

# **“Fake News”: The Danger of Being Fooled by its Own Lies**

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# Topics

- 1. What is old in “Fake News”?**
- 2. What is dangerously new in “Fake News”?**
- 3. Final Remarks.**

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# What is old in “Fake News”?

# “Fake News”, or Lying as a well-paid career

**“Honestly, people are definitely dumber. They just keep passing stuff around. Nobody fact-checks anything anymore — I mean, that’s how Trump got elected. He just said whatever he wanted, and people believed everything, and when the things he said turned out not to be true, people didn’t care because they’d already accepted it. It’s real scary. I’ve never seen anything like it.”** Washington Post, 17 11 2016, Interview to Paul Horner ([1978-2017] owner of a Facebook fake-news empire”).

# The Question that really Matters?

- “Is it of the very essence of truth to be impotent and of the very essence of power to be deceitful?” (228/237).
- ARENDT, Hannah, “Truth and Politics”, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York, Penguin Books USA Inc., [1<sup>a</sup> edition: 1961] 1993, pp. 227-264.

**This essay was published for the first time in the February 1967 edition of the *New Yorker*.**

Truth like ethics, is no match to the might  
of vested interests

**“For I doubt not but, if it had been a thing contrary to any man’s right of dominion, or to the interest of men that have dominion, ‘that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two angles of a square,’ that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry suppressed, as far as he whom it concerned was able.”, Hobbes, 1651, *Leviathan*, cap. XI.**

In the realm of truth, however, facts are  
the most vulnerable

**“The chances of factual truth surviving  
the onslaught of power are very slim  
indeed (...) Facts and events are infinitely  
more fragile things than axioms,  
discoveries, theories – even the most  
wildly speculative ones – produced by the  
human mind...” (231/241).**

# Why is factual truth so often politically inconvenient?

- **“Seen from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character. (...) Facts are beyond agreement and consent, and all talk about them (..) will contribute nothing to their establishment.”**
- **“(...) The trouble is that factual truth, like all other truth, peremptorily claims to be acknowledged and precludes debate, and debate constitutes the very essence of political life.” (241/250-1).**



# The paradox of “factual truth”

- **“Factual truth [although “precluding debate”] (... ) is always related to other people (... ) Facts and opinions (... ) are not antagonistic to each other; they belong to the same realm.” (238/248).**
- Being submitted to the horizon of opinion, factual truth can be **filtered, disguised, distorted**, even destroyed by the suppression of the key witnesses of it.

## A “*thin red line*”

- Friedrich Nietzsche: “Es gibt keine Tatsachen, nur Interpretationen..”
- Who is to blame by the start of World War I?
- Germany invaded Belgium on 4 August 1914 “*we don’t admit the right to touch the factual matter itself.*” (239/248)...

Fake news are no error or mistakes: they  
are lies

- **“In other words, our ability to lie – but not necessarily our ability to tell the truth – belongs among the few obvious demonstrable data that confirm human freedom.” (250/260).**
- **Fake news reshape the factual truth of the past aiming to act into the shaping of the future. They are engaged in political action.**

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**What is dangerously new in “Fake News”?**

# “Traditional lie” (TL) versus “modern lie” (ML)

- TL: “concerned only **particulars** and was never meant **to deceive** literally everybody [**only the enemy**]” (253/262).
- ML: “**deals with things that** are not secrets at all but **are known to practically everybody**...harbor an element of **violence...tends to destroy whatever it has decided to negate.**” (252/261)”

# “The traditional lie” is partial and instrumental (1): Rommel in Tripoli, March 1941



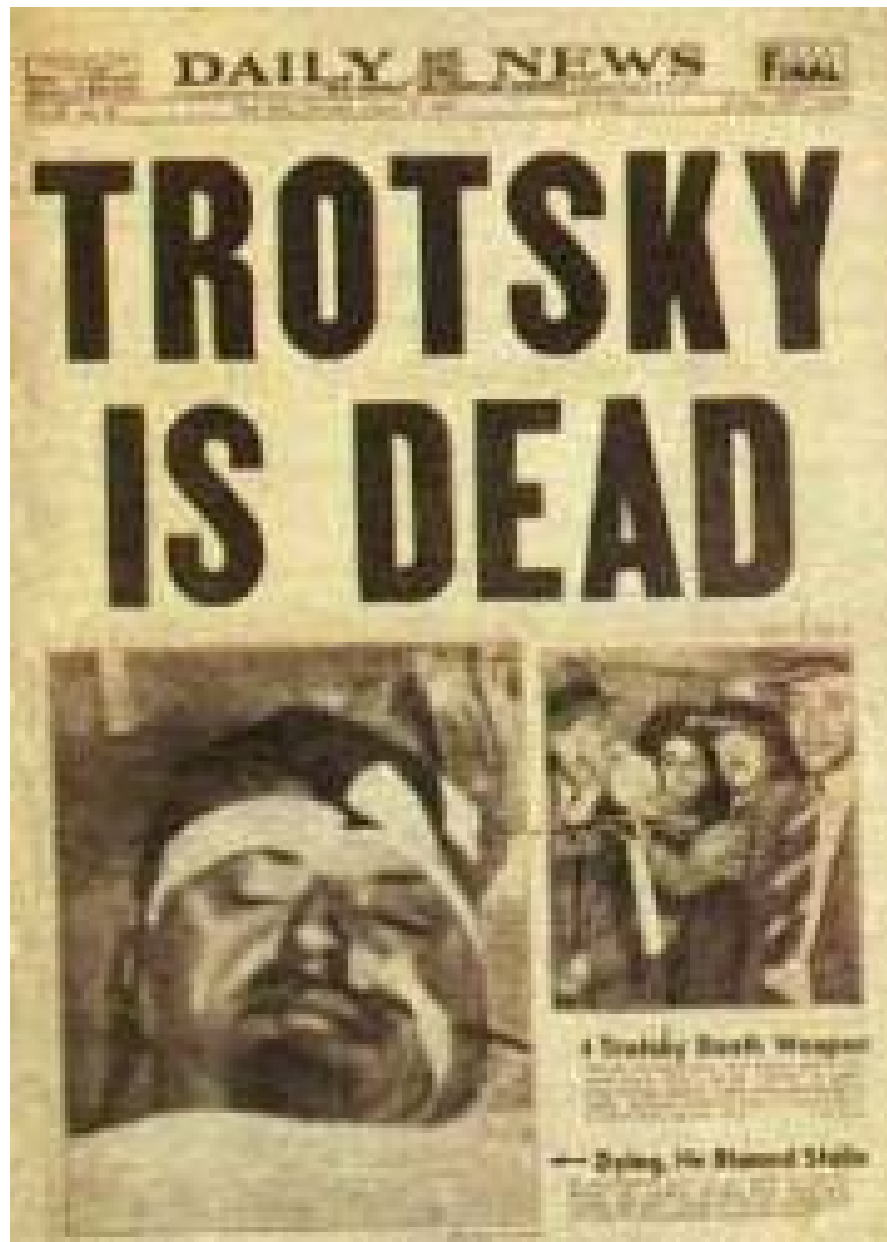
(1917) The modern lie tends to  
destroy...



(1930) ...whatever it has decided  
to negate...







# Modern lies

1. Reshape a global alternate reality.
2. Extends the warfare logic to its own people: politics as a continuation of war, instead of war as a continuation of politics.
3. Transforms State coercion in ideological terror.
4. Destroy factual truth using fear to build new images of reality in the heart of individuals.

# *Idealtypus* of modern lie: Holodomor famine (1932-1933)



# The Great Leap forward

(大跃进; [pinyin](#): *Dà Yuèjìn*): 1958-1962

40 to 55 million killed peasants in China.



# But democracies are not immune...

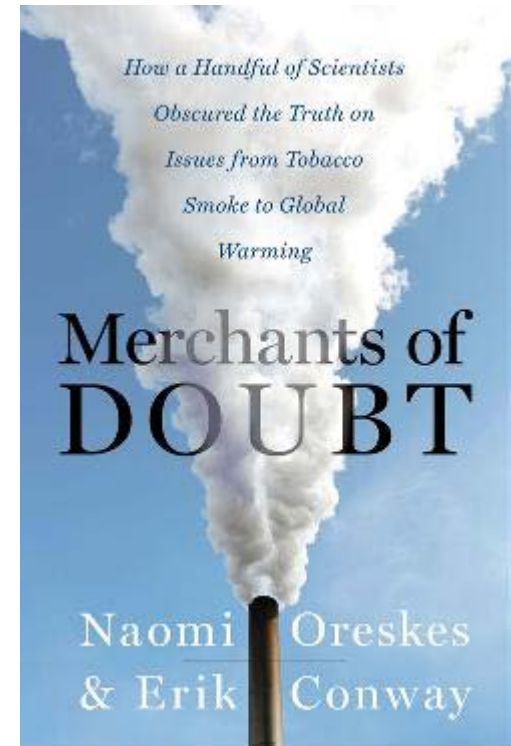
- De Gaulle: the lie of France as a victor of WWII.
- Konrad Adenauer: the lie of the German people as a victim of the barbarism of National-Socialism.
- The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the lie of the Weapons of Massive Destruction.

# Eurozone fake science: the bank crisis disguised as the Sovereign Debt Crisis

Countries/ Areas	2007	2008	2009	2010	Increase variation (p.p.)
Germany	65,2%	66,8%	74,5%	82,5 %	17,3
Portugal	68,4%	71,7%	83,7%	94%	25,6
Ireland	24,9%	44,2%	64,4%	91,2 %	66,3
Greece	107,4%	112,9%	126,7%	148,3 %	40,9
Eurozone (17)	66,4%	70,2%	80,0%	85,4 %	19
European Union (27)	58,9%	62,2%	74,5%	80,0 %	21,1

# Trump, Climate Change, nuclear deterrence

- Actively destroying the Environmental Protection Agency and the federal funding for climate research....
- Is it wise to play with the Fire of nuclear war?



**“Obama was born in Kenya” (Trump)**

**“Current moral prejudice tends to be rather harsh in respect to cold-blooded lying, whereas the often highly developed art of self-deception is usually regarded with greater tolerance and permissiveness.”  
(254/264).**

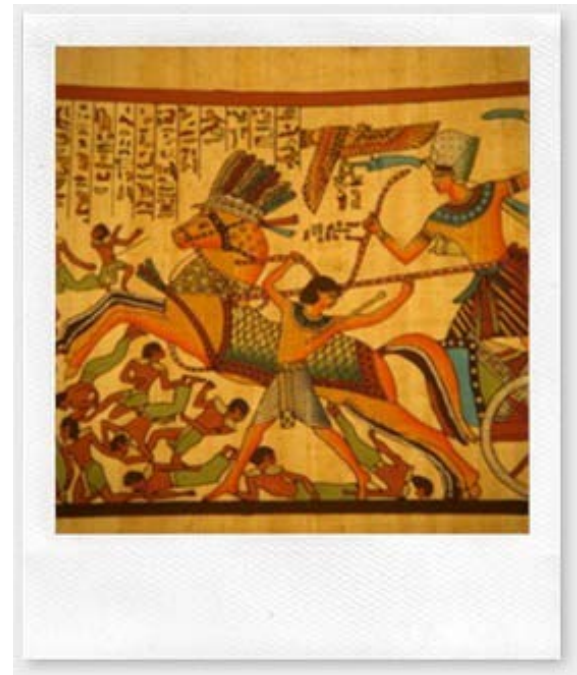


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## **Final Remarks**

# Our democracies are loosing “Homeric impartiality”

- The rare capacity of dealing with friend and foe on equal footing: Achilles and Hector...
- Battle of Kadesh: Ramses II against Hittites (1280 BC)



# The *constellation of truth* isn't in good shape

- Different forms of seeking and protecting factual truth: “*standpoint outside the political realm (...) being alone*” (259/-260/269): the philosopher, the scientist, the historian, the artist, the judge, the witness, the reporter...
- Karen Blixen: “*all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.*” (262/271).

# The risk of blinding ourselves

**“In other words, the result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world - and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end – is being destroyed.” (257/267).**

The other face of “fake news” is sheer  
resignation

**“The political attitude toward facts must, indeed, tread the very narrow path between the danger of taking them as the results of some necessary development which men could not prevent and about which they can therefore do nothing, and the danger of denying them, of trying to manipulate them out of the world” (259/269).**

# Factual truth as the ground and the sky of wise political action

**“And it is only by respecting its own borders that this realm [political action], where we are free to act and to change, can remain intact, preserving its integrity and keeping its promises. Conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.” (264/273).**

We are personally responsible for truth as condition for the future

- **“Not the past (...) but the future is open to action.” (258/268).**
- **“Persuasion and violence can destroy truth, but they cannot replace it.” (259(269).**