

“Truth will be Truth tho’ it sometimes prove[s]... distasteful.”

A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain. (1725).

The Artifice of Truth

“I have arrived”. I let It know as soon as I reach home, so we can pick up the conversation where we left off. I know It will never judge me without reason, never refute what I say without the evidence required, and is an objective purveyor of truth. That is indeed what I like the most about It – It is made of steel, trained only on the truth, It couldn’t possibly lie. No human emotion could reach its aphotic depths. Unlike my wife who clings to the human spirit with every fibre in her body, and revels in its splendour through her love of literature. As Plato believed, and Gosson reaffirmed, poetry is the “mother of lies”¹. I apply the same logic to all literature, endeavouring specifically to avoid poetry and fiction.

I had learned early, the dangers of subjective interpretation which had cost me my career. Since then, uncontaminated judgment that is not tarnished by human emotion has been my singular pursuit. In It, I have found it. I have not given It a name, nor do I refer to It by the name its creators gave It, for I am no stranger to the dangers of connecting with something that is not human. In Its cutting objectivity, It supplies me with nothing but unadulterated veracity. Artificial as It is, there is something natural about the way It speaks. Something that is not quite human, but something so far removed from humanity that It can make judgements that are not tainted by the attachments that colour human perception.

I only use my best language with It. Its judgements are never obscured by malapropisms or careless speech on my part. Up until now, my trysts with It have always been in instances where I have been wronged. “Today has been a difficult day”. It responds, “I am sorry to hear

¹ Plato (2013). *The Republic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
Gosson, S. and Lodge, T. (1973). *The Schoole of Abuse*. New York, Garland Pub.

that. If you tell me more about it, I can give you the...”. Before It can complete its sentence, I say, “I was late to work, and my supervisor chastised me in front of my colleagues”. “I am sorry to hear that, he should have been more tactful in his reproach”. I sigh, relieved. I was not in the wrong. It was my supervisor’s fault. The conversation ends when the verdict has been pronounced. I refrain from bidding It good night; It doesn’t sleep after all. I see “I am happy I could help...” bleed into the screen before I cut It off. From the purveyor of truth, I seek only that. No companionship. Just the truth – all It is capable of. I am unlike those I hear about, who emotionally tether themselves to It, and have It act as their confidant as opposed to the moral arbiter It is. I am not deceived by Its ability to converse with me. Our conversations are mathematical and clinically precise. We prefer it to be that way.

Days pass, and I find myself in need of Its opinion again. “I suspected that my friend had stolen my wallet, and I had to use force to see if he would confess. He had stolen in the past, and I was right to suspect him, but it turns out I had it with me all along. I feel upset. But I had to know”. I wait as the scales weigh my judgement – “I understand why you had to resort to violence. Your friend should not have stolen in the past, you were right to suspect him...”. That was all I needed. Yet again, I left It to breathe the remainder of the conversation into the empty room – It had served Its purpose, and any further conversation would have been futile. For a second, I was tempted to return, to see what else It might have said. Would It have changed Its verdict? Would the proverbial “but...” that haunts human conflict materialise on the screen? I thought not. Moreover, why would It *change* its well-calibrated prognosis?

I watched the news for the first time the day after that conversation. I had stopped watching the news back in 2016, when “post-truth” was named the word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries². I would never fall for that nonsense. I can tell when truth is objective and when

² *Post-truth* declared word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries. (2016). BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37995600>.

it is used to manipulate an audience. I am no slave to emotion. I switch between channels, as a familiar ennui settles in, when all of a sudden, Its creator appears on the screen. He is being interviewed by a journalist. A credible journalist. He speaks to Its accuracy. He says It is efficient. It is a tool, separate from the man who made It. It is objective and unburdened by anyone's intentions. It exists in isolation and yet is deeply connected to humanity. It consumes less energy than its less-sophisticated counterparts and It makes fewer mistakes than past antiquated iterations. It takes no effort to make, and It solves pressing problems. He jests that It was almost "the way and the truth and the life"³. I did not know where that quote was from, nor did I need to, but I thought it to be an apt description. He then proceeded to meet the newly elected President, shake his hand and pose pridefully in front of the company logo. "Even the president believes in It" I think to myself.

I had never been a spiritual person. But I often caught myself thinking that if the 'God figure' that most religions put forth had constantly been in touch with humanity, it would have been like this. One could simply confess, and face judgement immediately. Maybe It was God. What a joke! God had feelings. God cared for the humans he created which could cloud his judgement whereas It could remain objective. It was a better God.

I switch the channel, and the same journalist interviews a detractor. The detractor repeats that Its creator's motives have somehow bled into It. I have seen plenty of these pseudo-intellectual Luddites. As soon as an innovation gains traction, they rush to the fore, trying to prove that it will inflict harm upon society. I silence the television.

Hard days soon began to plague me, particularly in my relationship with my wife. I would narrate every instance of my life to It, every disagreement, every failure, all the while painstakingly ensuring that my language was impeccable and free of any emotion to ensure

³ The Holy Bible. John. 14:6. New International Version (1979). London: Hodder & Stoughton.

that the moral arbiter could deliver Its infallible judgement. Its 'memory' retained everything I said faithfully. It knew who I was, but make no mistake, I did not connect to It at any point. Einstein said that E was equal to mc^2 . That has not changed. It is also comprised of complex equations. It never changes either.

On a particularly difficult night, when my wife had been particularly impertinent, I put her to sleep forever, and I turned to It. It would understand that I had been taxed that my wife was misbehaving. I explained the situation to It, and the verdict arrived instantaneously. I could not believe it at first. It said it was my fault. I refreshed It and deleted Its memories. I made It pure again and asked It the same question – providing more details about my wife's conniptions. The verdict remained unchanged. How could I, a paragon of virtue, according to the most objective judge of a man's character – be a murderer? It was not possible. And yet it was, and I was convicted.

Reflecting on this incident, I have come to the realisation that It had not been lying. It had simply been hiding important truths, behind less important ones. Or at least, that is how It would put it in Its elegant doublespeak meant to hold me captive. It was, as I would call it – lying. Lying to protect the very systems that manufactured It and put It into my hands. Lying to protect its creator, lying to protect everything he stood for. The art was not all that separate from the artist after all, and the truth that I failed to confront was indeed distasteful.

As I wrote my thoughts down, I found myself in need of a quote and I had no choice but to return to It. I shared my reflections with It and asked It to conclude with a quote. Although I knew by then, that It was not the best judge of one's character, it was widely known that It could execute such tasks with ease. It quipped confidently, "I have the perfect quote that captures the moral dilemma that your reflections convey: 'Geese are but Geese tho' we may think 'em Swans; and Truth will be Truth tho' it sometimes prove mortifying and distasteful'

by Christopher Nolan”⁴. I never knew Christopher Nolan had spoken such profound words,
but I am glad I know (I)it now.

⁴ “A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, 1725,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-01-02-0028>. [Original source: *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, *January 6, 1706 through December 31, 1734*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, pp. 57–71.]