Deception

**General Definition**
Deception may be defined as misleading an audience – in other words, leading them to adopt false beliefs. It may be accomplished through lying (a lie is a statement the speaker knows is false), or without lying (e.g., through misleading truths, facial expressions, gestures, omissions).

**Two Types of Deception**
Acts of adversarial deception are performed for the good of the deceiver (generally at the expense of the deceived).

Acts of paternalistic deception are performed for the good of the deceived.

**Albert Carr on Deception (Bluffing)**
In his article entitled “Is Business Bluffing Ethical?” Carr focuses on adversarial deception in business, and argues that it is ethically permissible. He argues that ordinary morality (a.k.a. private or personal morality) does not apply to business: business, according to Carr, is a game-like activity governed by game ethics similar to the ethics of poker. More specifically, he claims that business, like poker, is an activity in which bluffing is expected and accepted by participants as a competitive strategy, and is therefore ethically permissible – even though it is generally ethically wrong outside of business, according to ordinary or personal ethics.

Carr’s central argument may be expressed as follows:

1. Poker and similar games have their own ethics, different from ordinary or private morality.
2. Bluffing is ethically permissible according to the ethics of poker and similar games.
3. Business is strongly and relevantly analogous to games like poker (the elements of the analogy he emphasizes are the competitive nature of the activities, and the expectation and acceptance of bluffing he claims exists among both business participants and poker players).
4. So, bluffing is ethically permissible in business.

**Responses to Carr (from lecture):**

One morally relevant respect in which business differs from games like poker (in other words, a disanalogy between games and business) is that game players generally fully consent to the practice of bluffing, while business participants usually do not. Full consent to a practice or act requires that one a) be fully informed about it (the informational requirement) and b) willingly accept it (the volitional requirement). These requirements are rarely both met with respect to bluffing in business. This disanalogy counts against Carr’s third premise.

A second disanalogy between games and business (see Gillespie below) is that the stakes are generally higher in business. So when adversarial bluffing occurs, it is likely to be more harmful in
business, and is therefore more ethically problematic.

Note that the first disanalogy provides a Kantian reason for not bluffing in business (interference with autonomy, lack of consent); while the second disanalogy provides a consequentialist reason for not bluffing in business (likely harmful consequences).

**Norman Gillespie’s Response to Carr**

According to Gillespie, Carr’s analogy between business and games is flawed: business is not a game, because the stakes are too high. (Gillespie is responding here to the third premise in Carr's argument). Since business is not a game, on Gillespie’s view, it is not governed by game ethics. Ordinary or personal ethics/morality does apply to business (another disagreement with Carr); and ordinary morality generally prohibits deception; so deception is generally wrong in business.

**However,** Gillespie points out that ordinary morality does allow for exceptions to the duties it prescribes. For example, according to ordinary morality we are not required to do what would normally be our duty when either of the following conditions are met:

1) The personal cost (to the agent) of performing the duty is too high.
2) Performing the duty would not accomplish anything unless others perform it too, and they won't.

So even though the (ordinary morality) duty not to deceive or bluff applies in business, we cannot blame those who bluff in business in exceptional cases, when the two conditions above are met. Business persons should try to change the way business is conducted, though, so that the conditions which pressure people into bluffing do not arise.

**Responses to Gillespie's Two Conditions (from lecture):**

Condition #1 does not take into account the harm which bluffing may do to others. We may still have a duty not to deceive, even if the personal cost is high, when deceiving will harm others.

According to condition #2 we need not perform a duty when it would not accomplish anything.... It is often hard to determine, though, that doing our duty will not accomplish anything. In many cases, people have accomplished a lot by performing duties when it looked as if nothing could be done.