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## CHAPTER EIGHT



# The Noble Art of Lying

JAMES EDWIN MAHON

“A man is never more truthful than when he acknowledges himself a liar.”

—Mark Twain<sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain wrote two essays about lying: “On the Decay of the Art of Lying” and “My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It.” They remain among the most original things ever written about lying. Nevertheless, they are seldom included in discussions of lying. This is probably because they are considered too light-hearted.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Oscar Wilde’s later, more famous, and similarly titled dialogue “The Decay of Lying: An Observation”—in which, after complaining that politicians, lawyers, and journalists are “unimaginative” in their lies, he proceeds to discuss “Lying in art”<sup>3</sup>—Twain’s earlier, largely overlooked essay “On the Decay of the Art of Lying”<sup>4</sup> is devoted to everyday lying. It is said to have been read at a meeting of the “Historical and Antiquarian Club” of Hartford, Connecticut, and offered for the “thirty dollar prize” (which it did not win).<sup>5</sup> Scholars date the reading to April 5, 1880, when Twain delivered it to the Monday Evening Club.<sup>6</sup> It was first published in his collection *The Stolen White Elephant, Etc.*, in 1882.<sup>7</sup> It was in this essay that Twain first discussed the so-called *silent lie*. Twain returned to the silent lie in his somewhat better-known essay “My First Lie, And How I Got Out of It,”<sup>8</sup> which is largely devoted to a discussion of the “lie of silent assertion.” This essay was first published in a special Christmas section of *The New York*

*World* on December 10, 1889, and was reprinted in *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays* in 1890.<sup>9</sup> Taken together, these essays form an important contribution to the philosophical discussion of lying.

### Everybody Lies

In "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," Twain says that "Joking aside, there is much need of wise examination into what sorts of lies are best and wholesomest to be indulged, seeing as we *must* all lie and we *do* all lie, and what sorts it may be best to avoid."<sup>10</sup> In order to defend Twain's claim that everyone must and does lie, what Twain means by "lie" should first be explained.

In "On the Decay," Twain makes it clear that lying is anything other than strict candor. The only people who do not lie are people who "*always* speak the truth."<sup>11</sup> That is, the only people who do not lie are people who always volunteer, unbidden, exactly what they are thinking. These are people who are candid all the time. The only people who are candid all the time are "Children and fools"<sup>12</sup>—as well as, we might add, lawyers under the grip of a magic spell,<sup>13</sup> the inhabitants of Earth in an alternate universe,<sup>14</sup> an idealistic boy on a Christmas Day truthful crusade,<sup>15</sup> and the naïve, aptly named Candide of Voltaire's famous novella.<sup>16</sup> The rest of us—"adults and wise persons"<sup>17</sup>—do not always speak the truth. That is, the rest of us do not always volunteer, unbidden, exactly what we are thinking. We either do not say what we are thinking, or we say what we are not thinking. Hence, we are liars. For us, "No fact is more firmly established than that lying is a necessity of our circumstances."<sup>18</sup> Hence, "Lying is universal—we *all* do it."<sup>19</sup> While it is true that "None of us could *live* with a habitual truth-teller," as it happens, "thank goodness none of us has to."<sup>20</sup> This is because "An habitual truth-teller is simply an impossible creature; he does not exist; he never has existed."<sup>21</sup> While it is true that "there are people who think they never lie," as it happens "it is not so—and this ignorance is one of the very things that shame our so-called civilization."<sup>22</sup>

### The Silent Lie

According to Twain, you lie whenever you do not share whatever you are thinking. Importantly, lying does not require making an assertion, or even speaking. Twain distinguishes between the spoken lie and the "*silent* lie."<sup>23</sup> The spoken lie, which is what most people understand by a lie, is when you do not say what you are thinking, *and* you say what you are *not* thinking (you speak an untruth). The silent lie, which is more common, is when, simply,

*you do not say what you are thinking. You say nothing.* Although “Many obstinate truth-mongers indulge in this dissipation, imagining that if they *speak* no lie, they lie not at all,”<sup>24</sup> they fail to appreciate that a person lies “if he keeps his tongue still”<sup>25</sup> and does not say what he is thinking. The silent lie can be “the deception which one conveys by simply keeping still and concealing the truth.”<sup>26</sup> This silent lie is the lie of omission, otherwise known as the passive lie.<sup>27</sup> In “My First Lie,” Twain says the proportion of the spoken lie to the silent lie is “as 1 to 22,894.”<sup>28</sup>

Twain provides an example of a particular kind of silent lie in “On the Decay.” Remarking once at a dinner in California that “Yes, *all*—we are all liars. There are no exceptions,”<sup>29</sup> a woman at the table took issue with his claim. “I have made a rule of my life to never tell a lie; and I have never departed from it in a single instance.”<sup>30</sup> To this Twain replied that “I don’t mean the least harm or disrespect, but really you have been lying like smoke ever since I’ve been sitting here.”<sup>31</sup> She required that he give her a single instance of her lying, and he obliged. She had filled out a form about a sick-nurse who had helped her nephew through his dangerous illness. The form warned the person who filled it out “to be very careful and explicit” in answering the questions, “for the welfare of the service requires that the nurse be promptly fined or otherwise punished for derelictions.”<sup>32</sup> She had told Twain that she had been “perfectly delighted with this nurse,” and that she had only one fault: “you found that you could never depend on her wrapping Johnny up half sufficiently while he waited in a chilly chair for her to rearrange the warm bed.”<sup>33</sup> But in answer to the question on the form, “Was the nurse at any time guilty of a negligence which was likely to result in the patient’s taking cold?” she had “*left it blank*.”<sup>34</sup> As Twain says, “Just so—you have told a *silent* lie; you have left it to be inferred that you had no fault to find in the matter.”<sup>35</sup> Upon hearing this, “that same day . . . she sent a line to the hospital which filled up the neglected blank, and stated the *facts* too, in the squarest possible manner.”<sup>36</sup>

### The Elephant in the Room Lie

The lie by the aunt who left the section of the form blank was a deceptive silent lie. In addition to saying that lying does not have to involve speaking, however, Twain says that lies do not have to be deceptive to be lies. There can be *nondeceptive* lies, of both the silent and the spoken kind. While certainly not the first to argue that lies do not have to be deceptive,<sup>37</sup> Twain was nevertheless ahead of his time. It is only recently that a number of philosophers have argued that an intention to deceive is not necessary for lying, and

that those who make obviously false assertions are still lying even if they do not intend to be believed.<sup>38</sup> Twain goes one step further than these philosophers in holding that keeping silent about something, without intending to deceive anyone, is also lying.

Twain's nondeceptive silent lies include cases of what Thomas Nagel refers to as cases of "non-acknowledgment," where everyone is thinking the same thing, and everyone knows that everyone is thinking the same thing, and no one will say what everyone is thinking.<sup>39</sup> This would be a case of a "the elephant in the room" lie, such as when two people who have been fighting publicly over the Internet about some matter run into each other at a social event and do not acknowledge the fight and talk instead about a neutral topic. Both are silently lying, according to Twain.

Nondeceptive silent lies would also include cases of normal reticence, such as not sharing one's opinions or details about one's life with strangers or people one does not know particularly well. As Nagel says, "The first and most obvious thing to note about many of the most important forms of reticence is that they are not dishonest, because the conventions that govern them are generally known. If I don't tell you everything that I think and feel about you, that is not a case of deception since you don't expect me to do so and would probably be appalled if I did."<sup>40</sup> This kind of lie of the unspoken kind would also include cases of a keeping a secret from friends or family or people you know well, where the person you are keeping a secret from is merely being kept in ignorance of the matter, and has no false belief about the matter.<sup>41</sup> For example, not telling people that you are pregnant is a lie on Twain's account.

### The National Lie

Although the silent lie about the sick-nurse is presented as a not very serious silent lie, in the later essay "My First Lie," Twain provides examples of silent lies that are much more serious. Identifying "the lie of silent assertion" as the lie "we can tell . . . without saying a word,"<sup>42</sup> he says that "In the magnitude of its territorial spread it is one of the most majestic lies that the civilizations make it their sacred and anxious care to guard and watch and propagate."<sup>43</sup> The first example he gives is the silent lie across the United States that there was nothing wrong with slavery. This silence about the injustice of slavery was the greatest lie of all:

For instance, it would not be possible for a humane and intelligent person to invent a rational excuse for slavery; yet you will remember that in the early days of the emancipation agitation in the North the agitators got but small

help or countenance from any one. Argue and plead and pray as they might, they could not break the universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society—the clammy stillness created and maintained by the lie of silent assertion—the silent assertion that there wasn't anything going on in which humane and intelligent people were interested.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the silent lie about the injustice of slavery, Twain instances the case of the trial and imprisonment for espionage in France of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, who was scapegoated because he was Jewish: “all France, except a couple of dozen moral paladins, lay under the smother of the silent-assertion lie that no wrong was being done to a persecuted and unoffending man.”<sup>45</sup> Twain also instances the silent lie “over England lately”<sup>46</sup> about British imperialism and the immanent second Boer War, where “a good half of the population” were “silently letting on that they were not aware that Mr. Chamberlain was trying to manufacture a war in South Africa and was willing to pay fancy prices for the materials.”<sup>47</sup>

These were “three prominent ostensible civilizations working the silent-assertion lie.”<sup>48</sup> Twain says that it would be possible to find “a billion”<sup>49</sup> of such lies. The various countries “are working that kind of lie, day in and day out, in thousands and thousands of varieties, without ever resting.”<sup>50</sup> The “universal conspiracy of the silent-assertion lie is hard at work always and everywhere.”<sup>51</sup> Importantly, the “silent assertion that nothing is going on which fair and intelligent men are aware of and are engaged by their duty to try to stop” is the “most timid and shabby of all lies.”<sup>52</sup> It has “mutely labored in the interest of despotisms and aristocracies and chattel slaveries, and military slaveries, and religious slaveries, and has kept them alive.”<sup>53</sup> It is the “silent colossal National Lie that is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples.”<sup>54</sup>

Although he does not say so explicitly, it can be argued that these silent National Lies, such as the silent National Lie in the United States that there was nothing unjust about slavery, were *nondeceptive* silent lies, specifically “the elephant in the room” lies: everyone knew that slavery was unjust, but no one would acknowledge it. Indeed, it is possible to see Twain himself as being complicit in the National Lie about slavery.<sup>55</sup> Twain did not say anything critical about it, at least early on in his life, when he knew, or at least was beginning to understand, that slavery was unjust.<sup>56</sup> At least one commentator has suggested that the “First Lie” of this essay’s title, which Twain says he has forgotten, is Twain’s own acceptance of slavery.<sup>57</sup> It is also possible to see this silent National Lie about slavery, as well as other silent National Lies, as cases of mass self-deception: people had deceived themselves in believing that

there was nothing unjust about slavery.<sup>58</sup> If this were true, of course, then they were *not* silently lying about the injustice of slavery, although they had lied to themselves originally about it.

Twain does not speak about the possibility of silent lies that transcend national boundaries, and that could be classified as “global lies,” such as the silent lie that there is nothing unjust about the unequal division of domestic labor between men and women across the world. Nor does he speak about the possibility of silent lies that transcend the boundary between humans and nonhumans, and that could be classified as “human lies,” such as the silent lie that there is nothing wrong about killing and eating animals. His analysis of silent lies allows for such silent lies, nevertheless.

### Hello, He Lied

Nondeceptive spoken lies are also discussed in some detail by Twain. In “On the Decay,” talking about a “far country” (his other essay reveals that he has England in mind), Twain anticipates the title of Hollywood film producer Lynda Obst’s memoir, *Hello, He Lied*,<sup>59</sup> when he says that “The men in that far country were liars, every one. Their mere howdy-do was a lie, because *they* didn’t care how you did.”<sup>60</sup> In response to such a nondeceptive lie, you were obliged to lie in return with your own variation on “Fine, thanks” or “Good, thanks,” it would seem: “To the ordinary inquirer you lied in return; for you made no conscientious diagnostic of your case, but answered at random, and usually missed it considerably.”<sup>61</sup> Such nondeceptive, polite lying was pervasive. As Twain says, “If a stranger called and interrupted you, you said with your hearty tongue, ‘I’m glad to see you,’ and said with your heartier soul, ‘I wish you were with the cannibals and it was dinner-time.’”<sup>62</sup> Then, “When he went, you said regretfully, ‘*Must* you go?’ and followed it with a ‘Call again,’”<sup>63</sup> despite having no wish to see him again. Importantly, in all of these exchanges, “you did no harm, for you did not deceive anybody.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, “all this courteous lying is a sweet and loving art.”<sup>65</sup> All politeness and tact, for Twain, is nondeceptive lying: “The highest perfection of politeness is only a beautiful edifice, built, from the base to the dome, of graceful and gilded forms of charitable and unselfish lying.”<sup>66</sup> Twain provides, as another example of nondeceptive spoken lying in England, those “ladies who used to go around paying calls, under the humane and kindly pretence of wanting to see each other.”<sup>67</sup> When these ladies came home, they said “We made sixteen calls and found fourteen of them out,” but “their manner of saying it expressed their lively satisfaction in that fact”<sup>68</sup> that fourteen of the women were not at home to receive them. Their “pretence of wanting to see the fourteen—and the other two whom they had

been less lucky with—was that commonest and mildest form of lying which is sufficiently described as a deflection from the truth.”<sup>69</sup>

### Acts as Lies

In addition to silent lies (both deceptive and nondeceptive), and spoken lies (both deceptive and nondeceptive), Twain considers there to be deceptive nonlinguistic *acts* that are lies. As he notes, it is a “quite commonplace but seldom noticed fact” that “almost all lies are acts, and speech has not part in them.”<sup>70</sup> It is possible for a person to “convey deception—and purposely,” with “his hands, his feet, his eyes, his attitude.”<sup>71</sup> Smiling at a friend’s success when one is jealous, waving one’s hands in excitement when inwardly one is depressed, appearing downbeat when one is actually elated, etc., all count as lies for Twain. A person lies, he says, “in his joy; in his mourning.”<sup>72</sup>

In “My First Lie,” Twain says that he remembers his “second lie,” which was a nonlinguistic lie that he committed with he was “nine days old.”<sup>73</sup> He had noticed that when the pin of his diaper stuck into him, and he “advertised it in the usual fashion,” he was “lovingly petted and coddled and pitied in the most agreeable way and got a ration between meals besides.”<sup>74</sup> Because “It was human nature to want to get these riches,” he “lied about the pin—advertising one when there wasn’t any.”<sup>75</sup> All babies did, he says. “During the first half of my life I never knew a child that was able to rise above temptation and keep from telling that lie.”<sup>76</sup> (Not all children are truth-tellers, it seems). It was not to last: “Up to 1867 all the civilized children that were ever born into the world were liars. . . . Then the safety-pin came in and blocked the game.”<sup>77</sup> Twain’s nonlinguistic lie as a baby was discovered by his parents: “They found no pin and they realized that another liar had been added to the world’s supply.”<sup>78</sup> He recollects “that I was reversed and stretched across some one’s knee and that something happened” as a result.<sup>79</sup>

Twain provides another example of a nonlinguistic act that is a lie in “My First Lie.” Here he tells of an argument he had with an English friend who claimed that “I have never told a lie and I should be very sorry to do such a thing.”<sup>80</sup> Twain then describes what his English friend did minutes later: “Just then he lifted his hat and smiled a basketful of surprised and delighted smiles down at a gentleman who was passing in a hansom.”<sup>81</sup> Although his friend had no idea who the man was, his friend says that he lifted his hat and smiled at him, “Because I saw that he thought he knew me and was expecting it of me. If I hadn’t done it he would have been hurt. I didn’t want to embarrass him before the whole street.”<sup>82</sup> Twain tells him that “What you did was kindly and courteous and beautiful; I would have done it myself; but it was a

lie."<sup>83</sup> Against his friend's protest that "I didn't say a word," Twain replies, "I know you didn't speak, still you said to him very plainly and enthusiastically in dumb show, 'Hello! You in town? Awful glad to see you, old fellow; when did you get back?' Concealed in your actions was what you have called 'a misleading reservation of an explanatory fact—the fact that you had never seen him before. You expressed joy in encountering him—a lie; and you made that reservation—another lie. . . . But don't be troubled—we all do it."<sup>84</sup>

### Modified Lies

A final kind of lie that Twain discusses is what he calls a "modified" lie—"a half-breed, a mulatto" lie.<sup>85</sup> A modified lie is an assertion that is truthful but that is intended to deceive—something also known as a palter.<sup>86</sup> He relates the story of how he managed to get "out of an embarrassment in Austria last year"<sup>87</sup> (it is unclear if this story is a lie). He told the police "that I belonged to the same family as the Prince of Wales."<sup>88</sup> After telling them this, "That made everything pleasant and they let me go; and apologized, too, and were ever so kind and obliging and polite, and couldn't do too much for me, and explained how the mistake came to be made, and promised to hang the officer that did it, and hoped I would let bygones be bygones and not say anything about it; and I said they could depend on me."<sup>89</sup>

Twain considered his lie to be merely a modified lie because "I didn't say I belonged to the royal family; I only said that I belonged to the same family as the Prince—meaning the human family, of course; and if those people had had any penetration they would have known it."<sup>90</sup> In other words, Twain did not say something untruthful. He said what was true to the police—that he was a member of the family of humans—but with the intention that the police believe something false—that he belonged to the Royal family. As he said—joking—"of course I was distressed to find out that the police had misunderstood me, but as I had not told any lie I knew that there was no occasion to sit up nights and worry about it."<sup>91</sup>

It should be noted that Twain's English friend, to whom he told this story, refused to agree that he had not told a lie, telling him that "so far as he could see the modification was itself a lie, it being a misleading reservation of an explanatory fact."<sup>92</sup>

### Pleasing Lies and Brutal Truths

According to Twain, lies can please others and can cost liars nothing. For example, "You lied to the undertaker, and said your health was failing—a

wholly commendable lie, since it cost you nothing and pleased the other man.”<sup>93</sup> This way, the undertaker is pleased, and you are pleased by this. By contrast, if you had told the truth, “the truth would have made you both unhappy.”<sup>94</sup> In the case of the ladies in London making house calls, these ladies “had a thousand pleasant ways of lying, that grew out of gentle impulses, and were a credit to their intelligence and an honor to their hearts.”<sup>95</sup> Their lying “is beautiful, it is noble; for its object is, *not* to reap profit, but to convey a pleasure to the sixteen.”<sup>96</sup>

While it is true that, in the case of the silent lie about the sick-nurse, the lie might have endangered the child, and the truth might have led to the sick-nurse’s being fired, nevertheless the aunt could have made up the possible harm in telling the truth by adding a harmless “fraudulent compliment.”<sup>97</sup> As Twain says, “Almost any little pleasant lie would have taken the sting out of that troublesome but necessary expression of the truth,” such as “In one respect this sick-nurse is perfection—when she is on the watch, she never snores.”<sup>98</sup> This joke would have counterbalanced the negative report.

In a letter in 1883, Twain said that “I would rather tell seven lies than make one explanation.”<sup>99</sup> In contrast to the pleasing results of many lies, the truth can be painful: “What I bemoan is the growing prevalence of the brutal truth. Let us do what we can to eradicate it.”<sup>100</sup> Twain invokes the American historian Francis Parkman who said that, “The principle of truth may itself be carried into an absurdity.”<sup>101</sup> It is only “imbeciles and nuisances,” Parkman says, says, who have a “sick conscience” and who engage in the “habitual violation of the maxim” that “truth should not be spoken at all times.”<sup>102</sup> Although Twain admits that this is “strong language,”<sup>103</sup> he believes it to be true. The “iron-souled truth-monger” would “be an ass, and inflict totally unnecessary pain.”<sup>104</sup>

Twain says that “an injurious truth” is “an uncommendable thing,” and adds that this is “a fact recognized by the law of libel.”<sup>105</sup> Twain is correct. In 2009, in *Noonan v Staples Inc.*,<sup>106</sup> a three judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit “issued a ruling that . . . took the ‘lie’ out of libel law” and made it possible for the truth to be libelous.<sup>107</sup> As the ruling has been summarized, “The three-judge panel wrote, ‘under Massachusetts law, even a true statement can form the basis of a libel action if the plaintiff proves that the defendant acted with ‘actual malice,’ where ‘actual malice’ is defined as ‘actual malevolent intent or ill will.’”<sup>108</sup> The case was one in which Staples management sent a mass e-mail to Staples employees naming an employee, Alan Noonan, who had been fired for violating the company’s travel expenses policy. Even though what the e-mail said was true, nevertheless they ruled that the e-mail was sent with ill-will and could be libelous.

The “First Circuit pointed out that the email sender had been employed with Staples for twelve years, yet had never before referred to a fired employee by name in an email. It noted that the sender had failed to send out a similar email with respect to a scandal involving another employee, whom it said had been discovered to be an embezzler. And it pointed out that the massive recipient list to which the email was sent included many employees who never traveled, and thus did not need to be reminded about the travel policy.”<sup>109</sup> Overall, the “First Circuit saw enough evidence of ill-will—in the singling-out of Noonan, and the sharing of his fate with over a thousand fellow employees—to send the libel claim to trial.”<sup>110</sup> In March the appeals court denied an en banc rehearing of the case, leaving their decision standing. The result is that “the publication of a truth, with nasty intent, can lead to a large damages award.”<sup>111</sup> The fact that one’s assertions are true, therefore, is no defense. The truth should not always be spoken, for the truth can be harmful, especially if it is told maliciously.

### Miseducation about Lies

According to Twain, the first error in his parents’ miseducation about lies—and of people’s miseducation about lies in general—is that lies must be spoken in order to be lies. The second error is that some people do not lie. If people only understood what silent lies are, they would appreciate that everyone must, and does, lie. In talking about his parents’ discovery of his first lie, Twain says that if his parents had “examined a little further” and understood the possibility of the silent lie—“the lie of silent assertion”—then they would have recognized that “all people are liars from the cradle onward, without exception, and that they begin to lie as soon as they wake in the morning, and keep it up without rest or refreshment until they go to sleep at night.”<sup>112</sup> If they had recognized this truth, then it would have “grieved them.”<sup>113</sup> This grief would have been a mistake on their part. They, like most people, “had been heedlessly and ignorantly educated by their books and teachers”<sup>114</sup> about lying. There is no reason “why should a person grieve over a thing which by the eternal law of his make he cannot help.”<sup>115</sup> People who lie—which is all people—“didn’t invent the law”; it is merely their “business to obey it and keep still; join the universal conspiracy and keep so still that he shall deceive his fellow-conspirators into imagining that he doesn’t know the law exists.”<sup>116</sup> The third error of people’s miseducation about lies is that the spoken lie is worse than the silent lie. As Twain says, “There is a prejudice against the spoken lie, but none against any other.”<sup>117</sup> It is the spoken lie that gets all of the criticism, despite the fact that “by examination and mathematical com-

putation I find that the proportion of the spoken lie to the other varieties is as 1 to 22,894.”<sup>118</sup> The truth is that “the spoken lie is of no consequence” by comparison with the silent lie, “and it is not worthwhile to go around fussing about it and trying to make believe that it is an important matter.”<sup>119</sup> Rather, “The silent colossal National Lie that is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples—that is the one to throw bricks and sermons at.”<sup>120</sup> Elsewhere, Twain said that “There are 869 different forms of lying, but only one of them has been squarely forbidden. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”<sup>121</sup> Only deceptive spoken lies, it seems, are condemned. The fourth, and related, error of people’s miseducation about lies is that as long as you abstain from telling spoken lies, you are virtuous. Not alone is this an error, but it is an extremely harmful error. People believe that as long as they refrain from telling spoken lies they are doing no harm, when in fact it is their silent lies that cause so much harm, and especially National Lies: “When whole races and people conspire to propagate gigantic mute lies in the interest of tyrannies and shams, why should we care anything about the trifling lies told by individuals? Why should we try to make it appear that abstention from lying is a virtue? Why should we want to beguile ourselves in that way? Why should we without shame help the nation lie, and then be ashamed to do a little lying on our own account? . . . Why should we help the nation lie the whole day long and then object to telling one little individual private lie in our own interest to go to bed on?”<sup>122</sup> This is not to say that people are never instructed to tell lies, of both the silent and spoken kind. As Twain said in another context, “‘Speak only good of the dead’ is a sentimental way of advising the living to lie—at least as regards the usual run of dead people.”<sup>123</sup> Instead of having the view that spoken lies should not be told (at least about the living) but that silent lies are okay, Twain says that one should “be consistent.”<sup>124</sup> This means that people should either lie “not at all,” which they cannot do, or that people should lie “all the time,”<sup>125</sup> which is precisely what he advocates. That is why people need to learn how to lie.

### The Noble Art of Lying

Although Twain believes that people should lie—indeed, they should lie all the time—his “lament”<sup>126</sup> for lying in “On the Decay” is not a lament for the practice of lying. In actuality, he believes that the practice of lying has not declined. His lament is that lying has become “lumbering and slovenly.”<sup>127</sup> Lying has been “prostituted.”<sup>128</sup> It is important to know that an “awkward, unscientific lie is often as ineffectual as the truth.”<sup>129</sup> As he said

in "Advice to Youth," a speech to the young women of Boston's Saturday Morning Club on April 15, 1882: "An awkward, feeble, leaky lie is a thing which you ought to make it your unceasing study to avoid; such a lie as that has no more real permanence than an average truth. Why, you might as well tell the truth at once and be done with it."<sup>130</sup> Training is needed, especially with regard to deceptive lying. As he remarked elsewhere: "Anybody can tell lies: there is no merit in a *mere* lie, it must possess *art*, it must exhibit a splendid & plausible & convincing *probability*; that is to say, it must be powerfully calculated to *deceive*."<sup>131</sup>

Given that lies can help to avoid harm, given that they can be a tool for good, what is needed is *better* lying. Lying, he holds, is a "noble art."<sup>132</sup> It is, indeed, "a Virtue."<sup>133</sup> The lie is "a recreation, a solace, a refuge in time of need, the fourth Grace, the tenth Muse, man's best and surest friend, is immortal."<sup>134</sup> It is obvious that "No virtue can reach its highest usefulness without careful and diligent cultivation."<sup>135</sup> The "ignorant, uncultivated liar" has no chance against the "educated expert"<sup>136</sup> when it comes to lying well. Hence, lying "ought to be taught in the public schools."<sup>137</sup> What the world needs is "*judicious* lying."<sup>138</sup> Only when people are experts at lying "shall we be rid of the rank and pestilent truth that is rotting the land; then shall we be great and good and beautiful, and worthy dwellers in a world where even benign Nature habitually lies, except when she promises execrable weather."<sup>139</sup> If "this finest of the finest arts had everywhere received the attention, the encouragement, and conscientious practice and development which this club has devoted to it,"<sup>140</sup> then it would never have declined into the state in which it is in today. Instead, people have been stopped from lying. Often, this is done by simply preventing people from lying. When the safety pin was introduced, which stopped babies from lying about being pricked by pins, such a "reform" was not "worth anything" at all because "it is reform by force and has no virtue in it; it merely stops that form of lying, it doesn't impair the disposition to lie, by a shade. It is a cradle application of conversion by fire and sword, or of the temperance principle through prohibition."<sup>141</sup> This was not true education about lying.

In the case of the aunt who lied by omission about the sick-nurse on the form, "this lady's fault was *not* in lying, but in lying injudiciously. She should have told the truth, *there*, and made it up to the sick-nurse with a fraudulent compliment"<sup>142</sup> in another part of the form. The great problem with liars, such as his friend, was, as he said to her, "your impulse was right, but your judgment was crude; this comes of unintelligent practice. Now observe the results of this inexpert deflection of yours."<sup>143</sup>

The truth is that "Lying is universal—we *all* do it."<sup>144</sup> As we all do it, "the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously . . . to lie gracefully and graciously, not awkwardly and clumsily; to lie firmly, frankly, squarely, with head erect, not haltingly, tortuously, with pusillanimous mien, as being ashamed of our high calling."<sup>145</sup> Here Twain is repeating something that he said years before, in his speech to young women: "Now as to the matter of lying. . . . Many a young person has injured himself permanently through a single clumsy and ill finished lie, the result of carelessness born of incomplete training. Some authorities hold that the young ought not to lie at all. That of course, is putting it rather stronger than necessary; still while I cannot go quite so far as that, I do maintain, and I believe I am right, that the young ought to be temperate in the use of this great art until practice and experience shall give them that confidence, elegance, and precision which alone can make the accomplishment graceful and profitable. Patience, diligence, painstaking attention to detail—these are requirements; these in time, will make the student perfect; upon these only, may he rely as the sure foundation for future eminence. . . . Begin your practice of this gracious and beautiful art early—begin now. If I had begun earlier, I could have learned how."<sup>146</sup>

Twain claims in "My First Lie" that he is "but a new and feeble student in this gracious art,"<sup>147</sup> which is of course a lie, albeit not a deceptive lie, and that his audience, the "Historical and Antiquarian Club," are "my superiors in this thing,"<sup>148</sup> indeed are "Old Masters"<sup>149</sup> at lying, and that they should receive his lament in the spirit in which it is given, namely, the "spirit of just and appreciative recognition."<sup>150</sup> He thinks that "there is much need of wise examination into what sorts of lies are best and wholesomest to be indulged, seeing we *must* all lie and we *do* all lie, and what sorts it may be best to avoid—and this is a thing which I feel I can confidently put into the hands of this experienced Club."<sup>151</sup> This was not the first or the last time that Twain claimed to be a bad liar. Twain once wrote in a letter to the Reverend Joseph H. Twichell that "I realize that in a sudden emergency I am but a poor clumsy liar, whereas a fine alert and capable emergency-liar is the only sort that is worth anything in a sick-chamber."<sup>152</sup>

### The Ethics of Lying

For Twain, the ethics of lying and truth-telling is relatively straightforward. First, he may be said to agree that "The moral reason we have not to lie stems not from the very nature of lying."<sup>153</sup> When lying is wrong, it is

wrong because of what it does to others. Twain's first ethical principle is the principle of nonmaleficence, that one should not cause others to suffer. As W. D. Ross has stated it, "No doubt to injure others is incidentally to fail to do them good; but it seems to me clear that non-maleficence is apprehended as a duty distinct from that of beneficence, and as a duty of a more stringent character."<sup>154</sup> One should not injure others—either by telling a lie, or by telling the truth. As between a lie that injures others, and a truth that injures others, there is no ethical difference, Twain insists: "An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie. Neither should ever be uttered."<sup>155</sup> However, as between a lie that avoids injuring others, and a truth that injures others, there is a clear ethical difference: the lie is ethically superior. In such a case, it is ethically better to tell the lie: "The man who speaks an injurious truth lest his soul be not saved if he does not do otherwise, should reflect that that sort of a soul is not strictly worth saving."<sup>156</sup>

In addition to appealing to the principle of nonmaleficence to support not telling truths that injure others, and to support telling lies that avoid injuring others, Twain appeals to another ethical principle, the principle of beneficence, to support telling lies that help others. As Ross puts it, some duties "rest on the mere fact that there are other beings in the world whose condition we can make better. . . . These are the duties of beneficence."<sup>157</sup> Importantly, the duty of beneficence is a duty to be *altruistic*, to count one's own well-being as *less important* than that of someone else's, and to make a *sacrifice* for someone else. The duty of beneficence, therefore, is a nonconsequentialist duty: "The utilitarian's ultimate moral principle, let it be remembered, expresses the sentiment *not* of altruism."<sup>158</sup> As between a lie that helps others and a truth that fails to help others, there is a clear ethical difference: the lie is ethically superior. In such a case, it is ethically superior to tell the lie, even if—or because—it comes at a cost to oneself: "the lies I speak of are self-sacrificing ones told for a generous object, not a mean one."<sup>159</sup> The cost to oneself of telling a lie could include losing one's soul, in view of the Biblical commandment against bearing false witness. Twain admits this: "The man who tells a lie to help a poor devil out of trouble, is one of whom the angels doubtless say, 'Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare in jeopardy to succor his neighbor's; let us exalt this magnanimous liar."<sup>160</sup>

In addition to the pleasing lie that benefitted the undertaker, Twain provides an example of a beneficent lie in "My First Lie." His friend "told of how he happened along once just in the nick of time to do a great service for a family who were old friends of his. The head of it had suddenly died in circumstances and surroundings of a ruinously disgraceful character. If known the facts would break the hearts of the innocent family and put upon them

a load of unendurable shame. There was no help but in a giant lie, and he girded up and told it."<sup>161</sup> Twain's response to this story about his friend's lie is to praise him: "the very next man that came along might have been one of these heartless and shameless truth mongers. You have told the truth a million times in your life, G—, but that one golden lie atones for it all."<sup>162</sup> Twain sums up his ethical views on lying when he says to the woman who claimed to have never lied "One ought always to lie, when one can do good by it."<sup>163</sup> Given that we must lie, we should "lie with a good object, and not an evil one," we should "lie for others' advantage, and not our own," we should "lie healingly, charitably, humanely, not cruelly, hurtfully, maliciously."<sup>164</sup>

### Lies about Lies

Concerning his ethical views on lying, Twain says that "Some may think me not strict enough in my morals, but that position is hardly tenable. There are many kinds of lying which I do not approve."<sup>165</sup> The first kind of lie that he does not approve is of, of course, "an injurious lie."<sup>166</sup> Into this nonapproved category would fall all three National Lies, as well as other National Lies that he suggests or intimates. All malicious lies, or lies that take advantage of others, would also fall into this category. Twain also says that he does not like "the lie of bravado" nor "the lie of virtuous ecstasy."<sup>167</sup> Both of his examples of these lies are *lies about lies*. As an example of the "lie of bravado," Twain gives essayist Thomas Carlyle's "This gospel is eternal—that a lie shall not live."<sup>168</sup> Twain, however, disagrees with the Scotsman completely.<sup>169</sup> As he wrote elsewhere: "Carlyle said 'a lie cannot live.' It shows that he did not know how to tell them."<sup>170</sup> Because Twain was an admirer of Carlyle's ("I have a reverent affection for Carlyle's books and have read his *Revolution* eight times"<sup>171</sup>) in his essay, he says that he prefers "to think he was not entirely himself when he told that one."<sup>172</sup> Although Carlyle "was truthful when calm," nevertheless "it is plain that he said it in a moment of excitement, when chasing Americans out of his back yard with brickbats," and "I am quite sure that when he told that large one about a lie not being able to live he had just missed an American and was over-excited."<sup>173</sup> Although Carlyle told this lie "above thirty years ago," it is "alive yet, and very healthy and hearty, and likely to out-live any fact in history."<sup>174</sup>

As an example of the "lie of virtuous ecstasy," Twain gives poet William Cullen Bryant's "Truth crushed to earth will rise again."<sup>175</sup> About this Twain says, "I have taken medals at thirteen world's fairs, and may claim to be not without capacity, but I never told as big a one as that."<sup>176</sup> His excuse, Twain indicates, is that "Mr. Bryant was playing to the gallery; we all do it."<sup>177</sup> Twain

himself believes in the efficacy of liars and their lies. As he says in other places, “The most outrageous lies that can be invented will find believers if a man only tells them with all his might,”<sup>178</sup> and “How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!”<sup>179</sup> In his advice to young women in 1882, referencing what seems to be another “lie of virtuous ecstasy”—General Robert E. Lee’s “Truth is mighty, & will eventually prevail”<sup>180</sup>—Twain says:

Think what tedious years of study, thought, practice, experience, went to the equipment of that peerless old master who was able to impose upon the whole world the lofty and sounding maxim that “Truth is mighty and will prevail”—the most majestic compound fracture of fact which any of woman born has yet achieved. For the history of our race, and each individual’s experience, are sewn thick with evidences that a truth is not hard to kill, and that a lie well told is immortal. There is in Boston a monument of the man who discovered anesthesia; many people are aware, in these latter days, that that man didn’t discover it at all, but stole the discovery from another man. Is this truth mighty, and will it prevail? Ah no, my hearers, the monument is made of hardy material, but the lie it tells will outlast it a million years.<sup>181</sup>

The final lie about lying that Twain discusses is the young George Washington’s lie.<sup>182</sup> Washington’s claim that he chopped down the cherry tree “was a timely and judicious truth, and I should have told it myself in the circumstances.”<sup>183</sup> He says that the future president’s telling the truth about cutting down the cherry tree “was not premeditated, but an inspiration. With his fine military mind, he had probably arranged to let his brother Edward in for the cherry-tree results, but by an inspiration he saw his opportunity in time and took advantage of it. But telling the truth he could astonish his father; his father would tell the neighbors; the neighbors would spread it; it would travel to all firesides; in the end it would make him President, and not only that, but first President. He was a far-seeing boy and would be likely to think of these things. Therefore, to my mind, he stands justified for what he did.”<sup>184</sup> His truth-telling about the cherry tree can be justified.

Nevertheless, Twain says, “I should have stopped there. It was a stately truth, a lofty truth—a Tower; and I think it was a mistake to go on and distract attention from its sublimity by building another Tower alongside of it fourteen times as high. I refer to his remark that he ‘could not lie.’”<sup>185</sup> He says that Washington should have “left it to Carlyle; it is just his style,”<sup>186</sup> implying that Washington’s lie may be another example of a “lie of bravado.” The “Father of his Country,” Twain says, “was excited”<sup>187</sup> when he said that “I cannot tell a lie.”<sup>188</sup> This lie that he could not lie was “a mistake.”<sup>189</sup> How-

ever, as Twain admits, it is that “Tower” of a lie “that makes the other” truth about the cherry true live: “If he hadn’t said ‘I cannot tell a lie’ there would have been no convulsion. That was the earthquake that rocked the planet. That is the kind of statement that lives forever, and a fact barnacled to it as a good chance to share its immortality.”<sup>190</sup>

Although Twain distinguishes between injurious lies and these two lies about lies—the lie of bravado and the lie of virtuous ecstasy—it is clear that Twain holds that both of these lies about lies are, ultimately, harmful. If people believe that lies do not live, and that the truth will always win out, they will be harmed. These lies about lies should *not* be told—because they are harmful. Nothing good comes of telling these lies. Lies that can help others, however, *ought* to be told. Hence the need for the “high-minded man,” the “man of right feeling,”<sup>191</sup> to cultivate the noble art of lying.<sup>192</sup>

assumed the name of Jesus Christ, he became the opposite of what he was before: that is to say, he became sweet, and gentle, merciful, and all harshness disappeared from his nature and a deep and yearning love for his poor human children took its place. Whereas it was as Jesus Christ that he devised hell and proclaimed it!

Which is to say, that as the meek and gentle Savior he was a thousand billion times crueller than ever he was in the Old Testament—oh, incomparably more atrocious than ever he was when he was at the very worst in those old days.

Twain, *Letters from the Earth*, 45.

41. Twain, "Eve's Diary," in *The Bible According to Mark Twain*, 31–33.

## Chapter 8. The Noble Art of Lying

1. Mark Twain, from Opie Read, *Mark Twain and I*, quoted in *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2013), 62.

2. A University of California, Berkeley, extension course on "The Philosophy of Mark Twain" includes "the ethics of lying" as one topic covered in the course: <http://extension.berkeley.edu/search/publicCourseSearchDetails.do?method=load&courseId=10464593> [accessed 09/17/2016]. But there is little or nothing published specifically on Twain's contribution to our understanding of lying and the ethics of lying. Twain is cited a number of times by Martin Jay in *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), but only in passing.

3. Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying: An Observation," in *The Collected Oscar Wilde*, with Introduction and Notes by Angus Fletcher (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2007), 363. An early version of the essay first appeared in *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, No. 143, January 1889. The final version appeared in Wilde's collection of essays, *Intentions* (London: James A. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1891), 1–56.

4. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," in *The Writings of Mark Twain*, vol. 20, 355–62.

5. *Ibid.*, 355.

6. R. Kent Rasmussen, *Critical Companion to Mark Twain: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2007), 797; cf. Peter B. Messent, *The Short Works of Mark Twain: A Critical Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 80.

7. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," in *The Stolen White Elephant, Etc.* (Boston, MA: James R. Osgood and Company, 1882), 217–25. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.

8. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," in *The Writings of Mark Twain*, vol. 10 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1915), 159–70.

9. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," in *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), 167–80. Subsequent page numbers refer to this edition.

10. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 225.
11. Ibid., 218.
12. Ibid., 218.
13. See *Liar, Liar*, directed by Tom Shadyac (Universal Pictures, 1997).
14. See *The Invention of Lying*, directed by Ricky Gervais and Matthew Robinson (Warner Brothers, 2009).
15. Richmal Crompton, "William's Truthful Christmas," in *Still—William* (London: George Newnes, Ltd., 1925), 164–79.
16. Voltaire, *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (Paris: Sirène, 1759).
17. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 218.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 224.
20. Ibid., 219.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 221.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 219.
26. Ibid., 221.
27. See Amelia Opie, *Illustration of Lying in All Its Branches* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825).
28. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 169.
29. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 221.
30. Ibid., 222.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 223.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 224.
37. According to Paul J. Griffiths, Saint Augustine held that lies do not have to be deceptive. See *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).
38. See Thomas L. Carson, "The Definition of Lying," *Noûs*, 40 (2006): 284–306; Roy Sorensen, "Bald-Faced Lies! Lying Without The Intent To Deceive," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 88 (2007): 251–64; Don Fallis, "What is Lying?" *Journal of Philosophy*, 106 (2009): 29–56; A. Andreas, Stokke, "Lying and Asserting," *Journal of Philosophy*, 110 (2013): 33–60.
39. Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and Exposure," reprinted in *Concealment and Exposure and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.
40. Ibid., 6.
41. See my "The Definition of Lying and Deception," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2015).

42. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 161.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 161–62.

49. Ibid., 162.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., 169.

55. See Lawrence J. Oliver, summary of "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Mark Twain*, eds. J. R. LeMaster and James D. Wilson (London: Routledge, 2011), 530.

56. In his autobiography, Twain says that, "In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong with it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind—and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing. In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave misused; on the farm, never." Nevertheless, he tells a story about complaining to his mother about the singing of a slave boy who was hired to work on the farm, and being told in response that the boy "will never see his mother again," and that "when he sings, it shows that he is not remembering" and that "If you were older, you would understand me; then that friendless child's noise would make you glad" (*The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. I, ed. Harriet Elinor Smith [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010], 212).

57. Evan Carton, "Speech Acts and Social Action: Mark Twain and the Politics of Literary Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. Forrest G. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163.

58. See Forrest G. Robinson, *In Bath Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); and *The Author-Cat: Clemens's Life in Fiction* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2007).

59. Lynda Obst, *Hello, He Lied—and Other Truths from the Hollywood Trenches* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1996).

60. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 220.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid., 220–21.
67. Ibid., 219.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 219–20.
70. Twain, “My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It,” 160.
71. Twain, “On the Decay of the Art of Lying,” 219.
72. Ibid.
73. Twain, “My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It,” 159.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid., 160.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 170.
80. Ibid., 165.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., 166.
85. Ibid., 164.
86. Frederick Schauer and Richard Zeckhauser, “Paltering,” in *Deception: From Ancient Empires to Internet Dating*, ed. Brooke Harrington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 38–54.
87. Twain, “My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It,” 164.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 164–65.
91. Ibid., 165.
92. Ibid.
93. Twain, “On the Decay of the Art of Lying,” 220.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid., 224.
98. Ibid.
99. Quoted in “Twain Quotes—Lies,” <http://www.twainquotes.com/Lies.html> (accessed October 8, 2016).
100. Twain, “On the Decay of the Art of Lying,” 221.
101. Ibid., 219.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid., 220.
105. Ibid., 221.

106. *Noonan v. Staples Inc.*, U.S. Court of Appeals, First Circuit, February 13, 2009. <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-1st-circuit/1308763.html> (accessed September 5, 2016).

107. Julie Hilden, "Can A True Statement Form the Basis for a Defamation Lawsuit? In a Controversial Ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit Says Yes," *FindLaw*, March 30, 2009, <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/hilden/20090330.html> (accessed September 5, 2016).

108. Hilden, "Can A True Statement Form the Basis for a Defamation Lawsuit? In a Controversial Ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit Says Yes."

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.*

112. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 160.

113. *Ibid.*

114. *Ibid.*

115. *Ibid.*

116. *Ibid.*, 160–61.

117. *Ibid.*, 169.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.*

120. *Ibid.*

121. "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar," *Following the Equator*, chap. XIX, vol. II, quoted in *Mark Twain at Your Fingertips: A Book of Quotations*, ed. Caroline Thomas Harnsberger (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009), 237.

122. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 162–63.

123. "Bright People in Autograph Albums," *Fresno Republican Weekly*, 8 March 1884, 1. Quoted in "Twain Quotes—Lies."

124. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 163.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 218.

127. *Ibid.*, 217.

128. *Ibid.*

129. *Ibid.*, 218.

130. "Advice to Youth," in *The Portable Mark Twain*, ed. Tom Quirk (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2004), 548.

131. "The Ashcroft-Lyon Manuscript," in *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. III, eds. Benjamin Griffin and Harriet Elinor Smith, et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 403.

132. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 217.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

135. *Ibid.*, 218.

136. *Ibid.*

137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid., 224.
140. Ibid., 218.
141. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 160.
142. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 224.
143. Ibid., 223.
144. Ibid., 224.
145. Ibid.
146. Twain "Advice to Youth," 548.
147. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 224.
148. Ibid., 217–18.
149. Ibid., 225.
150. Ibid., 218.
151. Ibid., 225.
152. Letter to Revered Joseph H. Twichell, 1902, in *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. II, eds. Benjamin Griffin and Harriet Elinor Smith, et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 104.
153. Philip Stratton-Lake, "Introduction," in *The Right and the Good*, W. D. Ross, ed. Philip Stratton-Lake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xxxvi.
154. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, ed. Philip Stratton-Lake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21.
155. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 221.
156. Ibid.
157. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 21.
158. J. J. C. Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics," in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 32 (emphasis added).
159. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 164.
160. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 221.
161. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 166.
162. Ibid., 166–67.
163. Twain, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," 223.
164. Ibid.
165. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 167.
166. Ibid.
167. Ibid.
168. Ibid.
169. It should be noted that the editors of Mark Twain's autobiography cannot find this quotation in Carlyle's writings: "Nature admits of no lie,' Carlyle wrote in 'The Stump-Orator,' but no closer version of the quotation has been found" (Hirst et al., *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. II, 591).
170. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. II, 304.

171. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 167.

172. Ibid.

173. Ibid., 167–68.

174. Ibid., 168.

175. Ibid., 167.

176. Ibid.

177. Ibid.

178. Letter to the *San Francisco Alta California*, dated May 17, 1867, published June 16, 1867, quoted in *The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain*, 62.

179. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. II, 302.

180. Quoted in Peter S. Carmichael, "'Truth is mighty & will eventually prevail': Political Correctness, Neo-Confederates, and Robert E. Lee," *Southern Cultures* 17 (2011): 25. Carmichael may be said to agree with Twain that Lee was lying when he said this: "Despite Lee's assertion after Gettysburg that 'truth is mighty, & will eventually prevail,' the general knew better" (Ibid.).

181. It should be noted that the editors of Mark Twain's autobiography cannot find this quotation in Carlyle's writings: "'Nature admits of no lie,' Carlyle wrote in 'The Stump-Orator,' but no closer version of the quotation has been found" (Hirst et al., *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, vol. II, 591).

182. Of course, the story about the young George Washington, first reported by Mason Locke Weems in his biography in 1800, *The Life of George Washington: With Curious Anecdotes, Equally honorable to Himself and Exemplary to his Young Countrymen*, is probably itself a lie (Ralph Keyes, *The Quote Verifier: Who Said What, Where, and When* [New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006], 121).

183. Twain, "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," 167.

184. Ibid., 168–69.

185. Ibid., 168.

186. Ibid.

187. Ibid.

188. Ibid., 169.

189. Ibid.

190. Ibid.

191. Twain, "Advice to Youth," 548.

192. My thanks to Mary Kate McGowan for suggesting that I write on this topic.

## Chapter 9. Twain's Critique of Human Exceptionalism: "The Descent of Man" and the Antivivisection Movement

1. Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Book of Animals*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 125.

2. Ibid., 99 (emphasis is Twain's).

3. Ibid., 100.