

THE EGO* (the "I") AMIDST POWER, LIES and REALITIES

Immanuel Kant, the great late eighteenth-century philosopher, would have said that lying could never be an ethical choice, besides making it clear that no exception could ever break this rule. It seems, however, easy to realize situations refuting that alleged ethical superiority of never lying. A clear example is the citizen who, living under a dictatorship which annihilates opponents, hides a human rights activist fleeing from persecution by the political police. Then, the latter knocks on the door and asks whether anyone is there besides the resident, or if by chance this has news of a "dangerous subversive", so sought after, who would have been seen by the surroundings.

Clearly, if the resident does not lie, he or she commits a serious ethical infraction, handing the activist over to the police, who will certainly lead him arrested to a torture room and thence to death.

Obviously, before such an enemy, lying must be the only, rigorously ethical option.

Since this police power is illegitimate, because of exercised by dictators, there is no moral reason to recognize it, and the ethical duty to lie in defense of a threatened opponent is imposed.

From this example, we can extract some basic elements always on scene when a choice is made between telling the truth (T) or lying (L):

A) Characters:

- 1) Declarant D;
- 2) Figure F to whom the declaration is uttered;

B) Forces at play:

- 1) *F's Power*, which may be actual or just supposed;
Truth (T) or lie (L) are attributes of statements that always imply a power relationship between the declarant and the receiver;
- 2) F's power may be *legitimate, or not*,
- 3) *D's deliberation* process between T and L. This choice between lying and telling the truth takes place in the conscious self, and implies a process of evaluating, i.e., a taking of a stand before involved circumstances, which may lead to accepting or not the actual or supposed power, incarnated by F.

When someone lies, outside exceptional situations like that mentioned above, he or she generates memory registers of both *T* and *L*, which keep their interplay within the limiting zone between the conscious and the unconscious mind.

Indeed, two parallel events become imprinted on memory, something that puts the 'I' before a fork with varying degrees of intensity. Each way generated by such a bifurcation leads to its own associative strand, which function as alternative webs for capturing reality.

In situations where the E event is relevant enough, such a bifurcation generates association flows each derived from those divergent memory registers. Therefore, the conflict between versions may interfere with the liar's whole mind performance.

Each one of these divergent webs try to keep the stronger coherence, be it with the true event, or with the false one. A perfect way to better understand what is meant here, comes from the famous advice: "lies have short legs". These "legs" may be taken as those web threads which must maintain coherence with any asserted fact, whether the capture and interpretation of the world is sought.

The greater the meaning of the event about which a lie is uttered, the more difficult it will be to maintain coherence between the eventual associations from it derived, the more fragile the capture of the world. Since our mind's web of associations functions as an specialized organ for the capture and interpretation of the world, whether it poorly works the result is Ego's growing insecurity and fragility, as a consequence of varying degrees of confusion to discern which among the caught realities is the experienced. In other words, it may be impossible for the "I" to accurately discern which of the parallel webs catches better the surrounding world, but also the own inner world. In psychological terms, it may be said that the test of reality, a function which Freud called Realitätsprüfung (German word for such a test), becomes weaker at every relevant lie since alternative webs of association spring up.

Corollary: to lie is to recognize the power of the one to whom the truth is withheld. When such happens without a good grounding, the first victim of the

lie is the mental link between the liar with his reality.

*Freud's English translators unnecessarily resorted to Latin, with 'Ego', 'Superego' and 'Id', for obscure reasons. We believe it is more faithful to the author to translate 'das Ich' for 'the I', das 'Über-Ich' for 'the Over-I' and 'das Es' for 'the It'.