

**SOCIAL STUDIES OF NEGATIVE LIE: A BRIEF EXPLORATION OF
PSYCHOSOCIAL, SOCIOCULTURAL, AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES ON
SELFISH AND HARMFUL PREMEDITATED DECEPTION**

***ESTUDOS SOCIAIS DA MENTIRA NEGATIVA: UMA BREVE EXPLORAÇÃO DE
ESTUDOS PSICOSSOCIAIS, SOCIOCULTURAIS E SOCIOLÓGICOS SOBRE O
ENGANO PREMEDITADO EGOÍSTA E DANOSO***

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DE LOS ESTUDIOS PSICOSOCIALES, SOCIOCULTURALES Y SOCIOLÓGICOS
SOBRE EL ENGAÑO PREMEDITADO EGOÍSTA Y PREJUDICIAL***



Jair ARAÚJO DE LIMA¹
e-mail: jairpopper1@gmail.com



João Leite FERREIRA NETO²
e-mail: jleite.bhe@terra.com.br



Juliane RAMALHO DOS SANTOS³
e-mail: juliane.ramalho@yahoo.com.br

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¹ Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC), Belo Horizonte – MG – Brazil. PhD in Social Sciences and Post-doctorate in Psychology. Develops research in the sociology of lie, sociology of action, sociology of rationality, subjectivity and identity of the subject and strategic interaction.

² Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC), Belo Horizonte – MG – Brazil. Professor with a CNPq productivity grant. Develops research in the field of public health, public policies and formation in Psychology.

³ Brazilian Psychiatric Association (ABP), Belo Horizonte – MG – Brazil. Graduated in Medicine from UNIFESO-RJ. Specialist in psychiatry at IPAMED Medical Sciences-MG. Develops research on psychic disorders and psychiatric illness, psychiatry of lies and sociopathy.

ABSTRACT: The article consists of a brief exploration of psychosocial, sociocultural, and sociological studies on selfish and harmful premeditated deception. Authors and works that make a contribution to social/sociological studies of lying from the birth of sociology to the contemporary moment are presented. Although the list of authors and works mentioned here is very short, it is significant in addressing those authors and works that have made an important contribution to the psycho-sociological study of lying, both in the classical period of the birth of sociology and psychology, and in the contemporary period of these two disciplines.

KEYWORDS: Lie. Selfish premeditated deception. Sociology of lying. Social studies of lying. Social psychology of lying.

RESUMO: *O artigo consiste em uma breve exploração de estudos psicossociais, socioculturais e sociológicos sobre o engano premeditado egoísta e danoso. São apresentados autores e obras que dão uma contribuição aos estudos sociais/sociológicos da mentira, desde o nascimento da sociologia até o momento contemporâneo. Embora a lista de autores e obras aqui mencionados seja brevíssima, ela é significativa ao abordar aqueles autores e obras que deram o uma importante contribuição ao estudo psicossociológico da mentira, tanto no período clássico do nascimento da sociologia e da psicologia, quanto do período contemporâneo dessas duas disciplinas.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Mentira. Engano premeditado egoísta. Sociologia da mentira. Estudos sociais da mentira. Psicologia social da mentira.*

RESUMEN: *El artículo consiste en una breve exploración de los estudios psicosociales, socioculturales y sociológicos sobre el engaño premeditado egoísta y perjudicial. Se presentan autores y obras que contribuyen a los estudios sociales/sociológicos de la mentira desde el nacimiento de la sociología hasta el momento contemporáneo. Aunque la lista de autores y obras que aquí se mencionan es muy corta, es significativa al abordar aquellos autores y obras que han hecho una importante contribución al estudio psicossociológico de la mentira, tanto en el periodo clásico del nacimiento de la sociología y la psicología, como en el periodo contemporáneo de estas dos disciplinas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Mentira. Engaño premeditado egoísta. Sociología de la mentira. Estudios sociales de la mentira. Psicología social de la mentira.*

Introduction

The article consists of a brief exploration of psychosocial, sociocultural and sociological studies on selfish and harmful premeditated deception. It presents authors and works that have contributed to social/sociological studies of lying, from the birth of sociology to the present day. Although the list of authors and works mentioned here is very brief, it is significant in that it addresses those authors and works that have made an important contribution to the psychosociological study of lying, both in the classical period of the birth of sociology and psychology, and in the contemporary period of these two disciplines.

Immediately, the reader should be warned that the section outlined here focuses on authors and works that deal with lying as *selfish and harmful premeditated deception*, and that also approach this phenomenon from a psychosocial or sociocultural point of view. Sociology knows lies in the form of *altruistic and beneficial premeditated deception*, but this type of lie and the works that deal with it will be left out of this article. Likewise, studies that approach lying from a strictly psychological or psychobiological point of view are not covered in this article.

The style of the presentation will be through a critical exploration of the literature, a style that implies confronting - at times - what the authors and works address, their findings and affirmations with the current state of psychosocial, sociocultural and sociological studies of lying. Inevitably, the approach to the works will be brief, given our main objective of listing, in this text, the authors and works that have made a significant contribution to the study of premeditated deception.

We chose to *selectively* review the literature on *representative works* for the study of lying in its negative aspects from a psychosocial, sociocultural and sociological point of view. In this type of analysis, the corpus consists of "a finite collection of materials, determined in advance by the analyst, with (inevitable) arbitrariness, and with which he will work" (BAUER; AARTS, 2002, p. 44, our translation).

According to Bauer and Aarts (2002), the corpus in this case refers to representativeness:

[...] reduces considerations of selection to a few pages [or works]. [Here] Selection seems less important than [the] analysis, but it cannot be separated from it. Arbitrariness is less a matter of convenience and, in principle, more inevitable. [...] In synthesis, while older meanings of "body of a text" imply the complete collection of texts according to some common theme, more recently the meaning emphasizes the purposeful nature of selection, and not only [an exhaustive collection] of texts, but also of any material with symbolic

functions. This selection is, to a certain extent, inevitably arbitrary: the comprehensive analysis takes priority over the detailed examination of the selection (p. 44-45, our translation).

Having clarified the selection conditions above, we will now begin the analysis of authors and works that have contributed to a sociological or psychosocial approach to selfish and harmful deception.

Classic social psychology studies of negative lying

Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon and the psychology of crowds

The sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1983 [1890]; 2005 [1901]) and the social psychologist Gustave Le Bon (2002 [1911]; 2008 [1895]) were the pioneering scholars of premeditated deception/lies from the point of view of sociological science. In "*As leis da imitação*" (The Laws of Imitation, 1890) and "*A opinião e as massas*" (Opinion and the Crowd, 1901) Tarde offers a pioneering contribution to the sociology of lying and his own approach is used by Le Bon in his books "*Psicologia das multidões*" (Psychology of the Crowds, 1895) and "*As opiniões e as crenças*" (Opinions and Beliefs, 1911).

Their analyses of "currents of opinion", "fashion", "passing opinions" and "false beliefs" are very relevant to the sociological study of negative lies. They dealt in a pioneering way with lies in the press, the manipulation of public opinion and the "opinionism" practiced in "opinion" articles.

The works of Tarde and Le Bon are relevant in pointing out that some of the fashionable names of our time - such as "fake news" and "post-truth" - refer to old phenomena that were given other names by analysts of the past, such as "factoid", which is a questionable or spurious statement presented as fact, but without authenticity by the press. Tarde and Le Bon state that the advent of the press brought about the "golden age of public lies".

Beyond all this, Tarde and Le Bon are *effectively* the founders of the *psychosociology of lying* - of the "thing", although they did not give it a name. Thus, these authors are very useful as an initial theoretical reference for a *psychosociology of lying*.

However, these rivals of Durkheim only flew high over the topics they dealt with and did not immerse themselves in the analysis of *simple* interactional forms - they dealt with complex interactional forms such as "mass phenomena" and the formation of a mistaken "group consciousness", the idiotization of the "public", etc. -therefore leaving out a wide range of facts of micro-interactional interest.

As Tarde and Le Bon competed with Durkheim in the field of macro-interactional studies, the micro-interactional shortcomings of Tarde and Le Bon's pioneering research are obvious; which does not mean that they are not important works, after all, they are so relevant that they were taken by Freud as a theoretical reference for some of his works, notably his *negative theory of the masses*. A perception of the masses also adopted by Serge Tchakhotine in his "*A mistificação das massas pela propaganda política*" (The rape of the crowds by political propaganda) (1938).

Sigmund Freud and the notion of wishful thinking

Tarde and Le Bon were a fundamental influence on two of Freud's psychosociological works that also touch on the phenomenon of lying: "*Psychology of the Masses and Analysis of the Self*" (1921) and "*The Future of an Illusion*" (1927).

In the first, Freud - largely based on Le Bon and Tarde - carries out a relevant analysis of the phenomenon of massification, taking a negative perspective of the crowd. Facts such as the *intellectual manipulation* of the masses, the *fraudulent* use of *factoids* in the press and the process of identification with a *charismatic* leader are addressed by Freud (2013 [1921]). There Freud makes it clear that *social processes* have the power to determine the cognition of subjects and that the conscious use that some leaders make of social processes to seduce the masses is what determines both their success and the credulity of the masses.

The use of persuasion techniques via rhetoric, the use of social "myths" and the very transformation of a charismatic leader into a "myth" are *social resources* mobilized by a faction of the elite or sectarian group to "hypnotize" mass social actors into irrational followers of ignorant, narcissistic and inconsequential leaders.

It was because he recognized the use of *social influence* processes by unscrupulous leaders and groups that Freud adhered to the negative theory of the masses, aligning himself with Tarde and Le Bon and coming to influence Wilhelm Reich in his "*The Mass Psychology of Fascism*" (1972), which completes - along with Tchakhotine (1967 [1938]) - the list of the first proponents of the negative theory of the masses.

In "*The Future of an Illusion*" (1927), Freud (2010 [1927]) uses the same principles mobilized in his "*Psychology of the Masses and Analysis of the Self*" (1921). In addition to using the processes of social influence as the basis for the idiotization of the masses, Freud makes relevant use of the illuminating notion of wishful thinking.

According to Bastardi, Uhlmann and Ross (2011), the term wishful thinking summarizes the cognitive phenomenon in which one or more actors assume their desires to be reality and start to make decisions and/or act based on this perception. It involves forming a belief based on what is pleasing to the *wishful thinking* of the person who believes in something, *to the detriment* of the facts and reality that contradict this belief.

In fact, this is the concept that best explains people's adherence to fake news. On the part of the *receiver/consumer of news simulacra*, for example, it consists of accepting what they like and what relates to their desire for things to be as they perceive them to be, despite the concrete facts of the matter.

The wishful thinking mechanism acts on the receiver of the information, while the producer acts on the persuasive strategy ("that's a lie, but it's good for me that people believe it") and wishful thinking *can* also act ("it would be good if that were true"). The subject driven by wishful thinking selects everything he can to support and agree with his unrealistic belief, but which is fideistic and actively defended by him.

For Freud (2010 [1927]), wishful thinking is the basis of religious people's attitudes towards facts that refute their religious beliefs. Since wishful thinking is the act of *taking desire for reality*, religious people - according to Freud - believe the uplifting lies of their religion and turn a blind eye to everything that denies the reality of their beliefs. Thus, desire is assumed and reality is rejected.

Wishful thinking is synonymous with what is now known as the cognitive "confirmation bias" or "comfort bias"; a *cognitive dissonance* that leads people to *adhere* to and pass on ideas and opinions that are agreeable to them, reverberating views that are comfortable with their values and that imply an ideological rejection of the truth and the deliberate blind belief in *unjustified doxies or beliefs*. In fact, wishful thinking anticipates both the theory of *cognitive dissonance* (FESTINGER, 1975 [1957]) and the theory of *willful blindness* (SYDOW, 2016), both of which are in increasing use today.

José Maria Martinez Selva and the big lie or "the massive lie"

As a model for some contemporary studies on lying, we have the text by Spanish social psychologist José Maria Martinez Selva (SELVA, 2009).

Selva is professor of psychobiology at the University of Murcia, where he has been professor of psychophysiology since 1978. Selva's book is divided into nine chapters and has four hundred and four pages of *chronicles* about *selfish and damaging lies*. As for the title, a

"big lie" - this is an important concept in Selva's text - "is one that affects many people" (p. 17, our translation) and is also a harmful lie based on the narcissism/selfishness of those who practice it. For this reason, Selva invites us to understand negative lies - including corruption - for their harmful social consequences: "Let's not fool ourselves, they harm others" (SELVA, 2009, p. 403-404, our translation).

The book contains no methodology or theoretical principles of analysis. It is an exposition of facts interpreted in the light of a reasonable naturalistic ethic, with little explanation of the psychosocial foundations of its analysis. This is because Selva derives her analytical principles from her previous work, "*La psicología de la mentira*" (2005).

If the reader is not familiar with Selva's analytical principles, which are present in his previous work, they will get the impression that Selva is merely presenting a collection of lies gathered together as "material" or "data" without any theory to order them in an approach that would make it possible to "understand" or "explain" them based on any psychosocial mechanism. However, this is only an "impression", since Selva's book consists of an in-depth analysis made possible by his *psychosocial* approach.

In "The Big Lie" we see various indications that there is some mechanism, whether "psychological" or "social", at work in the emergence of selfish and damaging lies in the social fabric. One example is when Selva (2009) evokes the notion of "psychopathy" (p. 403, our translation) to qualify the elementary "profile" of the "swindler or trickster" (p. 12, our translation). In other words, it is selfishness/narcissism that underlies the behavior of the deceiver who causes damage to others. Selva had already assumed this perception in his "*La psicología de la mentira*" (2005).

Some positive aspects of Selva's work can be highlighted. The first is that - already in his *La psicología de la mentira* (2005) - Selva does not give in to the reductionism present in approaches to lying from the perspective of biological/evolutionary psychology and/or neuroscience. For Selva, lying must be explained, above all, from a sociocultural point of view and not just from a psychobiological point of view. The second positive aspect of Selva's text is that, as a social psychologist, he thinks of lying less in terms of any morality than according to a perspective close to the *consequential realism* of social ethics.

An attentive reader can detect important analytical principles that Selva makes explicit in his text, such as when he presents the notion that the actor is - due to the social foundations of his subjectivity - multi-motivated, since "the maker of chimeras and illusions [deceiver] [...] acts motivated by the desire for profit, vanity or several motives at the same time" (SELVA,

2009, p. 11; p. 403, our translation). The seriousness of a lie is measured "by the *consequences* it entails" (SELVA, 2009, p. 18, our translation) and the deceiver - acting to "take advantage of others" (SELVA, 2009, p. 17, our translation) - acts on the basis of the law of least effort and, thus, "deception and fraud lead him to get more for less, or to get something for nothing" (SELVA, 2009, p. 20, our translation).

Selva admits that, in this work, he has not tried to be exhaustive, but rather has sought to present facts about the negative lie as "a mosaic that has sufficient variety for demonstrative purposes" (p. 13, our translation). After introducing us to his "chronicles of fabulists and their fabrications" (SELVA, 2009, p. 391, our translation), Selva concludes by stating that - in our day and age - when we read newspapers, listen to the news and expose ourselves to historical accounts, we have the strong feeling that all of this is an "endless narrative of lies and deceit" (p. 391, our translation). As Selva points out, we can speak of the "eternal and repeated story of deception, always new and always the same" (p. 392, our translation). After all, "the protagonists, the places, the details of what happened will change, but the essence of what was narrated here and what will happen [somewhere in the future] will be the same" (SELVA, 2009, p. 391, our translation).

Selva concludes that "it is not a pleasant job to dig into human misery" (p. 392, our translation) and demonstrate "the pernicious effects of the conduct" (p. 392, our translation) of *selfish* liars, since "it is undeniable that great liars and great lies harm many people" (p. 398, our translation). In fact, a careful study of negative lying ends up demonstrating the harmful "consequences and damage caused by lying" (SELVA, 2009, p. 399, our translation).

In the last pages of his book, Selva takes on an "ethic" about social lying and, to do so, bases his analysis on consequentialist realism. Thus, he notes the role of culture in the behavior of actors: "There is an effect of the general [i.e., surrounding] moral culture on individual behavior. The general spirit of society influences the behavior [...] [of] [...] citizens" (SELVA, 2009, p. 400, our translation).

After pointing out the influence of the surrounding culture on people's conduct, Selva comments on the role of organized civil society in containing harmful lies within its walls. Selva elaborates on some obligatory tasks of civil society, which are (a) "There is a moral obligation to fight against lies and to extend their denunciation to all spheres of social life" (p. 398, our translation); (b) "It is necessary to develop a certain intolerance and a certain spirit of denunciation against the big lie, against the fabricator who causes harm" (p. 400, our

translation); (c) "The truth is not free and neither is it given, one must strive to know it, without any guarantee that it will ever be achieved" (p. 400, our translation).

These principles are important to Selva because, according to him, "The absence of control or its lax nature and opportunity favor fraudulent behavior" (SELVA, 2009, p. 401, our translation).

Contemporary sociocultural studies on negative lying

Jacque Derrida and the history of lies

We begin our brief exploration of sociocultural studies of the lie and start with Derrida.

Derrida (1996) rehearses a *very brief* study of the lie during a conference he gave in the Masp auditorium in 1995. The content of this *essay* is, above all, the *detraction* that Derrida finds himself receiving from his critics, extending to the broad social lie that is *intellectual politics* as a whole.

Derrida carries out a real work of antiquarian theorizing by retrieving texts by ancient/classical authors from the Western tradition that dealt with lies. Derrida does all this in order to point out that lying is a fundamental theme *and practice* in humanistic studies. Derrida's main objective, however, is to defend himself against the criticism he has received from historian Tony Judt, a professor at New York University,

Derrida argues that, *at least in social interactions*, lies and truth *exist*. He states that "a lie [...] is false testimony" (DERRIDA, 1996, p. 09, our translation), that "a lie supposes [...] the deliberate invention of a fiction" (DERRIDA, 1996, p. 09, our translation) and that "a lie [...] is an intentional act, a lying [...] [,] [...] because one only lies to another, one cannot lie to oneself" (DERRIDA, 1996, p. 09, our translation).

Derrida (1996) affirms the important understanding, in the study of lying, *that lying is an intentional act* and that:

Such intentional acts are aimed at the other, at another or others, in order to deceive them, to make them believe (the notion of belief is irreducible here, even if it remains obscure) what is said, in a situation where the liar, whether by explicit commitment, by oath or implicit promise, has implied that he is telling the whole truth and only the truth. What counts here, first and foremost, is intention (p. 09, our translation).

Thus, among the evidence that lies and truth exist is in the situation pointed out by Derrida that lies occur "in a situation in which the liar, whether by explicit commitment, oath

or implicit promise, has implied that he is telling the whole truth and only the truth" (DERRIDA, 1996, p. 09, our translation). This is something that Ricoeur (1997) formulates quite clearly when he comments that:

The epistemology of truthful discourse is thus subordinated to the political, or rather cosmopolitical, rule of truthful discourse. There is thus a circular relationship between the personal responsibility of the speakers who establish a *commitment by promise* [which is the presumption of truth], the dialogical dimension of the pact of fidelity by virtue of which promises must be kept, and the cosmopolitical dimension of the public space generated by the tacit or virtual social pact (p. 398, authors' emphasis, our translation)

Ricoeur, then, recognizes that there is (a) the *assumption of truthfulness* of the statements in the interaction and, because of this assumption, (b) the *tacit commitment* of the interlocutor to the assumption of truth in sociodiscursive interactions. Therefore, the deceiver works to make his speech/action *appear* to be in harmony with these two fundamental components of sociodiscursive interactions: (a) the assumption of the truth of intentions and (b) the commitment to this assumption.

This is why Ricoeur (1997) observes that "Every proposal of meaning is at the same time a claim to truth" (p. 381, our translation). The obvious betrayal of these two foundations of interaction led Derrida (1996) to state that "What counts here, in the first and last place, is the *intention*" (p. 09, authors' emphasis, our translation) to deceive.

The term "lie" has its origins in the word "*mentonica*" (late Latin from the 11th century), which would have come from the low Latin "*mentire*", which goes back to the classical Latin "*mendacium*". The latter term is linked to the word "*mens*", the etymological root of *lie*. Now, "*mens*" means "mind", "intelligence", "discernment". This leads to the conclusion that the liar needs both discernment of what is at stake when acting and sagacity when playing the game for his own selfish benefit. In addition to all this, there is also a special meaning to "*mens*", which is *intention*. Intentionality is what demarcates the fact that the deceiver knows he is lying when he makes use of the *assumption of the truth* of his statement in front of his victim in order to *lead them into error* and consummate the deception.

Derrida's text deserves mention in this article because of its allusions to scholars of lies and truth at different times in Western philosophy, notably St. Augustine, Kant and Hanna Arendt. In these terms, this text is relevant as a first approach to humanistic studies of the lie.

Jacques Revel and useless knowledge

French philosopher Jacques Revel came to the subject of lies as a result of his studies on totalitarianism. Revel explains his foray into the world of lies as the result of his realization that, in the world of intellectuals, "democracy has imposed itself as a theoretical reference value" (REVEL, 1991, p. 09, our translation). Driven by this awareness, Revel takes on the task of observing the role of truth and lies in democracy and totalitarianism. So, he realizes that "Totalitarian leaders have information at their professional disposal just as much as democratic leaders, although they [the former] are obstinate in withholding it from their subjects [...]" (REVEL, 1991, p. 09, our translation).

Revel distinguishes between the false and the true realization of the democratic principle and formulates that the false realization of the democratic principle is present in the "lie of tyrannies that intend to be exercised in the name of a so-called 'authentic' democracy or in the hope of a perfect but eternally future democracy [...]" (REVEL, 1991, p. 09, our translation). This is why he says that "democracy cannot live without a certain amount of truth. It cannot survive if the truth in circulation falls below a minimum threshold" (REVEL, 1991, p. 11, our translation). Revel speaks of "a certain amount of truth" because he recognizes that *fictionality*, and therefore a *certain amount of unreality*, is crucial to democratic life. Despite this recognition, Revel reiterates that if "Democracy cannot live without the truth, totalitarianism cannot live without lies; democracy 'commits suicide' if it allows itself to be invaded by lies, and totalitarianism if it allows itself to be invaded by the truth" (REVEL, 1991, p. 35, our translation).

Because of this understanding, Revel's main question in his text is the role of autonomous science in democratic societies. According to him, if science is not autonomous in relation to the state, it will play the same role as religion in societies where there was no separation between religion and government, the role of justifying the power of the ruler through some resource inscribed in its own argumentative logic.

In this sense, for Revel, the intellectual's only commitment is to science that is autonomous from government and from any "political fable" (REVEL, 1991, p. 43, our translation) with a totalitarian zeal. The intellectual is committed to democracy here-and-now and knows that democracy can always improve, but this improvement is conditional on a commitment to the truth of the facts and to the "search for the truth to the end" (REVEL, 1991, p. 42, our translation).

For Revel, the search for truth to the end means the commitment to the search for truth even if it contradicts our thinking about the facts and invites us to a cognitive conversion/rupture:

For there are frequent circumstances in the life of societies, as well as in that of individuals, in which one avoids considering a truth that one knows very well, because, if the consequences were evaluated, one would realize that the action would be against one's own interest (REVEL, 1991, p. 10, our translation).

Not being willing to change one's point of view when pursuing the truth of the facts is a refusal to seek the truth to the end. This refusal becomes clear when one observes that, in science, "a lie is not just an intermittent ruse, but the permanent affirmation of the opposite of what everyone can see" (REVEL, 1991, p. 34, our translation). Which is why:

The scientific lie is therefore all the more marginal the truer the science, becoming all the more inopportune and attractive the more conjectural the science and all the more tempting the more it lends itself to being exploited as a source of argument in political debate (REVEL, 1991, p. 30, our translation).

According to Revel, the autonomous scientist/intellectual does not choose "themes dictated [...] by [...] passion and [political] propaganda" (REVEL, 1991, p. 30, our translation), but rather believes in the "importance of [true] information to clarify action or even conviction" (REVEL, 1991, p. 10, our translation).

The refusal of truth and the stubbornness of political fables, according to Revel, explain "the scarcity of accurate information in free societies [...]" (REVEL, 1991, p. 10, our translation), which is due to "the desire to see reality conform to our prejudices and the laziness of the spirit" (REVEL, 1991, p. 12, our translation). When one is not open to the reality of the facts, when one does not submit to the "naked" truth: "A great sage can forge his political and moral opinions as arbitrarily and under the influence of such foolish considerations as men who have no experience of scientific reasoning" (REVEL, 1991, p. 13, our translation). In this case, science and truth become *useless knowledge*, the title Revel gave to his book.

Useless knowledge of science and intellectual intervention occurs through the practice of "shying away from evidence when it contradicts their [the intellectual/scientist's] beliefs, preferences or sympathies" (REVEL, 1991, p. 13, our translation); which leads to "incoherence and [...] intellectual dishonesty [...]" (REVEL, 1991, p. 13, our translation).

Scientific/intellectual autonomy leads the scientist/intellectual to "Behave scientifically, [...] [to] bring together rationality and honesty" (REVEL, 1991, p. 14, our translation) in their

scientific practice. According to Revel, rationality is possible and demonstrated in the technological advances engendered by the conquests of scientific knowledge. Therefore, it is essential to pursue the rational, since "we will not build an airplane capable of flight if we do not observe the norms of rational thought" (REVEL, 1991, p. 19, our translation).

When we renounce rationality, "we persist in moving away from it whenever we hope to do so with impunity" (REVEL, 1991, p. 20, our translation). However, this behavior has its price and "the harmful consequences of this preference cause inescapable damage sooner or later" (REVEL, 1991, p. 22, our translation). Revel therefore states that: "Today, as in the past, man's enemy lies deep within himself. But it is no longer the same: before it was ignorance, today it is lies" (REVEL, 1991, p. 24, our translation).

Finally, the lie, when it is uniformly related in science, the intellectual world and politics, consists, according to Revel, of a "set of behaviors of resistance to [true] information [...]" (REVEL, 1991, p. 25, our translation). This type of behavior turns science and truth into *useless knowledge* and reveals that "lying in its raw and natural state, [...] is practiced [...] with the full awareness of being deceitful" (REVEL, 1991, p. 25-26, our translation).

In final terms, Revel postulates that, while in the exact sciences lies have short legs, in the human sciences lies have a long existence and can only be unmasked in *certain theoretical currents that are more demanding* in terms of argumentation and commitment to the facts:

No lie could stand up for long in the exact sciences. From time to time, hoaxes occur. They may fool the scientific community for a while, but in the end [...] [,] their authors know deep down that they will be discovered in a short space of time and that they will pay for their ephemeral glory with definitive dishonor. [...] On the other hand, in the social, human, economic and historical sciences, governed by a system of proof that is by its nature less rigorous, it is possible to deceive public opinion and even scientific opinion [...] (REVEL, 1991, p. 26-27, our translation).

Revel points out that the style of approach that can be called lying - in the social, human, economic and historical sciences - consists of "theories that are too vague to be verified or refuted" (REVEL, 1991, p. 30, our translation). Revel also sees the stance that deliberately lies about the facts as "the exploitation of scientific authority for propaganda purposes" (REVEL, 1991, p. 31, our translation), which reveals that the intellectual recognizes that "lying is an integral part of politics" (REVEL, 1991, p. 31, our translation) and, in this case, he submits science to politics. Once again, Revel understands that submitting science to politics makes science *useless knowledge*.

We realize that Revel's book is important for the current debate on the role of truth in democracies, as it helps to demonstrate how lies end up eroding the social capital of *trust*, which is fundamental to modern democratic life.

Revel's text is also relevant in pointing out that the social condition that today is referred to as "post-truth" emerged in totalitarian or democratic societies with the *massification of the public*. For Revel, the media is a liar per se, and it is up to intellectuals and scientists to monitor the media and debunk it when necessary, giving civil society true, sophisticated and well-founded knowledge through the permanent education of citizens and the city. In this way, scientific knowledge - from the human, historical, economic and social sciences - will actually accomplish what it exists for: the production of factual, true knowledge about social life. Such knowledge is undoubtedly *useful knowledge* for society and social life.

Harry G. Frankfurt and bullshit or "idle chatter"

The American philosopher Harry G. Frankfurt, professor emeritus of moral philosophy at Princeton University, immersed himself in the study of lies in an article written in 1986 entitled "*On bullshit*", in which he - through an analysis of the book "*The Prevalence of humbug*" (1983) by the British analytical philosopher Max Black - makes a very brief incursion into the world of "bullshit" in science, in human relations and, above all, in everyday life. The article was published as a booklet in 2005 by Princeton University Press.

First of all, it should be borne in mind, and Frankfurt does not make this observation, that Max Black, as an analytical philosopher, wrote in "*The Prevalence of humbug*" (1983) - and in his first published book "*Vagueness: An exercise in logical analysis*" (1937) - a study of academic trickery and imposture carried out through vague, ambiguous and obscure language. Frankfurt himself (2005) points out in his text that (a) both writing or speaking in an obscure way (b) and writing and speaking in a sloppy way are forms of "bullshit", they are academic "impostures" (cf. p. 12-17, our translation). Writing vaguely or obscurely is a practice of "charlatanism" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 13, our translation).

Frankfurt defines it as: "Imposture: deceptive hoax close to lying, especially by means of a pretentious word or act, in relation to one's own thoughts, feelings or attitudes" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 13, our translation).

The first type of imposture is not in the sloppiness with words, but in the pretension to be profound through the intentional use of obscure argumentation, verbose writing style, and the creation of a hermetic vocabulary that only makes sense in the work itself, when one could

make use of concepts that are better known in the scientific or intellectual field in which the author works.

Frankfurt is not criticizing authors who construct concepts in an original and scientifically significant way, but those authors who mythologize their own writing, preferring to use obscure and vague concepts, to the detriment of clearer explanatory concepts that already exist in their field and that better clarify the phenomena portrayed.

The problem here is not the creation of a conceptual language, but the elaboration of a vocabulary that only makes sense within the work of the "profound" thinker who writes ambiguously so that it can be interpreted in different ways. In fact, we can say with Frankfurt that the dream of authors who mythologize their writing is to become the object of exegetical disputes about the correct interpretation of their work.

Frankfurt sees the "deep thinkers" who mythologize their work through obscure and hermetic language as charlatans, practicing something like Humpty Dumpty's saying that *words mean what I want them to mean*. Revel (1991) said the same thing and, in addition to the imposture of sloppy, content-free language, he highlights the use of "simplistic slogans" (REVEL, 1991, p. 32, our translation) commonly "used to instruct or deceive others" (REVEL, 1991, p. 24, our translation). Such styles of imposture are referred to by Frankfurt (2005) as "bullshit".

These types of linguistic deception reveal a "deliberate" attitude (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 14, our translation) and an "intention to deceive" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 14-15, our translation). Those who lie through the use of sloppy language reveal "a kind of relaxation that resists or deceives the demands of a disinterested and austere discipline [of logical and clear language]" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 29, our translation).

For Frankfurt (2005) it is necessary to know how to distinguish between science and "bullshit" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 39; see p. 40-43, our translation). The scientist/intellectual should not allow himself to use "bogus talk" (p. 45, our translation) or "idle chatter" (p. 45, our translation) in his scientific/intellectual discourse: "It should be noted that the inclusion of insincerity among its essential conditions implies that idle talk cannot originate inadvertently; since it does not seem possible to be inadvertently insincere" (FRANKFURT, 2005, p. 44, our translation). In other words, *charlatanry* is intentional.

Frankfurt's (2005) conclusion relates to a fundamental axiom of the study of lies, which we have already explained here: lying is an *intentional falsehood*. In order to lie, you have to deceive others about what you believe in your heart, but which is concealed by *simulating* the

truth through a statement that is used as a ruse for the epistemic pair that will become the victims of the deception.

Sociological studies of lies

Ignacio Gómez de Liaño and deliberate mythification

Ignacio Gómez de Liaño is an emeritus professor at the Complutense University of Madrid and his book aims to be a *sociological* approach to the use of images as *deliberate mythification*, carried out in the media universe to influence the behavior of individuals. When Liaño (1989) states that a lot of intentionally false news is produced by the media in order to amuse people by *misinforming them*, this confirms the theses of Hans Vaihinger (1968 [1911]) and Wolfgang Iser (1983) on the *fictitious* dimension of everyday life, something that is also pointed out by Baudrillard (1981). Only Baudrillard is cited by Gómez de Liaño (1989), who points out the *media* dimension of social consciousness and the power of the image over the simulacrum of "public opinion".

According to Liaño (1989), the place that images, such as *myths* and *fictions*, occupy in social life contributes to the growth of deliberate lying as a way of influencing behavior. Images are used as a surreptitious means of persuasion - something like the "new technique of convincing" pointed out by Vance Packard (1959; 1965) who makes use of *subliminal persuasion*⁴, although Packard was not cited by Liaño (1989) - as sociological mechanisms to *condition* long-term behavior, as well as the will and action of the individual.

Liaño's book (1989) is a conversation with Debord (1997 [1967]) and Baudrillard (1981) and an anticipation of Vargas Llosa (2013), books that approach society as founded on simulacra, fiction and the spectacle. Liaño (1989) traces a line from Plato's "*The Republic*" (IV BC) to the contemporary "advertising city" or "propaganda society"; investigating and scrutinizing the power that images, as *myths* and *fictions*, play in social life, as well as the state, totalitarian or democratic use of images as the great vehicle of lies.

For Liaño, any reconstruction of the forms of contemporary culture, including values, norms and ideologies, needs to analyze the power of images in the construction of the social *imaginary* and the subjectivities impacted by the power of this *factory of lies* that is the media.

⁴ The *lie* is that it can *force* us to do something we do not want to do, but it has the real and effective power to *condition the way we see and interpret social events*.

The cognitive effect of the original 1989 text - an updated version of this work was published in 2016 - is that there the media appears with its true face: that of the *lie factory* interested in accumulating political and economic power, directing public opinion according to its (shareholders') interests and producing the social imaginary and subjectivities.

While today the standard media presents itself under the "mask" of the "well-meaning and reliable" media that is concerned with "real news" and would never produce fake news, for Liaño (1989) the media is inescapably a *liar*, a mythmaker and a *builder of false images* about social reality. This is something that Champagne (1996) and Charaudeau (2013) confirm, because, for them too, the media is a *liar*, this is its way of being, something that was pointed out by Tarde in 1890 (1983[1890]) and in 1901 (2005 [1901]).

However, we must understand that the *fictionality* of everyday life is both *positive* and *negative*. Positive, because this fictionality makes up the *illusory* sense of "order and meaning" for the existence of life and the world; such fictionality that Freud (2010 [1927]) called "illusion" and must be grasped as a *fictionality* essential to collective life.

What Hans Vaihinger (1968 [1911]), Wolfgang Iser (1983), Jean Baudrillard (1981) and Emar Maier (2018) point out as a *positive* dimension of everyday fictionality is the *lay metaphysics* about the meaning of life, the Panglossian "order" *fictitiously* present in the world, the illusion cultivated, because it's good for your health (HILLMAN, 1983), that *everything makes sense*.

Liaño (1989), Debord (1997 [1967]) and Baudrillard (1981) focused on the *negative* aspects of such fictionality which, in its lying aspect, becomes alienating and ends up idiotizing the masses.

On the contrary, *positive fictionality* is a social organizer, in the sense of the *lay metaphysics* that supports it - a *metaphysics of common sense* that endows the human world and everything around it with meaning, even allowing us to *trust* others, to correctly assume that everyone gains from cooperation, that it is good and fair to trust people. Peyrefitte (1999), for example, believes that trust is a phenomenon that is firstly *fictitious*, then factual and finally an intangible but concrete social capital, since it is through trust that society organizes itself, even taking precautions in advance to punish the *abuse of trust*.

In its negative aspects, the fictionality of images points to Debord's "society of the spectacle" (1997 [1967]), which is cited by Liaño (1989). For Debord (1997 [1967]) - and Gómez de Liaño (1989) agrees - there is an *empire* of lies in the social world.

But Liaño (1989) is wrong to give in to the idea that lying is the social organizer, since what is false and untrue presents itself as being true and conceals the lie. It is one thing to note that lies are widely practiced in social life, including by institutions that claim to defend the truth, such as the media and the press. It's quite another to say that lies are the driving force behind social life. This would only be true if lies - and not truth and trust - were the fundamental "currency" *valued* in social exchanges. Remember Novalis when he says: "The distinction between illusion and truth lies in the difference in their vital functions. Illusion lives on truth, truth has its life in itself" (NOVALIS, 1988 [1798], p. 39, our translation).

Thus, lies are practiced sneakily, those who practice them do not say they are lying, they do not defend lies as a *value*, lies are an anti-value and a *disvalue*. Those who intend to use it take advantage of the fact that truth and trust are social organizers and present their lies/falsehoods *as if they were* the truth, because only truth and trust make it possible to deceive others. A lie is *an abuse of trust* and a *betrayal* of the truth.

Liaño's study (1989) is very important for two fundamental reasons: (a) for pointing out the *fictional* dimension of social life - he emphasizes only the *negative* aspect of this fictionality of everyday life - and (b) for informing us of his very important perception that *an image lies more than a thousand words*, a statement that can be established as a synthesis of the lessons his book teaches us.

The lesson left by Liaño (1989) is that lying through images is easy; and even more so when you can use an image as an argument and proof and along with it linguistic statements that can induce untruthful interpretations in intentions about the fact shown by the image.

A sociology of imaginary lies is possible and proves to be very important in an analysis of lies. This was Liaño's (1989) contribution to the study of social lies.

John A. Barnes and the creation of the sociology of lying

Australian anthropologist John A. Barnes (1994) is the father of the sociology of lying, not the name of the thing. In his book "*A Pack of Lies: Towards a Sociology of Lying*" (1994), Barnes makes a relevant, albeit more *programmatic* and *panoramic*, flight over the embedded web of lies in the social world. Above all, he is concerned with *opening* questions of analysis and directing future research into the *new field* (which he proposes) of the *sociology of lying*, something he has done very well.

His text/*programme* is the result of his experience and important production as an anthropologist studying the *strategies* of kinship, which includes the discovery of lies (See BARNES, 1980).

Barnes (1994) provides a *very brief* "history of the approach to lying" in the social sciences. There is no title or subtitle that reveals that Barnes is interested in carrying out what I have called a very brief "history of the approach to lying"; it is only possible to observe that, in this book, Barnes mobilizes ancient texts to inform the antiquity of the theoretical concern with lying in the classical authors of Western culture and in the precursor theorists of the social sciences such as Locke, Hobbes and Machiavelli, for example.

As an example, Barnes points to the fact that Locke had an aversion to rhetoric, which he considered to be one of the greatest evils stemming from Greek democratic culture: "It is evident how much many men like to deceive and to be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error and falsehood, has its titular teachers, is publicly taught, and has always been held in high regard [...]" (LOCKE, 1894, p. 146 *apud* BARNES, 1994, p. 18, our translation).

To begin with, Barnes (1994) deplores the fact that - apart from the work of early social thinkers - "sociologists [...] have regrettably done little work on lying" (p. 22, our translation). He also points out problems in the titles of books on lying - something that is notorious to anyone who ventures into the study of lying - which "announce" that they will do something and yet fail to do it, such as "the academic survey [...] on lying edited by Lipman and Plaut (1927), [which] [...] contains very little sociological analysis - despite the claim in the subtitle that the book includes an account of lying from a sociological point of view" (BARNES, 1994, p. 22, our translation). Barnes (1994) therefore concludes that there is a "relative neglect of lying in sociology" (p. 23; see p. 260, our translation).

In relation to this, Barnes (1994) concludes: "I regret the scarcity of empirical findings, however, I am pleased to be spared the arduous work of citing [sociological] definitions and analyses of lying [...]" (p. 23, our translation).

Barnes' excuse points to the fact that, in this work of creating the discipline, this anthropologist, versed in the empirical research that is ethnography, does not intend - in this introductory and panoramic study of lying from a sociological point of view - to base himself on empirical material collected first-hand; rather, he mobilizes data from studies by other researchers to create what he calls the "current state" of the studies of lying from the point of view of sociology.

In creating this new field of sociological research, Barnes launches a programmatic challenge based on a historical overview of what has already been written on the subject in the long tradition of Western social thought. Barnes' work is erudite and theoretical.

As he sets out to introduce a new field of study from a panoramic viewpoint, Barnes (1994) states: "I will mention some aspects of lying only in passing, partly because of the lack of empirical data and partly because of the limitations of my opinions [...]" (BARNES, 1994, p. 29, our translation). This is because, as Barnes (1994) explains, he was interested in providing "an introduction to a field of research which, from my point of view, has been strangely neglected. [So] if nothing else, this book should point to certain areas where [empirical] research is needed [...]" (p. 30, our translation).

Barnes points to the "ubiquity of lies" (BARNES, 1994, p. 25, our translation) in social settings, but he does not fail to recognize that *trust* and *truthfulness* are the fundamental social organizers of social life. In other words, there are "expectations of truthfulness" (p. 45, our translation) in social domains, albeit to different degrees in each social underworld, through which premeditated deception becomes possible. This is why one observation becomes pertinent: "We encounter lies in practically every walk of life, alongside an equally ubiquitous moral and pragmatic desire to tell the truth" (BARNES, 1994, p. 48, our translation).

However, Barnes (1994) warns that we should not mistakenly assume that lying is the fundamental social organizer of societies, this would be a great mistake. He notes that "in a situation where the majority of participants are honest, some individuals can become charlatans. The assumption of good faith, generated by the actions of the majority, ensures the success of the lie practiced by the minority" (p. 53). Here's the fact: *fake coins*, which are released from time to time into commerce, are mobilized *as if they were real coins* whose existence and value cause the use of fake coins *that pass for real*. Without the real value and organizational relevance of real coins for the economy, fake coins would never be used, because the fake is like the moon, it has no light of its own, it needs the light of the real thing to shine.

Trust is the cement of society, because of the relationships of trust we need to establish in order for our social life to be successful. Our deepest and most intimate relationships are based on a "shared expectation of trust" (BARNES, 1994, p. 49, our translation), which is why "deception as a norm [of society] cannot sustain itself" (BARNES, 1994, p. 50, our translation). Thus, the perspective of lying as a social organizer is not realistic, it is a misconception. It is a fundamental condition of so-called ontological *security* that "people [...] need [...] to trust someone and to be trusted" (BARNES, 1994, p. 50, our translation).

Barnes (1994) states that "although cultures differ in the way lying is evaluated, the practice of lying occurs in most, if not all, societies" (p. 118, our translation). Barnes therefore postulates the growing importance that lying/premeditated deception has received in scientific literature since the early 1990s:

Scientific interest in this subject has increased over the last two or three decades, and has affected current perceptions of various phenomena, including premeditated deception. For example, at the annual meeting of the American Society for the Advancement of Science in 1991, we held a symposium entitled: "The Evolution of Deception: A Biocultural Approach" (p. 230, our translation).

Barnes goes on to point out that there is "evidence [that] should be sufficient to establish the omnipresence of lying as a human activity, as well as its diversity and antiquity" (p. 230, our translation). He therefore states that the study of lying is "an important but neglected topic" (p. 260; see p. 23, our translation) and that, in a study of lying: "We need the help of a plurality of sources of information [including] [,] to compare facts and opinions [...]" (p. 259, our translation).

After presenting a series of historical texts that deal with issues related to lying, whether in the humanities or the social sciences, Barnes ends on a note that is both programmatic and normative.

On the *programmatic* side, he says that it is necessary to carry out "more in-depth" research and, in short, to continue what he started, the *sociology of lying*, based on empirical and/or theoretical research. On the *normative* side, Barnes thinks of a possible *public utility* - beyond the scientific - of the sociology of lying: "Further research should improve our understanding of the phenomenon of lying and could lead to recommendations [...] for public policy and personal conduct" (BARNES, 1994, p. 259, our translation). Still on a *normative* level, he states that such "Research [...] should [...] be directed toward investigating the social consequences of variation in the degree of lying and other modes of deception in the [social community studied]" (BARNES, 1994, p. 260, our translation).

The fact is that Barnes made a significant contribution to the social sciences by inaugurating *a research program* on the various types of lies - both selfish and harmful and altruistic and beneficial - in the social fabric. He recognized that many intellectuals and thinkers had already conducted studies on lying before him, but he took it upon himself to formulate the *social scientific research program on lying*.

We can see that Barnes' initiative was successful and that he became a fundamental source for the sociological study of lying.

Final considerations

Undoubtedly, many other authors and works could be analyzed here, but the works cited are representative. However, there are not many works that analyze lying *from a social or sociological point of view*, such as those mentioned here. The publishing market is full of works that study lying from a moral or ethical point of view, from a psychological point of view and even from a biological point of view, such as works on neuroscience and the evolutionary psychology of lying. All these works tend to gloss over the impact of social and cultural factors on lies.

The works mentioned here have contributed to a non-reductionist analysis of lying, since they focus on lies from a psychosocial and sociocultural perspective. In addition, all the works cited - except Barnes', which also analyzes altruistic and beneficial lies - analyze selfish and harmful lies.

The sociology of lying is aware of the existence of *altruistic and beneficial lies*. A survey of works that study lies from this perspective is also important. This is a job to be done by someone and would be a relevant contribution to the sociology of lying.

The founder of the sociology of lies - John A. Barnes - ends his book thinking that the sociology of lies can make an important contribution to societal happiness and the personal happiness of individuals. According to him, knowing about lies makes us wiser in choosing both the motives and paths of our society and our own. Despite these possibilities, the sociological study of lies is a vast field in which future empirical and theoretical research will be welcome, since it will make us more knowledgeable about how the intelligence and creativity of social actors are mobilized by them to assert their interests in the social spaces in which they weave their existence. Such intelligence and creativity are used both to do good and to do evil; this is the truth demonstrated by psychosocial and sociocultural approaches to lying.

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