

Question 1: Reflect and respond critically to the following quotation “Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie.”(1)

(1) Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics, Indiana University Press, 1976 - Literary Criticism
- p 7

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The truth about lies.

“Semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything
which can be used in order to lie.” -Umberto Eco

We come to the world as "Tabula rasa"(Aristotle, 350 BC). External factors gradually fill our personality and shape our perception. As time goes by we learn to read the environment, scan reality based on signs. Semiotics as a discipline focused on signs and their meaning is thus a field directly affecting everyday life.

According to Pierce sign is “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Pierce, 1987). Eco simplifies its definition took everything which can be taken as something standing for something else” (Eco, 1976). Excluding communication between two mechanical devices, each pattern of signification is a cultural convention (Eco,

1984). Thus language as a basic way of communication is a simple collection of signs based on its meaning on the adopted agreement. While the word has its denotation, the literal, uttered meaning based on the description of an object it also has connotations coming from the culture in which it's rooted. We are programmed to receive words and their meanings in a specific way to make the transmission of data effective. The meaning can be intentional or unintentional and can communicate through all senses (Dodig-crnkovic and Burgin, 2019, pp.225). The act can be voluntary or involuntary depending on the intention and awareness of a subject. (Eco, 1976). According to Aristotle "words are symbols of affections of the soul", which connects the meaning to mental experiences (Michael Tomasello, 2003). In this concept sign is perceived emotionally, its meaning is pragmatic and variable.

Noun and verb resemble a concept as a sign, unit of meaning. Its veracity however signifies by conventions, depends on the connections with clear symbols (Baird, 2016). Thoughts in our minds are not usually fixed, they are not attributed as truth or lie. By combining and dividing with the suitable anchorage the idea can be assigned with truth or by falsity (Baird, 2016).

Eco is referring to semiotics as a field studying lies. (1976). The meaning of a sign does not necessarily have to exist in the particular moment that it's used. His assumption is based on the fact that communication is achieved through words that have the potential to convey any information, including a false one. Inferring from this, Eco shows that language as a communication tool creates the concept of the lie as a tool.

This essay aims to explore the phenomenon of lies as an unspoken code for maintaining social habitats. Therefore it is devoted to the analysis of the notion and practical use of the assumptions. By using the form of a divergent discourse I will try to transmute my reflections into philosophical dilemmas.

Taking information as a freedom of choice we are facing the equiprobability problem. Languages and letters making them create many variable choices (Eco, 1976). A language is an instrument giving countless conceivable combinations of messages and its interpretations.

Lying is defined as false speaking. To lie is “to say or write something that is not true to deceive someone”. Lie as a phenomenon is a simple concept with an undeniable impact on the cultural communication network. In society, lies can be used as implements to maintain diplomatic and socially correct ground. According to Lacey Rose (2005), lying is considered as an expression of tact or social grace. Honesty can be taken as faux pas by perceiving it as antisocial or pathological behavior.

Lie as a medium has been categorized depending on their nature and use. Lies can be divided into black and white ones. A black lie is what is known as a regular lie which we know carries false information. A white lie is a statement not false in its core although it's missing integral parts of the truth. It could be considered as harmless beneficial, used for the greater good as a pro-social behavior. It may take the form of an open secret, disambiguation.

A blue lie is positioned in between a white lie and a black lie. The color blue is a reference to its purported use by the police. It's an example of simultaneously pro-social and anti-social behavior as it is intended to help one group by damaging others through deceit.

A barefaced lie is one that is a lie to both sides of the conversation. It takes a form of a deceitful dance when both sides go along creating two merging realities. The idea is based on the duality of a concept that is "officially" (de jure) a secret or restricted in knowledge, but practice (de facto) may be widely known.

The term is also known as "Secret de Polichinelle" which derives from the classical commedia dell'arte character originated in the 17th century. Pulcinella is a treacherous, polarised character. He is a social chameleon who appears to be dumb while in full awareness

or the most competent while being woefully ignorant. He is always on the side of the winner throughout deciding his loyalty after the result is set (Rudlin,1994).

Pinocchio is a protagonist of the children's novel "The Adventures of Pinocchio" by Carlo Collodi. Pinocchio is a wooden puppet who is punished for each lie he tells by undergoing further growth of his nose. (Collodi, 2009). Hence long nose has become a caricaturesque symbol of liars. The story created a logical paradox which arises when Pinocchio says "My nose grows now" and is a version of the liar paradox.

Term "Lie-to-children" describes a simplified explanation of technical or complex subjects. It is commonly used as a teaching method for children and laypeople. Although seen as trivial it can promote the creation of misconceptions and myths as shown concepts are a form of paraphrased reality (Cohen and Stewart,1994).

The Little Prince is a novella written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. It is a philosophical story that shows the strangeness of the adult world and by the use of societal criticism reveals the absurdity and myths within. Characters in The Little Prince are committed to discovering the truth. It all comes to "what is essential" (Saint-Exupéry, 1943). The entity of a matter is what makes the meaning. What is important becomes a factor of the truth.

Adults are portrayed as people who lost their pursuit of truth in the process of adapting to social norms. They love numbers and are driven by data. They can't detect the true matters and it is due to children to explain. The businessman might not be a liar, but he is pursuing a lie. He claims he owns the stars by counting them. So because he is driven by greed, he is blind to the essential. Adults cannot see the essence of the portrayed forms. The reality depends on the essence, but simultaneously it can be easily shaped using imagination. This is shown by the motif of drawings. The hat is an elephant eaten by a snake and the box has a sheep inside. It all makes perfect sense for the Little Prince while being an abstract, unachievable truth to the

grown-ups. The Little Prince explores the profound secrets of reality without fixing it. It opens the discussion without bowing to any particular dogma.

Adding any extra factors to the actual truth can be misleading. Minimization is the is a deception involving denial and rationalizing situations where complete denial is implausible.

Puffery is an exaggeration, claim typically found in advertising and publicity announcements. Those statements are unlikely to be true but cannot be proven false. As the consumer is expected to be able to determine the truth those practices are not against the law.

A big lie is an attempt to trick the victim into believing something major, which could be easily contradicted by common sense. The strategy is based on the victim's reluctance to believe that an untruth on such a grand scale would indeed be concocted. It's widely used in politics and advertising to initiate rumors and question the opponent's strategy.

"Ogilvy on Advertising" by David Ogilvy is the Bible of the industry. In his view advertising is just a reasonably efficient way to sell. It's not a form of entertainment or art but a medium of information. Following this thought, the success of most great campaigns depends on the right amount of information transmitted. Many myths are functioning around this discipline. One claims that advertising is selling lies. However, according to Ogilvy: "Advertising is only evil when it advertises evil things" (Ogilvy,1963). Thus the advertising as an action is not perceived as bad as long as its subject is good. Although the base of this field may not be evil deception plays an integral part. Personality means everything and image means personality. In this area, small details count the most. The important aspect is to show the subject from the best angle, designing its identity without losing its nature. The first impression and brand experience play a huge role and are widely monitored. One of the classic tactics is an exaggeration. By simple actions like choosing a small conference room to create an

atmosphere of success or referring to an event in a high manner, the actual subject gains additional value in the eyes of the audience (Ogilvy,1963).

To bluff is to pretend to have a capability or intention one does not possess. Bluffing is an act of deception that is rarely seen as immoral when takes place in the context of a game. It appears as a commonly expected tactic, part of the game.

Artur Schopenhauer in "The art of being right" (1831) approaches the problem of lies and recognizes its source in the human ego. According to his thought, the lie is an element strictly concerning the lowest human instincts. The lie is depicted as a dialectical problem. It is due to a simple hypothesis: people are dishonest. Schopenhauer explains this with the natural human desire to defend the base of our consciousness and identity. Thus the dialectical dimension of the lie is not only a false testimony against another person but also a challenge to reality and everything that can be objectively described by a language code.

Schopenhauer's dialectical disputes include logic as an integral part of lies. Creating a conceptual field based on false arguments is a fairly common technique. Their synthesis may bring the correct conclusion, but completely unattached to reality. While advocating on the side of reliable knowledge about reality, Schopenhauer claims to dedicate his work to the defenders of truth. He presents a general tendency closely related to heuristic approach, according to which shortcuts can also be used in rational sequences. Abbreviations committed in the logical conceptual development may in straight-forward cases easily lead to correct results however, in complex topics it allows achieving false but rational conclusions. Most commonly used quick and thoughtless answers while being incorrect are used to maintain the status quo.

A noble lie, called a strategic untruth, is one that could cause discord if uncovered but offers great benefits to the liar. It's perceived as an element of order in society as it can potentially maintain law, order, and safety. Its most important element is self-determination,

which makes a liar morally superior. According to Plato, such actions are elements of a political game thus are the only plausible justified decisions (Page,1991).

Famous commanders and strategists have pragmatically discussed the topic of the lie for hundreds of years. According to Sun Tzu in "The art of war"(5th century BC), a lie can be not only an element undermining reality but above all, a matter that decisively determines the success of actions and the lives of soldiers. In his study, Tzu shows the issue of victory as the overriding argument in any conflict. However, according to the author, the reference victory is a state in which the strategic goal has been achieved without making a single sacrifice.

Referring to Tzu: "If you have a few forces, give the impression of strength, but if your army is strong in numbers, try to hide it." Surprising your opponent is one of the most important assets of an efficient commander, which cannot be done in the light and truth. Besides, as Tzu states: "deserving special attention and closeness to the ruler's heart are those who pretend to be allies of the enemy," which means that he sees the role of double agents as an extremely important and distinctive force against the background of a conventional army, and what else is an agent such as not a lifelong liar?

Niccolo Machiavelli noticed the same qualities of a lie. He claimed that false testimony is a decisive factor in how long the victory will last. It is because people who bribe a word can easily break it. On the other hand, he describes a good ruler as a combination of a fox and a lion. The lion means strength and majesty, but his fox side is all that we would describe as a perfect liar (Machiavelli, 1532). A ruler who is ready to use words and facts in his fashion to achieve benefits for himself and thus the kingdom or family. This approach is potentially dangerous as Machiavelli believed that morality was subordinated to politics. Thus a moral person would die in an immoral environment, which confirmed Schopenhauer's thesis that man is not honest.

Plato's "Apology of Socrates"(4th century BC) is one of the most important works of ancient culture. It is treated both as a philosophical treatise and as a relation from a trial. It tells the story of a political game against the Greek thinker Socrates. He was accused of spoiling the youth which was a serious charge at a time. Socrates, being able to escape, remained in truth unmasking the intrigue against him, which is why he was sentenced to death as part of the vote. It can be assumed that truth is part of his heroism and a contribution to his death.

Darwin's evolutionary theory states that only the fittest will survive. Following Yudhijit Bhattacharjee (2017) by lying, we aim to improve other's perceptions of our social image and desirability. Ker Than (2018) claims that the ability to lie is thus a universal talent, deeply ingrained human trait. Studies have shown that for most lying people lying starts at a mere age of six months. Seth Slater (2013) states that crying and laughing are recognized as manipulative behavior used to gain attention. According to Kang Lee learning to lie is a natural stage in child development and children become more sophisticated liars as they age. "The truth comes naturally but lying takes effort and a sharp, flexible mind", says psychologist Bruno Verschuere (2017).

Researchers speculate that lying as a behavior arose not long after the emergence of language. Referring to Sissela Bok (2017) the ability to manipulate others and gain power without using physical force as an advantage in the competition for resources and mates. Deceptive strategies such as camouflage are also widely known in the animal kingdom.

What are the underpinnings of dishonesty? We're prone to believe some lies even when they're unambiguously contradicted by clear evidence. Truth is our default option but lies are our survival tool. We choose to be deceived for our comfort. We create precious new names describing new kinds of lies. We write manifestos and fight for the Greater Good, the inner

truth. Aren't we all live one big fantasy? Is this false world better than the original one? Is there even another one? What if that is the only way it works?

These insights show how our proclivity for deceiving others, and our vulnerability to being deceived, are consequential in the contemporary world. Social media, fake news, and identity crises are more common than ever before. Our ability to separate truth from lies is under unprecedented threat that we have to take into consideration to face those challenges and grow as a society.

It is a lie that everything I wrote is the truth.

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