

A NEW ESSAY ABOUT LYING: A RESPONSE TO ALEXANDRE KOYRÉ

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Abstract

There is a tendency to assume that, under certain circumstances, lying is morally justifiable. There are numerous logical and philosophical arguments, which claim to have objective validity, point out that a world where only truth exists would be unbearable. This brings, as a necessary consequence, the relativization of the importance of truth and its function of being the pillar mode of the moral principle of honesty, turning truthful discourse into a tool, as usable as lying for pragmatic matters that are sometimes disguised as moral. Frankly in disagreement with such positions, this essay aims to present a detailed counter argument, claiming that lying is always immoral.

Keywords: Alexandre Koyré, Ethics, Pragmatism, Radical Honesty, Truth and Lies.

UN NUEVO ENSAYO SOBRE LA MENTIRA: UNA RESPUESTA A ALEXANDRE KOYRÉ

Resumen

Existe una tendencia a asumir que, bajo las circunstancias adecuadas, mentir es moralmente justificable. Argumentos lógicos y filosófico, que pretenden tener validez objetiva, se presentan constantemente señalando que sería insoportable un mundo donde sólo existiera la verdad. Esto trae como consecuencia necesaria la relativización de la importancia de la verdad y la función que tiene como un modo pilar del principio moral de honestidad, convirtiendo los discursos veraces y los falsos por igual en herramientas utilizables para cuestiones pragmáticas que, muy frecuentemente, se disfrazan de moral. En franco desacuerdo con tales posiciones, este ensayo se propone presentar una contra-argumentación, señalando que mentir es siempre inmoral.

Palabras clave: Alexandre Koyré, ética, honestidad radical, pragmatismo, verdad y mentira.

Foreword

For in the same way you judge others,
you will be judged,
and with the measure you use,
it will be measured to you..
~Jeshua ben Joseph, *Matthew 7:2*

The ultimate in vanity
Exploiting their supremacy
I can't believe the things you say
I can't believe
I can't believe the price you pay
Nothing can save you
~James Hetfield, *And... Justice for All*

The following essay has two main goals. First of all, and most importantly, it aims to answer some of the arguments constantly presented by pragmatic or consequentialist moral systems regarding the utility of lying and/or its moral justification when the external circumstances “oblige” us to do so. Secondly, in order to achieve the first goal, I propose to present some of the ideas written by one of the most underrated philosophers from the 20th century, Alexandre Koyré. The Jewish-Russian thinker is better known for his contributions in the fields of philosophy of science and of religion, yet he held very firm anti-totalitarian and libertarian political positions which can be seen in his essay *Réflexions sur le mensonge* (“Reflections about lying”). I certainly do not claim that Koyré is a supporter of subjective moral systems nor that he would find lying as something desirable. It is evident that he was very critical towards political groups and it seems that his criticisms are aimed towards people for whom lying is a tool; it must be made clear that I have the impression that Koyré’s essay is filled with irony. Nevertheless, the fact that he does not soundly condemn lying, and since irony is quite often not understood by many, his arguments invite us to consider that given no further alternative, lying might be the right thing to do as a way to fight fire with fire. I claim, however, that if the analysis were to remain purely pragmatic, it is beyond any doubt that lying buys time, yet it should never be the ultimate solution to any problem which affirms

once more, that formally, utilitarian pragmatic positions are vulnerable to the fallacy of supervening evidence and, materially, they do not suffice, since lying generates more problems than it solves.

Beyond the pleasure brought by reading Koyré's essay, due to his excellent and politically critical writing style, his text *Réflexions sur le mensonge* results very helpful when the discussion revolves around lying, since he presents common arguments often heard among utilitarian or post-modern ethicists regarding the action of falsifying thoughts and beliefs.

I. About lying

True worshippers shall worship
the Father in spirit and in truth:
for the Father seeketh such to worship him.
God is a Spirit: and they that worship him
must worship him in spirit and in truth
~John 4:23-24

Believe in the liar
His words will convey
Profound and charismatic
Influence all to his side
Tell them what they want to hear
Keep the wolves at bay
~Ross Dolan, *Crown the Liar*

If the immediate cognitive content of man results from the collaboration between the sensibility, gatherer of data coming from the world outside, the pure *a priori* concepts and rational schematism,¹ we can affirm that fantasy and lies –i.e. fantasies that consciously and strategically arrogate an illegitimate pretension of validity– are the result of the capacity of man to build a world which he understands as possible, twisting its “hows” in the interior of those who judge it. From that same capacity to re-construct, and in combination with

¹ The use of Kantian terms is permissible without any further argument, because he is the most representative defender of the radical honest philosophy wing.

the instrumentality that the practical reason possesses, human beings have recognized that in front of the apparent hostility of the environment, just as affirmed by Koyré, “lying is a weapon”: “lying is a weapon: if there is no threat or danger it will not be employed. A group will only utilize lye if, because of being weaker, it is attacked and persecuted” (Koyré, 2009: p.40).² Lying is thus a tool for survival. The circumstances in which Alexandre Koyré lived, being from Jewish ascendancy during the Nazi epoch, help new generations understand the reasons for such claims. No one can argue that the content of Koyré’s assertion is, at least, partially right.³ To lie is very useful. This can be proved at any level of human life. Lying prevents the uttering subject from disgrace (for as long as they are not caught) allowing them to continue their everyday existence just as much as it helps a defenseless subject to survive before stressing circumstances. “Everybody knows that lying is ‘ugly’. But this indictment is far from being absolute. The prohibition is far from being total. There are cases in which lying is tolerated, permitted and even recommended” (Koyré, 2009: p.30).⁴

Long time gone are the days of the religious moral systems in which deforming the truth was a grave sin (*péché très grave*) that separated humans from God and opposed us to him (*nous sèpare de Dieu et nous oppose à Dieu*), because God was of light and being (*de la lumière et de l’être*). For Koyré, the order of things that has resulted from practical inter-subjectivity has brought Humanity far beyond those times

2 In the original (I.O.): “*Le mensonge est une arme; on ne lémpoloiera donc pas si l’on n’est pas menace et ne court pas de danger. Il en résulte qu’un groupment n’adoptera la règle du mensonge que si, étant le plus faible, il est attaqué et persecuté*” Translated by the author (T. A.).

3 It must be remarked that Koyré’s essay “Reflections about lying” can be read from a very ironical and critical perspective that aims to criticize totalitarian regimes as the Nazi one; yet, the arguments that Koyré presents are double edged as it will be argued in this essay. In a moral system, and lying is an object of moral study, that which is valid for a subject is implicitly accepted as valid for any subject since morality has a claim to universality.

4 “*Tout le monde sait qu’il es “laid” de mentir. Mais cette condamnation est loin d’être absolue. L’interdiction est loin d’être totale. Il y a des cas où le mensonge est toléré, permis, et meme recommandé*” (T. A.).

in which mirroring the Word of Righteousness –materially truthful– and the Word of God –formally truthful–, perennially identical to each other in the mythical/religious thought, was an obligation.

It is undeniable that what we find today in everyday life has made us understand that, before the need of survival, lying indeed presents itself as a useful tool whose strategic use finds its germ within the family from the first formation of children and follows a continuous and safe path of normalization until the day we die: without any right to know their real origin, children are anything in the parental conservative speech except the plain product of a sexual relation, while, stripped from their right to know their real end, the unavoidable is hidden from dying persons with the hope of delaying the arrival of that which is impossible to postpone, death. “It might be worse for them to know the truth”. Both of these examples, as common to find as they are *naïve*, are grounded in the belief that the life of the individual is worthy in itself, transcendental and priceless even if we live in a world of preventing wars and reifying capitalism.

According to the defenders of “more human moralities”, truthful and deceiving sentences co-exist in the same league, for both “might” (or might not) harm: “*Grosso modo* it can be proved that lying is tolerated as long as it does not harm the well-functioning of social relations, as long as it ‘does not harm anyone’; lying is allowed as long as it does not rip the social *liaison* that binds the group, that means, as long as it is not exercised upon the interior of the group but upon the outside” (Koyré, 2009: p.32).⁵ Exceptions are made, as the sentence states, when the passive subject of the lie, i.e. the addressee, is our own identity. For radical moral philosophies that claim that lying is undesirable under any circumstance, the immoral act derives from a false axiom: an “ought to” (tell the truth or lie) cannot derive from a “might” (harm or be convenient). Since lying is the fear of derivable consequences from telling the truth,⁶ humans

5 “*Grosso modo on peut constater que le mensonge est toléré tant qu’il ne nuit pas au bon fonctionnement des relation sociales, tant qu’il ne ‘fait de mal à personne’; il est permis tant qu’il ne déchire pas le lien social qui unit le groupe, su nois, mais en dehors de lui*” (T. A.).

6 Under no circumstance shall we fall into logomachical situations leading the atten-

have been robbed from their rights to know and articulate the latter. Given the circumstances, the obligation to tell the truth, taught to most of us as an empty formula when we were children, is only another element in the staging of a shameless and deceiving environment. If the subject shall be majorly understood as an entity that results from, and at the same time generates social inter-action, the development inside the existential contour lets him know that any articulation of speech is teleological –something that shouldn't be any novelty even in a world of truth, because language is a mediation and not an end in itself–, and that, at the same time, the addressees of communication are used as resources to facilitate reaching specific goals under the claimed legitimacy of the personal or common survival. Truth and lies, in a utilitarian world, have exactly the same value and become friends of vacuity alone. When in the middle of relevant situations, lying will be used as much as necessary while the truth will be told only if required, because the discourse transforms itself into conditions of benefit for its transmitter. Veracity, i.e. the correspondence between thinking and articulated speech directed towards a listener, is only common in bland and superficial situations merely descriptive of the Outside (*clichés*) but never descriptive of profound thinking and living, nor of the inner realm. Thus, “the weather is beautiful” (or ugly, hostile or agreeable) to us while “humans are monogamous by nature” (and happy because of it), “countries are sovereign” and “people are the holders of political power”. Needless to say these latter sentences should be read sarcastically.

Now then, since humans find constant resistance to their survival, can lying be judged as a moral act when the value of articulating the truth and that of self-preservation seem to be in conflict? Koyré pragmatically answers that:

Philosophical morals, leaving aside some cases of extreme rigor like the ones of Kant and Fichte are generally more indulgent. More human. Intransigent in matters of the positive and active

tion away from the core of this text: under the term *truth* I will only understand, to simplify the language, the same as veracity (Cfr. Kant, 2000, AA VIII, UvRMI: p.426).

forms of lying, *suggestio falsi*, they are much less so in matters of its negative and passive form: *suppressio very*. They know, according to the proverb, that ‘not every single truth is good to be told’? At least not always and not to everyone (Koyré, 2009, p. 28).⁷

They are more human (*plus humaines*), affirms Koyré in what could be understood, with or without the intention of the Russian-French philosopher, as a critique to moral systems that are internally inconsistent, because “Man has always lied. He lied to himself. And to the others” (Koyré, 2009: p.18).⁸ An essential criticism towards lying is however weakened when he neutralizes it by connecting it with language in a necessary manner. According to Koyré, the feature that makes moral systems, which are flexible in matters of lying, “more human” is the fact that “Man is defined by the Word which inherently brings the possibility of lying” (Koyré, 2009: p.16).⁹ This implies that, if they are more human, they are moral systems that won’t doubt transforming the speech they emit for their own convenience in order to justify actions whose moral valuation will be from that moment on, undeniably contingent. They are thus philosophical morals that are based on that which “could be” and not on that which “should be”. Since any system of human knowledge must be based on axioms, it results evident that, at the moment of building a foundation for a system, *accidens pro essential absurdum est*.

7 “*Les morales philosophiques, quelque cas de rigorisme extrême, tels ceux de Kant et de Fichte, mis à part, sont, généralement parlant, beaucoup plus indulgentes. Plus humaines. Intransigeantes en ce qui concerne la forme positive et active du mensonge, suggestion falsi, elles le sont beaucoup moins en ce qui concerne sa forme négative et passive: suppression very. Elles savent que, selon le proverbe, ‘toute vérité n’est pas bonne à dire’. Du moins pas toujours. Et pas à tout le monde.*” (T. A.). However and due to the historical context in which he is writing and the context of the essay itself, I grant Koyré that his statements might be full of criticism towards totalitarianism and that he might have been a Kantian in disguise. Yet he remains ambiguous while condemning the act of lying and recurrently presents double edged arguments.

8 “*l’homme a toujours menti. Menti à lui-même. Et aux autres.*” (T. A.).

9 “*l’homme se définit par la parole, que celle-ci entraîne la possibilité du mensonge*” (T. A.).

Koyré affirms that at the moment of telling the truth “consequences must be considered just as the use that listeners will do with what is being told” (Koyré, 2009: p.30).¹⁰ Such a bold description, I could not do anything but disagree, since from the past you can only foresee the future in an accidental manner. From our understanding of matters of fact—since they indefectibly go hand in hand with synthetic *a posteriori* judgments and are therefore merely subjective, relative and dependent—no universal apodictic principle, condition for the possibility of the foundation of a system, can be extracted. To think the opposite would lead us to two aberrations: firstly, we would have to implicitly accept the possibility of totalizing a particularity which dangerously flirts with intolerance and negates the understanding of reality of “the Other”. Secondly, we would be mentally filtering the undisputable principle that claims that “the perfection of an idea (epistemological field) tells us nothing about its material content (ontological field) in a necessary way”. Doing the opposite illegitimately allows the intermingling of fields of human knowledge at the moment of reflection, originating countless contradictions and fallacies. However, it is possible to agree with Koyré to a certain extent when he rightfully differentiates, exempting the result from inherent moral contradictions, *suppressio veri* from *suggestio falsi*—a distinction which was not unfamiliar to the most representative defender of Truth, Immanuel Kant—¹¹ as he critically analyzes the possibility of measuring (*doser*), diluting (*diluer*) and concealing (*habiller*) truth in its pure state (*pure état*) (Koyré, 2009: p.30). Contrary to

¹⁰ “Il faut bien tenir compte des conséquences, de l’usage qu’en feront ceux à qui on la dira.” (T.A.)

¹¹ It can be seen that Kant did not hesitate to utilize *suppressio veri* and euphemisms to protect his autonomy. In the prolog of his work *The Conflict of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*), Kant explicitly writes that he carefully chose the words and their order within a sentence of promise at the moment in which he forever committed to the *King Friedrich Wilhelm* not to publicly teach about religion. Kant considered that his promise was directed to a particular person (the Prussian King) and was not referred to the particular action of never teaching again about religion: “I also carefully chose the expression in such a way that I wouldn’t be renouncing to my freedom of judgment about religious matters forever, but only as long as his Majesty lived” [*Auch diesen Ausdruck wählte ich vorsichtig, damit ich nicht der Freiheit meines Urtheils in diesem Religionsproceß auf immer, sondern nur so lange Se. Maj. am Leben wäre, entsagte.*] (T. A.) (Kant, 2000, AA VII, SdF: p.10)

suggestio falsi which is always immoral even if many consider the opposite, *suppressio veri* does not necessarily break any moral maxim. Euphemism blurs the truth, but that is not immoral, due to that which is known as the “abstraction principle”, even if the act is instrumental and strategically aims for self-conservation. In order to avoid any suspicion, I will come back to this matter later.

Can a “lie to protect” approach in life find a justification in the text of Koyré? “Truth is precisely the nourishment of the soul, mostly of the strong souls. It might be dangerous for the rest [...] It can even harm them” (Koyré, 2009: p.30).¹² However, this way of protecting “the Other” by means of lying to them, departs solely from suppositions referring to future possibilities, to possible material or psychological harming effects whose generation is factually uncertain. One of the logical wrongs of pragmatic and consequentialist systems is to filter the fact that even when they claim one should solely take the “possible” –yet, always unknown and uncertain– material effects into consideration before acting (in this case telling the truth or telling a lie “to protect”), certain values are still to be found as the motor of the action: more dignifying conditions of living (dignity –more desirable than indignity–), peace of mind (tranquility –more desirable than anguish–), goodness (more desirable than evilness), love (more desirable than hate), healing or comforting (more desirable than harming), etc. Thus, they substitute *a priori* principles with *a priori* values –oxymoronically–, yet they cannot resign to *a priori* categories even if they suggest the opposite. Pragmatic systems are recommended and thus contradictory in themselves. Formal moral systems, such as Kant’s, do take harm into consideration at the moment of making a decision, yet conceptually, thus apodictically, erasing the inner contradiction while remaining humanitarian. The Kantian system of morality departs from the idea of absolute worth had by humans. This feature comes from our capacity to regulate ourselves (autonomy) which is harmed every time we act selfishly, not granting “the Other” before us the same value we place

¹² “*Si la vérité est bien ‘la nourriture de l’âme’, elle est surtout celle des âmes fortes. Elle peut être dangereuse aux autres [...] Elle peut même les blesser*” (T. A.).

upon ourselves (Cfr. Kant, 2000, AA IV, GMS: p.428). We harm our autonomy (faculty to give ourselves rules, which determines what we are as humans), when we break them. The harm “might” be done to “the Other”, but it is definitely done to ourselves and to the concept of humanity: “lie, simply defined as an intentional false declaration directed to another human, does not need the complement of having to harm another [...] for it always harms [...] humanity in general [...]” (Kant, 2000, AA VIII: p.426).¹³ Furthermore, “for the infamy (the state of being morally despicable) which accompanies [a lie], also accompanies the liar like his shadow [...] Lying is the disparagement and quasi elimination of his human dignity” (Kant, 2000, MS, AA VI: p.429).¹⁴

Dichotomization of communication is the main problem faced by those who claim to place truth and lies on the same level of neutralized contingencies equally applicable depending on the requirements of the situation inside a system based upon self-conservation. As Niklas Luhman sustains, this form of dual communication has a high affinity with opportunism and can be adequately used to twist their original sense, thus saying the opposite about any particular theme. This would be a little bit like Göddel’s theorem taken to the sphere of conduct normativity: any existing thing can turn into a proposed theme from opposite points of view, refuting the reasons of their opposition using exactly the same arguments as long as they are seen from the abstract perspective (Cfr. Luhman, 1995: pp.81ss). Systems that utter determinations from the outside world presenting subjective valuations as axioms or principles adequately function in both senses inside a context whose logic always seems to be convincing. However, these systems ignore the principle of economy¹⁵

13 *“Die Lüge also, bloß als vorsetzlich unwahre Declaration gegen einen andern Menschen definirt, bedarf nicht des Zusatzes, daß sie einem andern schaden müsse [...] Denn sie schadet jederzeit [...] der Menschheit überhaupt [...]”* (T. A.).

14 *“Denn Ehrlosigkeit (ein Gegenstand der moralischen Verachtung zu sein), welche sie begleitet, die begleitet auch den Lügner wie sein Schatten. [...] Die Lüge ist Wegwerfung und gleichsam Vernichtung seiner Menschenwürde”* (T. A.).

15 The answer that requires less conditions for the possibility to be sound is the answer which has more probabilities to be the right one.

and always have to turn to either a new external factor that patches up the holes of their system, or to fetishization¹⁶ by presenting their aims as principles. The reasoning process in those cases goes a little bit like this: “I am the good guy, the bad guy is the one who opposes my survival, whose worth is based upon my beliefs which are valid as principles (strategically teleological) always referring to myself and, therefore, I can lie (and given the case make use of any mean close to me) in order to reach my ultimate goal (my survival)”. If the subject can accept that which is contingent as a principle (which from that moment on will be free of any need of being *a priori*) upon which a moral system will be based, everything can be plausibly valid and moral. To base a moral system (or any other) on *a posteriori* facts is a fallacy. Unfortunately, that seems to be the logic permeating everyday inter-subjective relations in the micro and macro spheres. Koyré himself, defending tolerance, intelligence and freedom of people affirms in the very last sentence of his essay that “the popular masses of democratic countries [...] revealed themselves as the superior category of humanity comprised by men who think; on the other hand, the totalitarian pseudo-aristocracies appear to be the representatives of the inferior category, of the naïve man who does not think” (Koyré, 2009: p.76).¹⁷ I am sorry to say that Hitler, the Nazis and the Fascists, to whom Koyré’s essay is directed, would have agreed every time had they listened to a person expressing himself in such terms. Totalitarians, epitome of the deceivers, using the same abstract principles, could go from the point that truth and therefore rightfulness is had by those who have seen the greatness of the Aryan race and the “German” and “Roman Destinies”. If principles don’t change, the material facts that concrete them are subjective and therefore all equally valid. Moreover, an affirmation, such as

16 By this I mean to grant essential import to a feature or an object, may it be real, imaginary or conceptual, which is actually subordinated to another object, twisting the categorical hierarchies between them.

17 “*ce sont justement les masses populaires des pays démocratiques [...] se sont avérées appartenir à la catégorie supérieure de l’humanité et être composées d’hommes pensants, et ce sont, en revanche, les pseudo-aristocraties totalitaires qui représentent sa catégorie inférieure, celle de l’homme crédule et que ni pense pas.*” (T.A.) Underlining by the author.

the one made by Koyré, confirms that using *a posteriori* conclusions from biased subjective interests is quite risky: post-WWII history has plainly evidenced that taking democracy as something given, prevailing over aristocracies in the internal political life of western nations, is nothing but a lack of information or analysis. Koyré incarnated the same *naïve* credulity he was criticizing.

II. About telling the truth (veracity)

Profound it is, dark and obscure;
Things' essences all there endure.
Those essences the truth enfold
Of what, when seen, shall then be told
~Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching*

Once again I know that looking through their eyes
... As they came with their love...
I know the truth of life and it lies before my eyes
The truth lies within you know
~Kobi Farhi, *The Truth Within*

I will dedicate the following lines to analyze the famous, almost mythical, affirmation attributed to Jaques Derrida in the sense that it would be unbearable to live in a Kantian world where there could only be correspondence between our saying and our thinking. Undeniably, if the content of that which constructs the subject –*a priori* formal capacities aside– is almost completely determined by the social environment, and at the same time the fear of the consequences that the linguistic formulation of truth to the outside world is the origin of using lies,¹⁸ it results that in a social sphere where, not only for matters of speeches but also within the praxis of daily life, truth were considered as an inalienable and necessary¹⁹ value, humans would not even have the concept of the possibility of not accepting

18 It is important to notice that I'm not talking about phantasies whose differentiation has already been explained in the first lines of this text.

19 In the logical sense of the word.

the effects –moment 2– of telling the truth –moment 1–, because they would not be harmful –moment 0–. Thus, given the case that someone would ask anyone²⁰ for:

- 1) The way he/she looks, or
- 2) A possible infidelity, or
- 3) For his/her time left on this earth.

The asking person would be doing it from a perspective of sincere acceptance of an answer that would reflect:

- 1a) the subjective appreciation, or
- 2a) the actions of his/her interlocutor, or
- 3a) the facts of life

The asking person would have the following options after listening to an answer that could be considered rude:

1b) since the answer regarding appearances always comes from a plain subjective judgment, the asking person can ignore it (which would be absurd, because in that case he/she would not have asked in first place); or he/she could simply ask for further advise that would help him/her about how he/she looks according to the external criteria that he/she has previously accepted as being valid. In any case the asking person would have no reason to feel offended.

2b) In a world where fear of the consequences of truth is non-existent, it would be accepted universally that humans are promiscuous by reasons of their own “animal nature” and the tendency to biological reproduction within it; therefore, the question would have to be formulated under different terms, where the free use of sexuality, an inherent right for a “rational being with free will”, would be the core of the question and not a possible cheating action which by definition would be impossible in a world of truths: With how many persons

²⁰ I am using the same examples attributed to Derrida.

have you freely exercised your sexuality lately? The possible irritation before a multiplicity of sexual partners would result from the eagerness to dominate from the asking person and not from an impossible and under the described circumstances unconceivable “cheating”.

3b) The same logical principles that operate in 2b) operate here. Just to clarify because of the differences in each case, the fear of dying comes from the totally absurd negation of an unavoidable reality that finds its origin in another lie: “death is something bad and undesirable”, and not from an affirmation in a positive sense: “life is beautiful and worthy, when it comes to its end what’s important is what you did and not what you won’t be able to do”. Thus, that which would be fomented would be a vital attitude and not the negation of death. If that would not be enough saying, “lying for philanthropy” –argument not used by Kant in the essay that holds that phrase as the title– always implies the underestimation of the emotional capacities of the interlocutor. To lie for love of mankind is not love but disguisedly disdaining the capacity to accept the facts and the strength of “the Other”. Against that, it could be argued, on the other hand, that to tell the truth is sometimes the best way of lying, which is called second-degree lying, “where truth itself turns into a plain and simple instrument of deception” (2001, p.18), but this premise presupposes the incredulity of the interlocutor as a condition for the possibility. Yet, in a world of truths, incredulity cannot exist, because deceiving would be impossible to conceive in the first place, as already mentioned in several occasions.

Incredulity is nothing but a defense mechanism before the deception brought on by lies: a) parents always know better and they always love their children, just as teachers do while relating to their students; b) “Santa Claus” and “baby Jesus” exist (even if he historically died at 33 years old); c) in the capitalist system democracy exists just as a sensible appreciation for the life of an individual who earns more because he works more. Once again, needless to say, I could not resist the temptation of being ironic while exemplifying. QED.

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III. About *Suppressio Veri* and Euphemism

He who in (Tao's) wars has skill
Assumes no martial port;
He who fights with most good will
To rage makes no resort.
He who vanquishes yet still
Keeps from his foes apart
~Lao Tse, *Tao Te Ching*

I used to trust the media
To tell me the truth, tell us the truth
But now I've seen the payoffs
Everywhere I look
Who do you trust when everyone's a crook?
~Geoff Tate, *Revolution Calling*

I will now fulfill my promise of elucidating euphemism, i.e. the soft and decent manifestation of ideas whose straight and forward expression would be rough or offensive. In the following lines, thanks to the principle of abstraction, I will prove that euphemisms and suppression do not violate the principles of correspondence that must be fulfilled by any action that feigns to be considered valid inside a moral system never based on contingencies.

The abstraction principle, so common in the legal German thought, rightfully seeks to avoid the so often presented *quid pro quo* as well as the fallacy of the false cause: "Two different acts have nothing to do essentially with each other".²¹ In the moment of lying the person responsible for the possible consequences of their act in the world is the transmitter of the distorted speech, i.e. the cheating-active subject. In the case of euphemism, it is the thought alone that

21 Understanding the principle of abstraction give better arguments than the ones offered by Kant in his work *Concerning a pretended right to lie from motives of humanity* (*Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen*) to defend telling the truth even under critical circumstances: lying and saving a life are two different acts. One is always immoral, the other contingently moral. Both are separated, melting them together and confusing them lead us to an *accidens pro substantia*. It is therefore illogical and it is impossible to build a consistent moral system upon an error of logic.

has been softened, thus the responsibility of reading “the white fire under the black fire” belongs to the listener.²²

What happens, then, when politicians use euphemisms to disguise the facts in their speeches, presenting thus misery salaries, price liberation and tax-exemption to giant enterprises as *investment support*, just to give an example? Are they being immoral or not? When the abstraction principle is applied in the analysis of this case, that which makes the uttering politician immoral is not fulfilling the function of fomenting the optimal conditions of existence for the whole of the society, which is the real source of their political legitimation. Their immorality comes not from using euphemisms, even if they do it cynically aiming to hide their intentions and not to illustrate their thinking because the passive-subject of the political speech in our example, i.e. the citizen, is obliged to know the positions and projects of those who postulate themselves and their proposals to the public. It is so because the legit cession of our faculty to transform the social reality requires thorough knowledge and deep analysis of the problematic elements for it is the result of an act that has “Will” as a condition for the possibility. When the political act of voting is performed with knowledge and awareness, the external elements that could turn it into a mere mechanical heteronomous act are left behind. The opposite would mean giving an opinion with no fundamentals, i.e. a clear fallacy *ad ignorantiam* which implies a form of lying, because it means that the active citizen presents him/herself as a knower of a theme even if he/she doesn’t. He/she would be claiming authority to diagnose that which is convenient for the

22 For this very same reason, those who thoroughly criticize books considered holy by certain cultural identities accusing them of being books of lies are nothing but *naïve* persons. Perhaps some of them have even good intentions, but they, mostly sure, have not occupied themselves in understanding those texts considering them to be 1) anthropological expressions of culture, and 2) preparatory means for the development of ethical education within a social core where not all the persons are obligated to understand philosophical academic abstractions. Furthermore, nobody is obligated to be interested in formal argumentations. In this world there must be a place for everyone, ranging from logical rationalists all the way to poetic writers, readers and conceivers. The goal of moral is solely the construction of a congruent world under principles valid for everyone. Fantasy and metaphors do not aim to hide “truths” but to illustrate them.

majority even if he/she actually ignores it. Judging something publicly as convenient without analyzing the material meaning of political discourses is an act of irresponsibility towards society.

In cases involving *supressio veri* nobody is really responsible, although there is contingent responsibility. This is so because transmitting communication is a right, yet it is only an obligation when hiding information serves to directly affect the will of the listener. Just to exemplify: nobody is obligated to tell every interlocutor they meet that the spare tire of their car is flat, but they are certainly obligated to do so if their conversation revolves around a possible selling contract whose legal object is the car.

Finally, the principle of abstraction is very helpful when giving better arguments than the ones offered by Kant in his work *Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen* (*Concerning a pretended right to lie from motives of humanity*) to formally defend that to lie remains immoral no matter what and that telling the truth even under critical circumstances is always moral. In that essay, Kant appeals—in a very uncommon fashion to his way of arguing—to hypothetical scenarios and to the probable external consequences occurring when a person has lied. Whatever might happen, claims Kant, the legal responsibilities would fall upon the liar and not upon the truth telling person:

If you have in fact prevented a murder attempt through a lie, you are legally responsible of all the consequences that could come from your action. But if you severely remained on the side of the Truth the public justice cannot do anything against you never minding what the consequences might be. It is probable, on the other hand, that after you truthfully answered with a “yes” the murderer’s question of whether the person he is seeking was at home, she had left unobserved and the murderer would not find her and the crime would not have taken place. But if you have lied and said she was not at home and she really wasn’t (even if you are not aware of that) and the murderer finds her as she runs away and commits his crime, you can be rightfully accused as the author of the death. Because if you had told the truth just

as you knew it, perhaps the murderer would have been caught by your neighbors while he was looking for his enemy in your home and the crime could have been prevented (Kant, 2000, AA VIII, UvRML: p. 427).²³

Beyond presenting a very selfish argument, since the person telling the truth would be driven by his desire not to go to jail, Kant's explanation is very inconsequential since he mixes formal principles with hypothetical happenings. That which is uncertain cannot and will not serve as the foundation of a moral principle. The problem is formally solved with the abstraction principle in sight: lying and saving a life are two different acts. One is always immoral, the other contingently moral. Both are separated, melting them together and confusing them lead us to an *accidens pro substantia*. It is illogical and, as frequently said, impossible to build a consistent moral system upon an error of logic. To tell the truth or to lie under those circumstances does not belong to the realm of plain morality anymore, because saving lives belongs to the realm of "heroic" morality, it is therefore not a common obligation. Saving a life is beyond plain moral, because, even if it goes according to an imperative based on principles such as solidarity or humanity, it necessarily implies putting one's life at risk. It is evident that no congruent "common" moral system commands to put life at risk. What to do in such a case? If we consider that lying is the only possible way to save an innocent person, we are "pragmatically invited" to use it, even if we are morally obliged not

23 *"Hast du nämlich einen eben jetzt mit Mordsucht umgehenden durch eine Lüge an der That verhindert, so bist du für alle Folgen, die daraus entspringen möchten, auf rechtliche Art verantwortlich. Bist du aber Strenge bei der Wahrheit geblieben, so kann dir die öffentliche Gerechtigkeit nichts anhaben; die unvorhergesehene Folge mag sein, welche sie wolle. Es ist doch möglich, daß, nachdem du dem Mörder auf die Frage, ob der von ihm Angefeindete zu Hause sei, ehrlicherweise mit ja geantwortet hast, dieser doch unbemerkt ausgegangen ist und so dem Mörder nicht in den Wurf gekommen, die That also nicht geschehen wäre; hast du aber gelogen und gesagt, er sei nicht zu Hause, und er ist auch wirklich (obzwar dir unbewußt) ausgegangen, wo denn der Mörder ihm im Weggehen begegnete und seine That an ihm verübte: so kannst du mit Recht als Urheber des Todes desselben angeklagt werden. Denn hättest du die Wahrheit, so gut du sie wußtest, gesagt: so wäre vielleicht der Mörder über dem Nachsuchen seines Feindes im Hause von herbeigelaufenen Nachbarn ergriffen und die That verhindert worden"* (T. A.).

to do so. Then again, in such a case we are not talking about normal morality. If we use the abstraction principle in our analysis, we could plainly see that lying and saving a life are two different acts, one pragmatic and immoral and the other “heroically moral”. Thus, if we lied, we can later accept we did it and publicly claim that lying is always immoral and ask for social forgiveness. At the same time, we all know that societies and history do pardon heroes. By doing so, we defend truth as an immovable moral principle and we saved a life with one voice.

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