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Mitt Romney, Moral Intelligence and the Anti-Golden Rule

What are we to think of Mitt Romney and his long distance relationship with the truth? How do we evaluate his tendency toward prevarication? Does he tell these fish stories because *he* does not know any better? Or does he think that *we* do not know any better? Either way, his mendacity is evidence of a lack of moral intelligence.

Let us stipulate that most politicians spin the facts to suit their theory of the case. They, as do we all, pay attention to the set of facts that will support our side of the argument. Ideology is often the lens through which we view the fusion of past, present, and future horizons that creates the context for interpretation. We may have varying interpretations of the meaning of facts, but when we make counter-factual statements, that is something other than interpretation. That is misrepresentation. That is lying.

For example, Romney has said over and over that President Obama has traveled the world apologizing for America. Those of us who advocate for just peace theory know that offering an apology when it is appropriate is one aspect of just peace. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton apologized to the people of Pakistan for the accidental killing of some of their military personnel. Even though the apology was forced by Pakistan's refusal to allow equipment necessary to supply NATO in Afghanistan to cross its borders, it was nonetheless appropriate.

Just peace theory also considers truth-telling an important element in and of a just peace. While President Obama has told the truth about some of America's less than honorable actions in the world, he has not apologized. More than one fact-checking organization has looked closely at his speeches and determined that the president has not apologized. (<http://factcheck.org/2012/08/romneys-sorry-apology-tour-dig/>) This leads us to ask the question: Does Romney not know the difference between saying: "I shot the sheriff, but I did not shoot the deputy." and saying: "I am sorry I shot the sheriff, but I did not shoot the deputy." Perhaps I am not sorry I shot the sheriff. Perhaps shooting the sheriff was the least bad of an array of bad options. Perhaps saying I shot the sheriff is enough to demonstrate my good faith to work for peace.

Another example is Romney's accusation that President Obama is divisive because he speaks about income inequality, and he speaks about pay inequity between women and men. Does Romney not know of the logical fallacy of misdirection? Did his teachers at the Cranbrook School or Harvard or the school of life not teach him this? To accuse someone of causing the condition that they describe is misdirection. It is a misdirection of cause. It is a logical sleight of hand intended to take attention away from the problem and place it on the person. Did he think that we would not recognize the trick?

In its first commercial of the general election, Romney's campaign quoted Obama out of context quoting John McCain in 2008 to make it seem as if President Obama did not want to talk about the economy. The commercial became a joke for late night comics. When questioned about the deception, Romney said that sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander. Could it be that Romney did not comprehend the difference between candidate Obama quoting John McCain accurately and his campaign making it seem as if President Obama was saying something that he was not saying? (Rachel Maddow of MSNBC presented a segment on Romney's penchant for lying: <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/the-rachel-maddow-show/46816690#46816690>. Steve Benen writes a column at the *Maddow Blog*—"Chronicling Mitt's Mendacity"—that lists Romney's lies from week to week: <http://maddowblog.msnbc.com/news/2012/09/07/13731433-chronicling-mitts-mendacity-vol-xxxiii?lite>)

In another incident, Romney sent members of his Boston campaign staff to heckle David Axelrod, a senior campaign advisor for President Obama. It was a thuggish act of hooliganism unbecoming any campaign for anything let alone a campaign for the office of President of the United States. When asked about this, Romney returned to his sauce for the goose and gander moral logic. Again could he not perceive the difference between people who oppose your campaign showing up on their own to heckle you and sending your own workers out to do it? Two wrongs do not make a right. (Eric Zorn of the *Chicago Tribune* has written about this. http://blogs.chicagotribune.com/news_columnists_ezorn/2012/06/romney-hits-the-sauce-again.html)

In the days leading up to the Republican convention, the Romney/Ryan campaign accused President Obama of taking the work requirement out of welfare. The campaign wanted to give the impression that the president wanted to take something away from hard-working people to give to the undeserving. Romney said he thought President Obama wanted "to shore up his base." Again, fact-checkers looked at the claim and determined that it was not true. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/27/mitt-romney-welfare-waivers_n_1832871.html) If anything, the Obama administration wanted states to put more people to work, not fewer.

On Medicare, the Romney/Ryan campaign claimed that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) "robbed" Medicare of \$716 billion to pay for the ACA. It is true that the ACA makes cuts in Medicare, but those cuts come from overpayments to insurance companies and to providers of care. At the same time, seniors will receive drug benefits that close the donut hole and free wellness visits and screenings. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. After choosing Rep. Paul Ryan as his running mate, the Romney/Ryan ticket went on offense regarding Medicare because Ryan's plan to change Medicare from a guaranteed benefit to a voucher program that could end up costing seniors more out-of-pocket for health care is deeply unpopular. Moreover, while Romney/Ryan attack President Obama's plan, the Ryan budget makes the same cuts.

And the hits just keep on coming.

The dominant theme of the Republican National Convention was: We Built It. For weeks before the convention the Romney/Ryan campaign promoted the lie that President Obama thinks business

people are not responsible for the success of their businesses. What President Obama actually thinks is that business success comes through the risk-taking and hard-work of entrepreneurs *and* the stability provided by government. It is the people as a whole, represented by local, state and federal government that provide the infrastructure that allows goods and services to move from here to there and provide an educated work force. We the People provide police and fire protection and a legal system that makes for a stable business environment. One critical question in the 2012 election is the role of government in society and how best to pay for it.

In the wake of Paul Ryan's speech before the Republican convention, pundits were straining to find euphemisms for lying. They used words such as inaccuracies, misstatements, rewriting history, playing fast and loose with the facts, misrepresenting the facts, stretching the truth. Sally Kohn writing for FoxNews.com said:

[T]o anyone paying the slightest bit of attention to facts, Ryan's speech was an apparent attempt to set the world record for the greatest number of blatant lies and misrepresentations slipped into a single political speech. On this measure, while it was Romney who ran the Olympics, Ryan earned the gold.

[\(http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/08/30/paul-ryans-speech-in-three-words/\)](http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2012/08/30/paul-ryans-speech-in-three-words/)

Romney's acceptance speech was also full of political prevarication. He intimated that President Obama wanted to redistribute prosperity, that he had raised taxes on the middle-class, that his policies have not created but rather depressed job growth, that the president has "thrown allies like Israel under the bus." Romney pulled out the old tired lies that Obama is robbing Medicare and "[the] president began his presidency with an apology tour." In a strange kind of distorted projection of his own distorted reflection, Romney said President Obama had made attacking success the centerpiece of his campaign. The truth is that Romney has made this distortion of President Obama's words the centerpiece of the Romney campaign.

When one witnesses the pageant of lies that was the Republican convention, one wonders if these speakers have any sense of responsibility to their families, to their own personal stories and to history. Lies are corrosive. They undermine other things that the liar says. They tarnish the brilliance and beauty of any other story that the liar tells. Both Ryan and Romney told wonderful stories of their parents. Yet, the political lies they told made the beautiful family stories less beautiful because if they were lying about politics could we believe the other stories?

And they told these lies in front of their children. How can they teach their children to be truth-tellers when nearly everyone is calling their lies what they are? These speeches will be preserved in history. What will they tell their grandchildren and what will their grandchildren tell their grandchildren about their ancestor who ran a dishonorable campaign for the highest office in the land, a campaign that became a joke for a claim by one of its campaign managers that "we're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact checkers." (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/01/us/politics/fact-checkers-howl-but-both-sides-cling-to-false-ads.html>)

We remember Mitt Romney's father –Gov. George Romney—as a man who never achieved the presidency, but who was an honorable man. He released 12 years of his tax returns and walked out of Barry Goldwater's acceptance speech in 1964 because of Goldwater's positions on civil rights. George Romney was a man of integrity who we all can admire. He is an American patriot who is important to the history of this country even though he never became president. Such cannot be said of his son who does not seem to care very much about our estimation of his integrity.

(<http://aboutmittromney.com/georgeromney.htm>)

The speeches before the RNC are only campaign speeches, only hot air. We can label them as elements of a pageant of lies intended to win the presidency by any means necessary, an example of the human will-to-power and move on. However, on September 11, 2012, Romney's by any means necessary will-to-power took on a more troubling aspect. On the eleventh anniversary of the horrific attacks by al-Qaeda against the United States, demonstrations broke out against the United States in Egypt and Libya. People took to the streets because of a video originating in the United States that was disrespectful of the Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him). In Egypt the crowd scaled the embassy walls and tore down the American flag. However, in Benghazi, Libya, a violent faction that it seems at this writing was intent upon doing grave harm, possibly in retaliation for the killing of the second in command of al-Qaeda, Abu Yahya al-Libi, attacked the embassy and killed four people, including the US Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens.

About 6 a.m. EDT, before the attacks, the US embassy in Cairo issued a statement that read in part: "The Embassy of the United States in Cairo condemns the continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions."

At around 10:24 p.m. EDT, Mitt Romney issued the following statement:

I'm outraged by the attacks on American diplomatic missions in Libya and Egypt and by the death of an American consulate worker in Benghazi. It's disgraceful that the Obama administration's first response was not to condemn the attacks on our diplomatic missions, but to sympathize with those who waged the attacks.

(<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/09/12/us/politics/libya-statements.html>)

Again, either Romney and his advisers did not completely read the embassy statement, or they misunderstood it, or they did not care about the lives of the people who were in harm's way but were entirely focused on their own will-to-power. There is nothing in the statement that sympathizes with the people perpetrating violence against the embassy. It was a statement intended to prevent violence by telling people that the United States condemns anti-Islamic expressions. While the Constitution of the United States of America guarantees freedom of speech, there is nothing that says the government of the United States of America has to defend a particular kind of speech. The embassy was right to communicate the nation's condemnation of this video.

The next day, Wednesday, September 12, Romney reiterated his criticism. He returned to his lies about appeasement and apology. Romney said that he wanted to defend American values. A hateful

insult to another religion is *not* an American value. The producers have a right to make it, but the administration does not have an obligation to defend it. Romney clearly does not see the difference. At this tragic moment in America's collective consciousness, Romney injected politics in a most inappropriate way and unnecessarily added anger to our national grief.

This raises the question of Romney's moral intelligence.

Moral intelligence is a concept in business ethics that recognizes the importance of integrity, responsibility, empathy and forgiveness in effective leadership. In their book, *Moral Intelligence: Enhancing Business Performance & Leadership Success*, Doug Lennick and Fred Kiel say that moral intelligence is "our moral capacity to determine how universal human principles—like those embodied by the "golden rule"—should be applied to our values, goals, and actions."

The Golden Rule says: In *EVERYTHING* do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Romney is given to saying: "what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander." This is tantamount to an anti-Golden Rule. Romney's anti Golden Rule is: "do unto others as you imagine they have done unto you." Such tit for tat moral logic is a dangerously immature approach to ordinary life not to mention a morally ignorant and reprehensible way to think as president of the United States. Such reasoning and actions do not demonstrate or foster the values we as a nation want to project to the world.

Lennick and Kiel say that moral intelligence is a kind of aptitude: "Without it, no amount of training will turn us into moral leaders." Further, integrity is a principle element in moral intelligence. A leader with moral intelligence stands for h/er values even when s/he must stand alone. S/he is not afraid to speak-up for what s/he thinks is right and vigorously challenge what s/he thinks is wrong. S/he perseveres especially when the going gets difficult and others around h/er say: "go small" or "go slow."

Earlier this year, Romney showed his unwillingness to stand-up to bullies among his supporters when radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh called Georgetown law student Sandra Fluke a "slut." Romney's response was very weak tea. And, his unwillingness to admit that the Affordable Care Act is practically the same as the health-care law he signed as Governor of Massachusetts, that it is at least a starting place for providing universal health care in the entire nation, shows a lack of courage and integrity and thus a lack of moral intelligence. His habit of lying is evidence of a lack of moral intelligence, and his performance on September 11, 2012 and in the days following shows that he cannot discern the distinction between the right to say hateful things and the obligation to defend the hateful things that are said. We can defend the right without defending the expression of the right.

The concept of moral intelligence is akin to judgment, character, temperament, instinct, discernment. Lennick and Kiel tell us that often when businesses are in the process of hiring an individual for a particular position, they are looking at many candidates who can technically do the job. They hire the person whose moral intelligence coheres with the company's values. The Republicans are good at telling the nation that the government ought to run as a business runs. This is much too simplistic, and to analyze this statement is beyond the scope of this essay. However, as we look at the two men who are running for President of the United States, it is important that we keep our values as a country in mind.

We the People of the United States are hiring a new president. We have to keep our values in mind, and I say that truth-telling ought to be a core value. In just peace theory, truth, respect and security are three core principles of both peacemaking and of personal integrity. I say President Obama is a just peace president and understands this. Mitt Romney does not respect either himself or the nation that he says he loves enough to tell the truth. The principle of security not only means safety from harm, but it also means that each individual ought to be secure in the knowledge of his or her own worth. We ought to know that we are loved with a radical love by Divine Love. When we live in this arc of safety, we need not live on lies. We need not desperately cling to the will-to-power that causes us to lose our moral minds.

The poet May Angelou gives us an important bit of wisdom when she says: "The first time someone shows you who they are, believe them."

No one will say it. Republicans will not speak of Romney's lack of moral intelligence because he is their standard bearer. The Democrats and the Obama campaign will speak of it obliquely, politely, lest they are accused of character assassination. So I will say it straight out.

Mitt Romney lacks the moral intelligence to be president of the United States of America.