

Chapter 2

An Epistemology of False Beliefs: The Role of Truth, Trust, and Technology in Postdigital Deception



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Introduction

In *Truth and Lying in a Nonmoral Sense*, Nietzsche wrote:

This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in humankind, where deception, flattery, lying and cheating, speaking behind the backs of others, keeping up appearances, living in borrowed finery, wearing masks, the drapery of convention, play-acting for the benefit of others and oneself-in short, the constant fluttering of human beings around the one flame of vanity is so much the rule and the law that there is virtually nothing which defies understanding so much as the fact that an honest and pure drive towards truth should ever have emerged in them. (Nietzsche 1873/1999: 142)

As Nietzsche observes, humans deceive in many cunning ways and for multiple reasons. Dupery manifests in various guises, and we should know that seeing is not believing. Over two centuries later, Nietzsche's words still resonate, no less than with the 45th US Presidents' incitement of violence leading up to the 6 January 2021 riots. While one may interpret Nietzsche's reflections as overly pessimistic about the human condition, he does raise a point worth noting: if deception has reached its pinnacle among humans, and is so pervasive, why has truth come to dominate traditional epistemological analytic discourse and secure its status as the primary epistemic good?¹ This debate I do not address; however, I do question truth as a primary epistemic aim.

¹ *Defining* what *constitutes* truth is under debate (see Kirkham 2001); however, traditional analytic epistemologists have focused on how to *achieve* 'truth' through discussing various forms of justification, which are connected to achieving 'truth'. For one example see Goldman (1986).

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My claims are not an all-out assault on the truth. Possessing truthful information and knowledge is central to the workings of any society. Truthful and accurate information and knowledge allow us to navigate our seas, roads, and aircrafts or help reduce disease risks. The coronavirus pandemic is the most recent worldwide example of how the lack of truthful and accurate information can exacerbate humans suffering (Rose 2020b). In this sense, it seems reasonable that we might adopt truth as a primary epistemic aim, as many traditional analytic epistemologists have done because truth is a requirement of knowledge (Kvanvig 2003; David 2001). Truth is a necessity in life that *can* help our planet's survival, overturn oppression, or increase equality; it is embedded into our knowledge construction. Some may argue for the intrinsic *value* of truth, pursuing truth for the sake of truth rather than for pragmatic reasons; however, trivial pursuit, whereby players win by knowing the most little-known facts, is not *valuable* during a pandemic other than, perhaps, to pass the time in isolation. Debates over *the value of truth* are ongoing,² complex, and not quickly resolved, and I do not attempt to resolve them in this chapter. However, in a human social environment where deceit is woven throughout our daily lives, social, technological, media, and epistemological ecosystems have become corrupted with false beliefs through pervasive deception; it is critical to revisit truth as a primary epistemic aim because achieving deception is directly related to ideals of truth.

In this chapter, I construct an *epistemology of false beliefs* to reveal one way in which audiences acquire technologically mediated false beliefs specifically focusing on the relationships between truth, trust, and technology in postdigital deception. I begin this argument by explicating the most fundamental way in which we acquire knowledge or information in social relations. I argue that we are dependent upon one another for constructing and disseminating information and knowledge. This dependence places us in a relationship where we must trust others to tell the truth if we are to acquire a true belief over a false one. I add an additional layer of analysis through a discussion on deception. Here I argue that the social relations in which we are embedded are absent from discussions on deception in epistemology; therefore, in discussions of deception, we must consider the deceiver as well as the audience to understand how false beliefs are engendered.

Next, I discuss the role of audiences' epistemic and psychological certainty of truth. I argue that a *holistic account of epistemic certainty* is something we simply do not possess because not all knowledge is epistemically certain and that commitments to truth about uncertain knowledge are through commitments to truth based on psychological certainty. I then add in the role of trust in social relations. I illustrate that trust can be established by deceivers exploiting an audiences' psychological certainty of truth. Lastly, in the final layer of analysis, I discuss the role that technology has in deception and how a postdigital lens can assist us in understanding an epistemology of false beliefs in postdigital deception. I conclude that truth ought to remain an epistemic aim. However, education can additionally focus on

²For an example on debates on the *value* of truth see James (2001) on the pragmatic value of truth and Bonjour (1985) for an account that claims that truth is the primary epistemic value.

engendering the value of understanding and a healthy scepticism to help people consider explanatory relationships in their social contexts, rather than solely focusing on truth.

Interdependence and the Search for Truth

Deriving from the Enlightenment tradition is the idea that we are autonomous individuals who can individually and independently generate and acquire knowledge, abstracted from social relations (Fricker 2006; Goldman 1999). For instance, Fricker (2006: 225) explains that '[t]he wholly autonomous knower will not accept any proposition, unless she herself possesses the evidence establishing it'. One of the founding philosophers of the Enlightenment era, Descartes (1637/1960: 51), contributed to the understanding that we were individual autonomous knowers when he wrote that we should 'never accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such' and to 'comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt'.

Descartes focuses on the individual, agency, and self-reliance for ascertaining truth by focusing on one's own mind. He is sceptical of the certainty of knowledge deriving from the external world. However, he realises he cannot doubt all knowledge as he observes, 'I think, hence I am' (Descartes 1637/1960: 63), because in *thinking*, he *knows* that he exists. Descartes is certain of his knowledge deriving from his thoughts, experiences, and rationalizing, and it is the only with this evidence that he can *know with certainty* about how to obtain or establish *knowledge*. He writes that 'such evidence, that no ground for doubt...could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking' (63). Therefore, he suggests with certainty that one must rely upon oneself and accept this as the first principle of rationality.

Descartes was influential in the development of epistemological principles upon which to establish knowledge in traditional analytical epistemology. Additionally, his meditations were influential in the development of the modern individual knower (Coady 1994). However, Descartes' meditations do not capture the social nature of knowledge and the fundamental way in which we construct, disseminate, and acquire it. Goldman (1999: 4) observes that Descartes meditations are 'highly individualistic, focusing on mental operations of cognitive agents in isolation or abstraction from other persons'. However, knowledge is a social endeavour, so it requires consideration of its 'social routes to belief acquisition' (Goldman 1999: 4). Fricker (2006: 225) identifies Descartes' meditations as 'extreme purism' which circumscribes what we can come to know. Fricker (2006: 225) writes: 'it is not clear that we do or could possess any knowledge at all which is not in some way, perhaps obliquely, dependent upon testimony'.³

³ While Fricker's analysis focuses upon learning from testimony, testimony can come in verbal or written forms.

Fundamentally, we owe much to others because most of what they learn derives from others in some kind of form (Fricker 2006). Our social relations readily evidence this understanding. We learn from our education, educators, families, doctors, neighbours, materials written by others, and many other human sources in life. However, the autonomous individual as the epistemic agent who pursues knowledge, knowing, and truth individually dominates Westernized thinking and traditional analytic epistemology (Coady 1994). Upon consideration of what we do know, we would be constrained in what we know if we did not learn from others. For example, from an epistemological point of view, Fricker (2006) explains that the autonomous knower is an extreme case of a knower and whose learning of the world will likely be severely restricted. Our world is social; others' words, in its varied forms, are how we acquire knowledge in and about the social world.

Consider how one comes to know one's birthdate. We rely upon others' testimony to tell us that we were born on a particular day at a particular time and in a particular year. We carry this belief with us for a lifetime. Suppose we look at our birth certificate or the birth registry to verify our birthdate if we do not believe our family. The accuracy and truthfulness of our birthdate still ultimately rely upon the individuals who completed the forms. We can trace our birthdate back through written testimony; however, it is traced back to an individual's first-hand experience, whose testimony we *unquestionably* accept, although there are no guarantees it is true or accurate. We have no avenue for verifying our birthdate through first-hand experience. We are necessarily reliant upon testimony. We learn from one another through written texts, dialogue, interlocutions, and what we read and see in online environments.

Rather than accepting arguments that knowledge construction and dissemination are fundamentally social processes, on the one hand, one may believe that Descartes' method is appropriate for combating online deception because we cannot trust what we read, see, or hear online, so we therefore ought to question it. However, Descartes' methods for determining what is true, while they may *seem* helpful for combatting online deception, can encourage individuals to only rely upon themselves which can lead to sceptical extremism, or 'full-fledged scepticism' (Gelfert 2014: 9). If we adopted Descartes' meditations, we would not believe anything we saw online or through digital media because we simply could not verify what we see through first-hand experience. However, we do indeed believe some information that we see online.

On the other hand, Descartes' search for truth excludes the fact that the language he uses in his philosophy is infused with meaning that he has learned from others. This meaning influences how he interprets the world. The epistemic clarity and certainty about what he can know can be questioned whether or not the epistemic sources he uses when rationalising are genuinely his representation of the world and are certain. What he rationalizes and comes to believe with certainty is fundamentally based on the meaning within the language that he uses and learned throughout his life. Although Descartes' ideas became influential over the development of the modern self as the independent, agential knower, they do not address the most

fundamental way in which we acquire information or knowledge from others and their verbal, written, or shared representations of meaning, in social relations.

An obvious problem is that if deception is pervasive and we are reliant upon each other to learn and acquire information and knowledge, how have we learned anything at all? Indeed, we have managed to communicate information and knowledge that is true enough (I will discuss the nature of truth, knowledge, and certainty later on) so that we can come to *know*. However, because others' words can be deceitful, careless, inapt, or unreliable, questions about trust are raised. For this reason, Burnyeat and Barnes (1980) argue that testimony is not a sound method for acquiring knowledge. The authors explain that to accept knowledge through testimony is a credulity. Knowers may accept testimony too quickly in everyday life or knowers may illustrate a propensity towards gullibility, an inapt epistemic practice. Resultantly, knowers should be sceptical of testimony and not use others' testimony in everyday actions as a source for epistemic beliefs but to search for knowledge ourselves (Burnyeat and Barnes 1980).

The arguments that Burnyeat and Barnes and Descartes put forth are tempting to adopt because we do need some kind of scepticism because others may attempt to deceive us. However, wholesale adoption of a sceptical stance is untenable because we cannot escape learning information or knowledge from others in all of its forms; we are necessarily dependent upon others for coming to know things. Because we do learn from others, we inherently, and necessarily, *trust* others' and their words; otherwise, what we would learn and know would be very little. Students will not verify the truth, certainty, or validity of everything they learn from educators, and we do not and cannot possibly verify the truth, certainty, or validity of everything we read or hear. Learning from others is the fundamental way we acquire knowledge and information because knowledge and information is fundamentally socially constructed and disseminated. It is to be expected that it has problems, as people may be careless about speaking, and as I will discuss, deception further exacerbates these problems by exploiting truth, certainty, and trust. First, let us explore deception.

Dupers and Dupees: The Missing Link in Deception

A truism is that humans deceive. As Nietzsche (1873/ 1999) observed, there are many motivations for why people deceive. Deception by lying, for example, may be told to benefit oneself, but it may also be told to benefit others, such as an altruistic lie (Stokke 2018). Lies may be perpetrated about public or private life, to ensure social graces; to impress, define, or protect oneself; to cope with stressful situations; or to avoid embarrassment or punishment (Solomon 2009). Alternatively, and fundamentally, lies are told to change a belief or to obstruct the flow of knowledge or information (Marsili 2019). Why people deceive us just is as multifarious as how they deceive, making understanding deception highly complex.

Lying, for example, is *often* taken to be part and parcel of deception; insofar they are considered mutually constituted; if there is a lie, there is deception, and if there

is deception, there is a lie. However, there are differences between lying and deception. *Deception* implies that the hearer has been deceived (Carson 2010). A case of deception is only deception if someone is caused to have false beliefs. Merely uttering a lie, or aiming to deceive, does not mean that the hearer believes the lie. The hearer can reject the lie and not be deceived.

A common understanding of lying comprises a speaker making an utterance, assertion, or statement that is false and intending to deceive, resulting in the audience acquiring a false belief. Ironically, this common understanding of lying ‘deceives’ us because it only accounts for one kind of lying and deception. Carson (2010: 3) argues that to be considered a lie, a liar must make ‘a deliberate false statement that the speaker warrants to be true’. The liar may not necessarily *intend* to deceive a hearer, but a lie occurs when the speaker breaches an implied guarantee that his words are true when they are not. For Carson, the liar invites his hearer to trust him and then betrays the trust by speaking a statement that he does not believe to be true, though he has no intent to deceive. For example,

I witness a crime and clearly see that a particular individual committed the crime. Later, the same person is accused of the crime and, as a witness in court, I am asked whether or not I saw the defendant commit the crime. I make the false statement that I did not see the defendant commit the crime, for fear of being harmed or killed by him. However, I do not intend that my false statements deceive anyone. (Carson 2010: 20)

Similarly, Sorenson (2007) points out that lying does not require intent to deceive. ‘Bald-faced lies’, Sorenson (2007: 645) explains, occur when a speaker lies without intention to deceive because they think that the hearers know they are lying, such as a person telling their partner that burnt rice tastes good when they both know that it does not. It is still a lie because the person does not believe the utterance made, but there is no intention to deceive, or to change another’s belief or obstruct the flow knowledge. While the reasons for telling a bald-face lie, or it may be called a ‘fib’ (the gravity of which is not as serious as the calculated intention to deceive), may improve human relations, Sorenson still fundamentally considers it a lie.

Additionally, a true statement can be spoken to deceive if it misleads one to believe or continue to believe a falsehood (Carson 2010). Bill Clinton, for example, stated ‘I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky’.⁴ Relying on a specific definition of what constitutes sexual relations, Clinton did not lie. However, he certainly aimed to deceive though he spoke a true statement. Saul (2012: 65) defines lying as one that the speaker must not be the victim of linguistic error such as malapropism, using a ‘metaphor, hyperbole, or irony’. People lie if they state a proposition that they believe to be false, are in a warranting context, and intend that their audience believe it to be true, and the audience believes they are in a warranting context.

Deception can also occur through ‘half-truths’. These are true statements that selectively emphasize facts that support a particular interpretation of an issue to selectively ignore or minimize other pertinent facts or statements that may be

⁴ See Yagoda (2018).

contrary to one's intended interpretation (Fallis 2019). For example, half-truths are a grey area 'of deceptive utterances that are difficult to classify' (Marsili 2019: 170). The 'grey area' is an area for which deceivers strive because it includes statements that are not entirely believed to be false but are also not believed to be true (Marsili 2019). Similarly, there are quarter truths and 'spin' (Solomon 2009). Additionally, Stokke (2018) points out that people are skilled at navigating the spaces between lying and deception. Stokke argues that people 'exploit the difference between outright saying what we do not believe and conveying disbelieved information in other ways' (3). These other ways include feigning emotions or attitudes by using non-declarative language such as 'questions, imperatives, or exclamations' (3). Sometimes there is no aim to deceive; people just speak insincerely.

Chisholm and Feehan (1977: 143–145) present eight basic ways deception can occur when the speaker intends to deceive. A speaker intentionally acts to:

- (a) Cause a hearer to believe a false belief
- (b) Cause a hearer to continue to believe a false belief
- (c) Cause a hearer to lose a true belief
- (d) Prevent a hearer from acquiring a true belief

Alternatively, a hearer may intentionally omit information and fail to engender a true belief by:

- (e) Allowing the hearer to believe a false belief
- (f) Allowing the hearer to continue to believe a false belief
- (g) Allowing the hearer to cease having a true belief
- (h) Allowing a hearer to continue to believe a false belief

As seen with Chisholm and Feenan's conceptualization of deception, deception can occur by omission or concealment of information that leads to one's audience not acquiring a true belief. Deceivers can cause someone to falsely believe by withholding information if that is information that would affect them acquiring true belief. Deception by omission or concealment is not a lie because it requires someone to make a statement, but it entails the withholding or concealing of information that the hearer might need to know. This kind of deception through misleading can occur with or without a word as well as overt behaviour when deceivers suggest 'in their actions what they might never put into words' (Solomon 2009: 16). Additionally, silence can be a form of deception if a person knows that their silence will be understood as an agreement, that person intends that their silence be understood that way, and they remain silent on purpose (Fallis 2019). The complexity of deception increases because it is intertwined and intimately connected to self-deception.

Self-deception is inducing a false belief in oneself; it is intentional and motivated and simulates wilful ignorance (Beier 2019). What people deceive themselves about is broad and can include themselves or others, politics, economics, or anything that a person wilfully misconceives. The complications with self-deception are exacerbated because it is intertwined with deception. Martin (2009) explains that the lies that people tell others can be intricately entangled with the lies they tell themselves. Believing one's lies and the lies told to others may be done for strategic reasons.

Deceivers have motivated deceptions and self-deception that enables them to convincingly persuade their audiences of their deceptions because they speak with real sincerity (Martin 2009). Self-deception is not merely a linguistic activity like the nature of lying was initially thought to be; it involves more than an assertion of a false proposition. It includes a range of psychological attitudes, such as ‘self-love, self-pity, self-respect, and self-loathing’, and one can deceive oneself about others or the self (Solomon 2009: 23). In any account of deception, the self is central and critical because people are not deceitful in the traditional sense if they believe the falsehoods they tell.

Definitions of lying *presume* that one is certain about the truth oneself, as it is usually contradictory to believe something that is knowingly false. However, deception can also occur through various certainty levels, such as psychological certainty, the ‘highest degree of confidence that a subject can have in the truth of a proposition’ (Marsili 2019: 171). However, psychological certainty is always ‘relative to *someone’s standpoint*: it does not matter if the subject has no ground (or bad grounds) for holding that belief, because certainty requires only that *the subject* be supremely convinced of its truth’ (Marsili 2019: 171). The deceiver need not believe that the uttered statement is false; her belief may simply be on a continuum of uncertainty/certainty about the belief. Beliefs can be understood with degrees of certainty; we can believe things in which we are not wholly certain (Marsili 2019), such as a person believing that a political party will win.

Typically, this illustrates a discrepancy between speakers’ psychological state, such as intent or belief, and the psychological state expressed by the linguistic action, such as asserting, requiring, or promising (Marsili 2019). If people believe what they are assert is partially true but are not confident of it, they are not lying, though their statements can be misleading because they do not represent their psychological state. These ‘graded beliefs’ become lies when deceivers express ‘certainty when [they] are uncertain’, ‘expressing uncertainty when [they] are certain’, and ‘expressing certainty or uncertainty to a higher degree than being adequate with respect with [their] knowledge base’ (Marsili 2019: 177). So when deceivers pretend to have a higher or lower degree of belief and knowledge than expressed, they lie.

Traditional understandings of lying also *presume* that people knowingly and intentionally, often maliciously, deceive (Solomon 2009). This further supposes that people are autonomous, transparent, and rational because it is assumed that they *rationally* deceive (Solomon 2009). Deceivers may be blatant about self-interested lies, but self-deception is not individually self-contained, insofar, as we merely deceive ourselves. Self-deception is connected to social and personal relationships. Solomon (2009: 25) explains: ‘to fool ourselves, we must either fool or exclude others; and to successfully fool others, we best fool ourselves’. Self-deception is a ‘surreptitious, social construction of the self’ (Solomon 2009: 27). We can deceive ourselves about who we ‘are’. However, self-deception is also about one’s particular role in social relationships, such as one posturing to be thought of or treated in particular ways by other people (Solomon 2009). Self-deception increases deception’s complexity because the deceivers need not necessarily believe that what they

convey is false. Deceivers may be disillusioned about what is true, which raises questions about if it is a case of deception or if deceivers merely believe and spread false beliefs because they have deceived themselves. Deception and self-deception are complex phenomena, which are not easily or readily apparent to any observer, I will not aim to explicate the complexity of deception and deceivers' possible self-deceptive epistemic states, but only to expose that a broad understanding of deception is thorny, and deceivers' states are not easily categorized into simple states of intention and lying.

However complicated the notion of deception is, the problem with this epistemological literature about deception is that it is still fundamentally based upon an individualistic Cartesian understanding. It focuses on deceivers, beliefs, behaviours, language, epistemologies, psychological states, and intentions to deceive. However, it does not consider the hearers, the learners, or the audience's role in accepting or rejecting the lie or believing the deceptive statement. If deceivers aim to deceive, achieving deception is about the audience as much as it is about the deceiver. As deceivers lie, mislead, or manipulate, it only is a case of deception if the audience believes their corrupt attempts to deceive. My claim is that deceivers can use 'truth' or what is *believed to be true* by the audience with *psychological certainty* to achieve deception. Therefore, I include the *audience's* psychological states of certainty with respect to the development of false beliefs because deception requires that audience *believe the false statement*. There is no case of deception if the hearers do not believe what information the deceivers present. Also, focusing on the deceiver as well as the deceived is necessary to understand the accumulation of false beliefs because we are reliant upon one another to create, share, and *learn* new information or knowledge. Deception is a blockage in the accumulation of true or accurate information. For these reasons, an audience's psychological certainty is of importance because deceivers can exploit it to engender false beliefs.

Certainty and Truth

There are two types of certainty that I distinguish here to illustrate that psychological certainty is the primary kind of certainty that people operate on when justifying their beliefs: psychological certainty and epistemic certainty. Psychological or subjective certainty is 'an attitude that persons can have towards a proposition' (Klein 1998: 1358). As Marsili (2019) observed, psychological certainty does not require that individuals have good doxastic reasons for their belief; it only requires that the individual has psychological certainty in what one believes is true. Psychological certainty is one's commitment to truth in a particular proposition. However, epistemic certainty 'is a measure of the epistemic warrant for a proposition' (Klein 1998: 1358). Alternatively, as Stanley (2008: 35) observes, a case of epistemic certainty is when a person knows that a given statement is true based on evidence that 'gives one the highest degree of justification for one's belief'. One has *absolute epistemic certainty* if one has infallible doxastic reasons for believing a stated

proposition as truth, because if it is fallible, it is not certain. This is an absolute case of certainty; certainly if we removed gravity and oxygen from the earth, we know with *certainty* that we would be nothing more than floating dead bodies, without grounding and breathing paraphernalia.

These are particular aspects of life we might be certain about; however, because we do not have this same epistemic certainty with all aspects of life, such as what will the weather be tomorrow, we can *predict* what the weather will be like tomorrow, but we do not *know* it with certainty. *In consideration of a holistic view and account of knowledge, we do not have epistemic certainty.* Some things about how our world functions are more certain than others, but epistemic certainty is not something that pervades all knowledge because certainty is not a requirement for knowledge (Stanley 2008). Holistically, if we do not have *certainty in all* knowledge, then we must necessarily be operating on psychological certainty, unless we speak about only those things that are epistemically certain. Wittgenstein (1969: 52e) makes a similar point; he writes, ‘it’s not that on some points men know the truth with perfect certainty. No: perfect certainty is only a matter of their attitude’. Wittgenstein also distinguishes between epistemic certainty and subjective certainty, highlighting that epistemic certainty is not absolute because it is not perfect; therefore, any absolute certainty is a psychological function of certainty.

While we can be certain about particular aspects of life, *holistically* we do not possess epistemic certainty. However, we *do* make certainty claims, such as one believes with certainty that the election was stolen from Trump or that the democratic party is corrupt. If we do not have epistemic certainty about all aspects of life, then many claims of certainty we make are those of psychological certainty, our attitude of certainty of truth towards the claims we make. As I will discuss next, a deceiver can exploit psychological certainty in one’s trusted relationship, positioning an audience in a state of vulnerability to blindly believe the statements of a deceiver.

The Exploitation of Trust Through Psychological Certainty of Truth

Because we are dependent upon the word of others, in any of its forms, we necessarily do trust some of what we hear or read; otherwise, we simply would not learn new information or knowledge. Trust is central to our social relations and operations of any society. We trust that other drivers on the road are competent and will not cause an accident. We trust that our doctors are truthful and competent. We trust the person we ask for directions to tell us truthfully and accurately how to get to our destination. Alternatively, we trust in a particular political party over another. My concern is not with explicating the central nature of trust. Processes of trust are complex, and the reasons and source of trust are many. However, my central concern here is with the relationship between truth, trust, and deception. We live by a fundamental maxim

that we place trust in people when we know they tell or are telling the truth. Nooteboom (2006: 249) identifies this as 'intentional trust', trust in the honest or truthful individual, group, or organization. A broad definition of intentional trust is when the trustor trusts the trustee and accepts the risk associated with vulnerability to opportunistic actions (Nooteboom 2006). Intentional trust is primarily concerned with individuals' intentions in the trusted relationship; individuals can generally be benevolent, honest, or truthful in their intentions in the relationship or opportunistic, which entails 'lying, stealing, and cheating to expropriate advantage' (Nooteboom 2006: 249). With respect to learning from others, benevolent intentions are related to truth-telling and trust, conducive to learning from others in any form, and necessary in the epistemic relationship between givers of information and an audience.

Opportunistic intentions are where I place the relation between trust, truth, and deception. I take opportunistic intentions to be an abuse of relationships in deception. As Lackey (2008) explains, the hearer who places blind trust in a speaker because she has a relationship with her, and therefore cannot provide reasons for her belief, is an inapt knower. While Lackey takes a strict view on always justifying one's belief when learning from others, there is reason to heed her observations because trust involves risk. The audience is at risk of betrayal, opportunistic advantage, and exploitation by givers of statements. Audiences are at risk when the messenger does not enact the trustworthiness expected when one places trust in someone, thereby making blind trust a relevant concern to deception and the development of false beliefs. In online environments where the audiences need to determine who and what sources, and information to trust, rather than trust *prima facie* because deception is pervasive, my claim is that audiences with psychological certainty of truth are in a position of vulnerability to deceivers' opportunistic exploitation of the trust.

O'Neill (2020) argues that trust can be exploited when people abuse the trust they have been afforded. Stated another way, trust is corrupted when people abuse trustful relations with others and breach an implicit warrant of truthfulness. As already discussed, trust is central to acquiring any kind of knowledge or information simply because we cannot know everything, much of what we do know is limited, and what we can come to know in online environments is limited (Rose 2020a). Because the audience must necessarily decide who or what to trust, they are vulnerably situated in the relation to the giver of statements or potential deceiver because the deceiver can exploit that trust. My claim is that the deceiver exploits trust through his audiences' psychological certainty of truth and limited knowing because they do not have epistemic certainty. The deceiver builds trust by telling what appears to be truthful or believed to be truthful by the deceived. For instance, Trump has touted that he does not believe that systemic racism is problematic. 'Trump says he doesn't believe racism is a systemic problem within US police forces. He has positioned himself as a firm advocate of law enforcement but has opposed chokeholds and offered grants for improved practices.' (BBC 2020) Moreover, we see here in the testimonial of one of his supporters that the supporter also does not believe in systemic racism. 'I am not racist or sexist. I believe in personal responsibility and equal opportunity for all, not equal outcomes. Outcomes are left up to individuals. Man, 40s.' (Dunn et al. 2017)

The supporter's belief and psychological certainty in personal responsibility, equal opportunity, and unequal outcomes reveal the inherent belief in the nonexistence of systemic racism. Otherwise, he would not believe that outcomes are solely an individual problem. In relation to Trump's stances and stated policies, he garnered his supporters' trust by mirroring their ideologies and psychological certainty. In honest relations, a politician does as the people wish and communicates his pledge; people vote for the candidate that promises to address their needs. However, in dishonest relations, a pledge can be conveyed to establish trust, and once trust is established, it can be exploited. We justify our beliefs in others in two general ways: through prima facie trust and using our beliefs and knowledge as criteria for evaluating another's claim.⁵ Because deception is rampant, we are less inclined to trust a speaker prima facie because we aim not to be deceived. However, we necessarily justify our belief in a speaker when they tell us things we already believe with certainty, simpliciter, and trust is established. Because we must trust someone or some institution to acquire our information or knowledge, once we trust, we are vulnerably positioned to be exploited and acquire false beliefs from the trusted. While it may seem absurd that anyone would trust in Trump's word, O'Neill explains that trust can be misplaced:

Trust may be misplaced in liars and fraudsters, in those who are incompetent or misleading, and in those who are untrustworthy in countless other ways. Equally, mistrust and suspicions may be misplaced in those who are trustworthy in the matters under consideration. (O'Neill 2020: 17)

The central concern here, if trust is misplaced, and once trust it is established, the trusted can exploit the trust and deceive the trustee, who, consequently, is vulnerable to developing false beliefs based on a foundation of trust.

We now know that we are interdependent with one another for learning new information or knowledge. Therefore, conceptualizations of deception must necessarily consider the deceiver as well as the deceived to fully understand deception. Additionally, we have seen that we do not have a holistic account epistemic certainty, and many claims we make with certainty are done so upon psychological certainty. Psychological certainty about truth is directly related to how we justify our belief in our interlocutor and can be used by a deceiver to establish trust, which can later be exploited. An additional layer of analysis in the epistemology of false belief in a postdigital era requires consideration of technology's role in deception.

Postdigital Deception: Virtual Reality or Reality as Virtual?

Postdigital is a term, though messy and not concretely defined, that captures human relationships between humans and technology (Jandrić et al. 2018). Postdigital complexity is evident when we consider the complexity of people, life, the societies in which we reside, and the multitude of technological and digital devices that we

⁵ See Gelfert (2014) for a discussion on reductionism and anti-reductionism in testimony.

use. In this view, technology is not a benign construction of materials into a cultural artefact; technology can be defined by how we use it (Dusek 2006). Technology, as Dusek (2006: 33) observes, can be understood as a tool (e.g. a phone) or as rules (e.g. software), and it can be understood as a system that ‘needs to be set in the context of people who use it, maintain it, and repair it’ (Dusek 2006: 33). Understood as a system, technology encompasses the postdigital condition and the complicated relationships we have. Our relationship to technology is further complicated when considering the nature of deception, us, and technology. Dusek (2006) explains that what we see through technology is not a direct route to visualizing what we see but is represented by technology (Dusek 2006). When someone sends us an electronic photo, we only see a representation mediated by technology; we do not see the actual objects or people in the photograph.

In honest relations, we trust that what we see in an online photograph is a true or accurate representation of reality. However, in deception, technology can be used not only to fabricate or manipulate images, words, and sounds but also to emulate the reality of one’s audience and geographical context. For instance, Rose (2020a) revealed that online news consumers are limited in their knowing when attempting to determine the truth of what they see online because fake news posted online represents plausible truths that exist offline. In this instance, when individuals use their epistemic orientations to assess truth, they will arrive at false beliefs because they individually cannot ‘know’ what is true or false by simply viewing what they see online because it mirrors reality. This is because technology enables the digitized creation of audiences’ realities, such as Trump using technology to build trust with his supporters by telling what they wish to hear and what corresponds to their beliefs and certainty of truth. Furthermore, technology enables the provision of new digitized realities for audiences, such as online epistemic bubbles.

Understanding technology, specifically in the role of deception, exposes it as a mediator between the deceivers and the deceived. This point is vital because, through technological mediation, deceivers can manipulate reality and establish trust. For instance, deceivers can easily and craftily omit, conceal information, and present half-truths or spins that prevent an audience from developing a true belief. Deceivers can embed lies, deceitful, or misleading information directly into images, text, sound, or videos. These latter tactics are readily seen in fake news memes, stories, and deep fake video productions. Technology enables an abundance of new ways to deceive because deception is not merely about a person misleading, deceiving, or lying verbally, or through body language face-to-face, technology affords deceivers with the instruments, such as software, to digitally create and recreate lies through misrepresentations of reality, which is well documented through the genre of fake news. Technology also enables asynchronous deception. For instance, deceivers may post a fake news story online, and while it can potentially reach millions of online users instantaneously, once it is online users can be exposed to it at a later date and time, which could entail days, weeks, or even months. The deceit stays embedded into the technology and lingers there for users to knowingly or unknowingly consume asynchronously from the original deceptive act. Deception is ongoing though the deceptive act is long over. These new forms of deceit are directly

related to the development and advances in technology. This raises questions about what new ways of deceiving are emerging as technology rapidly changes.

A Way Forward: Revisiting Epistemic Values

The Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire (1778) wrote: ‘those who make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities’. Though written over two centuries ago, Voltaire’s insights seem to resonate with the events of American politics over the last 4 years as the 45th American President is credited with inciting fascism, violence, white supremacy, imperialism, and many other violent and unjust actions within some of the American people, leading up to the insurrection on 6 January 2021. When people trust and believe in a leader, they can be led to violent action by believing in falsehoods. An epistemology of false beliefs arises from trust being established on psychological certainty of truth and people’s vulnerability to deceivers and being deceived. Once trust is established, people are vulnerable to believing any falsehood that the trusted makes, including dismissing or discrediting opposing views for which there is significant more evidence. These processes are further exacerbated and complicated in consideration of technology because technology mediates between deceivers and the deceived and can emulate truth and reality, or it can create new realities as people engage in online communities, such as social media groups.

Deceit is a broader problem of humanity, and it is remiss to address it only in online environments. We are situated in historical, social, gendered, and racialized contexts with politics, economics, laws, and unspoken structures by which we abide, such as capitalism that can motivate deceivers to deceive (Rose 2020b). Though I have discussed an epistemology of false belief, deceivers and the deceived will utilize their broader social contexts in digitally mediated communications. We simply cannot step outside of our societal and cultural context, particularly when establishing trust, because it is psychological certainty about the truth that establishes trust in givers of statements and potential deceivers and is directly related to our cultural context. Often what we believe as ‘truth’ is related to our context, such as the Trump supporter who does not believe systemic racism is a problem because he lives in a political environment that values individualism, individualist achievement, and disregards the fact that racial inequalities are socially constructed notions that are embedded into the fabric of our societies. Holistic epistemic certainty is something that we do not possess, so we ought to always foster truth-telling; however, truth as the sole epistemic aim is insufficient. As discussed, it can be used to establish trust, which can be exploited.

As Nietzsche (1873/1999) observed, deceit is pervasive, so much so, that it defies understanding how truth as a primary epistemic aim emerged from traditional analytical epistemology. Nietzsche’s observations point towards deceit as being deeply embedded in human psychology and from this one might postulate that people fundamentally need to focus on truth to overcome their deceitful ‘nature’. While this is

an argument well beyond the scope of this chapter, one way to help soften the effects of postdigital deception is to add the value of understanding to epistemic aims.

Kvanvig (2003: 193) explains that understanding helps us grasp explanatory connections between pieces of information or the propositional compartmentalization of knowledge because ‘it focuses on the question of whether the person has seen the right kinds of relationships among the various items of information grasped’. Understanding requires that individuals grasp the relationships between information and propositions, but also that it has a psychological component because the person must be able to *comprehend* the relations, and the relations must be within their awareness (Kvanvig 2003). This takes people beyond notions of knowing the truth as the epistemic aim because it helps them organize and systematize their thinking about the world’s explanatory relationships. Helping people understand how to ‘make sense’ of their contexts and their relationships between each other, technology, knowledge, beliefs, and social structures can help combat deception because they are enabled to more aptly understand the relationships they have with the world, rather than merely being certain of truth claims and beliefs. Additionally, people ought to acquire a *healthy scepticism* about their truth *claims* and *beliefs* about truth.

Descartes’ (1637/ 1960) methods for determining what is true, while they may *seem* to be helpful to combat postdigital deception, can encourage extreme scepticism and position people to develop false beliefs because they are limited in what they can know in technologically mediated environments (Rose 2020b). We do rely upon others to acquire accurate information and knowledge and cannot solely rely upon ourselves, because we are necessarily dependent upon one another, in some form, to acquire accurate information and knowledge: we cannot help but learn from the contexts in which we are born. A healthy scepticism requires us to consider our psychological certainty of truth about our beliefs. As discussed, we simply do not have a holistic account of epistemic certainty, so any claims of certainty about truth are primarily psychologically based. Until there is radical change in the social structures that contribute to deception, education can help people understand the limits to what they know, the certainty of what they know, and what they can reasonably know, not only in online environments but also through any technologically mediated communication.

This epistemology of false belief is critical to *understand* because it explicates a fundamental way in which deceivers aim to deceive us. If we can begin making the necessary connections in our world through a postdigital understanding, we will be further equipped to combat postdigital deception.

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