

# TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

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*(Note: The following is a short excerpt of Donohue's Commencement Day address at Christendom College, given on May 15.)*

When I was growing up, there was a very popular game show on TV called "Truth or Consequences." In the real world, of course, telling the truth has as many consequences as lying, the difference being, however, that the consequences of not telling the truth are frequently pernicious. This explains why our culture is in so much trouble today—we have come to devalue truth. Indeed, in some quarters, particularly in the academy, we deny that there is such a thing as truth altogether.

Attacks on truth are commonplace. The attacks come in three forms: in the acceptance of moral neutrality; in the rejection of logic and evidence; and in lying.

To believe that all values are relative, that there is no such thing as truth, is to treat morality as if it were comprised of tastes and opinions. But morality is not an individual property, it is a social construct.

When Monica said that truth is what you feel it to be, she spoke like a real child of our age. In her world, truth is reduced to feeling, which means that it has no independent status. Truth, in this view, is not something we come to know, it is something we experience. And one experience is just as good as another. This is something that certainly would have resonated well with Jeffrey Dahmer. The trench coat mafia definitely believed that truth is whatever you want it to be.

It is fashionable these days to teach that "all knowledge is a social construct." For this we can thank the French. It was

one of their learned men who gave us deconstructionism, the belief that a text has no meaning of its own, that what matters is the ancestry and anatomy of the author, not his or her thoughts. That the person responsible for this intellectual heist was a fan of Adolf Hitler is not hard to believe.

The rejection of logic and evidence is the second assault on truth that is so commonplace today.

One of the most popular multicultural books is *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, the story of an indigenous Guatemalan revolutionary. The gist of the book is that the Menchus were a poor Mayan family who were exploited by the rich landowning class. Rigoberta was supposedly an illiterate girl. Her father organized a peasant movement to fight the landowners and Rigoberta herself joined with native Marxist guerrillas who came to save them.

The problem with this account is that there is no evidence to support it. Rigoberta was not illiterate and she was not denied the opportunity to go to school. She spoke two languages and attended a private boarding school. Her father was not a poor peasant but a rich landowner: he owned 6,800 acres of land. Finally, the Marxists guerrillas were not indigenous to the area and were, in fact, the ones responsible for terrorizing Rigoberta's relatives, most of whom they killed.

Rigoberta Menchu, we now know, was a Marxist terrorist who perpetuated an intellectual hoax. But she is still revered on many campuses and no one has dared say that she should be forced to give back her Nobel Prize for Peace. When confronted with the evidence against Rigoberta, Wellesley professor Marjorie Agosin said, "Whether the book is true or not, I don't care."

Sheer lying is the third assault on truth these days.

We could fill a huge university library with all the lies that have been told, and are still being told, about Communism. The left simply doesn't want to hear it and that is why a lying traitor like Alger Hiss can have a chair named after him at Bard College.

As we have seen, the consequences of lying can mean death. In 1995, on "Nightline," Ron Fitzsimmons, the executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, said that partial birth abortion was "rarely used"; it was used "only on women whose lives were in danger," he said. Two years later, he admitted, "I lied through my teeth." "It made me physically ill."

Lying is so acceptable these days that some get paid to do only that. I'm talking about the spinmeisters, those ladies and gentlemen who are hired to lie for public officials. They take the truth and stand it on its head. This is what the Clinton apologists did night after night. Chris Matthews recently said that he was amazed by the number of men and women who would come on his show defending Clinton to the hilt, only to bash the president as a liar when they were off the air.

This, then, is what happens when truth doesn't matter. The result is moral nihilism, pure and simple. In such an environment, intellectual death is followed by physical death. Truth, then, has consequences, and so does the rejection of it.