

SHOULD WE SUSPEND THE TRUTH TO PREVENT HARM?

OLUSOLA VICTOR OLANIPEKUN*

ABSTRACT. The paper examines the ethics of truth telling and free speech in Jonathan Rauch's *The Humanitarian Threat*. The central question is this: "Should we suspend the truth to prevent harm?". Both humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians supply different responses to this question. While the humanitarians supplied a positive answer, Rauch argues that the anti-humanitarian posture of the exponents of liberalism supplied a negative answer. The paper considers the humanitarian argument that puts the welfare of the people above the truth or anything else. Meanwhile, for the anti-humanitarians, the right to speak the truth must be guaranteed at all time. This paper argues that, in practice, the morality of truth telling is not only context bound, it also depends on what the truth is meant to achieve. Thus, the suspension of the truth may be consistent with morality in some medical and sensitive security situations due to the tendency to cause harm. The paper does not argue that the truth be suspended arbitrarily or for mischievous reasons. It only concludes by identifying some practical situations under which suspension of the truth may not be inconsistent with morality.

Keywords: Truth-telling, Harm, Liberal Science, Humanitarianism, Situational Moral Relativism

Introduction

This article examines the ethics of truth telling and issues that surround it. Given the important of truth-telling in any human society, in the family, in the work place and relationship, it is highly imperative to examine whether truth-telling is

* Department of Philosophy, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife. Osun State. Nigeria.
olanipekuno@oauife.edu.ng



consistent with morality in all cases, and at all time. In ethics, the issue of truth telling is a complicated issue especially when discussed in connection with the politics of free speech. What is truth to begin with? Traditionally, truth is often contrasted with falsity. Generally, truth is always defined as the quality of those propositions that accord with reality, specifying what in case the fact is (Audi, 1999:929). Considering the central question in this paper, is truth really consistent with morality at all times? For instance, can a medical doctor tell his cardiac arrest patient the truth about his/her health condition at all time? Can the security agency give the true reports of the security situation of the society or what should be regarded as a classified information which is related to the weapon of mass destruction and its proliferation to the public at all time, even in the face of imminent danger? Part of the ethics of journalism is to seek truth and report it. But should a journalist report the truth at all time even if the truth could cause civil unrest? There are different approaches to these questions in ethics. In *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, one of the attempts to address the above questions is linked to Immanuel Kant. Kant supplies a positive answer to these questions in consonance with his categorical imperative which states that: Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law (Kant, 2012:421). Kant's argument is that, 'we could not will a universal law that allows us to lie, because such a law would be self-defeating' (Immanuel Kant, 1993:230). The import of this is that we should not suspend the truth for any reason because truth is consistent with morality at all times. His point is that we should not tell lies for any reason. The reason is simply because, for any reason, categorical imperative will not permit a universal law that allow us to lie. Also, telling lies or withholding the truth amount to treating others as a means to an end, and this in turn affects the duty we owe to them as fellow human beings.

Contrary to the Kantian view, the consequentialists will always remind us of the role of consequences in the morality of truth-telling. One needs to consider the consequences of telling the truth always. This is borne out of the fact that the emphasis of the consequentialist such as the utilitarians is always on the promotion of greater balance of happiness over pain for the people affected by the act. This suggests that the utilitarians response to the question of truth telling is neither here nor there depending on the dictate of the principle of utility. The emphasis is always about the promotion of the greater balance of happiness or favourable consequence over pain.

Apart from Kant and the utilitarians, we have the humanitarian and the anti-humanitarian approaches to the same question of truth-telling under consideration. These two approaches will be the focus of this paper. Now, by extension, is an offense

caused through free speech morally justifiable especially when the speech is the truth? Must we tell the truth even if others will be offended, harm or hurt? Should we suspend the truth to prevent harm? The task of this paper is to attempt these vital contentious questions. Starting by considering what morality requires will help us to see how incompatible answers are offered by contending sides on the subject matter.

This paper considers both the 'anti-humanitarians'¹ as well as the 'humanitarians'² approaches to the questions of free speech and truth telling. The humanitarians emphasise the view that offensive speech (regardless of whether it is the truth) should be restricted for good humanitarian reasons with the sole aim of protecting offense and harm. Meanwhile, the liberals argue against such restriction because it is possible that the speech that causes such an offence is the truth. In fact, for Rauch who also shares liberals view, the liberal science with its method of non-restriction remains the best method available for determining the truth (Rauch, 1996:135). But, is Rauch's view really tenable? We shall return this. Our focus in this paper needs to be clearly defined at this level. Our aim is neither to support humanitarianism wholesale nor to reject anti-humanitarianism in entirety. The focus is mainly to critically examine whether one should suspend the truth in order to prevent harm or not. Relying on the situational moral relativism approach to interrogate this, the paper provides a positive response.

The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section considers the minimum conception of morality as well as the conceptual clarification of the concepts 'free speech' and 'offensive speech'. The second section considers the humanitarians arguments on free Speech, truth and harm. Meanwhile, the fourth examines a situational moral relativist approach to the question of truth-telling and harm. With practical examples, the paper concludes that the gap between the humanitarians and the liberals is not as wide as Jonathan Rauch assumed.

Minimum Conception of Morality

Ethics is often defined as the philosophical study of morality. Ethics is commonly used interchangeably with 'morality' to mean the study of right and wrong; and sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group, or individual. (Audi, 1999:317). Specifically, James Rachels sees morality as the effort to guide one's conduct by reason while giving

¹ In this paper, anti-humanitarianism and liberalism will be used interchangeable.

² For the purpose of this paper, humanitarianism is used interchangeably with communitarianism.

equal weight to the interests of each individual affected by one's decision. (Rachels, 2012:13). While considering the minimum requirements for morality for any moral theory, reason is one of the key factors. That is, there must be a reason for acting in a particular way or backing our moral judgements. That is, justification for acting in a particular way. Also, in Rachels' view, the interest of the people affected by the act is another very important factor for any moral theory. This idea of minimum conception of morality led to the idea of conscientious moral agent as far as James Rachels is concerned. Who is a conscientious moral agent? A conscientious moral agent is someone who is concerned impartially with the interests of everyone affected by his/her act; who carefully sifts facts and examines their implications. (Rachels, 2012:13). The above view suggests that even a conscientious moral agent respect the interests of the individuals affected by a particular moral action. In other words, a conscientious moral agent will examine the implication of a particular action whether it has a tendency of causing harm or not to the people affected by the act.

Jonathan Haidt and Jesse Graham, identified five basic moral foundations: harm, fairness, loyalty, respect, and sanctity. (Haidt and Graham, 2007:98-99). The first on their list is the idea of harm. That is, no moral theory will justify harm. Thus, the idea that one should not cause harm to others is one of the basic moral foundations as far as Haidt and Graham are concerned. Now, given the above conception of morality, would the suspension of the truth to prevent harm be consistent with morality? Answer to this question is the main concern of this paper. We shall return to this in the body of the paper for details.

Conceptual Clarification: Free Speech, Hate Speech and Harm

One important question that motivates this clarification is the question of "what type of speech causes harm?" Addressing this question will help us to understand that not all speeches cause harm. Discussion on free speech, hate speech and their associated problems is arguably traced back to Socrates in the old Athenian society where he was accused of polluting the mind of the Athenian youth with his speech. This was even before John Milton's *Areopagitica*³ and the "First

³ The foundation of the traditional liberal model of free speech is traced back to 17th century England as expressed in John Milton (1644) *Areopagitica*. *Areopagitica is the Title of a speech of Mr John Milton speech which monster argument for the liberty of unlicensed printing. Opposing licencing/ censorship.*

Amendment Issue”⁴ in the United States of America that scholars often refer to. What exactly is free speech? Obviously, there is no simple definition for free speech. Why is this so? The reason is simply because the concept is being abused and thus, our understanding of the concept has been distorted. In fact, as hinted by Rauch, some people often use free speech as a weapon to protect their hidden political agenda or ideology and often present it as a shield to hide behind when being criticized.

Generally, Free speech is the right of an individual to express opinions without censorship, restraint or retaliation. According to Stanley Fish, free speech is just the name we give to verbal behaviour that serves the substantive agenda we wish to advance; and we give our preferred behaviours when we can. (Fish, 1996:127). This definition is problematic. This is problematic because politically motivated speech will fit in into this definition. Similarly, it is problematic in the sense that it does not cover the whole essence of free speech. Instead, it only reveals the negative part of free speech. Meanwhile the positive part of free speech that has to do with truth is left unattended to.

Just like free speech, there is no simple definition for hate speech also. Hate speech is generally considered as the speech that singles out minorities for abuse and harassment (Slagle, 2009:238). Thus, an offensive/ hate speech is an act of whatever kind, which without justifiable cause do harm to others maybe, and in the more important cases absolutely require to be, controlled by the unfavourable sentiments, and, when needful, by the active interference of mankind (Fish, 1996;106). Hate speech regulation targets speech-based harms that are not covered under current First Amendment jurisprudence (Bennett, 1993:3). For Kegan, hate speech is conceived as a speech that projects, promotes or perpetuates racial and gender inequality, and that the uncoerced disappearance of such speech would be cause for great elation (Kegan, 1993:873).

Meanwhile for John Bennett, proposals for hate speech regulation rest on two largely unexamined premises: that hate speech causes social harm and that the degree of speech-based harm is so severe that speech regulations are warranted (Bennett, 1998:445). What do we make out of the above definitions? We need to understand how free speech, hate speech and harm are connected. The question that necessitate this is that, is free speech inherently harmful? Or, at what point does free speech become harmful? The simple answer to this question is that free speech becomes harmful the moment it accommodates politics of hate speech. In

⁴ “First Amendment” is often used to refer to the first amendment of the constitution of the United States of America that guarantees freedom of speech in 1789: The First Amendment states, in relevant part, that: “Congress shall make no law...abridging freedom of speech.”

other words, the moment it has the tendency of damaging and causing injury or trouble for the parties involved then, it becomes harmful. With the understand that free speech and hate speech are two different concepts, W. K. Crenshaw in his analysis actually used the term *assaultive speech* interchangeably with *hate speech* to define “words that are used as weapons to ambush, terrorize, wound, humiliate, and degrade” (Crenshaw, 1993:1). One thing that must be made clear at this point is that freedom of speech does not include the right to incite actions that would harm or make utterances to humiliate or terrorize others like hate speech. Now, with the above background, the next equally important question is what is the humanitarians’ position on free speech, truth and harm? This question determines the focus of the next section.

Humanitarians on Free Speech, Truth and Harm

Humanitarianism is the doctrine that the people’s duty is to promote the wellbeing/human welfare. Thus, for the humanitarians, it is morally wrong to offend another person for any reason, either through one’s speech or actions. The argument is that the welfare of the people or the community should be paramount. For the humanitarians, speech should be restricted for good humanitarian reasons with the sole aim of protecting offense and harm (Rauch, 1996:135). Stanley Fish’s view actually represents the view of the humanitarians.

For Fish, in his paper “There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech, and it’s a Good Thing, Too”, he argues that, free speech is such an abstract concept which do not have any natural content but filled with whatever content and direction one can manage to put into it (Fish, 1996:126). The argument is that free speech does not exist in the real sense of it. What we call free speech are mere politically motivated speech that expresses the hidden agenda and personal interest of the speakers. It is believed that such hidden agenda is often sponsored by the liberals. This is with the aim of rejecting Rauch’s position.

The Humanitarian popular slogan is “cause no pain and allow no pain to be caused” (Rauch, 1996:135). What is the import of this slogan? The point is that if my telling the truth as a result of freedom of speech will hurt others or the community, then I should not tell such truth for humanitarian reasons. One controversial question that comes to mind is this. Giving that human beings are created to live in close proximity to one another arising from Aristotelian notion of *zoon politicon* (Aristotle, 1989: 446), how practicable is this slogan? One problem for the humanitarians is that given the nature of our present human society, Rauch is of the view that “the

social system does not permit a situation whereby harm does not come to anybody. Conflict of impulse and desire is an inescapable fact of human existence, and where there is conflict there will always be a loser or wound" (Rauch, 1996:135). The point is that the humanitarians' slogan is too ambitious. It is too ambitious in the sense that through their slogan, humanitarians assume an unrealistic human society where harm will be impossible. Tracing the argument back to the inception of human societies, the humanitarians need to tread with caution in this regard because human society is structured in such a way that harm of one form or the other is inevitable. We are yet to witness such a perfect human society where harm does not exist in one form or the other. Let us now turn our attention to the liberals' response to the question about whether we should suspend the truth in order to prevent harm or not.

The Anti-Humanitarians on Free Speech, Truth and Harm

Unbeknown to the humanitarians, the anti-humanitarians also stand against deliberate harm. Thus, it will be wrong for the humanitarians to think that liberalism accommodates harm. This clarification is essential because humanitarians always present their arguments as if liberals do not consider or pay attention to the issue of harm. As Jonathan Rauch rightly pointed out, just like the humanitarians, liberals have a slogan which states that "cause no pain solely in order to hurt" (Rauch,1996:135). This slogan essentially captures liberals' idea of free speech and harm. The argument is that, if the only reason why you want to hurt someone is just because you take pleasure in causing pain to the person and not because you want the truth to be told, one should not do it. I also want to support this slogan because it is morally wrong to perform an action with the sole aim of harming them.

The anti-humanitarian's argument is that truth must be spoken even if some people will be hurt. Not just because you want to hurt them just for fun, but for the truth to be known. This proposal actually finds support in the work of Immanuel Kant. Emphasising the moral importance of this truth, Kant argues that "To be truthful ... in all deliberations, therefore, is a sacred and absolutely commanding decree of reason, limited by no expediency" (Kant, 1949:348). Kant as we know, is one of the scholars who is of the opinion that truth is consistent with morality. Kant supports the view that truth must be told at all time and that human beings ought not to suspend the truth to prevent harm or for any reason. Thus, considering the question of whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm, Kant answer as found on page 63 of *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Moral* is that we should not.

Similarly, for John Rawls, “each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of the society as a whole cannot override. The rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interest” (Rawls, 1981:3). Just like Kant, Rawls also supports the view that the rights to tell the truth ought to be exercised at all time and that human beings ought not to suspend the truth to prevent harm or for any reason including the welfare of the entire society. However, does it mean that all the liberals maintain the same position on the question of truth-telling and harm? We supply a negative answer. The reason is simply because J.S. Mill who is also a liberal provided different account. We shall return to this for details in the last part of the paper.

Essentially, Rauch considered the arguments of the non-liberals such as Stanley Fish’s view as a humanitarian threat to freedom. For the humanitarian offensive speech should be restricted for good humanitarian reasons with the sole aim of protecting offense and harm (Rauch, 1996:136). However, Rauch argues otherwise. His argument centres on the fact that such restriction is a humanitarian threat to liberalism. The rider to his arguments is that seeking the truth requires not only free inquiry but free intellectual battle, which may sometimes include offensive speech and behaviour (Rauch, 1996:136). The fact of the matter is that, if one stands for the truth all the time, such a fellow is bound to offend people who do not want the truth to be told especially the morally bankrupt people in the society. Rauch argues that liberal science remains the best method available for determining the truth. This view may be correct because if determining the truth will bring about harm to some people in the community, humanitarians or communitarians will kick against such truth.

The anti-humanitarians tend to justify freedom generally, and free speech in particular, for a variety of reasons. What does this mean? As J. S. Mill rightly pointed out, free speech fosters authenticity, genius, creativity, individuality and human flourishing. According to Mill, “if we ban free speech, the silenced opinion may be true, or contain a portion of the truth, and that unchallenged opinions become mere prejudices and dead dogmas that are inherited rather than adopted.” (Mill, 1978:12). The implication of this quotation is that the humanitarians’ argument that we should suspend the truth to prevent harm for “good humanitarian reason” is a mere prejudice and dead dogma as Mill hinted. One problem with the humanitarians is that, what is this “good humanitarian reason?” The humanitarians did not clearly specify everything under the purview of good humanitarian reason. As a matter of fact, the ‘truth’ may even be what this ‘good humanitarian reason’ requires in the long run.

Furthermore, as quoted by Yong, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes rightly argue that, “in a free ‘marketplace of ideas’, true ideas and opinions will tend to find favour and eventually prevail over false ideas and opinions.” (Yong, 2011:390). What does this suggest? Holmes idea tends to provide support for the liberals’ defence of free speech and the truth. This same view finds support in J.S. Mill’s claim that censorship will always be less likely to promote truth than free discussion because no authority can reliably identify wrong ideas and therefore suppression of ideas may simply lead to the suppression of true or at least partially true ideas (Yong, 2011:390). The point of emphasis in the above quotations is the truth.

This paper, I am not an advocate of free speech from a radical sense of the word due to the tendency of being abused as hinted in the introduction. Instead, our claim is that truth ought to be an utmost social value which should not be suspended because some people will be offended for their own selfish reasons.

As Caleb Yong has rightly pointed out,

Just as it is important to reach true judgments about which individual ways of life are good, it is important to reach true judgments about which collective ways of life are good, and which political and social arrangements are just. These are undoubtedly powerful values and interests (Yong, 2011:391).

What does this suggest? The point, in short, is that the “freedom” in free and equal citizenship requires respect for both the political and personal autonomy that citizens need to develop opinions about politics and the good life. The “equal” in free and equal citizenship reflects a concern to ensure that these capacities are respected equally regardless of one’s race, ethnicity, or gender (Bretschneider, 2012:1). Now, having considered the humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians’ positions on the question of whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm or not, it is equally important to consider the situational moral relativist approach to the question of truth-telling and harm. The aim is to show with this approach, it could be established that the humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians are not necessarily antithetical on the subject matter.

A Situational Moral Relativist Approach to the Question of Truth-Telling and Harm

Given the view earlier considered, will it be appropriate to argue that humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians are totally antithetical on the question of whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm? In my view, this may not be correct. The reason is this. Just like the liberals, the humanitarians too are not

really against truth telling. In fact, they both believe in truth-telling and support it differently. The only condition in which the humanitarians canvass for suspension of truth is if and only if the reason involve is a humanitarian reason. That is, if the reason concerns with the promotion of human welfare. But if the reason is not a humanitarian reason then, for the humanitarians, truth should not be suspended. For instance, it is doubtful whether the humanitarians will support the idea of suspension of the truth in order to defraud others. The reason is simply because doing so will amount to causing more harm to the people defrauded.

Now, the best way to address the question of whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm is to adopt situational moral relativists' approach. The reason for the suggested approach is because it is not impossible for both humanitarian and the anti-humanitarian of the exponent of liberalism to accept this approach at certain level of discussion. What is situational moral relativism? According to John Tilley, situational moral relativism is an ethical view which states that whether a deed is right or wrong depends on the situation in which it occurs; thus, moral appraisals must be sensitive to circumstances. (Tilley, 1998:283).

In line with the above view, the question of whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm depends on the situation under consideration. That is, the situation involved will determine that. However, it is important to announce at this juncture that there are positive and negative situations. It is only the suspension of truth in positive situations that is consistent with morality, and not under negative situations. For instance, a criminal who lied (suspended the truth) in order to escape being punished by the law has suspended the truth under negative condition and that is not our focus. The reason is because such negative condition is not consistent with morality because it is an indirect way of justifying crime. Our focus is on some medical and media positive cases which we shall consider below. The reason why we focused on the positive cases is because we are not ignorant of the fact that some people may want to engage situational moral relativism to justify injustice.

Case 1: Medical Case

The point about this case is this: should a medical doctor tell the truth about the condition of the patient at all time? Knowing fully well that truth telling is an integral part of the physician-patient relationship, it should however be noted that there are situations whereby telling the patient the truth in a certain situation could cause harm for the patient. For instance, let us consider this case study:

There was a car accident whereby a man was badly injured while the family have been killed. This badly injured man regains consciousness in a hospital bed and he is critically ill and fighting for his life after a road accident. If this man were to ask about his family as soon as he has regained consciousness, would lying to him be justified? It certainly will be difficult to see how it makes moral sense to tell him the truth, that his wife and three other daughters have been killed, until his condition is no longer critical (Yusrita, 2018:135).

From the above case, is the suspension of truth consistent with morality? For the situational moral relativists, it is. The reason is because the present condition of the man in the above example is critical. It is obvious that the humanitarians will also supply a positive response in the above situation. Similarly, it is doubtful whether the anti-humanitarians will reject the above view or supply a negative response. The reason is that doing so will not be consistent with their argument against "deliberate harm" because telling the truth in the above medical condition will amount to deliberate harm. That is, if the situation is not well managed, it could lead to the death of the patient in the above case. Thus, withholding the truth for the humanitarian reason in such a medically sensitive situation appears to be the morally right thing to do. The reason is simply because that is what the situation demands because that is what morality requires at that particular moment.

However, we are not ignorant of the fact that it is not impossible for a critic to make attempt to undermine the above case. How? It could be argued that even given the above case study, it is not in all cases that withholding the truth in such condition could cause harm. For instance, in a situation whereby the man in question has been thinking about how to terminate the lives of his wife and children because he got a privileged information that they are planning to kill him untimely so as to take possession of his properties, hearing such truth that his wife and children just died may as a matter of fact, aid his quick recovery instead of worsening his health condition. Thus, the claim that truth-telling in such a medical condition could be fallacious because it is based on a mere assumption.

As a rejoinder to the above counter objection, one may argue that the above objection is not strong enough. It is not strong enough because the above counter objection is also based on a mere assumption. The reason is this. If the man in the accident scenario did not have any information that his wife and children planned to kill him, and if the man so much love his family, suck from such truth (the news about their death) is enough to kill. The point is that whenever there is a clash between the truth and human welfare in such medical situation, human welfare should have it.

Case 2:

In community Q, there is a particular Mr. Y who after taking too much hard drugs became mentally derailed suffering from schizophrenic psychosis. One beautiful morning, Mr. Y picks his gun and enters into a particular grocery store to look for the owner of the store with the intention to kill whoever owns the store. Since he doesn't know the real owner, upon entry, he started asking for the owner of the store with gun in his hand. When he eventually met the owner of the store, being fully aware of Mr. Y's intention, he decided to tell him that the owner of the store is out of town.

In the above case, it is evident that the owner of the store suspended the truth to prevent harm. Given the situation in the above case, situational moral relativists will argue that suspending the truth in the face of such danger is consistent with morality. Interestingly, it is not impossible for both humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians to agree that suspension of truth in such condition is consistent with morality due to the reasons given in case 1.

One possible objection to the above case is that, the owner of the store should have spoken the truth because it is not impossible for Mr. Y who is the schizophrenic psychosis patient to change his mind. One way to reply the above counter objection is that if Mr. Y does not change his mind, not withholding the truth from him could be disastrous for the owner of the store. Thus, withholding the truth for self-defence is not inconsistency with morality because that is what the situation demands. This is quite different from withholding the truth in order to defraud others. That will amount to treating or using those people as a means to an end which is inconsistent with morality.

Case 3: Media Case

The point about this case is this: should a journalist report the truth at all time even if the truth is inimical to the peace and security of the people? Though, the ethics of journalism is to seek the truth always and to report it, but returning a positive answer to this question may not be consistent with morality. Arising from the fact that the public have the right to be informed about any matter of public concern and that a good journalist should always tell the truth, but such right may not be guarantee at all time depending on the issue under consideration. For instance, there are situations where it may be pertinent for the media to withhold the truth for the purpose of national goal and unity because failure to do so could lead to war or conflict.

There is a slogan that says 'Journalists should do no harm'. This is what led to the principle of harm limitation in journalism ethics. Principle of harm limitation deals with the questions of whether everything learned should be reported...it means that some weight needs to be given to the negative consequences of full disclosure.⁵ Consequently, this principle provides an exception to the claim that journalist ought to seek the truth and report it always.

Case 4: Others

In Joshua Chapter 2, Rahab the harlot hid the two men on the flat roof of her house, under large bundles of flax. When the soldiers arrived to look for the spies, Rahab told them that they were not there. The soldiers searched the tavern, but Rahab had hidden the spies well. The spies agreed to protect her and her family but explained that she must hang a scarlet rope out of the window so the Israelites would know which home to spare.⁶ What Rehab did in the above example was that she suspended the truth to prevent harm because human life is so sacred.

Evaluation of the Cases

Now, in the final analysis, are the actions in the above cases i, ii, iii and iv really consistent with morality? The above cases, under such situations are morally right especially for the humanitarian reason. As hinted earlier, the reason is simply because, if the truth is not suspended in the above cases and contexts, it could cause harm to the moral agents involved.

Interestingly, the fact that the anti-humanitarian posture of the liberals argues in defence of truth telling does not imply that they support wilful harm, especially when one has the knowledge that such truth could cause harm. In fact, their slogan is "cause no harm". J.S. Mill, for instance, gave an interesting account about situations in which suspension of truth could be consistent with morality. As a liberal, J.S. Mill in his 'Harm Principle' states that "the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (Mill, 2003:80). The above quotation is self-explanatory.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Journalism_ethics_and_standards&oldid=1072822084

⁶ Joshua Chapter 2 verse 1

Going by Millian's account, one moral drawn from the above view is that, the only situation or condition upon which one can be denied of his/her freedom is when one engages in activities that could cause harm to others. By extension, for a liberal like Mill, suspension of truth is not inconsistent with morality so long as it is done in order to prevent harm. Thus, it is our view in this paper that the gap between the humanitarians and the liberals on the question of truth-telling is not as wide as Jonathan Rauch assumed. The reason is simply that, just like humanitarianism, the anti-humanitarianism is not also an anti-welfare political theory.

Conclusion

The paper examined the ethics of truth telling and certain moral issues that are associated with it such as the issue of autonomy, benefit or harm. The paper explored the humanitarian and the antihumanitarian approaches to the issue as enshrined in the Jonathan Rauch's *The Humanitarian Threat*. The central question for the paper was that whether we should suspend the truth to prevent harm. Both humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians supplied different responses to the question. While the humanitarians supplied a positive answer, Rauch argued that the antihumanitarian posture of the exponents of liberalism supplied a negative answer. The paper considered the humanitarian argument that puts the welfare of the people above the truth or anything else. Meanwhile, for the liberals of Kantian version, the right to speak the truth must be guaranteed at all time. This paper argued that, in practice, the morality of truth telling is not only context bound, it also depends on what the truth is meant to achieve. Thus, the suspension of the truth may be consistent with morality in some medical and sensitive security situations due to the tendency to cause harm. The paper did not argue that the truth be suspended arbitrarily or for mischievous reasons. It only identified some practical situations under which suspension of the truth may not be inconsistent with morality.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle, *Aristotle Politics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905.
Audi R., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
Bennett, J.T., "The Harm in Hate Speech: A Critique of the Empirical and Legal Bases of Hate Speech Regulation" in *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, Vol. 43:3(2016):451.

- Bretschneider, C., *When the State Speaks, What Should It Say! How Democracies Can Protect Expression and Promote Equality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Bury, J.B., *A History of Freedom of Thought*. London: Effrey Kraus, 2004.
- Crenshaw, K.W., *Words that wound*. Westview: Boulder, Co., 1993.
- Dry, M., "Political Philosophy and Its Relation to American Constitutional Law: A Consideration of Mill," in Meikle John ed., *Constitutional Commentary*, vol. 11(2000):81.
- Fish, S., "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too" in Daniel Bonevac, ed. *Today's Moral Issues*. London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1996.
- Haidt J. and Graham J., "When Morality Opposes Justice: Conservatives Have Moral Intuitions that Liberals May Not Recognize" in SOC. JUST. RES. vol. 20, (2007):98-99.
- Kant, I., *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Edited and translated by Allen W. Wood). New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Kant, I., *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, translated by Kant, I., *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Moral*. Trans. by James Ellington. Third edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.
- Kagan, E., "Regulation of Hate Speech and Pornography After R.A.V." in *University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 60, (1993):873.
- Kalven, H., Jr., *A Worthy Tradition: Freedom of Speech in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Lewis W., *Beck*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.
- Meiklejohn, A., *Political Freedom: The Constitutional Powers of the People*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.
- Mill, J.S., *On Liberty*. Stefan Collini, ed., Cambridge U. Press, 1989.
- MILL, J. S., *On Liberty*, edited by Alburey Castell. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, Inc., 1947.
- Mill, J.S., *On Liberty*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978.
- Mill, D. V., "Freedom of Speech," in Edward Zalta ed. The SEP, 2021.
- Rachels, J., *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2012.
- Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice*, London: Routledge, 1981.
- Schauer, F., "Harry Kalven and the Perils of Particularism" in *University of Chicago Law Review*, vol.56(1989): 397.
- Slagle, M., "An Ethical Exploration of Free Expression and the Problem of Hate Speech" *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 24(2009):238.
- Tilley, J., "The Problem for Normative Cultural Relativism" in *Ratio Juris*. Vol.11, No. 3 (1998): 283.
- West, T.G., & West, G.S., *Plato and Aristophanes: Four Texts on Socrates 73 (24b-c)* Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- Yong, C., "Does Freedom of Speech Include Hate Speech?" in *Res Publica*, vol. 17(2011):390.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Journalism_ethics_and_standards&oldid=1072822084

