THE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF LYING.

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"Lying is a fairly common habit of humanity, to be studied objectively without any moral preconception of any sort."—RALPH DEMOS.

There is little doubt that deception or lying in its very principle is merely a 'physiological' manifestation which finds its justification in the tendency to survive. It can be easily noticed that deceptive methods are the most widely practised modi operandi in nature. The animal kingdom supplies us with splendid material in this respect, because falsehood among lower animals is more obvious than in the higher types of animal and man. When there is a situation of immediate danger, with the impossibility of escape, deception becomes the means in emergency and, therefore, very much in evidence. Again, a study of the organs of vision, hearing, smelling, etc., reveals the fact that these organs are so constructed as to leave free play for deception. The eye, for instance, can see only at a certain distance, and is subjected to illusory influences of combinations of colour and light. For example, a zebra has light and dark stripes which, even at a short distance, blend in the moonlight so as to match in colour the pale tint which the arid ground possesses. Deception in the matter of protection finds its application in nature in the same way as do strong teeth, speed, and force.

We shall take up later the question as to why nature resorts to falsehood. We will now refer to one of the most marked and interesting occurrences in nature, illustrating plainly the work of deception, viz., mimicry.

Mimicry is a deceptive and protective resemblance to appearance which nature has adopted for its use in order to preserve or protect life.

Edward Bagnell Poulton, in his Essays on Evolution, says that "protective and aggressive mimicry may be defined as false warning and signalling colours ('pseudosemantic'), repelling enemies by the deceptive suggestion of some unpleasant or dangerous quality, or alluring prey by the deceptive appearances of something attractive to them ('pseudepisematic'). Even foreign objects, commonly associated with some well-defended and aggressive species, may be mimicked by a comparatively defenceless form" ('pseudallopsematic').

It is known that the colourful appearance of certain flowers is to
attract insects, which transfer the pollen from the stamens of one flower to the pistil of another. It is common for different individuals of a species to adopt two or more different appearances, resembling some special object of no interest to the enemy. Spiders and beetles, when in danger, fall motionless to the ground to simulate or 'sham' death. A certain species of crab, when attacked by its enemies, skilfully throws its claws away, and they remain in motion while the crab itself disappears.

Certain birds, when attacked, produce a noise resembling the hiss of a serpent to scare their enemies. The bobolink never leaves his nest directly. To mislead his enemies he runs a certain distance upon the ground before taking flight. The fox doubles his track to fool the hound. He has various feints to make his pursuers believe he is going in a different direction from the one he intends to take. In nearly all birds and animals the sense of protective mimicry considerably increases when facing danger. Sir Thompson Seton invented a highly suitable name for this kind of protective mimicry: he calls it "freezing." The creature, in dangerous moments, assumes the appearance of surrounding nature, remaining motionless and thereby distracting attention as long as it proves necessary.

Some creatures' existence is based exclusively on fraudulent actions, e.g., the spider weaving its web expects the fly to enter into its network and thus serve as its food.

It should be kept in mind that this form of deception has all the elements of a lie with the exception only that it is not verbal.

Thus we come to the conclusions that (1) where there is a question of self-preservation and self-protection, and where direct force cannot be used, or escape is impossible, the means for defence are falsehood and deception. (2) Deception is much more widely used among the lower strata of animals than among the higher. (3) The sense of weakness, and fear, are specific characteristic features of animals practising deception, because higher animals, blessed with much more vigour and force, are thus able to protect themselves openly and do not resort to a lie so often. (4) With certain animals deception becomes a matter of habit, as is proved by the fact that when there is no imminent danger the creature still continues to use trickery, as in the case of the bobolink, the prairie-dog, etc. (5) I am not aware of a single instance in which creatures, when weak and in danger, and deprived of the means of escape, would resort to any other method but deception. (6) Nature has not provided the weak creature with better facilities by which to escape danger than deception.

If we ascend from the lowest to the highest in the animal world, we notice that in the matter of self-protection primitive man did not differ very much from animals. Similar instincts for self-preservation
and self-protection, the same conditions, environments and circumstances, in the struggle for life would compel him to use similar methods and means.

Jean Jacques Rousseau’s statement that the “state of nature (under which we understand the state of primitive man) is a state of peace, when man united in love leads a life unfettered and free from want” is more than incorrect, if we remember that primitive man, being physically inferior to surrounding animals, was constantly and permanently hunted by beasts on one side, and that hunger and rain compelled him to search for food and shelter on the other. He was thus forced to fight. His state was not much different from that of the animals. And Hobbes, therefore, was right when he said that man in his natural state, without social organization, had no other standard of conduct than his own interest. Being hunted, the primitive man would stop, turn around, and take the offensive. This offensive he could accomplish only through deception. The realization of his physical inferiority, in comparison with the animal, and nature, prompted him to use this method of self-defence.

When we look more attentively into his position we find it to be unique. A small helpless creature in comparison with the other big animals, deprived of external, physical means of protection, and with a tremendous ambition to dominate, struggling for existence. His sense of superiority must have been bitterly offended when he was forced to suffer on account of his physical inferiority. He needed something which would give protection, ensure safety, and therefore provide satisfaction. This something was his brain, to which the necessity to survive was a gigantic stimulus. The most difficult part was to learn, notice, and observe. After that had been accomplished the rest was easy. A branch falling off a tree, which incidentally killed a fox, was a good example to copy, and a lesson to use force skilfully. A stone rolling in a ravine was an illustration of motion; a branch of a bush hitting his face, while he was passing through some shrubbery, showed elasticity; lightning starting a fire in dry wood gave him an idea of the existence of light and heat. He saw a fly struggling in the net of a spider, thereby learning trickery. All these he copied in order to dominate and become lord. He then invented his instruments of defence by copying nature. But some of the natural facilities of defence are of a deceptive nature. He copied them and assimilated them, because of the necessity to use them, and from their constant use they also became habits with him; and it is well known, as Darwin has pointed out, that instinct and habit together are the strongest factors of our natures. Then again, pleasure, which is derived from exercising the function of instinct, must, in the process of lying, be very great, because of its identification with self-preservation.
Certain habits, when pleasurable, that is, the performance of which brings a great deal of satisfaction, become so closely connected with the individual, that they almost form a part of his existence.

One more point should not be disregarded. Besides the strong impulse to deceive, the cause of which was pointed out above, deception is also a comparatively easy means for application and use. "It is as easy as lying," said Shakespeare (in Hamlet). Another answer to our question, why nature resorts to deception, is that a lie is more fascinating, more picturesque, more colourful, and stimulates imagination more than the truth. One believes a lie more easily than the truth.

Thus falsehood substituted and challenged the physical forces between man and animal. Just in the same manner as, later on, Archimedes lessened the amount of effort by increasing distance, so primitive man resorted less to rough physical force when he began to use deception.

It is evident that the first discoveries of primitive man, which were mostly of a protective nature, were permeated with the element of falsehood. Besides the great advantages which he derived from practising deception, his impulse for domination was enormously gratified. By means of deception the primitive man attained peace, safety from beasts, and independence. Falsehood became a virtue with him.

Man, however, does not practise only external deception. Internal processes of a biophysiological nature contain an element of deception in themselves. Here nature resorts to another kind of protection in the form of self-deception. In order to induce the action of certain physiological processes, it introduces an element which is the most powerful agent in self-preservation, viz., 'pleasure.' Thus, for instance, in reproduction it is necessary to have the sperma and ovum only. Nature takes 'pleasure' into its service and uses it as a means for deception. It puts on the mask of pleasure to smuggle in the work of reproduction.

We will now take up the processes of psychology of the child in connection with our subject. The character of a child is in many instances similar to that of a savage. Sully says "the child mirrors for us, in a diminished, distorted reflection, no doubt, the probable condition of primitive man." He says further, "that according to many, children are, in general, accomplished little liars, to the manner born and equally adept with the mendacious savage. Every writer on childhood, by no means prejudiced against them, leans to the view that untruth is universal among children, and to some extent at least innate."

The 'urge' for lying must be immense because, in spite of the efforts to teach a child to tell the truth, he continues, apparently for no reason, to practise deception. What forces the child to lie? Why
should a child having no idea of what truth and untruth are: practice deception?

Firstly, we ought to remember that children have much in common with lower animals. We know that they are suspicious, fearful; when angry they bite their enemies; they are crude, egoistic. A child shows the same instincts as the animal. As animal deception is connected with self-preservation and self-protection, so it is in a child. Besides, a child is born with a sense of inferiority. He is helpless and physically impotent. Only with growth he gradually learns to free himself from the disagreeable and inconvenient condition of his feebleness. The child learns to stand, walk, take food, and talk. The 'urge' for self-preservation and self-protection forces the child to make this progress for his own benefit. Until fully developed he has a sense of insecurity, a sense of feeling of danger. With the sense of danger there always arises in the child an instinct for self-protection. Protection is in the entire animal kingdom associated with falsehood. Thus the child by lying tries to protect himself.

Being a result of the instinct for self-protection, a child's lie is a subconscious one, for a conscious lie is usually connected with some advantages for the liar, and this requires a certain amount of experience, which is lacking in a child. The child lies because he possesses an innate impulse for it. According to Adler, the child, from his birth, adopts an aggressive fighting attitude toward his surroundings. It is an expression of the child's inferiority feeling, from which, in his natural growth, he tries to liberate himself. In befouling others, psychologically, he brings the adult to the level of his own feebleness, thus trying to equalize the difference in strength between himself and the environment.

Another contributing cause to the lying of children may be found in the fact that the memory of the child is neither absolute nor perfect. He is not able to remember the effects of all sensations experienced since birth. There are no ready recollections to form the basis for reality, therefore imagination is brought into aid. Although imagination is not directly responsible for children's lies, nevertheless it plays an important part in their accomplishment.

Imagination is actually the material of which a lie is composed. The younger the child the greater is his imagination. The child is, on the other hand, moved steadily by his instincts towards pleasurable sensations. Governed by the instinct of preservation, strengthened by habit, the child uses his imaginative power for deception because of the latter's close relations with self-preservation and self-protection. A little girl, playing with a doll, through an excess of imagination believes the doll a living baby, thus deceiving herself. The instinct of motherhood in the child is here the deceptive factor. The phantom is enough to create this belief.
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It may be asked why a younger child possesses more imaginative qualities than an older one. The answer to this is that the older the child is the more experience and facts he acquires. Experience brings him nearer to reality, and reality excludes imagination. In other words, the imaginative processes are only substitutes for reality. The above, I believe, enables us to comprehend better how a lie in a child is originated, and why a child lies, apparently without reason.

Coming back to the relation of lie and man, we perceive that in spite of the innate tendency to lying, and the habit for it, man openly revolts against falsehood. His tendency to truth, an apparent sign of civilization, tends to eradicate the lie as a sign of atavism. Reason cannot allow lies. With the growth of culture, man becomes ashamed of deception, because deception intuitively reminds him of his ancient weakness, feebleness, and physical inferiority. He is ashamed of open and free deception in the same way as he learned to hide and suppress his other instincts, as, for instance, the sexual instinct, as well as the instinct of possession, etc.

On the other hand, having once experienced the use and value of brain substance, he refrained from physical force as the more dangerous and less wise mode of action in self-defence. Besides, he felt justified in using his brains in self-defence in the same way as he was using physical force. The reason why man hates lies is because of his associating it with the idea of weakness; because deception is the last resort for defence, and it cannot but remind him of fear. Healthy young people, when brought into a difficult situation, may fabricate refined and complicated lies. The difficulty of the situation forces them to resort to such means in order to escape the clutches in which they find themselves. That this process costs much effort is seen in the phenomenon of blushing, which very often occurs, and which is a result of an internal emotional revolt resembling that of fear.

Nevertheless, in spite of the tremendous efforts to eradicate lies, the germ of deception still lives within man; it nestles in his social, political, economical life. Lying is merely an ‘urge’ which, with the evolution of man, became modified and harnessed, but not eradicated.

Even art has not been saved from lying. Art is beautified through deception. Fiction and poetry are a skilful and beautiful deception. Fiction and poetry play an important part in our life as a stimulus, feeding our craving for something of which reality deprives us, and giving us a deceitful satisfaction in living in a world of unreality.

Oscar Wilde, in his Decay of Lying, puts into the mouth of Vivian a real illustration of how art is lying. “To return again to the past, take as another instance the Ancient Greeks. Do you think that Greek art tells us what the Greek people were like? Do you believe that the Athenian women were like the stately dignified figures of the Parthenon
frieze, or lived like those marvellous goddesses who sat in the triangular pediments of the same building? If you judge by art, they certainly were so. But read an authority, like Aristophanes, for instance; you find that the Athenian ladies laced tightly, wore high-heeled shoes, dyed their hair yellow, painted and rouged their faces, and were exactly like any silly, fashionable, or fallen creature of our own day. The fact is that we look back to the age entirely through the medium of Art, and Art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth."

In the foregoing I have tried to show that lying in man was primarily an urgent necessity for the purpose of survival, which in the course of time became, ceteris paribus, his second nature. He learned to control this 'urge' as he learned to control many others, but the 'urge' for lying remained intimately connected with the ego 'urge.' Lying brings a great amount of pleasurable sensations. When the 'urge' of lying exceeds its permissible degrees, we call it pathological lying.

Pathological lying is a pathognomonic symptom in many abnormal conditions, as, for instance, paranoia, imbecility, chronic alcoholism, psychoneuroses, hysteria, and certain forms of sexual perversion. Delbruck called pathological lying "pseudologia phantastica," in the belief that those lies are different from ordinary lying. Later investigations, however, as those by Koppen and others, show that it is very difficult to differentiate a 'normal' from a pathological lie.

In my opinion the principle of both kinds of lies is the same, because both kinds serve the same purpose, namely, the ego motive. The difference is surely in degree, in art in fabrication, and in application to reality. Pathological lying is a result of mental retrogression, which is clearly seen in individuals freed from obligations of their social impulses, thus returning to their primitive state of mind. The 'urge' to live is not lost in pathological individuals. They merely lack judgment as to how to conduct their ego properly without defying normal standards. The pathological liar, as the child, is not aware of his own lying. Both are led by subconscious force, the first by an impulse which has become morbid, the second by the same impulse, which has not yet been harnessed. Therefore the feeling of discomfort that their lie may be discovered is absent in both of them. The conscious lie is a 'wish' which is supported by subconscious impulse, and which is often observed, especially in sexual perverts. The cause of their fabrication of lies bears a compensatory character; for instance, elderly people suffering from sexual impotence sometimes try to make other people believe that they accomplished much in their youth in this respect.