

### III-13. Do People Tell Lies?

You feel shy if you lie because *Lies run sprints and truths run marathon*. As cultural clouds of moral high ground drift in from far and away, we shroud ourselves into wishful fog of secrecy and wishful constructs that sting us into apparent invulnerability. Some prefer rumors to keep the confusion going. All such wishful constructs, by definition, are landscapes of mind. They are invented when people can not live with the reality.

Deceit is pervasive in natural world. It is more common across the species line. We are all such sinners. And often do it knowingly. In a recent study of college students in USA, even in non-threatening situations such as party-talks, on the average 60% of the statements were not correct. In another study, college students admitted that 70% of the time they lie in the excuses they use to wriggle out of academic deadlines. In both studies the count is by self-admission.

Philosophers motivated by Aristotle may argue that *if people are not telling truth then they are lying*. Are behaviors as simple as the binary 0 or 1 (on-or-off) of a computer chip? There is more to the tension between truthfulness and trickery. Words with different degrees of disregard for truth include: lies, wishful, bullshit, hogwash, humbug, balderdash, claptrap, hokum, drivel, buncombe, imposture, quackery, smoke and mirror.

We all embroider mask of theory over the whole face of nature. We are storytellers. We weave levels of meaning beyond their superficial plots or the first level of meaning. Deeper levels of meaning are not the domains of only intellectuals or

transcendental reasoning. The search does not necessarily require wading through long, obscure, and complex works.

### **Paradox of Wishful**

Often it is not clear whether words are to inform or to sell - for deduction or for intention: Wishful choices make the consumer think that a brand is distinctive.

- White man speaks with forked tongue.
- My majesty detests falsehood. It is not in me to weave tall tales (Egyptian King Thutnose, 1479-1425 BCE).
- We sing loudest when we are loosing (Hemmingway).
- Promised truth is a commodity that is never delivered, yet we pay for it. We develop ideal of truth to fulfill obligations towards one's duty without knowing what would be the outcome.
- People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war, or before an election.
- These are images. The truth lies beyond. To find that everything lacks reality and not to put an end to it all, this inconsistency is not an inconsistency at all; taken to extremes, the perception of the void coincides with the perception of the whole, and the entrance into the All. At last we begin to see, we grope no longer, we are reassured, we are confirmed... it is the faculty of enriching ourselves upon contact with unreality that we must seek. The mythology of mind is the most intuitive through the wishful.
- Faith is believing in something you know damn well ain't so. Lack of faith is not to believe in things you know damn well are so! Never utter these words: "I do not know this, therefore it is false." One must study to know, know to understand, understand to judge.

- For justifying their animal ethics most Europeans believe that only the primates feel pain. Fish anglers are told to believe that fish do not feel pain.
- **Bandwagon effect:** How we are impressed with the reach of wishful. To appreciate what may be convincing to you we consider what we are served by others in spite of our best judgment. When we hear the same story everywhere you look and listen, we assume '*it must be true.*' And more people believe it is true, the more likely they are to repeat it, and thus the more likely you are to hear it.

**Forked tongue:** Forked tongue is the common weapon of mass deception (WMD). A disconnect between the self versus the cultural identities has earned Europeans a reputation of forked-tongue among the colonized people of all traditional societies of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. It is made worse by collusion of Church and State. The Victorians sermonized the world about virtues yet paid little attention to filth and depravation in their midst. Modern prophets of Human Rights and Globalization work with similar war cries. Traditional societies rarely judge others by their own standards. Fortunately most do not have to resort to *crocodile teeth* and *elephant tusks* and other reference to the reptilian character exhibited by diplomats, politicians and preachers alike.

**What is lying?** Whatever may be the evolutionary rationale, human societies display the widest range of varied, complex and premeditated deceptions. Thanks to the dye and bleach peddlers one would not know that only 10% of the blonds in USA are naturally blond. For the enticed is it mere wishful or something more?

Truthful utterance is not about saying what comes to your mind. It is about what you know and think to be, and live with its consequences. For the dogmatic *the truth is what I believe is the truth*. For the powerful it is fear backed up with force. Legal and statistical truths have their own spins. Reality of the situation shows up in the long term consequences. Imagine the value of a meter on your TV screen that tells the fractional truth value of the pronouncements you hear from the talking heads, experts and politicians. Nothing stays under wraps and secrecy stifles truth. Paradox of truth is that only fools stifle truth when they can not bear its consequences.

**False confessions.** Desire to be on the winning side sways elections. Such bets increases the number of just-in-case-believers. Others are coerced into submission with overt or covert threats of "hell." False confessions are extracted by torture. Such methods have not disappeared with the Inquisitors of the Christian Church, or even if declared unacceptable by Geneva Convention. Pressure tactics are routinely used to elicit confessions missed with wishful and willful lying, distortions, and self-aggrandizing. The enforcers and interrogators often manipulate suspects into confessing to crimes they did not commit. Many have ended up on death row without being guilty of the crime.

**Omniscience coexists with omnipotence.** Truthfulness is the basis of the concept of justice. It continues to evolve. Not long ago in Europe, even the search for reality was considered affront to Truth. It was a reason enough for beheading if the reason did not conform to the approved dogma. Social pressure is still applied in US in the form of bullying, hate mail and threatening

phone calls if you do not agree with the fundamentalist positions on creationism, school prayer, or abortion. In last few decades we have come a long way to demand that *assumption of innocence unless proven guilty, the burden of proof is on the accuser and prosecutor, and punishment to match the crime, and be able to hear accusation and face the accuser*. Of course very few will agree that the system is perfect: Deep-pocket and legal maneuvering can still have the last say; big swindlers do not get punishment in proportion to that matted out to petty thieves.

**No wonder we learn to say what others want to hear.** Healthy skepticism is part of public discourse. We distort truth to gain advantage. Selective use and partial disclosure of information is an accepted strategy in dealings, and more so in impersonal dealings. Fog of lies and cloud of uncertainty is the business of opinion-makers. Providing lip service to *truth and justice for the people* is integral part of the political process. Such environment of shaded information breeds unproductive cynicism.

#### **Did Shakespeare the writer exist?**

Contrary to popular belief, in all likelihood the literary works attributed to Shakespeare (1564-1616) were not written by the bard for the Royalty who acted in 2 or 3 show per week. The bard had little educational background (possibly Grammar school), time, and resources to have access to the variety of international and cross-cultural experiences that are part of the writings attributed to the writer. It is not clear if the bard actor ever traveled outside England.

We virtually no factual account of Shakespeare the writer. There is no mention of such a writer, or of his death, in the contemporary publications. There are no known manuscripts of any of the great works of Shakespeare. There was no such

contemporary literary tradition of individual writers in England from which the work could have sprouted. Only decades after the death of the bard, literary works attributed to Shakespeare were first published as an edited collection.

It has been suggested that the real writer could be Marlow (b.1564-?). He was recruited as a student at Cambridge and later sent clandestinely by Elizabeth I to spy on the activities of the Catholic Church in Italy. Another possibility has also been suggested. Recall that in 1611 the King James Bible was published as the *Word of God*. It was edited by some 40 scholars at Oxford and Cambridge from a version published 50 years earlier based on the more ancient Greek and Hebrew books. Recall that this was also the period when the European Universities were involved in reformulation for their own purposes of the material captured from other parts of the world. Could it be that following this tradition the works ascribed to Shakespeare came out of some such *committee*?

Dynamics of something *less than all truth* goes far deeper. To get around such limitations the thrust of the scientific search is on description of real-world behaviors. Inferences are valid only in the sense that they are falsified by evidence although they are falsifiable. On a more mundane level, motives for certain inferences come attached to the support. It has become necessary to guard against the 'findings' that may be encouraged by profit motives to tell *half-truth*.

### **Is it Lying or What?**

In a recent wartime interview, an army captain in the Middle East desert made a disclaimer: "The sun-glasses I am wearing are not advertisement for their manufacturer X but to protect against the

sun” By naming X the soldier just did exactly what he says he is not doing. Is it lying or what? Advertisements, propaganda and psychological operations (psi-op) rely on such dubious words to create a fog of uncertainty. If the soldier knows that he is advertising then he is a liar giving a contradictory statement but hiding behind the paradox of *I am a liar*. On the other hand if the soldier is stupid enough not to realize that he is advertising then the statement is true but wishful.

A US President and his Secretary of State made utterances during their pronouncements before the war in 2003. They relied on illogical negatives and implications to shape public opinion. With any facts, such assertions were designed to give an appearance of a logical argument. As it turned out even the so called evidence was fabricated after the decision to attack of Iraq had already been made. Who is responsible for such misinformation campaigns?

**Sooner or later people do begin to lump together the clever, wishful and false assertions into reasons to be cynical. The situation is made worse as the perpetrators remain unaccountable even after the lies are exposed.**

**Procrastinator’s excuse.** For chronic procrastinators doing a task tomorrow or even next year, is infinitely preferable to doing it now. Most of us postpone work sometimes, but about 20% do it most of the time. From US college students the usual excuses are: I was sick, I didn’t understand the assignment, I overslept, I forgot, I had bleeding gum, I had a family emergency, or my grandma or grandpa died. The last excuse is made multiple times a years, and sometimes to the same professor. According to a recent study, in 70% of the cases excuses are pure fiction. Although both males and females use such excuses equally easily,

the female professors are lied to more often. Most of these students say they felt a considerable amount of guilt as they lied to their instructor. Some even had residual guilt afterwards. But even the guilt-ridden excuse-makers said they would do it again.

*Sniffing out cheaters is innate.* Controlled studies demonstrate that humans from widely different cultures, ranging from the US college students to members of an Amazonian tribe, can identify when someone is reneging on some type of social agreement. It has been reported that a man, who suffered damage to one portion of the brain in a bicycle accident, lost the ability to detect a cheater, however, he remained able to reason and express emotions. It suggests that the ability to sniff cheaters may be linked to a particular region of the brain. The ability to spot a cheater is also seen in the behavior of a variety of species ranging from bats to baboons. Often it is in the interest of animals to help blood relatives without the promise of a reward. On the other hand, indiscriminately performing such favors can also hurt chances of survival for all.

**People can spot cheaters.** All systems of reciprocity are open to subtle cheating. The dialectic of cooperation and competition pushes social evolution. Since no individual can live by deception alone, deception has to be grounded in truth. When used too often, false signals lose their value. Animals also learn to be wary of lies. Sniffing out lies has great survival value. The body responds when one lies. People appear to have an innate ability to determine when someone is cheating them out of a deal. To ward off such incursions in the future it is also useful to let the other side know that you have spotted them cheating. It is like taking people initially at their own words, then tit for tat.

Before it is too late, it is advantageous to judge actions that do not work, are unfair, inconsistent, and contradictory. Are humans born with the capacity to identify people who cheat during social exchanges? The ability to spot contradiction in normal behavior may come from the ability to recognize unusual perturbations in a pattern of behavior. For example, parents usually know when the child is hiding something or not telling the whole truth. It appears that toddlers can also spot problems from the mother's voice. Individuals who enter into social exchanges without determining whether the participant will cheat them out of the return favor will become exploited over time. Consequently, those who try not to let themselves become exploited during social exchanges are more likely to live long enough to reproduce to pass their genes to the next generation.

It is wishful to think that we get away with excuses. People rarely confront the willful liar or cheater. Not only the behavior influences all of us, but it also has long-term consequences for the cheater as well as the society. We learn to be skeptical. Taking lies with a grain of salt does not make the experience palatable, but it postpones the moment of reckoning.

To be effective even the habitual liars do not always lie. Wishful lie, interspersed with occasional and well placed facts, is more advantageous. Accomplished liars have a fall-back position while keeping others guessing. Often bigger lies are likely to go unpunished, or even unquestioned. Most people can not very well grasp blatant contradictions – they begin to blame themselves *for not understanding the issues*. If exposed, big lies like corporate swindles and Government propaganda are often treated leniently in the public opinions. They are rarely tried in the courts. People are much harsher in their judgment about welfare mothers.

<b>Internet and rumors</b>
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Both relay information through interconnected nodes of the faithful and believers. In a network each useful node is connected to two or more nodes. A faithful node transfers or responds only to the information it receives. This is useful for e-mails and related uses of the cyberspace. However, fun, profit and trouble lies with the believers that add augment the message. It could be tagged on as an advertisement, it could be indistinguishable from the message or the mode of transfer, or it could be a virus or a worm. At one extreme, for making profit the unwanted messages attached to your internet rely on a return response rate of one in 500,000!

You become a useful node for spreading rumor if you respond or provide feedback. Reliability and speed of rumors and internet traffic is achieved because potentially all nodes in the network can be used for such purposes but a very small fraction is sufficient for the viability of the business. Insight into how rumors and propaganda spread is useful for shaping-public opinions. *Astro-turfing* is a way to cover up (with synthetic grass) and give appearance of credibility by creating an environment where nothing else can take root. Religions, politicians, governments, and war-machines rely on the believers to pass on the interpretations of buzz-words and sound bites, and at the same time create wedge in the ranks of the opponents. Together it creates a fog of unreliable information. In this environment relevant facts can not take hold and issues get lost as contradictions and inconsistencies. See Chapter III-30 to III-32 for more.

**Spotting contradictions.** Television has made it easier to judge the public performance of VIPs and celebrities. Even in the non-fiction of news and documentaries it is amusing to watch people

caught-up in a web of their own wishfulness. Watch twitches and gestures. Good cameraman and light conditions are remarkably effective in bringing “such people face to face with the viewers.” Then there are Teflon-coated actors can sing without a feeling, presumably because they do not understand what they are saying.

**Words of Mass Deception (WMD)**

In a recent (2002) speech at the United Nations US Secretary of State Powell made a pitch to “show” that Iraq possesses the “weapons of Mass-destruction.” Not only the logic of the argument was faulty, but the performance was unconvincing. By some counts well over 85% of the viewers were not persuaded. Contrast this to the pronouncements made by the partisans, talking-heads and opinion-makers sang the praise of the speech in chorus. The spin continued in spite of the fact that the UN inspectors could find no incriminating evidence before the war, or after the US occupation of Iraq.

**Make a loan and lose a friend.** Once a friend borrowed something. He did not return it, nor did I ever remind him. Slowly he drifted away. It was a reasonable price to pay because this person never asked me again for anything else.

One of my nephews asked me for some money. I gave it to him on the condition that he would return it. He took the money on my terms. Soon afterwards, he told many people that I wanted him to return the money, and that he had no intention of returning. After a couple of years when he did not return the first installment, I asked him if he realizes the consequences of what he did: First, he himself cannot ask me for more help. Second, the people whom he told about the incident will not trust him. Perhaps most importantly, others who may have wanted money

from me now know that I only give a *loan*. So I am spared the freeloaders.

### **On Truth**

- \* The world is Lawful, hence redundant (Herbert A. Simon).
- \* Much more is at stake in the form of the implication of truth than truth itself.
- \* Knowing nothing is the reason to doubt that one knows everything.
- \* And how will you inquire, Socrates, into that which you know not? What will you put forth as the subject of inquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is what you did not know?
- \* Something seemingly self-evidently true to us does not guarantee that it ever was strictly, true (Robert Nozick)
- \* Indeed, religious conviction is not a matter of religious conviction for me (Robert Nozick)
- \* To know the correct and deep theory of truth's nature requires far more than the mere ability to state particular truths. It requires knowledge of the ultimate dependence relations, and of the ultimate explanatory and ontological factors. A theory of truth, therefore, arises closer to the end of inquiry than to its beginning. Do not be surprised that we have not reached it yet (Robert Nozick).

# Against Gods and Humbug

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