

An ancient prophet, Persia's Zoroaster, gave the world some powerful concepts: life after death in Heaven or Hell (depending upon one's conduct in life); a single god of the universe, and god's shadow, an evil spirit who used the lie as his weapon. Ancient Persia's code of conduct for men was: ride well, shoot your arrows straight, and tell the truth.

While Zoroaster's religion faded, these concepts passed into Judaism when the Jews lived in captivity in Babylon. It was during this time that their concept of God (Yahweh) morphed from just their own god among many (henotheism) to the one god of all (monotheism). This concept was emphasized in the rising Jewish cult of Christianity (God of the Universe) and death's judgement day, in which the soul went to Heaven or burned in hellfire.

The issue of the truth and the lie became an identifying quality of Western civilization, in which one took an oath that words were true, not a lie. Lying, unlike just being mistaken or not knowing enough, is a deliberate act, and in English courts, was punishable by imprisonment. One did not lie under oath, or else.

The Romans took these values seriously in the many centuries in which they ruled Europe and the Middle East. But as Rome lost its power, the world descended into centuries of chaos, in which the strong treaded on the weak and centralized rule became impossible.

One consequence was the rise of the lie as a weapon for power. The conspiracy theory was born, in which misrule was never admitted, but scapegoats were pushed forward instead. During the Crusades period (1099 to 1250 AD), the scapegoats were Jews, exiled by the Romans from their homeland during the rise of Christianity. Conspiracy theories were used by Christianity and Islam (a then rising power) when misrule needed to be hidden. They were blamed for plagues, lied about using babies' blood for their Passover flatbreads, and blamed for being too smart as advisors, bankers, traders, and medical doctors.

The Spanish Inquisition was the next period of lying: Jews converted to Christianity accused of "backsliding," a crime punishable by burning to death. Confessions were extracted by torture. Soon, some Christian Spaniards lied about neighbors backsliding and were rewarded with the property of the accused being given to them.

The next conspiracy theories riled Europe for centuries as plague after plague swept through, and women were targeted as witches capable of bringing disaster on common people. A malformed calf or deformed baby could prompt a search for the "witch" who had put a hex (curse) on them. This folly also prompted greedy people to accuse whole families in order to obtain their property. The vast majority of people at the time truly believed these lies, culminating and finally ending in the Salem witchcraft trials in the early 17th century.

The French Revolution birthed the next lies as former aristocrats and Catholic priests fled for their lives. Conspiracy theories ruled the day until the whole caper was ended by the Napoleon dictatorship.

Hitler spun two big lies: first, that Jews were responsible for all of Germany's post World War I misery and second: that backward Poland was preparing to invade Germany. This silly lie gave Germany the excuse for invading Poland and starting World War II. Both lies tallied millions of dead bodies before the war ended.

Donald Trump still promotes the "Big Lie" that he really won an election that he lost, and that all elections are rigged. His takeover of the Republican Party has enlarged the pool of believers in the big lie to one-third of Americans. This results in disbelief in all the former institutions that gave Americans a common set of beliefs in democracy.

Now Russia is reviving the German playbook in lying that Ukraine is planning to invade Russia. Despite the silliness of this false flag claim, Putin is sticking to this lie. As Hitler said, "Lie loudly and repeatedly and people will believe you."

The Prophet Zoroaster was right 2500 years ago. The Big Lie is the Devil's ultimate tool.

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