

Framing is normal. Every sentence we say is framed in some way. When we say what we believe, we are using frames that we think are relatively accurate. When a conservative uses the “tax relief” frame, chances are that he or she really believes that taxation is an affliction. However, frames can also be used manipulatively. The use, for example, of “Clear Skies Act” to name an act that increases air pollution is a manipulative frame. And it’s used to cover up a weakness that conservatives have, namely that the public doesn’t like legislation that increases air pollution, and so they give it a name that conveys the opposite frame. That’s pure manipulation.

Spin is the manipulative use of a frame. Spin is used when something embarrassing has happened or has been said, and it’s an attempt to put an innocent frame on it—that is, to make the embarrassing occurrence sound normal or good.

Propaganda is another manipulative use of framing. Propaganda is an attempt to get the public to adopt a frame that is not true and is known not to be true, for the purpose of gaining or maintaining political control.

The reframing I am suggesting is neither spin nor propaganda. Progressives need to learn to communicate using frames that they really believe, frames that express what their moral views really are. I strongly recommend against any deceptive framing. I think it is not just morally reprehensible, but also impractical, because deceptive framing usually backfires sooner or later.

Why don’t progressives take advantage of wedge issues?

Conservatives have been thinking about the strategic use of ideas; progressives haven’t, but we could. We could perfectly well use wedge issues. They’re all around us. Take something like clean air and clean water. Conservatives want clean air and clean water. That can be made into a wedge issue.

Imagine a campaign for poison-free communities, starting with mercury as the poison of choice, then going on to other kinds of poison in our air and in our water, around us in various forms. That could be made into an effective wedge issue, splitting the conservatives who care about their own and their