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Global Media Wars: The Ironic Prescience of George Orwell

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Proscriptions can become prescriptions. Stipulating what's illegal, immoral, unethical, sinful, and forbidden necessarily denotes what can occur, because it has occurred. Proscriptions can't exist without prescriptions already existing as potential or actual—a popularized finding in postmodern analyses of language, communication, and meaning (1). What's more, proscriptions can increase, not decrease, the probability that what is proscribed will actually occur among people who process proscription as a call to action. These people are irresistibly pulled to engage in the proscribed as the law can intensify social deviance—e.g., dare deviling in the face of the certain and severe sanction awaiting those who are caught at the proscribed (2).

Intentionally telling lies is often but always proscribed, at times prescribed, at times without meaning as *lies* becomes only applied tar and feathers. But when the proscribed becomes the prescribed, there seems to be four irresistible sources. They can be found in an essay, "Why I Write," by the English author George Orwell (the pen name for Eric Blair) (3). Ironically, his intention was to provide the foundations for telling the truth even as they apply to telling lies as well.

The first source he termed *sheer egoism*. This includes the desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get back at those who deserve it, to exercise vanity and self-centeredness, perhaps, for material benefit. Truth and lies both can be egoistic servants (4).

The second is *aesthetic enthusiasm*. This includes the pleasure of forming and experiencing the communication—the very words, their order, their sound or look, their rhythm. Also, there's pleasure from how elements of the story, plot, and narrative hang together. And there's pleasure from sharing something that one thinks is valuable and not to be missed. Finally, getting the message over—whether truth, lies, or some admixture (5).

The third is *historical impulse*. Here Orwell suggests a desire to find out how things are and share them with others even far into the future. In essence, to bear witness. Orwell is referring to what many in the lay public might call the *plain unvarnished truth*. However, in Western philosophy the German philosopher Immanuel Kant's Copernican revolution popularized the notion that our mental concepts help to actively structure our perception of the world, as opposed to the world laying its mark on a passive mind (6). And many Eastern philosophies presume the material world to be but an illusion (7). The *plain unvarnished truth* then becomes a figure of speech with a problematic relationship to anything that may be plain or not, unvarnished or not, or anything or not. As well, there is considerable overlap among psychological and neural processes for memory, imagination, imagination of memory, and memory of what has been imagined. So, too, we tend to believe we can remember our truths better than lies even as our

memories show the converse (8). Thus, bearing witness of truth and lies seems to be stymied.

The fourth is *political purpose*. This includes the desire to intentionally affect the world and the people in it in a desired direction. Desire is founded on a world of infinite psychological need, finite material resources, and the various gaps between what is ideal and the contemporary reality. The German philosopher Hegel has noted how important this quest is for our very sense of self and the development of the mind towards rationality, freedom, and what he terms actual knowledge in *The Philosophy of Mind* (9). Careful readers of Hegel will note there is no semblance of a request for objective truth in absolute knowledge.

In today's global media wars, it is important to note the following. Whether alleging or denying electoral interference, scandal and impropriety, or whether the sun comes up, we are not engaged in a struggle for what is in our hearts and minds. The struggle is more existential—whether there are hearts and minds, whether there is a lifeworld with or without meaning. Today is still Orwell's time with echoes of thoughtcrime, doublespeak, doublethink, crimethink and goodthink as we live on the Ministry of Love's Animal Farm. And there may be no exit, no way out.

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Keywords: Information War. Media, Lies. Orwell. Propaganda. Truth.

Abstract/Description: This article describes similar psychologies among people who intend to tell the truth and those who intend to lie. It posits the writings of George Orwell on political communication as relevant today as back in the 1940s.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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