

COMMENTARY

The ignoble lie protects only the teller



Victor Davis Hanson
Columnist

In a controversial passage in Plato's "Republic," Socrates introduced the idea of the "noble lie" ("gennaiois pseudos").

A majestic fiction, he says, could sometimes serve society by persuading uninformed citizens of something good for them.

Ever since, many prevaricators have used the excuse that they lied for the common good.

Take Dr. Anthony Fauci, our point man on the COVID-19 epidemic.

Fauci misled the country about mask-wearing during the pandemic by claiming they were of little use. But he argued that he lied so the public would not make a run on masks, deplete the supply, and thus rob medical professionals of protective equipment.

Fauci also told "noble" lies about the likely percentage of the public needing to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity. He kept raising the bar — from 60 percent to 70 percent to 75 percent to 80 percent, to 85 percent.

Apparently, Fauci feared a lower figure, even if accurate, might lull people into complacency about getting inoculated.

Fauci also lied about his own role in routing U.S. aid money to subsidize gain-of-function viral research at the Wuhan virology lab — the likely birth-

place of COVID-19.

Either Fauci was hiding his own culpability, or he believed the American people might not be able to fully accept that some of their own health officials were promoting the sort of research that was partially responsible for more than 700,000 American deaths.

Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas has serially lied about the number of undocumented immigrants who have crossed into the United States.

He falsely claimed mounted agents were whipping migrants. He fibbed about the purported lack of federal data of apprehensions, detentions, and deportations. His assertion that the border is secure was a joke.

Apparently, Mayorkas believes the public would go ballistic or his own administration would be roundly despised, if he told the bitter truth about the border: by intent, the Biden administration has apparently deliberately left it wide open.

And it will likely allow 2 million undocumented immigrants into the country in the current fiscal year.

Lots of other unelected federal officials lied over the past five years by claiming or implying that harming the Trump administration was in the public interest.

Former FBI directors Andrew McCabe and James Comey likely misled the nation. McCabe admittedly lied that he did not leak FBI information to the media.

James Comey lied under oath on

multiple occasions in congressional cross-examinations and claimed he did not know or could not remember basic facts about his own role in promoting the Russian collusion hoax.

Apparently, Comey and McCabe believed that by being less than truthful, they might better emasculate Donald Trump. And that result would be beneficial to America.

Our former intelligence leaders may have been the most brazen liars. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper lied to Congress about the NSA surveillance program, though he denied it.

When caught in the untruth, Clapper reverted to the noble lie that he gave the least untruthful answer, apparently on the pretense that he did not wish to damage the reputation of an important intelligence agency.

Ditto John Brennan, the former head of the CIA. On two occasions he lied under oath about the agency's monitoring of Senate staffers' computers and the deaths of civilians caused by U.S. drone assassination missions along the Afghanistan border.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mark Milley lied for days about the details of an accidental drone strike that killed innocent women and children in Afghanistan.

Either Milley is now lying when he says he warned Joe Biden about the disasters to come in Afghanistan or Biden is lying when he denies hearing any such advice.

Many of the details of Milley's con-

versations with authors Bob Woodward and Robert Costa as reported in their recent muckraking book were abjectly denied by Milley.

The list of such lies could be vastly expanded.

IRS functionary Lois Lerner never told the whole untruth about weaponizing the IRS.

Former Attorney General Loretta Lynch spun an implausible yarn that she accidentally bumped into Bill Clinton on a tarmac in Phoenix and never discussed the then-current FBI investigation of Hillary Clinton.

Special counsel Robert Mueller told a whopper under oath, claiming to know almost nothing about the Steele dossier and the misadventures of Fusion GPS. Both were the two catalysts that prompted his entire investigation of "collusion" in the first place.

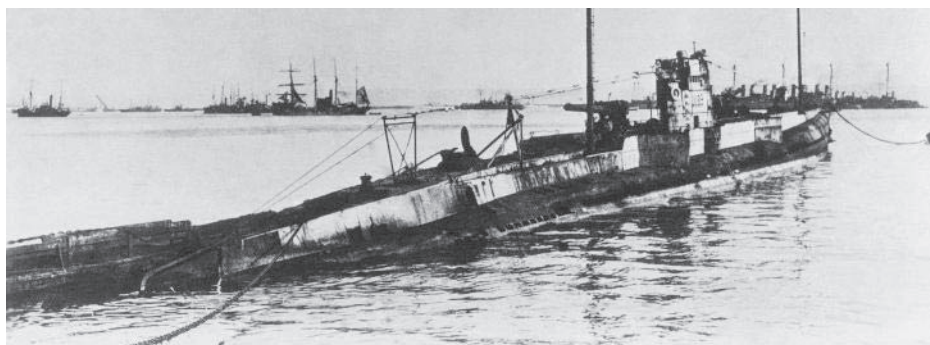
In some of these cases, when caught and exposed, the liars will hedge by claiming temporary amnesia.

But sometimes they admit they lied but suggest they did so for higher purposes like national security.

In truth, in most cases there was nothing noble at all in their lying. They simply spread untruths to protect their own endangered careers by masking their own wrongdoing or fobbing it onto others.

In other words, "noble lies" are rarely spun for anyone's interests other than those of the liars themselves.

Victor Davis Hanson is a classicist and historian at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



A World War I German U-boat similar to the one captained by Hans Rose, who anchored his U-35 in Newport and whisked away copies of *The Providence Journal* and *New York Times* that contained shipping news. AP

How a German U-boat captain hoodwinked Newport in 1916

Your Turn

Daniel F. Harrington
Guest columnist

One hundred and five years ago, on a gorgeous October afternoon, an object appeared in Newport harbor that would threaten to upend a presidential election and drag America into a bloody war.

It was Saturday, Oct. 7, 1916. President Woodrow Wilson was battling to keep neutral America out of World War I, already in its second year, and he was trailing Republican Charles "The Beard-Ed Iceberg" Hughes in the polls.

Enter the dashing Lieutenant Commander Hans Rose of Germany, 30, and his sparkling new submarine, the U-35. After securing proper permission, the clever U-boat captain dropped anchor just off the aptly named Rose Island in Newport Harbor, bellowing from a megaphone to the naval brass assembled at the nearby U.S. Naval War College, "I salute my American comrades!"

He would remain in Newport for only two hours, but it was enough to cause all the world to hold its breath.

Within minutes, Rose made it to shore to meet Admiral Austin Knight and other dignitaries who, along with their wives, would tour the German submarine while its crew of 36 men, dressed in their finery, entertained their American visitors.

The gravity of the situation was all too real. German U-boats had brought Britain and France to their knees with their deadly torpedoes while America and Germany clung to a fragile treaty that barely kept America out of the war and out of Germany's gunshots.

It wasn't until the following day that the thorns of Rose's goodwill visit were revealed.

Unnoticed by nearly everyone, Rose was careful to secure copies of *The Providence Journal* and *The New York Times* under the guise of being a happy tourist. But of course, these publications were rich in East Coast shipping news and the lieutenant would put these to good use. On Sunday, Oct. 8 the U-35 would sink five foreign merchant

vessels, including three belonging to Great Britain, just off the Nantucket Shoals.

Britain demanded a formal complaint be lodged by President Wilson and quietly hoped for a declaration of war. Wilson, clinging to neutrality and the polls, offered neither. To make matters worse, a U.S. destroyer had obeyed Rose's order to stand aside before he torpedoed one of the vessels, although to Rose's credit, he allowed all passengers to vacate the ships before destroying them.

Still, ex-president Theodore Roosevelt, candidate Hughes' de facto campaign manager, wasted no time in eviscerating the president. "Instead of speaking softly and carrying a big stick, President Wilson spoke bombastically and carried a dish rag," he said. Candidate Iceberg's comment were less memorable: "We have had intermittent peace without honor and intermittent war without honor." Sure.

Wilson remained calm and 30 days later the Democrat was reelected as president of the United States. Six months after Rose's unannounced visit — almost to the day — America finally declared war on Germany and entered World War I.

Lieutenant Rose would continue to surprise and find the spotlight.

Despite casualty rates of up to 70% for U-boat crewman Hans Rose would survive World War I, serve as an instructor and survive World War II and die a natural death at the age of 84 in 1969. The Pour le Merite recipient is remembered not only for sinking some 70 ships but also for his humanity; routinely allowing for or arranging the rescue of passengers on the vessels he engaged.

Rose and his U-35 are immortalized in a series of paintings by maritime artist Claus Bergen. It is not known if he ever returned to Newport or ever picked up another copy of *The Providence Journal*.

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Recalling an Irish patriot who made a great escape

Your Turn

Scott Molloy
Guest columnist

On a crisp morning in early November 1921, a Catholic nun nodded to her fifth-grade class. Dozens of students at St. Mary's elementary school in Pawtucket ran to the classroom windows to peer out.

The funeral cortege of a famous Irish-American hero passed by to his final resting place in the cemetery of St. Mary's Church. Hundreds followed James McNally Wilson's casket right into the graveyard.

Wilson had helped orchestrate one of the greatest escapes in world history. He had been a soldier in his youth in the early 1860s fighting for the British government in the 5th Dragoon Guards. So bad was unemployment in Ireland, many Irish found employment in the armed services of their colonizing neighbors.

In the belly of John Bull, Wilson achieved a keen understanding of political economy. He became an Irish revolutionary seeking a democratic nation. He soon deserted and formed an underground cell with like-minded soldiers.

At a court martial in Dublin in 1866, he received a death sentence that got commuted to life imprisonment in Fremantle prison in western Australia: a kind of living death in a place so desolate the cells stayed unlocked.

Wilson languished there performing manual labor with many other Gaelic political prisoners.

In 1873 he leaked a letter to comrades in the United States.

In part Wilson wrote, "In the tomb it is only a man's body that is good for works, but in this living tomb the cancer worm enters the very soul."

The stirring appeal for help electrified Irish patriots in America. Teary-eyed delegates from one group or another pledged assistance.

The organizations hired a Yankee sea captain from New Bedford, George Anthony, to sail an ancient whaling ship to the borders of the world in Australia and undertake a breathtaking and, some whispered, foolhardy escape.

Despite a harrowing voyage that took almost a year from April 1875 to March 1876, the creaking Catalpa reached its destination. Wilson and five comrades breathlessly boarded the ship only to be accosted by a British gunboat off the coast. Captain Anthony raised the American flag forcing the pursuers to stop in international waters.

The battered whaler arrived in New



The gravesite of James McNally Wilson, an Irish revolutionary who escaped from an Australian prison in 1876 and lived the rest of his life in Pawtucket. KRIS CRAIG

York City in August 1876. The Fremantle Six finally escaped prison and angry seas.

The Quaker captain whose relatives fought in the American Revolution guided them to safety through the suffocating mesh of the British naval empire.

The attending publicity proved more victorious for Irish freedom than any military skirmish. The tomb had been breached; the prisoners resurrected. Still, they looked like skeletons. Eventually they dispersed around the United States. None ever returned to Ireland where arrest warrants awaited them.

James McNally Wilson settled down in Central Falls and Pawtucket. He died at age 85 in 1921.

One Rhode Islander has made it his dying work to avoid forgetting the Fremantle Six. George McLaughlin, a retired teacher, and a handful of other acolytes, has traced the whereabouts of the overlooked patriots. He's set stone markers at some of the resting spots, including Wilson's.

On the 100th anniversary of the tomb author's passing, Saturday, Nov. 6, a gathering will take place at St. Mary's Cemetery, 103 Pine St., Pawtucket at 1 p.m. Libations and donations will follow at the Galway Bay Pub, 156 South Bend St., Pawtucket. Only two tombstones remain uninstalled.

In 1920 Irish President Eamon De Valera remarkably visited Wilson in Pawtucket. The executive then traveled to New Bedford to kneel at the gravesite of Captain Anthony.

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