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DOES THE LIE CONTRADICT THE TRUTH?

The most dangerous lies are truths but slightly distorted

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Introduction

Philosophers usually do not ‘philosophize’ in separation from an ideology that is built into a political activity, which – in turn – is embedded in the given time and environment of their lives. The dignity of philosophy, and any other science, consists in an overall, undistorted constructing of an image of the reality, with the inclusion of the role of human being who learns about this reality, including that of a participant in the political life. In this context, we can say about reliable cognizance of reality. What is it? It is:

- searching for the truth,
- nearing the truth, and
- discovering the truth.

Without *reference to the truth*, acquiring the reliable knowledge about the world, as well as passing on such a knowledge in the process of language communication become *mendacious*, or even impossible. Righteous *approaching the truth* “opens the eye to injustice in the state and in the private life” – Plato wrote in his autobiographic *Letter* (VII 324 b), on the basis of his personal experience acquired in the course of his active political life.

Arriving at the truth and convincing in favour of *the truth*, in various spheres of life, has been one of the most important principles of life and dealing in science. This classical, universal, moral virtue devalues through the following phenomena, which are omnipresent today:

- widespread neglect of agreeing on the meaning of a word,
- lack of responsibility for consequences of uttering words with no publicly-established meaning,
- distorting the truth,
- evident lies.

These phenomena violate the care of the adequacy of representation of knowledge about the objective reality, as well as that of building a faithful linguistic reflection of the knowledge and also its correct transfer and the care of convincing in favour of *the truth*.

The art of language-based convincing which deals with political issues always brushes against the **problemate of the truth and the lie**. On the political scene there is a fight going on not only for power, but also for the truth. By means of political rhetoric (and not merely political one) it is possible to pass both the truth and the falseness in the process of language-based communication. When the sender's intention, in the act of communication, is to lie to the receiver, to pass false information to the latter, using persuasion, the former creates all sorts of impressions of telling the truth: he has to take into account what the receiver of the information knows and also what the former is ready to accept as plausible; he renders information in a certain order, in compliance with language rules of passing information, still – however – he infringes the rules of conversation proposed by H. P. Grice (1975)¹ and ethics of acts of communication by means of speech.

The main task of this work is not to determine the bases for a moral evaluation of the lie; neither is it to describe its negative qualification. We are interested rather in the very **problemate of the truth and the lie** itself, considered as a juxtaposition of two of its notions: *the truth* and *the lie*, one that aims to provide a positive – as it would seem obvious – answer to the question contained in the title of the present work:

Does the lie contradict the truth?

Will we, however, really obtain an obvious answer? A positive one?

The very motto itself in the opening of the work raises certain doubts:

Maybe the lie does not contradict the truth at all?

And if we add that a lie is often regarded as not only useful or necessary, but also even as a virtue of contemporary civilization, as a new principle of life, a “new truth”, then there may arise even new doubts. Is it, by any chance, possible that the foundations of a moral evaluation of the lie have changed and maybe this new “quality” is beginning to constitute such a quality for the coming times as the supreme value, that is *the truth*, makes

¹ It is violation, in particular, of the so-called maxim of quality, which reads (see Tokarz, M. (1993), p. 220): “Do not offer views about whose falseness you are convinced, nor even views for which you do not hold sufficient justification”.

for opponents of all sophistry? And if, moreover, one adds that, after all, many of us could learn ourselves that a liar – against his intention – can tell the truth, then does there exist any explicit satisfying answer to the questions posed above?

The considerations presented in this work are an attempt at giving an answer to the arising doubts: it is obvious to philosophers and logicians that such considerations must be grounded on a relevant conception of *the truth* and *the lie*, on bringing up one of the most difficult and disturbing philosophical problems, that is the **problemate of the truth**, on investigating what **the lie** is. The confusion about the notions related to the ambiguous terms of “the truth” and “the lie” introduces, in turn, a confusion connected with attempts at answering the questions posed.

Thus, in the first part of this paper, we will deal with the very notion itself, or – more precisely – with the notions of *the truth*; in the second one – with the notions of *the lie*, and in the third part – we will juxtapose the notions of *the truth* and *the lie* in such a way that in each case it should be possible to provide an answer to the question asked in the title of the work. Part four, being the final one, contains certain summary of it, as well as final considerations as a peculiar challenge.

1. On the truth²

1.1. On the truth from the ancient perspective and the contemporary history of philosophy and logic

The history of forming of the notion of ‘the truth’ had begun a long time before philosophers and logicians took up the problem of the **problemate of the truth**. “People who were communicating with one another wanted to make sure that they were not deceived. After all the lie is one of the most elementary means of manipulating the receiver of the message,” as J. Werszowiec Płazowski and M. Szuwara write.³ And we know this, too. People – while communicating with one another – as receivers of messages – wanted not to be led astray, they wanted the messages to be carriers of the truth. Thus, we cannot speak about the lie without making references to the truth.

² This part includes a discussion and reference to some themes considered in the author’s earlier work entitled *On Truth...* (2009).

³ See: Werszowiec Płazowski, J., Szuwara, M. (2008), p. 111.

What is the truth, however?

Can we speak about many kinds of the truth?

Does there exist one, commonly binding, objective truth?

These and similar questions have been asked from times immemorial. These and similar questions – relating particularly to the aim of science, philosophy, or to the sphere of ethical issues connected with ‘the truth’ have troubled philosophers for over two and a half thousand years. We will first make a presentation of certain reflections concerning the understanding of ‘the truth’. Further in the work, we will juxtapose them with some reflexions on the understanding of ‘the lie’.

It can be assumed that the contemporary ways of understanding of ‘the truth’ are connected with the traditional philosophical problem area around this notion and that they have their source in the ancient Greek philosophical thought, which gave raise to the beginning of the European philosophy.

In the ancient Greece, philosophers, that is ‘lovers of wisdom’, reserved to themselves the monopoly of truth; more exactly – searching for the truth and wisdom. In the V–IV centuries B.C., on the territory of Greece, mainly Athens, there were Sophists – travelling teachers of ‘wisdom’ and educators, who – charging a fee – offered education in the scope of subjects that were useful both in an active public life and in the private one.⁴ Although they did not create a uniform philosophical school, they worked out a style of new rational thinking about the natural and social reality. They are considered to be the first humanists in the history of ancient philosophy, since the object of their interest was life and human action, man. The Sophists regarded the relativism of human cognition and of the whole knowledge, because this is based on fallible perceptions of the senses. *The truth is relative* – the Sophists claimed, it has the character of human supposing, which can be – for our own purpose – freely shaped by means of argumentation, skilful convincing to accept our own views. In the opinion of the Sophists, there is not one, commonly binding and objective truth; there exist better (more useful) and worse (less useful) truths. The choice of the better truth depends on its higher usefulness, benefit(s) it brings. Wise men are those who can choose more useful truths and this not only in cognitive disciplines, but also in the domains of ethics, religion, legal norms.⁵

⁴ See: *Słownik kultury antycznej (A Dictionary of the Ancient Culture)*, Winniczuk, L. (ed.) (1989), p. 483 ff.; Szymanek, K. (2001), p. 293 ff; Tatarkiewicz, W. (2001).

⁵ In this place and others that follow, we are quoting ample fragments of the author’s work entitled *On Truth...* (2009), p. 26.

It is this taking the relativistic view of the truth, the pragmatism of the Sophists, the conditioning of justification of the truth to a practical goal had, with time, their consequences in the form of their abuse of science through application of unreliable argumentation in justifications of the advocated theses, making use of the so-called *sophisms*, i.e. skilful, seemingly correct reasoning, which contains logical errors hidden in it on purpose.⁶

The attitude of the Sophists led to acknowledging the view that one can announce two contradicting, yet true, sentences about every phenomenon, about every thing. This, obviously, required proficiency and dexterity in proving the theses which were propagated, false though they might be, as well as in refuting the adversary's theses. A lot of Sophists succumbed to the temptation of teaching deceptive, twisting arguments that had little to do with truth to rich Greek youngsters who wanted to make a political career. This resulted in the fact that the word "Sophist" acquired a pejorative meaning, the term being applied to the pseudo-educated people and teachers of pseudo-wisdom, specialists in using far-fetched, though convincing arguments. This notion of a Sophist has been in force until today.⁷

Socrates (469–399), counting as one of the most outstanding Ancient thinkers, originated from the circle of Sophists.⁸ Opposing the science and teaching of the Sophists, undertaking to fight against their theses and seeming truths, he claimed that

The truth is one, objective, commonly binding.

Socrates regarded dialogue as the only way of reaching the truth and exposing it.⁹ He propagated the cult of the truth, acknowledged the existence of the absolute good and the absolute truth. He also considered cognition of the objective truth and leading people to learning the truth to be the supreme ethical value. His teachings and methods that touched upon the problem area of ethics and those of human life had a strong influence on his disciples, among whom there were also politicians.

Socrates' views, in particular those on the truth, which are known mainly thanks to Plato's reports, have found their representation in the further development of the philosophical and ethical thought, not only in the ancient times, but also during the Middle Ages and modern times. Various

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 26/27.

⁸ See: Krońska, I. (1985).

⁹ The style used by him in dialogues was later on named 'socratean' and fixed in the famous Plato's dialogues.

schools made references to the great thinker's views throughout centuries, many a time themselves being totally in opposition to one another and understanding the truth in completely different ways.

Both Plato – the founder of the famous philosophical school called *Plato's Academy* (which managed to function for as long as ten centuries, until VI century BC) – and Aristotle (384–322), Plato's disciple and co-worker for many years, objected to cognitive relativism of the Sophists, acknowledging the primacy of the truth about science (objective truth) and fighting against the rhetoric plied by the Sophists.

Aristotle – one of the greatest and the most versatile scientists of the Ancient times – laid foundations under almost all domains of science. He distinguished, in particular, logic, separating it from philosophy; he is also called the “father” of formal logic. We owe to Aristotle the classical definition of the truth in the cognitive sense, the definition that has been around until today. The relative, utilitarian, truth, as well as the *pragmatic definition of the truth* are replaced by the objective truth and Aristotelian corresponding definition, according to which (putting it in brief):

***The truth is an agreement of thoughts and things
which are the subject of the thoughts.***¹⁰

In the formulation by St. Thomas of Aquinas

***The truth is an agreement of the intellect with the state of things
consisting in that the intellect acknowledges the existence
of what there is, or non-existence of what there is not.***

The classical Aristotelian definition of the truth makes the foundation of contemporary semantic concept of the truth offered by Alfred Tarski (1933), the famous representative of the Warsaw School of Logic and then the Californian Logical School founded by the scholar. According to this concept, the condition of adequacy (agreement) is preserved:

The sentence is true if and only if it is as the sentence states.

Let us go back, however, to our questions relating to the notion of ‘the truth’:

Does there exist one, objective truth or are there many truths?

Answering the above question requires, without a doubt, pondering over the very notion of ‘the truth’ itself. Since the question: “What, indeed, is the

¹⁰ *On Truth...*, *op. cit.*, 28.

truth?” which was asked in derision by the official of the Roman Empire – Pontius Pilate – while examining Jesus of Nazareth – if devoid of the derision – is one of the most challenging and disturbing questions posed to philosophers, and not only.

1.2. On the notions of the truth¹¹

Truth (t) can be conceived as:

- t1. an object of cognition, hence, substantially,
- t2. a feature, property of descriptive sentences or logical judgments¹² expressed by them or the cognition whose results are these judgments,
- t3. all the sentences (all judgments) describing the broadly-conceived reality,
- t4. a cognitive-ethical value,
- t5. the truth relativized to the domain of knowledge,
- t6. pragmatic truth.

In the case of t1, the word ‘truth’ is used as noun predicate, like in the sentences below:

*The fact that the lie has been in use since the times immemorial
is the truth.*

*The fact that the lie is often a tool of fighting, especially of a political fight,
is the truth.*

or as an operator function in the following examples:

The truth is that the lie has been in use since the times immemorial.

*The truth is that the lie is often a tool of fighting,
especially of a political fight.*

Such a usage assumes that *the truth* is something existing, is an abstract object, perceived with intellect as a set consisting of **partial truths** (in the exemplary sentences the partial truth are the following facts: that the lie was in use in the oldest times we know of and that the lie is often a tool of fighting, especially of a political fight). *The truth* is then something one and only which “can be discovered in an infinite effort of mankind”.¹³ **The truth**

¹¹ Speaking about the notions of the truth, we apply here the approach accepted in the papers by the author (2008, 2009). Still, for the use of the present paper we do not analyze the notion of “the absolute truth” or the notion “absolute falseness” which stands in opposition to the former, although all the notions of ‘the truth’ or ‘the lie’ discussed in it can be framed as relevant explications of these “absolutistic” notions.

¹² Logical judgments are meanings of sentences-*types* (cf. Reference 15). Thus, they are not psychological judgments (certain thoughts) of individual people.

¹³ Agazzi, E. (1994), p. 292.

conceived in this way is then a philosophical notion, an ontological one. One can say then about the *ontic truth*.¹⁴

In the case of t2, the word “the truth” is used in its role of an adjective, meaning that the truth is a property of sentences (or judgments corresponding to them), which consists in their being *true*. Then the word “the truth” is replaced by that of “truthfulness”, meaning certain property of descriptive sentences treated as sentences-types.¹⁵ This usage assumes then the existence of such sentences. We come to deal with them, for instance, in utterances, like the ones below:

The sentence “*The lie has already been in use since times immemorial*” is **true**.

The sentence “*The lie is often a tool of fighting, especially the political fight*” is **true**.

The truth understood in this way is then a logical notion, a semantic one. We speak then about *the semantic notion of the truth*. *The truthfulness* of the sentence is here a property, the possession or a lack of possession of which by the given sentence depends on whether between it (resp. what it expresses – a thought, an opinion) and what it concerns – the broadly conceived reality – holds a respective relation, within the framework proposed by Aristotle, the classical one – *agreement*. *The truthfulness* of the sentence is then an objective feature, it does not depend, in particular, on whether we consider the sentence to be true according to some criteria. The contradiction, negation, of *the truth (truthfulness)* is then *falsehood (falseness)*.

It must be observed here that the feature of *truthfulness* is attributed not only to sentences or their thought-relating correspondents, or to cognition, whose results are true sentences; in the last case we can speak about *the epistemological truth*. We speak about the truth also with reference to somebody or something that is not a sentence, opinion, or cognition, using, for instance, the expressions: “a true friend”, “true friendship”, “a true love”, “a true work of art”, “true good”, “true freedom”, “a true doctrine”, “a true theory”, “a true lie”, and the like. We use the word “true” then in its secondary, not the primary meaning, having in mind realizations of the essence of the object, its internal unity, harmony, *agreement* with some ideal, a cultural pattern, a modelling idea, a model, criteria.

¹⁴ Philosophy recognizes also the notion of *ontological truth*.

¹⁵ Sentences-*types* are abstract objects, non-physical. They can be conceived as classes of physical, concrete sentential inscriptions, in a sense identifiable, e.g. with respect to their shape (see Wybraniec-Skardowska 1991).

The truth, in the case of t3, is usually framed as the whole of sentences (logical judgments) which are objectively true, thus – as carriers of true cognition, propositions aptly, adequately describing the reality, that is sentences possessing the feature of *truthfulness*. *The truth* is then an abstract notion, an existing object, composed of all *partial sentences-truths*, such as:

The lie has been in use already since times immemorial.

The lie is often a tool of fighting, especially of the political fight.

In the case of t4, we use the word “the truth” to denote what is good, valuable, worthy of human cognition, what is an aim of human aspirations, what is an axiological value. When we speak about “cognition of the objective truth”, *the truth* is framed as a supreme cognitive value. When we speak about the purposefulness of “aspiring after the truth” and “propagating the objective truth”, *the truth* has a moral value for us.

Does there exist a relation between the ontological, semantic, epistemological and axiological conception of *the truth*? Getting to know more and more of new single partial truths (the *ontic truth*), we get to know also true propositions (the semantic and epistemological truth) about the reality which is of interest to us, and if searching for the truth (ontic or semantic), propagation of the truth (true propositions), becoming acquainted with the truth (with true statements) are the goal of our aspirations, the truth has to us a cognitive-ethical value.

The word “the truth” in ontology, logical semantics, epistemology and axiology has different, though – in the above-mentioned framework – related meanings.

It is often said, too, about different truths in individual domains of knowledge, treating them as laws or theorems of these sciences. Conceiving *the truth*, as we have so far, in an abstract sense *the scientific truth* consists of concrete laws, or theses of the given science, is the whole set of theses or theorems of the given science, the whole of *partial truths*. We come to deal then with the case of t.5 and a completely different conception of *the truth*. *The truth* in these disciplines is established by means of various methods of checking the truthfulness of judgments, according to different *criteria*. If, then, the meaning of the word “the truth” bears some reference to *criteria of the truth*, and these can vary in different domains of knowledge, one sometimes says about different kinds of truth, and even about many truths, since there are a lot of sciences. Then, one generally thinks about *truths relativized to the given domain of science*, e.g. ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of language, theory of cognition, logic, physics, geo-

metry, etc.¹⁶ If the criteria applied to establishing truths of science are reliable and serve to better understand the examined reality, *the truth* – then – has the scientific-cognitive value. Sometimes, however, *the object evidence*, internal in relation to cognition and connected with the manner in which the object of cognition (the state of things) is given to the subject in the act of cognition, guaranteeing the truthfulness (faithfulness) of the cognitive result, is accepted as a well-justified effective criterion of the truth.¹⁷

Still, it needs to be clearly underlined that the criterion of the truth – the basis according to which we recognize *the truthfulness* of cognition or the conditions sufficient to acknowledge a sentence, a view or a conviction (logical judgment) to be *true* – cannot be identified with the definition of the truth, with the definition of an objectively true sentence. The classical definition of the truth does not refer to any of its criteria. The definition of a criterion was clearly differentiated by Bertrand Russell and Jan Łukasiewicz. It can be accepted, following Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, that acceptance of the classical definition of the truth allows eliminating the criterion of the truth at all.¹⁸

In the case of t6., *the truth* is conceived in compliance with the *pragmatic definition* which makes the truthfulness of a sentence, a thesis, dependent on some pragmatic criteria: usefulness in foreseeing and practical applications, convenience, economicality. The American pragmatists of the 20th century (W. James, Ch. S. Peirce, J. Dewey) claimed that the truthfulness of sentences or propositions is determined just by broadly-conceived criteria of usability. Rejecting the classical definition of the truth and – thus – acquisition of theses which make a stable basis of our knowledge, pragmatists make the truthfulness of sentences dependent on some aims and actions, investing the truth with a relative character, and cognition – with a relative one. Acknowledging the primacy of action over thinking and practice over theory, pragmatists come closer to the stance of the Sophists. The *pragmatic truth* is then composed of particular *relative truths* which can be treated as those acknowledged by the pragmatists as true.

We can raise objections with reference to the pragmatic definition, like to other non-classical definitions of truthfulness, that – to some extent

¹⁶ See: Agazzi, E. (1994), pp. 285–307.

¹⁷ See: Herbut, J. (ed.), *Leksykon Filozofii Klasycznej (A Lexicon of the Classical Philosophy)*, pp. 438 and 439.

¹⁸ Ajdukiewicz K. (1985), pp. 13–14.

– it is justified by assuming the classical definition.¹⁹ Furthermore, as it was mentioned earlier, the classical definition does not require making references to any criteria of the truth. “The notion of truthfulness is a natural and fundamental characteristic of science, differentiating science from other creations of mental culture in the fullest manner”.²⁰

The aim of science, philosophy, is to strive for cognition of the objective truth as this is what invests the latter with a cognitive value. The Polish philosophers and logicians who were members of the world-famous Lvov-Warsaw School, whose founder was Kazimierz Twardowski,²¹ strove for the primacy of thinking, for the truth in science, and also in education and politics, for maintaining the classical, Aristotelian, definition.

2. On the lie

2.1. The lie yesterday and today

We know that the lie has been in use since times immemorial. It is rooted in our civilization and plays different functions. It was and is applied to enforce something or to reap some benefit. It was often and still is a tool or weapon of fighting, especially in a political fight, one in which a conflict of interests or opinions comes to the fore, in which human thoughts, views and struggles of intellectual, social, political spheres of life clash with one another, a fight targeted at entrapping or deceiving the opponent or society through not telling the truth to the public or, at least, not the whole truth.

The past century, the 20th century, took over the lie which is generally simple (a lie used while playing cards, a lie in the relations of sale-purchase, etc.). Lies of the past and of the current, the 21st, century are obviously more sophisticated and they are not simple lies, but frequently twisting political games, games on the international arena, ones that are shielded by accomplishments of contemporary civilization and commercial mass media.

The lie has become inseparable not only from politics – it has attacked all spheres of our lives. The modern lie has become insidious. Publicly and popularly repeated – like a typical commercial – it is becoming an integral part of our lives, not allowing us to perceive or come closer to *the truth*.

¹⁹ See: *Leksykon*, *op. cit.*, p. 439.

²⁰ Czeżowski, T. (1958a), p. 70.

²¹ A study devoted to this famous School was published by Jan Woleński in 1985 (English version in 1989).

This is a result of the information policy in force. The difference between the notions of the lie and the truth is getting blurred.

In this context, one can quote the well-known statement by the Minister of Propaganda of the Third Reich – Joseph Goebbels – a close collaborator of Adolf Hitler, who said:

“A lie that is repeated a thousand times becomes the truth”.

Does the lie which is referred to in the statement above, indeed, become *the truth*? If so, what kind of truth? The objective truth? The latter is stable and unchanging, independent of situations and contexts!

If the quoted sentence uttered by Goebbels were true, then the *liar’s paradox*: *On the truth-telling liar*, well-known already in antiquity, could perhaps be removed as well. After all, a liar could be truth-telling in fact, since one cannot see a contradiction in that the liar, saying “I am lying!”, is lying and is not (is telling the truth) at the same time,

because:

- if he is lying, then it is not so as he says, that is he is not lying, he is telling the truth,
- if he is not lying, he is telling the truth, then it is as he says, he is lying.

Why, then, solving this paradox has caused many a sleepless night to many a thinker for centuries?²²

We can feel here that the chaos in the use of notions, connected with the different meanings of the words “the lie” and “the truth”, makes it difficult to formulate rational answers to the questions posed in the present work. It is also felt justifiable to make a distinction between the notions of *the lie*,²³ like we already did about the notions of *the truth*.

2.2. On the notions of the lie

One cannot say about the lie without making references to the truth. Thus, we will refer the notions of ‘the lie’ to those of ‘the truth’.

The lie can be perceived as:

11. an object, substantially,
 - a. of negation of cognition, or
 - b. of falsifying cognition;

²² Solving this ancient semantic paradox had not been possible – as it is well-known – until the 20th century; the contradiction lies in not respecting the differentiation of expressions of objective language from expressions of its metalanguage.

²³ Detailed considerations relating to the notions of lie, from the perspective of logic, are taken up by M. Tokarz (2006), pp. 267–276.

12. a feature, property belonging to descriptive sentences or to logical judgments expressing them,
being the carriers of:
 - a. of negation of cognition, or
 - b. of falsifying cognition;
13. the whole of sentences (judgments) being carriers:
 - a. of negation of cognition, or
 - b. of falsifying cognition;
14. opposing cognitive-ethical values, anti-values;
15. pseudoscientific “truth”;
16. a pragmatic lie.

In the cases of 11. a/b, *the lie* is an existing object perceived as one composed of all concrete lies, when the case

a. of *untruth* (contradictions of partial truths, concrete facts) is concerned, and when it comes to the case

- b. what is perceived in concrete *behaviours* or *communication-related actions*, in which we come, or we came, to deal with *lying about a certain state of things s*, that is with a conscious formulation by the sender of a determined act (or acts) of communication, in a determined situation, of an utterance whose aim is to mislead the receiver and to lead the latter to interpret this utterance as one referring just to the state of things *s*, with reference to which he himself – as the sender of the utterance about *s* – is convinced that it does not hold, that it is not a fact, therefore being sure that his utterance is false; then, we say about such an utterance that it is *mendacious*, about its sender – that he/she is *a liar*, that he/she *is lying as regards case s*, about the state of things *s* – that it is *the object of the lie*, and about the receiver of the mendacious utterance that he/she is *one who is lied to*.

A lie in the sense 11.b can be meant to add colour to facts, to distort and misinterpret the latter, to falsely create the reality. It is then connected with falsifying the true cognition.

When the object of a lie in a communication-related action is a political issue, we shall call the lie *a political lie*.

In the cases 11.a/b, the word “the lie” is used as a noun, like in the following sentences:

- a. *That politicians always speak truth is a lie (an untruth).*

That the crime perpetrated in Katyń is the responsibility of the Nazi is a lie (an untruth).

- b. *What is publicly stated, that is that the Katyń crime is the responsibility of the Nazi is a lie.*

What some historians claim, that is that Poles contributed to the outbreak of WW2 is a lie.

Political and historical lies provided in the last two examples are – at the same time – concrete, verifiable untruths, concrete lies at the most general conceiving of “the lie” as the whole of all untruths (the case 11.a). Untruths in the sense of a, obviously, do not have to be lies in the sense of b, since they do not have to be connected with lying to somebody. This is testified to, at least, by the first of the examples given above.

In the cases of 11.a/b it is also possible to use the word “lie” as an operator, making use of certain expressions:

in the case of a, this can be: *It is a lie (an untruth) that ...*,

in the case of b, this can be: *It is a lie what X stated while trying to convince that ...*

In the cases of 12.a/b, the word “lie” is used in the adjectival function and what is meant here is a feature, property of sentences (or judgments corresponding to them), being the carriers:

in the case of a – of false cognition, and

in the case of b – of falsifying the cognition,

a feature consisting in their being:

in the case of a – untrue, false, and

in the case of b – mendacious.

Then, the word “lie” is replaced, in the case of a, with that of “falsity”, and in the case of b – with the word “mendacity”. The adjectival usage of the word “lie” can be encountered, for example, in the following utterances:

- a. The sentence, *“Politicians always tell the truth” is false (untrue)*,
- b. The sentence, *“The Nazi are responsible for the crime perpetrated in Katyń” is mendacious*.

The lie conceived in the way like in the case of 12.a (as *falsity, falsehood*) is then a logical semantic notion. The *falsity* of a sentence, similarly as the *truthfulness* of a sentence is an objective property: its possession or the lack of possession of it depends only on whether between it (resp. what it expresses, the judgment) and what it describes – the respective state of things – there holds the Aristotelian *agreement*. Thus, the *falsity* of the sentence does not depend on the time, place of circumstances, situation of its uttering. Neither is it conditioned by any criteria.

A sentence is *false* if and only if it is not so as it claims.

A contradiction of *the lie* (*falsity, falsehood*) is then the *truth* (*truthfulness*).

The lie conceived in the way like in the case of 12.b (as *mendacity*) becomes relativized to the following: the subject of the lie (the liar, the sender of mendacious messages), the one who is being lied to (the receiver of the mendacious messages), the mendacious utterance of the sender, and – obviously – the communication situation in which this utterance is formulated. The *mendacity* of a sentence (judgment) is not then its objective property. Whether or not the utterance intermediating between its sender and the receiver in the verbal communication is *mendacious* depends on sincere and insincere intentions of its sender.

The lie in the case of 13.a is conceived as a whole of untrue, false sentences, thus the whole of carriers of untruths. Each of such false sentences is then treated as a concrete lie. *The lie* in the case of 13.b is a different thing: it is the whole of mendacious sentences connected with communication-related behaviour consisting in lying to somebody about a certain issue. Each of such sentences is then treated as a concrete lie. For example, a concrete *Katyń lie* is not what is publicly stated about the Katyń crime, but the very sentence itself which is announced publicly:

“The crime of Katyń was committed by the Nazi.”

The lie, as a cognitive-ethical anti-value (the case of 14.) – in relation to conceiving ‘the truth’ as a supreme cognitive-ethical value (the case of t4.) – is connected with the use of the word “lie” to denote what is bad, wrong, unworthy of human existence, what should never be the goal of an action, what is usually an axiological negative value, what is not the aim of true cognition, what is not the source of knowledge about the world, does not aim towards the objective truth or spreading true sentences about the world. The axiological qualification of the lie depends on the motives which control it, on distinguished axiological criteria. In politics and rhetoric, neither *the truth* nor *the lie* are objective logical values.

In a similar way as one often speaks about various truths, one can speak about various *lies* in the area of sciences, which are to replace these truths, about pseudoscientific “truths” (the case of 15.) that are sets of mendacious, pseudoscientific theses (sentences) founded on unreliable arguments, on false or mendacious assumptions, on premises that are often unsubstantial, most frequently shorn off their primary meaning. *Mendacious theses* are formulated and justified for some utilitarian purposes and are related to assigning relative value to the truth. They were and are applied in politics with the aim to manipulate, with regard to shape given views, ideas, *Welt-*

anschawungs, ideologies, although – certainly – they are used not only for such purposes.

Mendacious theses are ones of pragmatic value, which can determine a *pragmatic lie* itself, that is *the lie* in the framework of l6. The lie in this sense is always conditioned by some criteria of usability determined by an established purpose of communication-oriented action, criteria connected with effective lying. The lie in the sense of l6. is thus of a relative character and consists of mendacious sentences – *relative lies* functioning in communication-related behaviours and established by given pragmatic criteria. The notion of the pragmatic lie can be – with the framework given here – considered subordinate in relation to the notion of the lie in the sense of l3.b. The political lie, whose aim is, after all, to prevent an unfriendly political situation, can be conceived as a kind of pragmatic lie.

3. Does the lie contradict the truth?

Undertaking, in this work, to discuss the difficult **problemate of the truth and the lie**, we cannot but separate the notions of the lie and the truth from each other, as well as – even the more so – endeavour to answer the question posed above. It is obvious that trying to answer this question we should not connect the notions of the lie and the truth, which refer to different categorical beings, with each other. But even eliminating such juxtapositions, the question asked here is ambiguous, since it may be relativized to different notions of l_n and t_n , with $n = 1, 2, \dots, 6$. In addition, answers to questions already suitably relativized may not be unambiguous, since we do not know what meaning of the word “contradict” is meant in the question: Does “contradict” mean “being in contradiction with something”? or Does it stand for “being in opposition to something”? Taking no account of the latter differentiation, answers to the following question in the affirmative:

(?n) *Does a lie in the sense of l_n contradict a truth in the sense t_n ?*
with $n = 1, 2, \dots, 6$,

will determine the exclusion relation between the extensions of the notions of l_n and t_n , whereas those in the negative – and they can be so in contrast to popular beliefs – will determine the crossing relation between the extensions of them.

“Moving from the bottom to the top of the list” and juxtaposing *the lie* in the sense of l6. – as one composed of *relative lies*, with *the truth* in

the sense of t6. – as one composed of *relative truths*, we cannot exclude the possibility that there exist (relative) lies which are (relative) truths, accepted both by liars and those whom are lied to. One can again quote here Goebbels’ statement:

“A lie that is repeated a thousand times becomes a truth.”

It has been proved psychologically that the liar usually starts to believe in his lies which he repeats a number of times, acknowledging them to be truths, and in the case of political rhetoric which is carried out in relation to the receiver, the strategy of shaping the opinion makes the lie craftily penetrate into his mind and by readjusting the appropriate course of reasoning favours acknowledgement of the lies passed to the one that is lied to as truths.

One can also, undoubtedly, provide examples of concrete lies founded on certain pragmatic criteria, which – according to some other criteria – are relative truths. Illustrating, by means of graphs, problems relating to the question (?6) with the aid of Fig. 1,

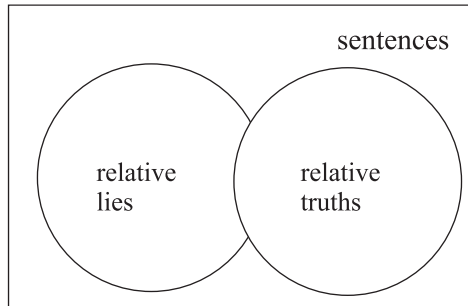


Fig. 1

we insert the negative answer to the question in the table below:

l lie	t truth	Does l contradict t?
l6	t6	No

Then, juxtaposing, *the lie* in the sense of l5. – as “a new truth”, a pseudoscientific one, composed of mendacious, pseudoscientific theses – with *the truth* in the sense of t5 – as a scientific truth consisting of theses, scientific laws, we cannot exclude the fact that there exist pseudoscientific, mendacious theses, justified on the basis of doubtful premises which are

scientific truths, too, justifiable on the basis of scientific criteria (mendacious theses may turn out to be true or made probable on the basis of applied scientific arguments). Illustrating these observations with the help of Fig. 2,

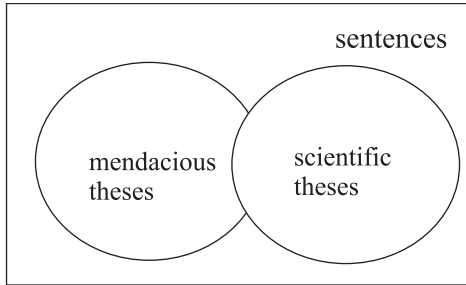


Fig. 2

we insert the negative answer to the question (?5) in the table below:

l Lie	t truth	Does l contradict t?
l5	t5	No

The answer to question (?4) is not unambiguous. If, by the ethical or cognitive value – as *the truth* in one of the possible meanings of the word “truth”, we understand the whole of cognitive-ethical values attributed to particular sentences that are objectively true (the whole of morally positive values), and by the ethical or cognitive anti-value – conceived as *the lie* in a certain meaning of the word “lie” – all of the cognitive-ethical values attributed to particular mendacious sentences, then it will turn out that certain ethical values of this kind are not always morally negative values *in sensu strictu*, since they can happen to be among mendacious sentences acquiring a positive value as they are evaluated to be morally good. After all, it was already Plato who wrote:

*A lie sometimes becomes the authority if it is necessary
for the good of citizens.*

Some mendacious utterances are thus accepted when offered by politicians, and we know only too well from life that not only by politicians. Then, we invest them with the morally positive value (+). When, however, we acknowledge that truth-telling is a principle in force in ethics, that all kinds of the lie are something wrong, we invest all mendacious utterances

with the morally negative value (-). The criteria of moral evaluations are very much varied. It is they that the answer to question (?4) depends on. Illustrating our considerations by means of Fig. 3 and Fig. 4,

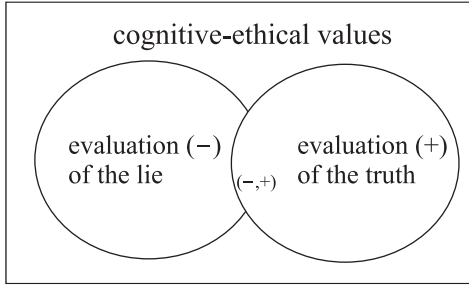


Fig. 3

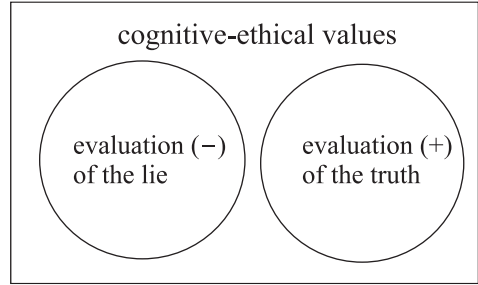


Fig. 4

we obtain an answer “No” which is shown in Fig. 3, and an answer “Yes” illustrated in Fig. 4. Using a table, we can thus frame the answers to question (?4) in the following way:

l the lie	t the truth	Does l contradict t?
l4	t4	Yes-No

Let us move on to the answer to question (?3). Since we have differentiated two notions of the lie in the cases of l3.a and l3.b, we juxtapose each of them with that of the truth in the sense of t3. The notion of *the truth* as the whole of objectively true sentences (t3) is contradictory, thus it excludes that of *the lie* in the sense of l3.a, as the whole of untrue, false sentences (see Fig. 5). However, this notion crosses that of *the lie* in the sense of l3.b conceived as the whole of mendacious sentences, because the liar – against his own intentions – by lying to somebody can utter a true sentence, being convinced that it is false. Mendacious sentences can at times be objectively true. The liar, while lying, can be telling the truth, utter a true sentence²⁴ (see Fig. 6). Mendacious sentences – torn out of their context – can be ambiguous, at the same time, vague, insinuating, allowing various interpretations of them and investing them with different logical values: truth or falsehood. They do not have to be logical sentences.

²⁴ See: Wójcik, A. (2002).

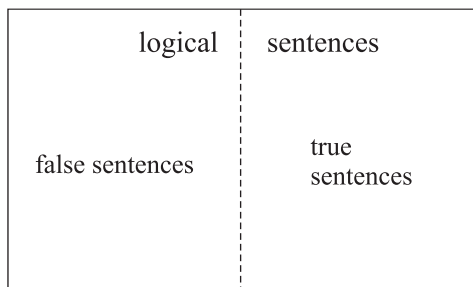


Fig. 5

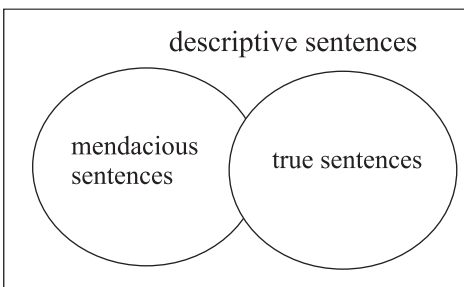


Fig. 6

Thus, there are two answers to question (?3). They are included in the table below:

l the lie	t the truth	Does l contradict t?
l3.a/b	t3	Yes/No

Let us move on to the answer to question (?2). Since the notion of *the truth* in the sense of t2. – as a feature of objectively true sentences – is juxtaposed here with the notions of *the lie* – as a feature of objectively untrue sentences, false ones (the case of l2.a) and then with the notion of *the lie* – as a feature of mendacious sentences – it is obvious that we will obtain two answers. It is easy to notice that the feature of truthfulness of the sentence is contradictory to the feature of falseness (no true sentence can be at the same time false and each logical sentence is either true or false /see Fig. 5/). Taking into account the case of l2.a, the answer to question (?2) is in affirmative. Let us note that also in the second case – l2.b – the answer is affirmative, as the features of truthfulness and mendaciousness are opposing ones: *the feature of mendaciousness* is a subjective one depending on the intention of the sender of the verbal message. It is appropriate for sentences which are false – in the intention of the sender (although they may be true), while *the feature of truthfulness* is an objective one and belongs to objectively true sentences, independent of what anybody thinks about, or is convinced of the truthfulness of this sentence. Juxtaposing the answers to question (?2) in the table, we obtain:

l the lie	t the truth	Does l contradict t?
l2.a/b	t3	Yes/Yes

Now, it remains to answer question (?1). Let us consider, first, the situation when the objective truth, as a set of all facts, states of things that hold (described by true sentences) which we discover – as *partial truths* – in the “infinite effort o mankind”, is juxtaposed with the notion of *the lie* in the sense of 11.a – as everything that is not a (partial) truth, everything that consists of untruths, states of things that do not take place. In this case, between the extensions of the notions: *the lie* (in the sense of 11.a) and *the truth* (in the sense of t1) there occurs a contradiction relation (see Fig. 7). Then, we should rather not say that the person who is telling untruth (a false sentence) is *lying*, but that the person is *telling untruth*. As a matter of fact, one can, even in a conscious way, be telling untruth (*e.g.* in jest) but is not lying at all.

When we consider the notion of *the lie* in the sense of 11.b – as everything that is the subject of mendacious utterances which are carriers of falsifying the cognition (and may, though they do not have to refer to untruths, to states of things that have not taken place, when such utterances – against the liar’s intentions – are true), then it needs observing that objects (states of things) which are objects of reference of the liar’s insincere statements are “de-objectivized”, state of things as objects of cognition shorn of objectivism, since they are based on the liar’s internal beliefs that the states of things which he is spreading around do not take place. Therefore, they cannot be state of things, partial truths or untruths referred to in logical sentences – objectively true or false. Thus, the extensions of the notions: *the lie* in the basic sense (11.b) and *the truth* as the object of a true cognition (t1) oppose each other (see Fig. 8).

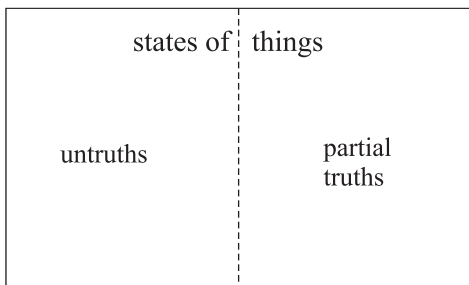


Fig. 7

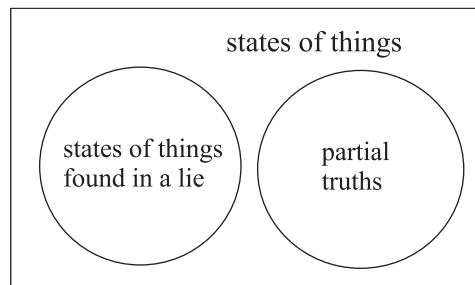


Fig. 8

Juxtaposing the results of the considerations carried out above with reference to (?1) we have:

l the lie	t The truth	Does l contradict t?
11.a/b	t1	Yes/Yes

A global juxtaposition of all of the inquiries into answers concerning the question posed in this work is presented in the table below:

l the lie	t the truth	Does l contradict t?
11.a/b	t1	Yes/Yes
kl.a/b	t2	Yes/Yes
13.a/b	t3	Yes/No
l4	t4	Yes-No
l5	t5	No
l6	t6	No

Thus, there is no unambiguous answer to the question posed in the work:

Does the lie contradict the truth?,

and the negative answers to its variants: the questions (?4), (?5) and (?6), manifesting in the last rows of the global table, can indeed be disturbing, since these answers violate certain ethical principles which are binding – primarily – in science, whose aim is searching for the *objective truth* (in the sense of (t1)), as well as accumulation and systematization of partial truths. *The truth* can be attained only through “pure” cognition, devoid of utilitarian goals. Scientific truths ought to be founded on reliable, logical arguments or well-verified hypotheses. There should be no room for any *lies* and acceptance of pseudoscientific theses in science.

And what should it be like in other spheres of life? In politics? Has anything changed since the times of Athenian democracy? The widespread hypocrisy which prevents any reliable communication has become a constant accompaniment of our contemporary life, and the very ethical postulate itself “do not lie” is beginning to sound quite anachronistic, the causes of which can be seen while endeavouring to answer the following question in the negative:

Is fighting with the lie more difficult today than it used to be in the past?

Answering this question, we can base on our own observations. From the perspective of my own experience – as a participant of the political life and events of the past fifty years – I would like to share some of my reflexions which the above question raises and I would also like to present a handful of my own ideas.

4. Is it easier to lie nowadays than it was in the past?

The title of this part of the work is borrowed from the short treatise written by Tadeusz Czeżowski in 1943.²⁵ The word “nowadays” is an occasional one. Its meaning changes in dependence on the context of its usage, time and circumstances.

Over half a century has passed since the treatise was published. T. Czeżowski gave an affirmative answer to the question posed in his work, justifying his choice with the following reasons:

- the inseparability of language and the reality has been violated (in the realism of the ancient philosophical thought a faithful reflection of the objective reality was found in words),
- the object of cognition has been de-objectivized, a subjectivistic conceiving of the world has been noticed (creation of the image of the world as the basis of an effective action, a visible tendency in compliance with the pragmatic conceiving of the truth),
- the foundations of the negative moral qualification of the lie have changed, one of the motives of which is disturbance of social relations, which was already emphasized by Kant (moral evaluation of the lie is losing its acuteness within society due to justifying the aims which it serves; this causes traditional sanctions aimed against the lie to become very lenient).

An affirmative answer to the question asked in the heading above – in this context – speaks for itself in a peculiar sense as there arise the following questions: Is the sense of it the same today as it was in the past?, and Has it been so in the past fifty years? We should then make a slight reference to the affirmative answer to this question in the post-war years, in the time of ‘real socialism’, when – in defence of the lie – a whole system of political lies was constructed, lies which were connected with the sphere of views and which resulted from the following factors:²⁶

²⁵ See: Czeżowski, T. (1958).

²⁶ See: Wierzbicki, P. (1986, 1987).

1. annulment of the language,
2. annulment of logic,
3. annulment of reality,

and thus from factors connected with:

- 1'. tearing the language away from the reality,
- 2'. justifying mendacious theses without any logical argumentation, and
- 3'. creating new, false reality.

Having at its disposal hosts of defenders of those lies and forgers of *the truth*, as well as a whole arsenal of tricks and manners of telling lies, known already to ancient Greeks, and also the methods applied by masters of lying of the interwar period and the methods of political rhetoric of post-war non-communist states, the moral evaluation of the lie was losing, and almost completely lost, its acuteness, imperceptibly creating, in society – through imposition of a peculiar obligation – a belief in the truthfulness or probability of the streams of lies that were passed and repeated. This also changed the society's attitude towards the lie as an unethical value, one that was supported by slogans propagating relativity of the truth and the "scientific" nature of the mendacious theses which were disseminated. The *New Speech*, connected with the propaganda of the 20th century and the functioning in it of two totalitarian state systems, did play an important role in deforming societies' consciousness, in not condemning the lie, or even – in the acceptance of the lie as a "new truth".

Times have changed. Political systems have changed in many countries. The factors differentiated by Tadeusz Czeżowski, those favouring the lie and the principle "It is worth lying", are becoming readily augmented by 'mediatization' of politics and social communication. Such mediatization allows fairly faithful presentation of politics, but also propagating untruths; it allows – as we often put it – missing the truth, or contradicting it. Today, society tells "the truth" or "the untruth" with the help of its media.

Philosophy is a friend to wisdom. But: Is it also a friend to the "wisdom" that is often hidden in a political lie? Is a commonly repeated lie, frequently accepted by society as "a new truth", bound to constitute any value in the times to come, when public and social mendacity grows to attain the status of a new life principle?

This "new truth" is materializing within the thinking process in a community, in which the direction of thinking is not determined by logic, but by some emotional factors. If there is a lack of good will and willingness to learn the truth, then working out new ways of acceptance of authentic political or historical events is a hard task. What is, then, the task set to philosophy in the service of politics?

A philosophical reflexion on the sphere of influences and interface of various political subjects is connected with shaping of political and logical culture, as well as with the level of it in contemporary society and among the very politicians themselves.

Entering the area of problems relating to political ethics and social ethics, it needs underlining that fight for power is also a fight for *the truth*, the objective truth. Such a truth cannot be defenceless in the face of the lie, especially those political and historical ones, it must defend itself against deceptive arguments, against being deluded into lying. The truth – as people say – will always out. Yet it will not defend itself only because it is *the truth*. It must be a result of the process of reliable searching for it, discovering it, justifying it, thorough understanding of it, and then – passing and absorbing it.

Philosophy occupies a central place among sciences. “By making the very truth itself the subject of its studies, by lighting up paths leading to it, by creating the theory of scientific cognition, philosophy becomes an ally and guide to all who – in any field of human study – aim towards the truth,” Kazimierz Twardowski – the founder of the famous Lvov-Warsaw School mentioned earlier – wrote.²⁷

It is time the appropriate study standards of philosophy – this lover of wisdom and truth – returned and stood up to the “dubious forces” that prevent the studies from being conducted.

One of the basic tasks to carry out by philosophy today is:

To serve the truth in politics.

It is a particular challenge and it requires engagement on the part of many philosophers who – while analyzing different problems pertaining to political philosophy, come closer to the new perception not only of its problems, but also of the very world of politics itself, exerting an influence on working out a sense of responsibility for the high level of public life. This task requires delineating new routes for philosophy of politics, which will allow developing a high political and logical culture in society – the culture which guards intellectual work related to shaping views or *Weltanschauungs*, as well as allows a critical analysis of the already accepted views.

²⁷ Twardowski, K. (1933).

S U M M A R Y

The paper deals with one of the most difficult and worrying philosophical problems, that is the **problemate of the truth and the lie**. First, certain analyses are made with reference to notions related to attempts at answering the questions: What is the truth? And What is the lie?, then – taking into account problems pertaining to political and social ethics – various notions of the truth and of the lie are juxtaposed, respectively, in such a way as to be able to answer the basic question raised in this work: Does the lie contradict the truth? Answers to this question are not unambiguous. In the author's opinion, this presents a peculiar challenge to philosophy, and – in particular – to philosophy of politics, as well as to the idea of shaping the culture of politics and logic in our society.

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