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Art is a Good Lie

On a Taxonomy of Lies

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The science of lies is a cognitive science. In my book on the cognitive science of lies, I noted there appeared to be no scientifically plausible taxonomy of lies in the scholarly literature. The book focuses on tempering lies in the media. Here is a summary of the book:

Fiat Lies are Genocide on the Human Race
The Internet Court of Lies
medium.com

Fiat lies make dialogue impractical, and these have thrown healthy lying out of kilter. The argument is that at the top level of the lie taxonomy is a distinction between fiat lies and folk, or conversational, lies. Fiat lies, for one reason or another are impractical to debate honestly.

The cognitive science says any sentence or story can be a lie. So, if debate is abated, any sentence or story can lead to harmful deceit. Fiat lies are the bad lies that we can do something about by open and honest debating.

Conversational or folk lies are lies we know are lies. We debate these, and we can see if they are true, or not the whole truth, if they are intentionally or not intentionally deceiving, and the reasoning behind the deceit. Conversational or folk lies are not harmful if we understand them for what they actually are.

So, here is my proposed taxonomy for lies.

Lie Decision Network © Robert Thibadeau 2019, All Rights Reserved. Green=Yes, Red=No, Blue = Select

Scientific taxonomies are hierarchies that come out of a study of the properties of instances of a thing. This taxonomy is exactly a decision network for the properties of the cognitive life of a potential lie.

The decision network starts with deciding whether a sentence or story has any cognitive place as a lie understood in terms of whether it is not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In other words, we want to take any sentence or story and decide if it is a lie.

So, it may be a lie at the beginning and decided as not a lie later. Similarly, it may be an assertion that is not even suspected to be a lie at the beginning, but it turns out it was one at the end because its deceit succeeded.

The decision network can be thought of as a probability network for an assertion's progress in that it should work both for an individual or a group of individuals in classifying the lie.

A fiat lie is a lie we suspect might be a lie but we are unwilling or unable to have a dialogue about. The argument that I have been making is that people have long decided that sometimes enforced, moderated, dialogue is required to determine if a suspected lie is, in fact, a real or folk lie. This is why we have courts of law.

In my book, I argue for an Internet Court of Lies that puts lies, not people, in jail to go through such an enforced, moderated, dialogue in order to reveal the folk lie, if there is one.

The result is consensual knowledge about whether the fiat lie is a lie of commission, or omission, how it deceives, whether the deceit is intentional or not, and, when it is intentional, what motives could underlie that deceit.

Sometimes we may find that the lie is indeed an intended lie that intends to do harm for a bad reason. Sometimes, we may find, as with great fiction or great art, that the lie is indeed intended as a lie but to do good with good reason.

The Internet Court of Lies from my book works through this decision network to present this evaluation of a lie in order to temper the harm of lies in the media.

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