Soundbites as Artful Dodging
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While soundbites and one-line slogans are everywhere in campaigns and other would-be persuasive genres of political communication, it is also worth attending to the ways in which politicians systematically use carefully crafted morsels of non-committal verbiage to evade critical questions and counterarguments – in ways that do not make the evasive intention too obvious. We may call this Artful Dodging (with thanks to Charles Dickens). For several years, the main piece of advice routinely offered by communication consultants to politicians, and practiced in debates and media interviews, can be summarized as follows: Evade questions while appearing to answer them, and then quickly counterattack. I shall focus on how soundbites are constructed and used to serve the former of these functions, that of dodging artfully.