

Truth

How important is it?

- Kant would say that it is fundamental to a society's functioning.
- Utilitarians would tell a lie if it promoted the greater good.

Sissela Bok proposes the "Principle of Veracity"

Not all lies are condemned; however, they must be proven to be a necessary last resort.

Why should truth be a fundamental principle of a society?

1. A lack of integrity in human communications undermines the autonomy of the individual.
 - The notion of individual autonomy is based, in part, on freedom of choice.
 - We depend on truthful and accurate information in order to make informed judgments.
2. A commitment to truth demonstrates a respect for persons as ends rather than tools to be manipulated.
 - Deception usually places self-interest over the interests of others.
 - Those deceived are put at a "competitive disadvantage."

Sissela Bok defines lying as "coercion."

- Telling someone a lie forces them to act in a way different from how they would have acted had you told them the truth.
 - Thus, you are coercing them to act in this way.
3. The belief in truthfulness of communications builds trust between individuals, and between individuals and society's institutions.
 - A record of deception or lying endangers future relationships.
 - Credibility always suffers in the long term.
 - Because trust is built on truthful communication, lying and deception undermine the foundations of society.

4. Truth is essential to the democratic process.

Democracy depends on an informed citizenry.

- In a complex democratic society, the media are the primary conduits of information flow.
- To the extent that they fail in this obligation, they deprive us of the information necessary for rational decision making.

Truth in Journalism

The Standard of Journalistic Truth

Three concepts underlie the notion of truth in reporting

1. The reporting of a story must be accurate.

- Facts should be verified
 - based on solid evidence
- Quotes should be accurate and unaltered
- Sources should be attributed

2. A truthful story should promote understanding.

- Given time and space constraints, the goal should be to provide an account that is essentially complete.
 - Enough relevant information should be included as to preclude misunderstanding of either the facts or the context of the facts.

3. An article must be fair and balanced

- Journalists should accord recognition to those views that enhance the understanding of an issue.
- These views should be presented fairly with quotes fully in context.

What about Deception?

According to the Kantian view:

- Any form of lying erodes the bond of trust between reporters and their audiences.

According to the Utilitarian view:

- Deception must be used at times to further the public interest.

Since the journalistic default is truth, the burden of proof is on anyone who chooses to use deception as a news-gathering technique.

Investigative techniques such as undercover reporting and the use of hidden cameras, should be employed only after a full and deliberate discussion in which the decision maker(s):

- are convinced that the information sought is of compelling public importance,
- have considered all alternatives to the use of deception,
- are convinced that the benefit to be derived from the deceptive practice outweighs the possible harm to the various parties involved, and
- are willing to disclose to their audience the nature of the deception and their reasons for using such tactics.

A Moderate Kantian View

“Compelling Reason Test”

Is there a compelling reason to deviate from the truth?

- The reasons for the deception must be important.

- The deception must be done for humanitarian purposes devoid of self-interest.
- The arguments in favor of deception must far outweigh the arguments against the compromising of truth.