

ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN POSTMODERN SOCIETIES

A Comparative Law
and Multidisciplinary Handbook

Edited by
Jehanne SOSSON
Geoffrey WILLEMS
Gwendoline MOTTE



intersentia

Cambridge – Antwerp – Chicago

PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS

The Weight of Truth in New Families

Nathalie FROGNEUX

Introduction	641
1. The Demand for Truthfulness and the Plurality of Family Truths.....	642
2. The Self-Narrative.....	643
2.1. The Practical Need for a Self-Narrative	643
2.2. The Family Narrative: A Polyphonic Construction	645
3. Living a Lie.....	647
4. The Demand for Truthfulness and the Risk of Truth.....	652
5. The Fragile Balance of Confidence.....	654
Conclusion	656

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of families today also involves a transformation in their relation to truth. Isn't there a paradox one should see here? On the one hand, families seem to demand more truthfulness from their members. On the other hand, plural truths coexist and a commonly agreed story seems more complex to reach. Consequently, the issues relate to the harmonisation of the sometimes widely divergent family truths and those relating to the fact that a decision may have to occur about which contradictory version will be authoritative. The law plays a decisive role in this dynamic, since it must arbitrate between truths that have become irreconcilable. Our hypothesis is thus that these new families generate higher expectations with regard to truth while at the same time making it problematic. Undoubtedly new challenges are also emerging: to be able to, or to have to, establish a legal truth when dealing with difficult family narratives marked by unsaid, secrets and lies, while knowing that the word of authority may itself have devastating effects on family truths.

1. THE DEMAND FOR TRUTHFULNESS AND THE PLURALITY OF FAMILY TRUTHS

If the question of truthfulness is taking on a new importance in families, it is because families are increasingly based on the quality of relationships. Indeed, today, the quality of feelings between two persons seems to be what guides the couple. In fact couples increasingly seem to be based on an agreement based on feelings of two reflexive emotional personalities,¹ who unceasingly think about and evaluate the way they live their lives, in order to assess whether it corresponds to their expectations and conditions in view of their accomplishment and their fulfilment. In addition, a child and children are no longer inevitability a question of fate, but the result of a decision, which is, itself, based on a desire. Consequently, couples and families see themselves as hubs of love and commitment where everyone is recognised in his/her uniqueness and can find a basis to develop their self-confidence.

In the evolution of families, these demands lead to new pitfalls, because insofar as romantic relationships are more and more based on feelings and emotions, they are less long lasting than when the couple was based on moral and social engagement. Hence compositions, ruptures and recompositions abound in the history of couples and families. The commitment of engagement followed by a marriage commitment does not mean the end of tumultuous intrigue and the advent of peaceful stability. It is a phase – sometimes never reached – in the adventure of feelings, which spreads throughout one's life.

To work out and make sense out of it, the family history will have to be told, with its pitfalls and its joys, its moments of serenity and its storms.

This has undoubtedly and traditionally always been the case for every family, but our thesis is that the family narrative is much more important as it must invent a family which no longer inevitably and solely reflects upon itself via the nuclear model. The family narrative will thus have as its initial task to define who belongs to the family and how; then decide on each member's place and, finally, ascertain the family members' commitment and attachment.

To the extent that feelings may be unstable and ambiguous, the search for a loving authenticity weakens couples. Paradoxically, the more their story of love and affection is complex and its foundation slightly delicate, the more important the family narrative becomes for the members living in it, because places in it are no longer allocated by tradition or status, but must be recognised by everyone: parents and children alike. Consequently, establishing the truth of the story of the relationship between the parents, the parents and children, and between the children is increasingly complex, as well as thornier than in the past.

¹ On the question of the 'emotional reflexive self', see E. Illouz, *Why Love Hurts. A Sociological Explanation*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012.

2. THE SELF-NARRATIVE

One must be able to tell his/her life story – in order to be able to bring out its meaningfulness and define the family ties which form the object of a conscious or unconscious heritage and which will gradually be re-appropriated based on verifications and confirmations, so as to progressively become a narrative in the first person that can serve as a basis to establish the autonomy of he/she who would tell him/herself his/her own identity. Through the narrative of our lives, we have to endeavour to explain and understand what we are living and have lived by retracing the successive sequences of our existence. The events of our lives find their meaningfulness either in causal explanation,² or because they are the result of an intentional action. Through this narrative, we mobilise our freedom and provide ourselves with the ability to act, which is why this narrative is not only descriptive *a posteriori*, like a biography written post-mortem, but practical and turned towards the future.

But couples today are increasingly founded on feelings of love, which will progressively give way to the commitment and attachment bonds families are based on. These two characteristics of contemporary bonds of love: the fact that they are ephemeral and ambiguous feelings, as well as the commitment and attachment, lead us to develop relationships that are constantly being reassessed and evaluated. A narrative of oneself and his or her love thus becomes all the more necessary when evaluating the quality of one's feelings and the importance of the commitment. Indeed, the commitment itself seems to have to justify itself in light of another contemporary requirement: that of individual autonomy. Only the couples and families to which we appeal will be able to satisfy us.

Hence the narrative about oneself and one's family have become more important today, because sexuality and alliances are no longer linked to the status of persons or to their moral engagement, but to a constant recognition of the quality of their lives.

2.1. THE PRACTICAL NEED FOR A SELF-NARRATIVE

In the self-narrative, questions aiming at elucidating and explaining our motivations and intentions are essential. However, this narrative initially depends on the narratives that were made for us by those who preceded us: the circumstances of our birth and early childhood, the history of our parents and the love that nourished us. We first of all discover the world from a narrative that, little by little, we will have to accept and take on in the first person in controlling its accuracy and reliability. Indeed, the temporal asymmetry

² Hence the importance of parents having recourse to juridical truth after the murder of their child.

between the adults and the children renders the parents' discourse authoritative vis-à-vis the children's discourse, taking into account the fact that the parents are not necessarily equal in the narration as one of the parent's version may have overridden the other's.

This self-narrative is of prime importance. This is because it conceals a practical dimension: that of unifying our experience and thus maintaining our confidence in ourselves and in our ability to act in the world. Indeed, the shadowy zones, taboos and discrepancies can all become obstacles to the child's opening up and evolution in the world. To accomplish him/herself, a child, helped by its parents, must know who he is, that is, where he comes from, what his origins are, and receive love within his primary bonds of commitment through a narrative which presents as much unity and clarity as possible.³

Moreover, in a culture that is increasingly basing love on an authenticity of feelings, we must insist on the fact that certain truths often remain hidden to those most directly concerned. Thus, certain very personal decisions, like those involving the choice of a partner out of passionate love, or creating a child, but because of the intensity of the moment, without anticipating the conditions it will grow up in, are not communicable, because they are largely based on obscure individual paths taken which the protagonists themselves would find difficult to explain to themselves. These altogether individual choices will indeed be very hard to account for vis-à-vis those concerned by the choice as well as the entourage.

We now know love has its share of opacity, undoubtedly intricate for both the willingness and for any conscious explanation. Consequently, and quite paradoxically, this love, which cannot completely be explained nor understood as an act of willingness, has all the more reason to find an acceptable meaningfulness. It will otherwise generate 'unsaid', which will operate in the shadows, with the long-term risk of jeopardising the subject's autonomy.

Thus our contemporary endeavour to base couples on a harmonious agreement and intense feelings sometimes seems to enter into competition with the requirements of communicating our affectivity and creating confidence through the quality of the commitment. The challenge of the self-narrative is to be descriptive and practical in one go, since it must account for what we are living and have lived, as well as constructing a positive unification of the self which allows us to act and undertake.

In a contemporary version of the myth, can we imagine Jocasta telling her husband Oedipus about the abandoning of the son she had with Laius, her first husband?⁴ Did Oedipus tarnish his image of a hero by acknowledging he had killed an old man at a crossroads on the road to Thebes to Jocasta?

2.2. THE FAMILY NARRATIVE: A POLYPHONIC CONSTRUCTION

If loving and saying it to yourself are one and same thing, then a loving family cannot help saying and resaying who the family is and how much the family loves each member composing it. The self-narrative is from the outset elaborated in a family narrative, which is hence essential to constituting the self, in a virtuous circle; the narrative of the persons composing the family contribute to creating a family discourse and encouraging everyone's discourse.⁵

Thus families talk about themselves to play-act their own history, but also to mislead the wounds and obstacles, because every family also has a practical aim: it is a question of finding a narrative by which life can go on and children can grow up. However, this narrative may end up wiping out a few points it does not want to fit in. Beyond silence and unsaid, which are neither deliberate, nor sometimes even conscious, a narrative is put in place with its own short cuts and shadowy zones, in order to forget the too painful wounds. And according to whether it is a more or less acceptable version of events for everyone, this will involve a description that is more or less close to the facts and accepted by a greater or lesser number of witnesses. Otherwise, the narrative may turn into a kind of family fable or myth, which will be maintained among a few people who have agreed to believe in it. The dissimulation consists in maintaining it as a treasure in the circle of those who can stick to it while wisely avoiding comparison with other versions of the facts.

How can Oedipus tell Eteocles and Polynices his story? How can Jocasta explain to Ismene and Antigone who they are? Whether the mistaken identity is the result of a wilful lie or ignorance is, in fact, immaterial. The lack of accuracy often makes it possible to mask the lack of sincerity or the desire to idealise the family we are part of. Inaccuracies and approximations, unsaid or half-truths,

resolved in a violent and tragic way. With the birth of their son, Oedipus, Laius and Jocasta, the sovereigns of Thebes, who had consulted the oracle, think that the child will become parricidal and incestuous. To avoid that destiny, his parents entrust him to a servant with the task of killing him. Oedipus, which means 'swollen feet', is then exposed with his feet bound, but a shepherd finds him and entrusts him to the King of Corinth, Polybius, and to his wife Merope, who raise him as their own son. The Oracle is repeated to Oedipus who consults it: 'you will be parricidal and incestuous'. To avoid this tragedy, Oedipus leaves Corinth and on the way kills Laius. He frees Thebes from the Sphinx, and in reward marries the queen, Jocasta, his biological mother, with whom he will have four children: two sons who will kill one another, Eteocles and Polynices, and two girls, Ismene and Antigone. Then a plague strikes the city: the oracle of Delphi affirms that Apollo is incensed for the death of Laius remains a mystery. Oedipus wants to solve the crime and promises to find the perpetrator. When Oedipus understands that he is the criminal he seeks, he blinds himself and sets out for Colone, whereas Jocasta, understanding that destiny had been achieved despite her, commits suicide.

Certainly behind questions of identity, issues of inheritance are also at play, which we will nonetheless leave aside here.

³ See B. Pierrehumbert, *Le premier lien. Théorie de l'attachement*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2003.

⁴ We refer to the myth of Oedipus in the version of Sophocles. In fact, in this myth, nobody had the intention of lying, but everyone's ignorance leads to a life in a lie which will be

are often simply generated through the narrative that the family tells to provide meaningfulness, beyond the wounds, to possible traumas or, even more simply, to counter the contingencies and accidents of life. The motivations for the creation of this narrative do not necessarily rely on a desire to mislead the interlocutor or deny reality, but rather to preserve oneself, to preserve a desirable image that enables self-esteem. Thus a secret may result from a reality the holder cannot manage to acknowledge or that he/she him/herself has repressed. He/she may then occupy the dual position of holder and recipient of the secret, and englobe other persons in this denial. In that case, the secret is not relational from the start for it was not the intention, but becomes so in its consequences.

Isn't it painful to have to say to a child that the warmth of love surrounding him/her went through the cold of freezers at the time of an *in vitro* fertilisation or an Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI)? Isn't it easier to keep quiet and let the social prejudices – which lead to supposing a natural conception in a marital bed – run their course? Is it important after all that he or she knows? Can the intimacy required around the marital bed include the hospital bed? Do we have to impart a truth, which may be hurtful and discouraging?

The need to tell the circumstances surrounding a birth is a traditional problem. But the need to reveal the feelings and emotions that make, shape and break families is less of a problem, as are the needs to reveal the medically assisted procreation circumstances of the birth of the child. The primary bonds of commitment may prove more complex today with the decomposition of the original family core, which include the biological parents, as well as in the context of recomposed family, with, depending on the case, children of the other partner or of new partners. When families base themselves more on commitment than engagement, the quality of feelings must be unceasingly checked and the choices constantly renewed. Indeed, to day the question arises for recomposed couples as to whether each of the partners can become attached to the other's children. And the older the children are the more important the question becomes, because commitment in that case corresponds to a bond of friendship more than a bond of protection. Indeed since Aristotle we know that friendship is based on attachment because of the friend's qualities.⁶ On the other hand, it is possible to remain attached to one's child even if he/she has chosen a life we disapprove of and do that even if it represents a wound or tragedy for us.⁷ Indeed the two types of commitment have quite different bases and will impose antagonistic logics on the family: in the case of the biological parent and the social parent who has watched the child growing up since birth, the commitment will belong to a natural affection related to protecting the vulnerable and consequently be

unconditional, while in the case of an already partially autonomous child, the commitment will follow criteria linked to the personalities of each person in the relationship.

The question of divergent choices in the education of children is essential too. Should they be made explicit? Is it possible without making things difficult for the children? The plurality of conceptions of what is 'good' within the same family constellation that results from recompositions often remains an unsaid. Between silence and transparency, how are the children going to express or conceal the part of their lives, which escapes the other parent, or their half-brothers and half-sisters?

Yet since these explanations are doubtlessly related to important emotional moments – of love or rupture – they are undoubtedly that much harder to express, or even unfathomable or unapproachable. Thus a paradox appears within the new families: the family narrative has become so much more important that for each and everyone it is hard to elaborate it according to one's own perspective and reconcile the viewpoints. The family members and witnesses in the entourage will also play a crucial role depending on whether they choose to respect the unsaid and lies which protect some of the members or insinuate that something is hidden or repressed – knowledge that might be invaluable to the others.

Certain issues may be different or even opposed for members of the same family. Then there is a strong temptation to find a flattering or pleasant interpretation, to sugarcoat it or idealise it and thus start inventing a lie. However, that untrue version will not please everyone. Indeed, what is unavoidable for some is often essential for other members and hence to withhold certain aspects of the past will amount to stealing a part of their identity. Faced with these antagonistic motivations, a family will sometimes be tempted to give up the idea of reconciling the individual narratives. However, if the secret holder manages to impose his version in the family, the deluded individual will have to check and confirm his version of the facts outside the family circle. This heteronomous unification, such as, for example, a truth imposed by historians or genealogists, an administration or a judge, will end up settling things in a public and authoritative way, at the risk of inflicting chaos on the various versions of the family narrative.

3. LIVING A LIE

The most painful family secrets are not those which relate to the parents' past love life before the birth of their children,⁸ but the secrets of descent and family genealogy: how were alliances composed and broken up, who are the parents

⁶ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII–IX.

⁷ See H. Frankfurt, *The Reasons of Love*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006; and, for an example, S. de Beauvoir, *La Femme rompue*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967.

⁸ We exclude secrets linked to the shameful activities of forebears criminal activities etc.

and what are the relations between siblings. These are lies that shall concern personal identities.

'The family secret is both something you don't talk about, something that nobody is supposed to know, and a painful thing for the parents.'⁹ The unspoken may be voluntarily or involuntarily hidden and, to remain hidden, it will generate a lie. The family constellation then divides its members up according to three positions: that of the secret holders (a parent, a couple or other family members); the one or more duped parties¹⁰ (one or more children who are linked to the hidden object: their descent, the conditions they were conceived under, born in, and named); the entourage of the holders; and the recipients who are all more or less lucid witnesses and who will either participate in keeping quiet (those who more or less know the hidden thing and who will show themselves to be more or less supportive of the secret holders) or in divulging the secret. Thus beyond the figures of the liar and the dupe (which is a classic pair in the lie stated in a language act), we should look at those who Tisseron calls in French 'feintistes' (*to feign*), meaning all those who are affected by the lie. Thus, for example, the deceived husband and the lying woman act out their relationship for the brothers and sisters of a child who did not have the same father. What happens is that the lie radiates out among the siblings in the family surrounding the persons directly concerned, either as deceivers or dupes.

Moreover, the secret may drag out over several generations and go on secreting ever more varied ailments and manifestations. We must insist on the circular dimension existing between lies and secrets, but also on the cumulative logic, which makes them proliferate over several generations and transform themselves. Whereas the lie sometimes stems from maintaining a secret, in other cases, the secret sometimes stems from a lie. We must therefore insist on the intentional dimension of the dissimulation of what cannot be said or is inaudible. Once the secret holders have told the lie, when it is born by the whole family, but forgotten, it will transform itself into silence in the following generation, meaning into an unsaid. Silence may thence be the third generation's lived experience; it comes from the two former generations' lack of self-introspection, for not having tried to reconcile and articulate a minimum of truthfulness and accuracy within the self-narrative and family-narrative.¹¹

Indeed secrets, even with the best intentions, generate lies to gain time and the initial goodwill most often leads to a protection by fraud. So as to avoid making the other suffer, we build a 'wall' says Sam Harris between him and reality.

⁹ See S. Tisseron, 'Le secret ne s'oppose pas à la vérité, mais à la communication', (2004) 33(2) in *Cahiers critiques de thérapie familiale et de pratiques de réseaux*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Tisseron speaks of dupes.

¹¹ See A. Ancelin Schützenberger, 'Secrets, secrets de famille et transmissions invisibles', (2004) 33(2) *Cahiers critiques de thérapie familiale et de pratiques de réseaux*, pp. 35–54.

Bernard Williams¹² insists on the danger of distorting our linkage to reality, because things are not what we think they are, words become untrue and rather than saying something, they conceal and mask. The son of Laius and Jocasta, Oedipus, saw himself deprived of a basic right.

In this respect, Maria Bettetini¹³ affirms that the lie and the secret are always inhabited by an intention to mislead and create an illusion. But here we will say that the consequences of secrets and lies are always detrimental, for both the secret holder and the recipients, because they always distort the bonds of confidence and the expectations of truth.

In other words, lying does not always mean telling lies and thus is not linked to language (or to using signs, as for Umberto Eco), but on an attitude, which induces the other into error, since it voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, misleads him by a word or gesture.

However, in families, it is impossible to forget completely, to hide definitively or throw a veil of silence over what is 'trying' to be said. As Serge Tisseron puts it, the lie oozes through slips, repetitions, mental or physical health disorders for those most concerned, but also for persons more or less concerned, and thus becomes progressively unsustainable.¹⁴

One might object to the statement according to which lies are not always negative and that they contribute to everyone's happiness. Indeed, the family is also often a hub of lies motivated and justified by goodwill and the liars' love for the ones they fool.

Among the non-malevolent lies that pass for allegedly harmless lies, the white lies (which conceal a truth) are more common than the outright lies (which state untruths). But the blurring, inaccuracies and unsaid that family narratives are supplied with may also prove to be detrimental, for half-truths often cause erroneous interpretations. Under the pretext of not saying what might be hurtful, we let the other go on kidding himself. These lies are also the least significant on a scale of duplicity, because we believe in them and value them for their capacity in allowing us to appear pleasant to people we like. However, if they turn out to last or if they relate to essential issues and not just harmless daily chatter, they may have serious consequences. Thus, for example, the tragic case of the husband who for many years never told his wife she sang falsely whereas she dreamt of being a great professional singer.¹⁵

¹² See B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness. An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2002.

¹³ M. Bettetini, *Breve Storia della bugia. Da Ulisse a Pinocchio*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano, 2001.

¹⁴ What can be devastating on a psychological level is to learn that a secret or a lie which concerned us directly was in fact known to our entire entourage and that in all that time nobody wanted to talk about it, dissociating themselves from the dupe and thus becoming accomplices of the deceivers.

¹⁵ The true story of Florence Foster Jenkins has inspired the films *Marguerite* by Xavier Giannoli in 2015 and *Florence Foster Jenkins* by Stephen Frears in 2016.

Undoubtedly there is a gradation in this complaisance with regard to approximation and lack of accuracy but, in any case, they will have to be circumscribed in time due to the logic of proliferation underlying them. Indeed, if I can avoid telling my husband that I don't appreciate him putting on weight, I will, at all costs, have to avoid leaving him in the dark until the day comes when physical aversion will make any sexual intimacy between us impossible. That may start with false excuses to spare his sensibilities and avoid being directly confronted with the question itself. Kindness can lead to a hypocritical flattery settling in, which will reach the point of uttering flattering untruths.

In any case, it is the confidence we have in the other, which may be damaged. How can you explain that someone you swear to have always loved has suddenly deserted you for another?¹⁶ This sudden rupture in the perception of oneself and of the loving relationship that was maintained can be devastating on the level of self-image and self-perception, but also and above all on the level of the perception of reality. Thus, just as with an abrupt and sudden revelation that a loved one believed alive actually died, the world can truly give way under our feet: everything collapses for we can no longer trust the person we loved and consequently what we perceive of the world.

In this respect, we would like to underline what Sissela Bok says about the creation of a secret, which, according to her, is always a power appropriation over the other who is in a relationship where truth is presupposed.¹⁷ It is most usually the parents who are in a position to keep secret information concerning their child (notably in relation to her or his origin, but also as regards the existence of Santa Claus).

While some authors try to distinguish inoffensive lies from toxic lies, it seems to us on the contrary quite difficult to establish those differences insofar as the lies with the best intentions and the silences maintained in time necessarily proliferate and construct twisted truths which will sooner or later unfold, causing more or less damage.

Indeed, from means designed to give pleasure or not to harm, lies and secrets end up becoming ends in themselves. After all, they have to be maintained and hence the conclusion is always that a person ends up feeling he/she is the object of the relationship rather than an equal subject. He/she feels not only misled by those who had wanted the best for him but also blocked in the exercise of his/her freedom and choices. However, the value of freedom does not only lie in the ability to achieve one's goals and objectives, but also in the very exercise of freedom. That explains why we sometimes prefer to see that we were flawed and have failed rather than to be constrained to a 'success'. It is not the same for our relation to truth: life is in truth, an expression of Jan Patocka, certainly supposes constant readjustments of the self-narrative, but if they are constant and

progressive, they do not involve major traumas and allow us to genuinely be the actors of our lives. On the contrary, the *a posteriori* observation that one lived a lie and, therefore, lived outside of reality can be extremely traumatising and give us the feeling that we are a stranger vis-à-vis the person we were before the secret was revealed. Thus, all lies, even white lies, damage the relationship of confidence you have with yourself, the real and others.

Like Sissela Bok, Sam Harris insists on the fact that all lies are detrimental for the relationship and for oneself. For Sam Harris, lies and secrets are always detrimental for whoever is their object, because they irreversibly damage confidence, be it between partners or between parents and children.¹⁸ However, the quality of the bonds of commitment is proportional to the confidence one can invest in the other person. Sissela Bok,¹⁹ however, insists on the harm the lie does to the liar, since it involves the personality splitting, an internal schism which is detrimental to self-construction, which supposes unification. But it also involves a lack of recognition of the lie's authors.

Thus not only the dupe, but also the liar finds him/herself affected in his emotional and psychic integrity. This is how personalities divide, darken and fragment, becoming irreconcilable, marked by taboos and whole sections which no longer make any meaningful sense in the person's discourse, or which may even risk fracturing the subject's psychic and moral integrity.

From our point of view, within families, there is therefore no need to distinguish intentional lies, silences and secrets, because while those differences are important from the viewpoint of the author of the secret, silence or lie, by contrast, they are not from the viewpoint of those who live in their shadow.²⁰ Indeed, whatever the origin of this distancing with regard to a reality, the result is that his/her life is built on a lie or in a distorted way.

The metaphor of the lie's 'weight' is certainly not insignificant. Silence is indeed cumbersome. And while it is possible to make it weigh on others' shoulders, we sometimes make it weigh on our own shoulders due to the lack of introspection into our own shadows. Thus whatever might be the elements of the narrative of oneself, a family or a couple: silences, approximations, lies or rubbish, the anthropological reality is the same: that of living a life in a lie. The expression 'living in a lie' indicates the moment when the lie has been sufficiently successful and has been proliferated sufficiently to create so to speak a world

¹⁸ S. Harris, *Lying*, Four Elephants Press, Cleveland, 2013.

¹⁹ See S. Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, Vintage Books, New York, 1999. See also S. Bok, *Secrets; On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*, Vintage Books, New York, 1989.

²⁰ We would rather refer to the self-narrative more or less concerned about truthfulness and truth than to rank lies in opposed categories: normal lies which permit the construction of intimacy and destructive lies that ravage the self and relationships. Lies and secrets produce different effects due to the constellations they are found in as well as the tone of the relationship.

¹⁶ See S. de Beauvoir, *La femme rompue*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967.

¹⁷ See S. Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, Vintage Books, New York, 1999.

that is parallel to the facts admitted by others and even more so, to oblige the liar to become a liar him/herself: he/she must henceforth maintain his/her world.

4. THE DEMAND FOR TRUTHFULNESS AND THE RISK OF TRUTH

But is life as a bullshitter bearable in the long run? The practical dimension of the identity of a person must stay close to reality. Thus, the Jean-Claude Romand affair had to end, because reality always reclaims its rights over the narrative.²¹ This is the expression Harry Frankfurt uses to underline a moment when the entourage will limit the possibility of moving away from what is collectively allowed: 'That's all bullshit!'²²

So do we have to tell the truth? Do we have to break the bonds of silence, by divulging the best-kept secrets? In this respect, the family members will not all adopt the same position. Two sometimes antagonistic family logics may, notably, be distinguished: one descending, going from the parents to the children; the other ascending, going from the children to the parents. Indeed claiming the truth is neither symmetrical nor synchronic. Everything seems to indicate that the descendants have more expectations in terms of truth and transparency in view of the constitution of their identities than the ascendants, and they sometimes no longer want to support the weight of a past which prevents them from being themselves, as, for example, when it is a question of clarifying the history of an adoption.

By contrast, in the context of medical necessity, the tracing of hereditary pathologies will require clarification of ancestors or family truth. So what truth do we owe to children? That of the shameful diseases of the previous generation, a grandfather's cancer, the circumstances of a parent's divorce, the parents' tormented love life, an *in vitro* fertilisation, a surrogacy birth, the donation of

sperm or an ovocyte at the origin of a pregnancy in the couple that the parents would, however, like to keep to themselves and not divulge?

Thus, we see clearly that that seeking truth is not symmetrical and individual interests may be opposed. As soon as the truth bursts out, power relations will come into play.

Given the damage lies do, should we conclude that the truth is always preferable? While having our children grow up in trustworthiness and authenticity is clearly desirable, the question relating to whether it is desirable to leave the lies and silence behind and how this can be achieved is a more delicate one (often involving psychotherapy). The longer a lie has been able to be maintained, the more it has contributed to building a 'misleading truth', for life goes on and takes its reference marks from the error and falsehood; suddenly leaving that framework, built up little by little on falsified bases, can prove extremely devastating.

Although he sought it, and ardently desired it, was the truth about his birth a relief for Oedipus? A false identity was at the basis of his couple and family, which couldn't help but be annihilated by the revelation of his true parentage. That revelation seems to have led to his personal destruction and even more so than his life in the lie. It also caused the ruin of the whole family by successive tragedies. Indeed, everything seems to indicate that when a life has unfolded in a lie, the truth will require courage on everyone's part to reconfigure both one's own self-narrative and the family's, which, undoubtedly, not everyone is capable of.

Hence family life is less nourished by truthfulness in the sense of accuracy than truthfulness in the sense of trustworthiness. It is a life which is based on two socially shared presuppositions: on the one hand, that the communication circulating within a relationship of love and confidence is true; and, on the other hand, that love and confidence are at the basis for a couple and its family relationships. Consequently, the authenticity and trustworthiness which are desirable for the child and for the couple will also be essential in order to come out of the life of lies, but it will undoubtedly be necessary to count on other family members than the secret holders or the accomplices to the lie. Becoming the object of negotiation, truthfulness, while required, does not necessarily presuppose total transparency and will have to leave room for psychological and emotional, as well as, moral intimacy.

Thus, there is only secrecy in a relationship where truth, meaning accuracy and sincerity, are legitimately expected. There is indeed a demand for truthfulness, meaning the desire not to be duped, and not to be misled. Bernard Williams poses truthfulness as a quality of the interlocutor. The demand for truthfulness is thus the expectation that an interlocutor is authentic and honest.²³

²¹ See E. Carrère, *L'adversaire*, Gallimard, Paris, 2001. The novel is based on an actual case which took place along the border between France and Switzerland in the 1990s. Jean-Claude Romand pretended to be a doctor for 18 years. In fact, he was not. After having successfully passed his first year medical examinations at the Faculté de Lyon, where he met Florence, who became his wife, Jean-Claude Romand did not take one of his second year exams, which he denies to this day. He continued to go to courses but took no more exams. He went on to pretend to be a doctor at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva and continued to keep abreast of medical progress by reading and frequenting would-be colleagues. While trusted by everyone, he nonetheless spent his days sitting in his car in car parks and lived thanks to sums of money entrusted to him by the family, intending to invest it in Switzerland. The moment he felt he'd been discovered, for he was asked for money that he had spent, he shot his wife and two children with a rifle on 9 and 10 January 1993, as well as his parents, before setting the house afire and attempting suicide. After his failed suicide attempt, he was tried and in 1996 sentenced to life imprisonment with a 22-year minimum period.

²² See H. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005.

²³ See B. Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness. An Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2002.

The discovery of the lie and the return to a greater truthfulness will not always be a relief, because it may take place in a sudden, uncontrolled and, sometimes, even traumatising way, generally involving a major turmoil that is quite threatening for the entire family. Yet there are always opportunities for proceeding to a reunification of oneself with the family.

In the best-case scenarios, and unlike those traumatising experiences, certain therapists manage to propose a new self-narrative and unburden the weight of a deceiving life without coping with the revelation of an alternative truth.²⁴

Because family secrets tend to ooze, sooner or later, they cause either damage or generate a search for truth. The complexity of the question thus lies in the fact that family truths rely on the truthfulness of the family narrative's narrators, which largely depends on the ability of each of its narrators to tell himself a narrative which constantly evolves and which makes sense because he/she is also able to accurately stick to the facts. Hence it is important that everyone make his questions and voice heard, so that the common narrative is not controlled by the most authoritative persons who would thereby disproportionately give weight to a particular narrative and therefore to their own interests.

5. THE FRAGILE BALANCE OF CONFIDENCE

As Williams underlines, the presupposition in any relationship is that what is said is meant to and intended to be true and, hence, just and sincere. Observing the opposite always engenders a disappointment, a disillusion and thus a loss of confidence, which will have to be rebuilt to save the commitment. Similarly, for Axel Honneth, confidence is linked to the recognition of the other's uniqueness by someone who is unique for the infant and the child; this will involve his/her parents or adults who respond unconditionally to his/her physical needs granting him/her a sense of security which will then enable him to develop self-confidence.²⁵ This confidence conferred by loving relationships in early childhood is played out again in adulthood within the couple, when two partners take care of one another in an inclusive manner: physically, affectively and psychically.²⁶ Thus, the confidence needed for a coherent

self-narrative is based on this double dimension: confidence in the other as a satisfier of needs and in the truth of his/her narrative.

While Axel Honneth insists on the quality of the physical relationship of confidence, which consists in unconditionally responding to the unique needs of a person, Bernard Williams shows that in the order of discourse and communication, confidence relies on the double virtue of the speaker's sincerity, truthfulness, and the accuracy of his remarks, their truth. In order to define the two faces of the required truth, truthfulness of the statement and its accuracy, we propose speaking of validity and falseness, which may be those of the person, or those of his/her interlocutor. It is only by satisfying this double condition that confidence will be maintained within families and that sense will be fostered in the narrative. It all goes on as if it were still a matter of maintaining or putting back into circulation those familial untruths and half-truths which consciously or unconsciously block self-narratives and family histories, without creating new traumas through the brutality of a piece of information some hadn't heard about or that comes out in the open at the wrong moment. And that will only be able to be done based on a certain degree of trustworthiness. It is here that an important fine line comes into focus: what is said within loving relationships must make sense and can only make sense if it is true, but obviously not everything has to be said. The quest for transparency soon comes up against its limit, for otherwise it would likely lead to a destruction of sense. It is only facing *legitimate* expectations within a relationship that we can speak about secrets or hidden truths.

However, transparency is not a legitimate expectation within the family. Legitimate expectations are those which enable us to know who we are (and thus to know our origins) and whether or not our love can build upon a relationship of trust. Thus a husband is deceived if his wife who promised to be loyal towards him takes a lover without his knowledge, but not if she buys herself a new suitcase without telling him about it. The question of legitimate expectations also seems to be changing substantially in our culture of feelings and commitment. In this respect, individuals eager for recognition may perhaps be tempted to seek redress for unmet expectations in the legal sphere.

While the law may often be summoned to reinforce the cognitive part of the truth, psychotherapists shall find themselves involved in the phase of the potential acceptance of new elements that shall require a reconfiguration of the self and the family to make them acceptable enough to avoid a collapse of the self and the family unit. 'So let us say that the problem is not the traumatism, but the way we work it out or manage it, and particularly the way in which we can tell it to ourselves and others who will be able to hear it, to listen to it, and to help us

²⁴ E. Goldbeter-Merindfeld relates this experience as the result of her therapeutic work. See

E. Goldbeter-Merindfeld, 'Le poids du silence: la révélation par la non-révélation' (2004)

33(2) *Cahiers critiques de thérapie familiale et de pratique de réseaux*, pp. 123-30.

²⁵ A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995.

On this subject, see the article by I. Roskam in this book.

²⁶ In shedding light on this first form of recognition, first in the genealogical sense and in the logical sense, we leave aside two other forms of recognition: recognition in the juridical

sphere and what Axel Honneth calls respect for oneself and others, and recognition within a social sphere, the esteem held for oneself and others. The former is based on a universal recognition, whereas the latter is based on recognition of individuality.

in naming it and hence in working it out.²⁷ Certain traumas ensuing after coming out of a lie may precipitate a change and an evolution of the personality, while others will do permanent damage, for the relationship's meaningfulness is irrevocably lost.

CONCLUSION

In a culture where the loving encounter is based on feelings and the lasting couple on commitment, the partners' truthfulness becomes essential, while at the same time the number of truths seems to multiply. Indeed couples and families are no longer just based on biological and legal truths, but also on emotional, psychological and family truths, which will give rise to social truths. The latter are undoubtedly also important in understanding how life, love and commitment, but also hatred and disputes, go on from generation to generation. The question will be about how to make these truths coexist and, where appropriate, how to hierarchise them.

In addition to a hierarchy of discourses due to relationships of power and asymmetry within the family, we should take relationships of power into account due to the social statuses of the discourses. Thus legal truth is called on when dealing with divergent family truths. And in the event of further contestation and referral to other levels of jurisdiction or of doubt as to conventional evidence, biological truth seems in turn to take precedence over legal truth.

However, that truth must itself take into consideration the risk accompanying its authority: namely that it may be violent when it contrasts too much with family explanations and interpretations or when, because of procedures, it is kept too long a time from persons for whom the family narrative shall no longer make sense in view of opening a world of engagement.

²⁷ See A. Ancelin Schützenberger, 'Secrets, secrets de famille et transmissions invisibles' (2004) 33(2) *Cahiers critiques de thérapie familiale et de pratiques de réseaux*, p. 43.

PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

Parent-Child Relationships in the Light of Psychology

Isabelle ROSKAM

Introduction	657
1. Children's Needs for Positive Development	659
1.1. A Model of Needs	659
1.2. Belongingness Need: The Attachment Theory	660
1.3. Esteem Need: The Identity Theory	663
2. Parental Duties for Positive Parenting	665
2.1. The Concept of Positive Parenting	665
2.2. The Challenge of Positive Parenting	667
2.3. The Relevance of a Co-Parenting Process	668
Conclusion	670
Selected Bibliography	671

INTRODUCTION

Parent-child relationships are something natural that perpetuates the human species, not only for the purpose of reproduction but also because human babies are born into a state of great dependence. They are 'altricial' mammals, i.e. being born in a very immature and helpless condition. In the absence of care, human babies cannot survive. They therefore have to be related to adults who take care for them. As we will see in the current chapter, these relationships that seem to stem from biological evidence are nowadays complex, due to the diversification of family groups, the emergence of medically assisted procreation techniques and the influence of cultural backgrounds. Of course, we must recognise that alloparenting, i.e. any form of parental care provided by an individual towards a non-descendant young, has always existed in most societies. In the past centuries, children of upper-class families were raised and even breastfed by nurses. And collective arrangements were frequent in the kibbutz or in polygamous families. But the reason why parent-child relationships became a matter of concern at the end of the twentieth century is that children's social status has profoundly changed. During the greatest part of history until the end of the twentieth century,