

Lying is wrong

It is widely accepted amongst human beings that lying is a part of human interaction. The severity and frequency of these lies differs from person to person but it is fair to theorise that almost everyone on the planet has told a lie at some point in their lives, whether it is a large or small one. However, many people, even those who do tell untruths, dwell on the possible consequences of this habit, both personally and for society as a whole. Lying also has very serious repercussions in the legal world, with an abundance of prosecutable crimes relating to the withholding of information. This essay will argue that lying is wrong due to its impact on both society, and individual people and their ability to make decisions.

First we must consider what is meant by a lie. Some people may count withholding the truth as a lie, even though it does not involve the direct spread of misinformation. The Oxford dictionary defines a lie as 'an intentionally false statement' and is the interpretation that shall be used throughout the rest of this essay, as it notes a deliberate intention to tell untruths which can be proved, unlike the withholding of information which may be more subjective.

Many people do not view lying a serious offense, as telling untruths may not always seem completely wrong. The most common example people use for the positive consequences of a lie is in order to spare someone's feelings, usually a close friend or family member who asks for advice or help. In most circumstances these types of lies can be seen as innocuous, after all not everyone needs or wants to hear the truth all the time. Sometimes, the alternative to lying can be to intentionally upset someone by telling them the truth, which may be unnecessary and cruel. For example, telling a friend that they look nice in an outfit when they in fact do not. This is a situation most people have found themselves in at one point where they must choose to tell a small white lie or risk upsetting their friend, especially if the aforementioned person has already worn this outfit many times before or has some sort of sentimental attachment to it. In this situation lying may not be seen as completely wrong as it avoids intentionally causing someone harm.

However, small lies still present an ethical issue. By telling someone a lie, a false set of circumstances or truths are created in their head. Following the outfit example, if your friend then believes this outfit looks good on them, they may wear it more and more and so could cause themselves further embarrassment, especially if they were to find out the truth. By telling someone a lie, we alter their perception of circumstances and therefore impair their ability to make a well-informed, free decision. This means that a person who tells a lie can be morally held responsible for affecting a person's judgment and so could be held accountable for the consequences of the lie. Your friend may be angry at you for telling them they look good and so you are held responsible for them embarrassing themselves after your actions.

This impairment of judgement becomes more serious in a legal argument, especially pertaining to contract law. When a contract is created, both sides have willingly chosen to

enter into a legally binding agreement based on the conditions negotiated between the parties. If one party has told a lie about the agreement, this has removed the other side's ability to make a fully informed decision. For example, if one party selling a house to another party has lied about the presence of mould in one of the rooms, they have impaired the buyer's ability to make a fully informed choice on whether or not they wanted to buy the house. Whilst they may have wanted to buy it believing that the house was mould free, its presence may alter their decision and so the contract has been agreed under false conditions. If it is ruled that the terms of the contract have been invalidated by the lie then the consequences, besides a great deal of hassle for both parties, are relatively minor. However, if it is decided that the contract is still valid and legally binding, one party is put at a disadvantage as they now have to deal with the impacts of a new agreement. It may be declared that the contract to buy the house is still legally binding and so one party not only has to accept that the consideration is now unbalanced, but that they are now responsible for solving a previously unforeseen problem.

Some philosophers have also considered the impact that lying has on our society. By accepting it as a everyday action with few consequences, people can build up an expectation that what they are told is a lie and so mistrust and apprehension is build between members of our community. When we hold the assumption that people may be telling us untruths, it creates a barrier to communication and teamwork that can stunt progress and create paranoia. The Swedish philosopher Sisella Bok argues in favour of the Principle of Veracity (a strong moral presumption against lying), pointing out that a certain level of trust is needed between people in order for a society to function, and that lying can act as a barrier to the development of trust. When one person tells a lie, it feeds into the assumption that everyone is lying and so trust between people is destroyed.

In conclusion, whilst lying may often seem like a less harmful, appealing option than telling the truth, even the smallest lies can have serious ramifications within society. The impairment of judgement that results from lying also creates a big issue legally as contracts may be formed on the basis of untruths, which can either invalidate them or leave one party with unequal consideration