

Sustainability Education, Responsible Truthfulness and Hypnotic Phenomena

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Abstract: I propose in this essay that a key to rebalancing life systems now being harmed by human activity requires a return to the priority of "truthfulness" as practiced by traditional Indigenous cultures for whom words are sacred vibrations of energy, requiring close attention to how one describes reality as truthfully and holistically as possible. This contrasts with the use of deceptive language common today. Furthermore, because words have the power to hypnotize self and others, awareness of trance-based learning is vital for helping assure one's beliefs are not based on untruthful sources. I assert that there is no better way to explain how intelligent people can destroy or allow for the destruction of ecosystems without referring to unconscious acceptance of misguided hypnotic directives. Uncritical hypersuggestibility relates to the rise of fear-based living, authoritarianism and deceptive hypnotic language that has been cultivated under the dominant worldview. A solution is to return to awareness and intentional use of trance-based learning for maintaining or re-establishing healthy, reality-based ways of being in the world such as humans did well for most of human history.

Keywords: Truth, truthfulness, words, Indigenous Worldview, hypnosis, trance-based learning, sustainability.

Former Dean of Education at Oglala Lakota College and currently a professor with Fielding Graduate University, Four Arrows was selected by Alternative Education Research Organization for their book, Turning Points, as one of the 35 "Visionaries in Education." Author of 21 books on wellness and numerous papers and articles on health psychology, spontaneous hypnosis and Indigenous Worldview, he is a recipient of a Martin Springer Institute for Holocaust Studies "Moral Courage Award" for his activism. Co-editor of the Indigenous section of Sage's new International Handbook for Critical Pedagogies, his newest text is The Red Road: Linking Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives to Indigenous Worldview (in press, IAP). His book, Teaching Truly, was selected as one of the top 20 progressive books of our times. Other books have been endorsed by Noam Chomsky, Michael Apple, Thom Hartmann, Jon Pilger, Darcia Narvaez, Henry Giroux and Michael Fisher wrote a book about his work entitled Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows (2018).

“Hindu Indigenous prehistory implies a first age of “truth-speaking.”
The second age is of “truth-seeking;” the third of “truth-declining”
and the fourth (present day) of “very little truth remaining.”

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Thomas W. Cooper (1998, p. 29)

“A ceremonial world (in the fullest sense of the term) is an actively constructed portrait of the world intended to be responsibly true, one which rings true for everybody’s well-being. Ceremonial worlds place communication and reciprocity with natural environments—rather than the desire to dominate those environments.” — Lee Hester & Jim Cheney (2001, p. 321).

“The trance state was socially acknowledged and accepted as a method of balancing body, mind and soul and of bringing back into harmony that which had caused dissonance.”

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Felicitas Goodman and Nana Nauwal (2003, p. 3)

I submit that there is no better way to explain how intelligent people can destroy their environment and vital ecosystems without referring to various forms of misguided hypnosis. Such hypnotic behaviors relate to the rise of fear-based living, authoritarianism, and deceptive language that has been cultivated under our dominant worldview. If there is truth in this claim, a solution is to return to intentional use of trance-based learning for maintaining or re-establishing balance in ways that traditional Indigenous Peoples used for 99 percent of human history (Four Arrows, 2016). A good starting place is to connect truth-speaking and awareness of hypnotic phenomena for better or worse, with sustainability education.

Indigenous communication is inseparable from the spiritual sense of interconnectedness to all things visible and invisible. For the “old Indians,” a phrase Vine Deloria, Jr. sometimes used when referring to pre-contact Indigenous people, speaking untruthfully was, by all accounts, unthinkable (Cooper, 1998). Today, however, truthfulness as a sacred phenomenon has all but vanished in our personal and public domains. In the Orwellian sense, the state and its corrupt hierarchical and capitalistic underpinnings have killed it. In fact, references to George Orwell’s *1984* and his “death of truth” (Kakutani, 2018) have exploded on the Internet since 2016. A search for “Orwell-loss-of-truth” displays numerous articles about its current relevance and how *1984* “has come true today” (Blakinger, 2016); “relates to you right now” (Temple, 2017) and “haunts our present” (2019). This shows how different modern civilization is from Indigenous truth-speaking cultures who conceive communication as being sacred and intrinsic to the concept of oneness (Four Arrows, 2019, pp. 183-188).

The impact of the loss of responsible truth on our current ecological and environmental plight is especially important to *fully* realize. I emphasize “fully” because merely noting climate change denial or political lies is insufficient to counter the Orwellian phenomenon. Each day we must also recognize how we allow language to hypnotize us into believing the deception or accepting its normalcy. To better understand how powerful words can do this, one can Google about how hypnosis is used for surgical procedures, such as that done for individuals who cannot tolerate chemical anesthesia. When I was vice-president of the Northern California Society of Clinical Hypnosis, I worked for a plastic surgeon in San Francisco and did such hypnosis with a number of patients. I even used self-hypnosis to undergo an appendectomy without anesthesia (Fisher, 2019). Or one might study modern practitioner of Newspeak named Frank Luntz to see how this happens. According to a piece in *Salon* entitled, “You don’t know Orwellian until you

know Frank Luntz,” Gabriel Winant (2010) writes, “Every word he speaks seems to be a lie.” Luntz has been a Republican media strategist (read “spin doctor”) for three decades. In a 2007 interview on NPR’s *Fresh Air*, Luntz redefined “Orwellian” as a compliment, saying that “to be Orwellian is to speak with absolute clarity, to be succinct, to explain what the even is...and to do so without any pejorative whatsoever” (NPR, 2007). Currently an influential Trump administration insider, he got the Republicans to change language about “funding the border wall” to “funding border security” (Cook, 2019).

Luntz began his work for the GOP in 1990 and one of his first impactful achievements was to recast “global warming” as “climate change.” Professor James Lawrence Powell (2011) explains in his text, *The Inquisition of Climate Science*, that he did this so as to elicit less emotional reaction (p. 174). According to a Yale university study in 2014, it worked (Nature World News, 2014). The study concluded that people are more likely to fear “global warming” and take part in a campaign to stop it than they are “climate change.” The main spokesperson for embedding the new term in the public psyche was Rush Limbaugh, the person who James Wolcott (2007) says, “has done more than any political or media figure to prevent the US from formulating sensible climate policy” (p. 2). D. R. Tucker also writes about the damage that Rush Limbaugh inflicted upon the United States in “Limbaugh’s 30 years of Lies and Fear” (2018). He begins asking, “Who could have realized how much damage he was capable of doing back then? Who could have imagined that one individual could contaminate American politics to the extent he did?”

Well, I imagined it in 1992. Then I wrote a book exposing it. Publishers rejected it, with several confessing privately that they did so “for fear of retaliation.” This is how connected Limbaugh was to top level politicians and power media outlets like Fox News. So in 1993, I self-published *The Bum’s Rush: The Selling of Environmental Backlash (Phrases and Fallacies of Rush Limbaugh)*. The back story about my writing the book is worth conveying as evidence for the hypnotic power of the kind of anti-environmental hegemony that has been so successfully orchestrated to become truly Orwellian today. It is worth telling now. After all, Limbaugh was just given the Medal of Freedom by the so-called President of the United States. And of course, even before this, The Rush Limbaugh Show had a wide audience. According to YouGov, an international research data and analytics group headquartered in London, The Rush Limbaugh Show is currently the 2nd most famous radio program/podcast with 81% knowing about it and the Sean Hannity Show is 3rd with 71%. For perspective, note that BBC Global News is 5th with 67% (<https://today.yougov.com/ratings/media/fame/radio-programs-podcasts/all>).

The story begins with my wife and I having dinner with her parents, rest their souls, back in August of 1991. I had just read a scientific article about ozone depletion and its potential consequences and brought it up. My father-in-law abruptly dismissed the concern as “rubbish.” He said he would prove it if I was willing to listen to a recording he would send me when I got back home. Knowing that Dad was an ardent viewer of Fox News, I could imagine what was coming, but of course I agreed. A few days later, he sent me a cassette tape of a Rush Limbaugh radio show. It begins with Limbaugh talking about the “environmentalist wacko crowd not knowing that the so-called ‘greenhouse gases’ are created not by man but by nature.” The relevant part was where Limbaugh refers to an editorial from the Wall Street Journal as his “first

guest” and a scientific position paper as his second guest. He then laughs for a full 42 seconds before saying “I want you to remember you’ve heard this all before. You’ve heard most of this in philosophical and theoretical form FROM MY MOUTH (emphasis his).” He then says, “Dr. Joe Waters, at Cal Tech, a top scientist with NASA’s Ozone Research Project, warns that in his view there will not be a large ozone hole this year” (saying “this year” very softly). He then paraphrases from the editorial:

As NASA has been the first to acknowledge, their own report is not finished... The Journal editorial goes on to say that environmental science has become an area fraught with political pressure... NASA’s Michael Kurylo himself noted that recent *Time Magazine* cover story on the subject plays on sensationalism and said that scientists have mixed feelings about press releases... That’s from our first guest and it can be summarized by saying that there is NO OZONE DEPLETION (emphasis his). No hole has been found!” Make no mistake about it folks. Even those who want you to believe that there is an ozone hole haven’t got the courage to lie about it. They are attempting to convince you that there might be, and the fact that there might be is reason enough to begin drastic measures that will have great economic harm and impact in order to fix them. (Limbaugh, Radio Broadcast, August 4, 1991, excerpted from Jacobs, 1994, p. 106).

After listening to this, I transcribed Limbaugh’s words and personally called Dr. Waters. After introducing myself and telling him what Limbaugh had read and said on the air, he told me that his statement merely described how a variety of environmental factors appeared to temporarily be slowing down ozone depletion. I then asked him if he thought ozone depletion was not a problem. He replied: “No, this is not a reason for any less concern. In fact, there are reasons for extreme concern for the human population!” Of course I called Dad right away and told him that Limbaugh had taken Waters’ quote out of context and that Waters strongly agreed that human-caused global warming was a very serious problem. Dad replied, “What does he know!” It was then I knew that the phenomenon of hypnosis was operating. Dad, a generous and intelligent man, a top executive with an automobile company, was no fool. So to my wife’s chagrin, I began listening to *The Rush Limbaugh Show* and read one of his books. I immediately recognized his use of hypnotic language and identified the most frequently used “red flags of persuasion.” In the book, entitled *The Bum’s Rush: The Selling of Environmental Backlash*, I show how persuasive words, fallacies and intent signals can be hypnotic, especially during times of stress, and how emotional words, pacing, double-binds, loaded questions, absoluteness, and other rhetorical strategies can bypass reasoning.

For example, I identify seven “red flags of persuasion” in the above Limbaugh presentation, one of 22 quotes from Limbaugh’s books and radio program I break down similarly followed by corrective evidence. In this particular one, he uses *absolute* phrases like “Make no mistake.” His laughing employs *humor* designed to relax the listener and create positive rapport. He uses *emotional words* like “drastic” and “great” to gain sufficient attention. He uses a deceptive strategy known as “missing word” when he says “make no mistake about it” (about what?) and *ambiguity* with his reference to people without the courage to lie. Ambiguity causes a listener to accept the intent of the speaker while letting pass other words for fear of misunderstanding. He uses *either-or* logic, a classic hypnotic device used by salesman (“Do you

want to use my pen or yours to sign the contract to buy this new vacuum sweeper?). He also uses the fallacies of *generalization*, *burden of proof* and *misrepresentation of reference*. Of course, Trump, like Limbaugh, is a master at such persuasion. Both use humor to deflect; create fear so as to increase receptivity to words (Jacobs, 1988); use authoritarianism to enhance compliance; and use hypnotic language, such as double-binds, repetition, provoking emotions, to create and/or take advantage of trance consciousness.

Of course, persuaders operating in any profession, political party, religion or social setting use such rhetorical strategies for convincing others to take a particular position. Their goals can be positive and useful or negative and harmful. In fact, most of us operate according to uninvestigated beliefs that stifle our movement toward our highest potential, especially as relates to sustainability. Settler colonialism is built into most of our systems and has normalized the occupation of Indigenous Peoples as well as the unnecessary destruction of life systems. The hypnotic hegemonic language and hypnosis of such systems continues in our schools, media and organizational structures.

Such negative, misleading hypnosis is the opposite of how natural hypnotic phenomena has been used by Indigenous Peoples for most of human history (Four Arrows, 2016, pp. 25- 52). Essentially, use of ceremony is a positive utilization of it. Intentions for being a better person, for the well-being of others while in a sacred space and using various mechanisms for entering alternative consciousness via changing brain-wave frequency. These include concentration, chanting, singing, drumming, prayerfulness, dancing, etc. There are many self-hypnosis techniques we can implement for “reprogramming” unintentional hypnotic beliefs inserted into our minds at some point in our life. We just need to couple such intentional self-hypnosis with meta-cognitive reflection and critical awareness that identifies possible false understandings and their source. The source is usually some authoritarian voice or misinterpreted experience occurring during a stressful moment. Coupling such a reframing with respectful and reciprocal communications with other-than-human energies in the natural visible and invisible world can help prevent susceptibility for the harmful consequences of our most powerful drug-words.

Linda Hogan (1982) writes that traditional Indian views on language recognize that words have power, that words become entities that have the power to destroy or save the planet (p. 352). With this understanding, Indigenous communication was inseparable from the spiritual sense of interconnectedness to all things visible and invisible. People under those forms of it, including art, prayer, song dance and dialogue, produced vibrational frequencies that moved through time and space (Four Arrows, 2019, p. 183). The idea of intentionally speaking untruthfully was, by all accounts, unthinkable. Thomas Cooper (1998), in his text, *A Time Before Deception*, tells about how when Europeans started breaking treaties with Indigenous Nations, the Natives did healing ceremonies because they thought the individuals responsible had a mental illness (p. 29). Perhaps this is still a good way to understand what is happening in the world today. Without worldview reflection and an operational awareness of the importance of words as a potent drug, we will continue to act as if insane. With it, we may regain our balance amidst the multi-faceted beauty of truthfulness.

In an 80-page paper entitled, “The Virus: Alternative Narratives,” John Fraim describes the rise of what he refers to as “alternative theories” and says it is time to strike back at them. He

includes Rush Limbaugh's disturbing claims (and Fox News personalities) as some of the authors of such potentially dangerous claims (Fraim, 2020). Although we must examine credible alternative theories and not fall for the always negative "conspiracy theory" men, truth-seeking demands attention to such potentially dangerous claims as we attempt to survive and learn from the current pandemic, a pandemic that stems from our continuing disrespect and destruction of ecological systems. More importantly, we must get back in touch with the worldview that guided us for 99% of human history. I close with some poignant words from a Navajo grandmother, sent to me by her daughter, who is a doctoral student of mine. Noting that the Navajo nation, being one of the top three hot spots in the country per capita for COVID-19, and that the grandmother was making face masks for the nation's medical personnel while speaking these words, I hope they remind all of us that the ultimate truth is in our hearts if we have the courage to dismiss the fear-based hypnosis all around. I quote from my student's email: "She said our mother (earth) is tired and warns that a break is needed for healing. This pandemic is a chance for families to come back together and shelter in safety. It is a blessing if we use our time wisely for remembering our songs and prayers. It is a time to teach our children and grandchildren our language and cultural knowledge because our elders are returning to be with our ancestors in great speed. She ended it is a time to listen to our hearts and speak the truth."

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