

SCIENCE, TRUTH AND LIES

In science it is possible, although difficult, to lie. In politics (although not so in good politics, which exists), it is easy, and possible, to lie. The principles, the statements and the findings of science are always, or at least should always be, subjected to perusal by the scientific community and by society at large. The assertions and statements made by politicians are very seldom subjected, at the time they become public, to a rigorous scrutiny by society. They are accepted blindly and submissively by supporters and denied, commonly in a sarcastic manner, by opponents.

For practitioners of science it becomes difficult, although not impossible, that false ideas, results or premises be accepted by the scientific dissemination media, which are generally very careful in subjecting every single paper to a detailed review by peers of high professional qualifications. It is easier to incorporate statements, opinions or declarations into the media, which are usually of commercial nature, and in search of news and, more so, breaking news, over truth.

For politicians it is rather normal that their opinions be spread as truth, more so when they are involved in proselytizing campaigns. Thus could a famous propaganda minister of a great European country proclaim that, even if something is false, it must be repeated a thousand times, and another thousand times, until the people and the entire nation believes it.

When a sovereign people goes out to the streets to express seven million times their adverse opinion to the dictatorship to which there are subjected, without the need of expensive protocols nor the intimidation of the armed forces, some politicians state that only a few people did so. At the same time, they affirm that eleven million people, representing almost all the rest of those citizens entitled to vote in that nation, expressed support for the project of the dictator, and so it is repeated by the dependent media. Very similar is what happens

when contrasting points of view express their appreciation about the crowds attending a proclamation act.

When the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, or his assistants, make a pronouncement and shortly thereafter they revert their opinion without a minimum of apprehension and nothing happens, we are not facing truths, but lies. What is hard to accept is that such discrepancies could take place in front of the eyes of the whole population but it evidently occurs. And it takes place with an extremely high frequency. It is obvious that there isn't an adequate and sufficient verification mechanism that would allow to trust that which becomes printed words.

Scientific publications have the very special responsibility to safeguard the verification of all that is stated in them. Because of it they have built mechanisms to assure that this takes place with regularity. In the case of the press, written or otherwise, and of the social networks, the influence of political factors is so great that the intention of many professionals to care for an adequate verification of the news counts very little, or nothing. Their rhythm is too hasty to allow the contents to be subjected to the needed validation prior to publication.

Two are needed to lie: one who lies and one who believes him. There are many examples of both. To express the truth it is needed for somebody to say it and those who verify it. Very many are required of the latter, who can do it without subjecting themselves to the interests and dependency of factors of power in a society. Be it in science, in politics or in any area.

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