoto no kokoro*' means as much as 'heart of Truth'. And you develop such a 'heart of Truth' through loyalty to ethical principles such as sincerity and moral purity. Follow these principles and your heart will be filled with Truth. Your heart will start to see what your rational mind can't see.

I am a very rational person myself. I often tried to determine rationally what I should do in life. And I just found out that my rational thinking led me deeper and deeper in endless doubts and indecisiveness. What job you should do or what woman you should be with – think rationally as long as you want, you won't find a satisfying answer. If you want to escape tormenting doubt and inner conflict, I would rather suggest this: forget about rational theories and just make your heart a little bit purer – develop *Makoto no Kokoro*.

It took me, paradoxically, a lot of rational thinking to be able to articulate this. In that sense, I don't plead against rational thinking. It's just that our rational thinking, in the end, is following blindly certain powers that are situated at a completely different level. Here's what Einstein said about this:

*'And certainly, we should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead, it can only serve; and it is not fastidious in its choices of a leader. This characteristic is reflected in the qualities of its priests, the intellectuals. The intellect has a sharp eye for methods and tools, but is blind to ends and values. So, it is no wonder that this fatal blindness is handed from old to young and today involves a whole generation.'*

(Out of My Later Years, p. 260).

It's something so simple that our enlightenment culture with its fanatic belief in rational and 'scientific' knowledge can only mock it: Truth is not 'invented' through arduous rational thinking, it is out there and it is *revealed* to us when we follow simple and elementary ethical principles. In plain words: walk in the direction of the light, and you will start to see. Here is a quote from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* which says something similar;

*'Love gives us in the blink of an eye what we hardly reach through years of hard slog'.*

It is the heart that is the place where Truth resides, and it is the heart that can discern between Truth and Lies. Hatsumi Masaaki, grandmaster of nine samurai and ninjutsu martial arts schools, put it like this:

*'In the presence of love, magic tricks do not fool'.*



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Mattias Desmet

What can we do in response to this propaganda machinery which has been unleashed, which is by far the most impressive, propaganda machinery that has ever been unleashed in the history of mankind.

I've been talking so much about, the phenomenon of mass formation and totalitarianism throughout the last few years, focusing on, on what happens in a population which falls prey to the machine, and focusing on how we can understand how an entire population goes mad and violent for the most absurd beliefs you can imagine.

I'm focusing now, much more on the psychology of totalitarian leadership and on the psychology of propaganda itself. And in particular, what can we do? Because that's the most important thing, of course. What can we do. I believe that the better you understand the nature of a propaganda, the more you see that counter propaganda is not an option.

If you use counter propaganda in response to propaganda, you're actually, slowly, going to the same level as the people you try to fight because you also lose touch with sincerity. You also lose touch with the ethical principles of humanity. And that's a big question we have to ask ourselves.

I was really touched by what Senator Johnson just said. As far as I remember, this is the first time that I hear someone say that freedom is important, but whether there is something that is even more important than freedom and that it is truth. I think that's really right. Because there is no absolute freedom for a human being. A human being can be free to a certain extent, but it will always be subjected, if it wants it or not, to the eternal ethical principles of humanity.

If we lose touch with that, freedom is worth nothing. And these ethical principles, these principles of humanity, we can get in touch with them by speaking sincerely, by speaking through truth-speech. I agree again, with Senator Johnson when he said that it is very hard to know for a human being what truth is. What is truth?

Actually, it's very hard to determine. If we think we can possess the truth, we lost it already. We can feel it for a moment, to resonate with it, articulate, truthful words. But that's it. We can never possess it. That's actually what I'm doing now. I'm focusing on the one hand on, propaganda and on the other hand, I try to understand, as well as possible, the psychologically speaking, what truth is.

Is Truth the kind of words that refer in the correct way to facts? I don't think so. Even a joke can be truthful if it is articulated at the right moment, and the joke has no reference to facts. We can only define truth in reference to something completely different than the fact. Truth-speech is this kind of speech which penetrates through the veil of appearances, which destroys lies, which destroys what is fake, which destroys the what I like to call the veil of appearances.

And we can do that at every moment in our existence. Every day we have a chance to speak truthful and sincere in so many occasions, and every time we do so, even if it isn't about the minor detail of life, every time we do so, we establish, we go through the veil of appearances that isolates people from each other.

We go through the veil of our own ego, and we establish a resonating bond between the soul of two human beings. That's why truth-speech makes the soul of a human being emerge from behind his ego. That's where we create human bond, and that's where we create resilience to propaganda. We can do so at 100 times a day, or at least ten times a day.

And every time we create a human bond, a human bond between two souls, we make the bond between the soul of two human beings stronger. And that's the historical revolution we are witnessing now. It's a historical revolution, the metaphysical revolution where a mass that is in the grip of propaganda is slowly getting weaker than the group connected through sincere speech.

The more we realize that, the more we understand that we have to do our best to learn the art of sincere speech. Because I believe it's really an art. It's an art we can learn in Belgium and Holland. I give these workshops about 300 people, in which we practice for four days straight. The art of truth speech,

and I encourage people to continue to practice it after it, because it is a like every art, we have to practice it our entire lives.

That's what will be decisive. The oldest act of humanity, speaking in a sincere way, will be what ultimately overcomes the most impressive propaganda machinery mankind has ever known. We will do it together, and I'm happy to do it with you people living.

Robert Malone

Part of the reason why it brings tears to my eyes. As I know how heavily censored he has been. I mean, he's not even allowed to teach his own book in his own university. He's been run out of his department. He's been ridiculed and harassed in the Belgian press. only for speaking about this problem of humanity getting enthralled by propaganda with a set of lies that they were herded into through the use of fear, you know, merely for speaking truth.

The man has been harassed, denigrated, ridiculed, just like so many of us. Many people are not aware of the pressures that Matthias Desmet has encountered. And I frankly feel a little guilty because I spoke about this theory of his on The Joe Rogan Show. And it just caused Google to lose its cookies. and, Crosby, Stills and Nash and Young, to decide that they were going to leave Spotify and everything else, all because of these simple two words mass formation.

So, please, join me in reaching out with your heart to this gentleman who has he isn't just talking about truth speech. He's lived it. He's lived the consequences. And yet here he is, still talking about it, still standing. Still, learning is still teaching. And. And I just, my heart is full of joy, and thanks.

Vaclav Havel

## The Power of the Powerless, 1979

Here we are, living in what Havel describes as the "post-totalitarian" system, a new brand of social manipulation, where forces other than Stalin or Nazi-style brutality is the organizing power, propaganda as mass manipulation. What follows are select highlights from "**The Power of the Powerless**" originally written ("quickly," Havel said later) as a discussion piece for a projected joint Polish Czechoslovak volume of essays on the subject of freedom and power. Vaclav Havel wrote this work in 1979. The themes he discusses apply directly to what is taking place in the United States and around the world today.

Those of us who are choosing 'truth,' which Havel equates with 'life' are, like it or not, 'dissidents' in an emerging global post-totalitarian system. Instead of floundering, best, we study from a master.

Who are these so-called dissidents? Where does their point of view come from, and what importance does it have? What is the significance of the "independent initiatives" in which "dissidents" collaborate, and what real chances do such initiatives have of success? Is it appropriate to refer to "dissidents" as an opposition? If so, what exactly is such an opposition within the framework of this system? What does it do? What role does it play in society? What are its hopes and on what are they based? Is it within the power of the "dissidents"-as a category of sub-citizen outside the power establishment-to have any influence at all on society and the social system? Can they actually change anything?

The system in which we live has very little in common with a classical dictatorship... Each country has been completely penetrated by a network of manipulatory instruments controlled by the superpower center and totally subordinated to its interests.

In an era when metaphysical and existential certainties are in a state of crisis when people are being uprooted and alienated and are losing their sense of what this world means, this [COVID] ideology inevitably has a certain hypnotic charm. To wandering humankind, it offers an immediately available home: all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxiety, and loneliness vanish. Of course, one pays dearly for this low-rent home: the price is abdication of one's own reason, conscience, and responsibility, for an essential aspect of this ideology is the consignment of reason and conscience to a higher authority.

The manager of a fruit-and-vegetable shop places in his window, among the onions and carrots, the slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" [or Masks are Mandatory]. Why does he do it? What is he trying to communicate to the world? Is he genuinely enthusiastic about the idea of unity among the workers of the world? Is his enthusiasm so great that he feels an irrepressible impulse to acquaint the public with his ideals? Has he really given more than a moment's thought to how such a unification might occur and what it would mean?

He put them all into the window simply because it has been done that way for years, because everyone does it, and because that is the way it has to be. If he were to refuse, there could be trouble. He could be reproached for not having the proper decoration in his window; someone might even accuse him of disloyalty. He does it because these things must be done if one is to get along in life. It is one of the thousands of details that guarantee him a relatively tranquil life "in harmony with society," as they say.

The slogan is really a sign, and as such, it contains a subliminal but very definite message. Verbally, it might be expressed this way: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace." This message, of course, has an addressee: it is directed above, to the greengrocer's superior, and at the same time it is a shield that protects the greengrocer from potential informers. The slogan's real meaning, therefore, is rooted firmly in the greengrocer's existence.

Let us take note: if the greengrocer had been instructed to display the slogan "I am afraid and therefore unquestioningly obedient;" he would not be nearly as indifferent to its semantics, even though the statement would reflect the truth. The greengrocer would be embarrassed and ashamed to put such an unequivocal statement of his own degradation in the shop window, and quite naturally so, for he is a human being and thus has a sense of his own dignity. To overcome this complication, his expression of loyalty must take the form of a sign which, at least on its textual surface, indicates a level of disinterested conviction... Thus the sign helps the greengrocer to conceal from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is **ideology**.

Ideology is a specious way of relating to the world. It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them. As the repository of something supra-personal and objective, it enables people to deceive their conscience and conceal their true position and their inglorious modus vivendi, both from the world and from themselves. It is a very pragmatic but, at the same time, an apparently dignified way of legitimizing what is above, below, and on either side. It is directed toward people and toward God. It is a veil behind which human beings can hide their own fallen existence, their trivialization, and their adaptation to the status quo. It is an excuse that everyone can use, from the greengrocer, who conceals his fear of losing his job behind an alleged interest in the unification of the workers of the world, to the highest functionary, whose interest in staying in power can be cloaked in phrases about service to the working class. **The primary excusatory function of ideology, therefore, is to provide people, both as victims and pillars of the post-totalitarian system, with the illusion that the system is in harmony with the human order and the order of the universe.** [i.e., that what is being done is for our safety and the safety of others.]

The ideological excuse... acts as a kind of bridge between the regime and the people, across which the regime approaches the people and the people approach the regime. This explains why **ideology plays such an important role in the post-totalitarian system**: that complex machinery of units, hierarchies, transmission belts, and indirect instruments of manipulation which ensure in countless ways the integrity of the regime, leaving nothing to chance, would be quite simply unthinkable without ideology acting as its all-embracing excuse and as the excuse for each of its parts.

Between the aims of the post-totalitarian system and the aims of life there is a yawning abyss: while life, in its essence, moves toward plurality, diversity, independent self-constitution, and self-

organization, in short, toward the fulfillment of its own freedom, the post-totalitarian system demands conformity, uniformity, and discipline. While life ever strives to create new and improbable structures, the post-totalitarian system contrives to force life into its most probable state.

This system serves people only to the extent necessary to ensure that people will serve it. Anything beyond this, that is to say, anything which leads people to overstep their predetermined roles is regarded by the system as an attack upon itself. And in this respect it is correct: every instance of such transgression is a genuine denial of the system. It can be said, therefore, that the inner aim of the post-totalitarian system is not mere preservation of power in the hands of a ruling clique, as appears to be the case at first sight. Rather, the social phenomenon of self-preservation is subordinated to something higher, to a kind of blind automatism which drives the system. No matter what position individuals hold in the hierarchy of power, they are not considered by the system to be worth anything in themselves, but only as things intended to fuel and serve this automatism. For this reason, an individual's desire for power is admissible only in so far as its direction coincides with the direction of the automatism of the system. [Jerry Mander, in *Absence of the Sacred*, describes corporations and corporate governments as machines.]

Ideology, in creating a bridge of excuses between the system and the individual, spans the abyss between the aims of the system and the aims of life. It pretends that the requirements of the system derive from the requirements of life. It is a world of appearances trying to pass for reality.

Individuals need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did, or they must at least tolerate them in silence, or get along well with those who work with them. For this reason, however, they must live within a lie. They need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. By this very fact, **individuals confirm the system, fulfill the system, make the system, are the system.**

We have seen that the real meaning of the greengrocer's slogan has nothing to do with what the text of the slogan actually says. [Mandating masks and the jab is no different.] Even so, this real meaning is quite clear and generally comprehensible because the code is so familiar: the greengrocer declares his loyalty (and he can do no other if his declaration is to be accepted) in the only way the regime is capable of hearing; that is, by accepting the prescribed ritual, by accepting appearances as reality, by accepting the given rules of the game. In doing so, however, he has himself become a player in the game, thus making it possible for the game to go on, for it to exist in the first place.

If ideology was originally a bridge between the system and the individual as an individual, then the moment he steps on to this bridge it becomes at the same time a bridge between the system and the individual as a component of the system. That is, if ideology originally facilitated (by acting outwardly) the constitution of power by serving as a psychological excuse, then from the moment that excuse is accepted, it constitutes power inwardly, becoming an active component of that power. It begins to function as the principal instrument of ritual communication within the system of power.

The whole power structure (and we have already discussed its physical articulation) could not exist at all if there were not a certain metaphysical order binding all its components together, interconnecting them and subordinating them to a uniform method of accountability, supplying the combined operation of all these components with rules of the game, that is, with certain regulations, limitations, and legalities. This metaphysical order is fundamental to, and standard throughout, the entire power structure; it integrates its communication system and makes possible the internal exchange and transfer of information and instructions. It is rather like a collection of traffic signals and directional signs, giving the process shape and structure. This metaphysical order guarantees the inner coherence of the totalitarian power structure. It is the glue holding it together, its binding principle, the instrument of its discipline. **Without this glue the structure as a totalitarian structure would vanish; it would disintegrate into individual atoms chaotically colliding with one another in their unregulated particular interests and inclinations. The entire pyramid of**

**totalitarian power, deprived of the element that binds it together, would collapse in upon itself, as it were, in a kind of material implosion.**

As the interpretation of reality by the power structure, ideology is always subordinated ultimately to the interests of the structure. Therefore, it has a natural tendency to disengage itself from reality, to create a world of appearances, to become ritual. In societies where there is public competition for power and therefore public control of that power, there also exists quite naturally public control of the way that power legitimates itself ideologically. Consequently, in such conditions, there are always certain correctives that effectively prevent ideology from abandoning reality altogether. Under totalitarianism, however, these correctives disappear, and thus there is nothing to prevent ideology from becoming more and more removed from reality, gradually turning into what it has already become in the post-totalitarian system: a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality.

Yet, as we have seen, ideology becomes at the same time an increasingly important component of power, a pillar providing it with both excusatory legitimacy and inner coherence. As this aspect grows in importance, and as it gradually loses touch with reality, it acquires a peculiar but very real strength. *It becomes reality itself*, albeit a reality altogether self-contained, one that on certain levels (chiefly inside the power structure) may have even greater weight than reality as such. Increasingly, the virtuosity of the ritual becomes more important than the reality hidden behind it. The significance of phenomena no longer derives from the phenomena themselves, but from their locus as concepts in the ideological context. *Reality does not shape theory, but rather the reverse*. Thus power gradually draws closer to ideology than it does to reality; it draws its strength from theory and becomes entirely dependent on it. This inevitably leads, of course, to a paradoxical result: rather than theory, or rather ideology, serving power, power begins to serve ideology. It is as though ideology had appropriated power from power, as though it had become dictator itself. It then appears that theory itself, ritual itself, ideology itself, makes decisions that affect people, and not the other way around.

If ideology is the principal guarantee of the inner consistency of power, it becomes at the same time an increasingly important guarantee of its continuity. Whereas succession to power in classical dictatorship is always a rather complicated affair (the pretenders having nothing to give their claims reasonable legitimacy, thereby forcing them always to resort to confrontations of naked power), in the post-totalitarian system power is passed on from person to person, from clique to clique, and from generation to generation in an essentially more regular fashion. In the selection of pretenders, a new "king-maker" takes part: it is ritual legitimation, the ability to rely on ritual, to fulfill it and use it, to allow oneself, as it were, to be borne aloft by it.

Naturally, power struggles exist in the post-totalitarian system as well, and most of them are far more brutal than in an open society, for the struggle is not open, regulated by democratic rules, and subject to public control, but hidden behind the scenes. (It is difficult to recall a single instance in which the First Secretary of a ruling Communist Party has been replaced without the various military and security forces being placed at least on alert.) This struggle, however, can never (as it can in classical dictatorships) threaten the very essence of the system and its continuity. At most, it will shake up the power structure, which will recover quickly precisely because the binding substance-ideology remains undisturbed. No matter who is replaced by whom, succession is only possible against the backdrop and within the framework of a common ritual. It can never take place by denying that ritual.

Because of this dictatorship of the ritual, however, power becomes clearly anonymous. Individuals are almost dissolved in the ritual. They allow themselves to be swept along by it and frequently it seems as though ritual alone carries people from obscurity into the light of power. Is it not characteristic of the post-totalitarian system that, on all levels of the power hierarchy, individuals are increasingly being pushed aside by faceless people, puppets, those uniformed flunkies of the rituals and routines of power?

The automatic operation of a power structure thus dehumanized and made anonymous is a feature of the fundamental automatism of this system. It would seem that it is precisely the dictates of this automatism which select people lacking individual will for the power structure, that it is precisely the dictate of the empty phrase which summons to power people who use empty phrases as the best guarantee that the automatism of the post-totalitarian system will continue.

Vaclav Havel  
The Power of the Powerless