

Glenn Campbell's  
*Philosophy Notes*

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# Fakery

Fakery is a natural phenomenon in any social or biological system. Every organism has its needs—food, protection, emotional affirmation, etc. When it broadcasts those needs to the world, it is going to get two kinds of responses: products that actually fill the need and products that pretend to but don't.

Think of the busy little bee, flitting from flower to flower collecting nectar. The bee and the flowers have an understanding: The flowers will provide food for the bee and the bee will distribute the flowers' pollen. The flowers have learned to attract the bee with bright colors and sweet scents so the bee knows when the nectar (and pollen) are ready.

Unfortunately, once this arrangement becomes known, poseurs start appearing on the scene. They are flowers that mimic the appearance and aroma of those the bee prefers but that don't provide any nectar. The bee wastes his time on a futile visit but still ends up distributing the fraud's pollen.

In the worst case, a flower entices the bee with a tempting aroma that cries out "Nectar here!" But as soon as the poor creature steps inside, the door slams shut and he becomes dinner himself. It's a terrible price for being naïve and trusting others.

Whenever you set up commerce of any kind, fakery is bound to happen. Politics, advertizing, sales and romance are rife with it. Distinguishing the fake from the real is the most

difficult challenge of being a consumer. If you go with your gut, you will often be fooled and might even lose your life.

The essential conflict is between substance and appearance. Substance is what really fills your needs. Appearance is what promises to fill them based on some limited sensory criteria. Organisms are easily seduced into believing appearance and substance are the same thing, but of course they're not, because senses can be fooled.

The color and aroma of a flower are not the same as nectar. They are a signal put out by the flower to advertize its wares. It is a form of symbolic communication that says, "I have what you want."

This communication depends on trust. If the flower and bee have evolved together for eons, they know what to expect from each other. Unfortunately, this trust can be subverted by an interloper who finds it easy to reproduce the signal without providing the substance. If the signal is cheap and gets him the same reward as doing the work, then why not?

Politicians are good at this. They get elected by reproducing the words and theatrical actions that people associate with leadership. They may or may not have the real skills. You find out who they are only after they have been in office for a while, and even then they have to do something exceptionally good or bad for substance to outweigh the signal.

Wherever there is communication with value attached to it, there is going to be fakery. It's a fact of life: Sooner or later, you're going to be burned by someone's lies. When this happens, you may get paranoid and stop trusting anyone at all, but that misses the point. You can't live without commerce, so you have to develop systems to distinguish the fake from the real.

In romance, it is easy to be seduced by poetry—by the gifts someone gives, by the lust they evoke in you or by how they say they love you. The real test of the relationship, however, is how it functions over time. This is substance, not signal.

A faked signal can only work for a limited time before the victim gets wise. In the case of the fraudulent flower, the bee is eventually going to figure it out. He'll learn the subtle differences between the fake and the real, probably more quickly than the fraudster can evolve. That's why most flowers with the aroma also produce the nectar.

In the long run, substance usually wins, but there can be some painful and expensive diversions along the way. We can't afford to invest in too many pyramid schemes or bad marriages before our time runs out.

The solution to fakery is operational testing. To truly evaluate a product, you have to put it through its paces in as close to real-life conditions as possible. The advice of a neutral party who has actually used the product, such as a fellow bee, is worth more than all the advertizing a flower can generate.

You shouldn't buy a car before driving it or marry someone without living with them first. Whenever possible, you should avoid making decisions based on signal alone. No matter what your emotions say, it is often wise to delay a commitment until more evidence is collected.

All fakes will eventually expose themselves, but you have to give them the chance.

*Glenn Campbell*