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Regarding Man's Concern With Truth

Laurance Labadie

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The human mind is so constituted that, given a modicum of experience in living, it forms within itself, as categories, a distinction between reality and illusion. The expression of reality, usually in words, he calls truth, and the converse of truth is error or a lie.

These are primary elements of thought behind which there can be no analysis of cause. In order to cope with the external world, it is important for a man to understand its reality, so that he may act accordingly if he expects to obtain what he desires (if anyone knows what he wants.) To live successfully he is vitally interested in truth.

But in his relations with other men, whose interests often diverge from his, to the extent to make them contestants, it is not to his interest to have those others as smart as he is. And therefore it is not always in his interest to tell others the truth. In fact, quite the contrary.

Thus, we see with man, as with other animals and plants, such subterfuges and deceptions as camouflage, bluff, secrecy, baiting, lying in wait, surprise, and pouncing on the unwary. In the nat-

ural world it is a vast devouring spree with life living on life, or thriving on decomposed remains of life, a whole process which is sometimes called the life cycle.

A similar phenomenon obtains with and among the human species. Practices at all times when we are in the company of others, we are putting on some kind of act, even unconsciously, to aggrandize ourselves, and to put others in unwary positions, a sort of universal pretense or lying. We each want what we want, and if “appearing natural” or telling the truth serve our purpose—OK; but if not, not. Even an infant learns the process quickly, and becomes one of the shrewdest and almost telepathic organisms in its game to “use” its parents—until it is taught how to be stupid.

Of course we invent the pretense and inject into our professed mores that everyone should tell the truth, but the subconscious motive for this exhortation is the hope that the other fellow will be impressed, and be naive enough to follow it, in which event it would save us the wear and tear of being continually on the alert. Often we even fool ourselves.

In an ordinary world one would suppose that all this would be tacitly understood, and we would not be so gullible as to be gulled by others. But instead of even such naturalness, we try to manufacture dubs wholesale, by indoctrinating or trying to indoctrinate others into believing that “the truth will make you free,” and injecting fears that if one can not be truthful one will suffer,—if not in this world then in the next. It is almost safe to say that there is no individual alive who hasn’t in some form or another been indoctrinated with such nonsense, which paradoxically makes life more difficult for all. Such indoctrination might well in fact be the basic cause of such disintegrations of personality as are known as neuroses. That is to say, individuals who have been indoctrinated with impossible morals, considering the world in which they must live, and have therefore developed internal conflicts, and have impulses working at cross purpose and so are woefully deficient and inefficient in making their way in the world.

The truth will make you free. The hell it will. Most likely it will make you the dupe of others and may land you in the hoosegow, or the gibbet, as has happened to too many who have spoken their piece—while liars and rascals have risen to be the cream of society. They are the ones who have been eating the pie and cake, while the indoctrinated or gullible ones have been grovelling in the gutters.

The whole complex of civilization is a fabric of truth and lies, quite a pattern, with the Church, the State, law and justice, medicine men and psychologists, advertising and selling, marriage, education, and all the rest of it nicely woven into the tapestry. To be a success in this world one needs to “use one’s wits.” The profession of politics consists in fooling the public; and the purpose of a diplomat is outwit his compeers of other countries. Anyone to whom one needs to press this point must be exceedingly naive indeed.

Talking about human relations a la Aristotle and other pundits—apart from their being tools and weapons serving the will-to-live—is pious and pompous nonsense. The reaction which the realism of a Machiavelli evokes in us only proves with what terror we face the facts of life—thanks to the teaching of those in authority who thrive best on gullibility and fears of those caught under their jurisdiction.

Brutal parents insist that their children tell the truth, under dire threats of what will happen to them if they are caught telling a lie. Since they cannot win the love, respect, and confidence because of their own unlovely characters, they resort to coercion, too stupid to realize that by their threats they are promoting the very untruthfulness which they desire to avoid. A loving and honest parent does not have to preach truthfulness to his children; they learn it by example and by being treated honestly and fairly. But to deny the child the opportunity to defend himself by telling an untruth, is to disarm him in his battle for life. An overprotected child or terrified child is going to have tough going in his relations with others. Grown-ups are the greatest liars, and to not a few their very pro-

fessions depend on trickery of some sort or another. If your child tells you a lie, the fault if there be any is yours, not his.

Am I preaching deception? Not at all, I am merely stating facts; facts that anyone with both feet on the ground should be cognizant of if he doesn't want to be an unwitting promoter of the very duping process which is crucifying all of us.

I think the foregoing is about as subversive a statement as might be made, yet it seems to me that those who do not realize the sense of it are plain fools. Incidentally, it may be useful seriously to suspect the self-righteous souls who, to satisfy their craving for the approbation of others, find it expedient to go about "doing good in the world. This is particularly applicable to politicians and in fact to the whole State apparatus, The extent of duper in the world may be estimated by contemplating the truth that in reality the State is little more than a juggernaut robbing and grinding the benighted souls which it holds in its power. And still so many idolize it!

There need be no hope that man will ever be an "honesty machine"; the very nature of things has destined him to be pretty much of a deceiver,—or to perish. More's the pity.