

Lying is Wrong

According to the Oxford Dictionary¹, lying is defined as the use of ‘an intentionally false statement’. I aim to discuss whether the use of an intentionally false statement is wrong and determine the reasons for it being so.

From experience I believe that fundamentally, lying is wrong. I have seen even the most insignificant of lies evolve into something much more sinister and upsetting than was intended. Lies tend to lie at the heart of many issues that people face. I find that for an action so damaging lying is done so frequently, unlike some other damaging actions such as stealing. Therefore, considering how often we lie as humans, I aim to establish how wrong the act of lying really is.

A first possible reason for lying being wrong is that in my opinion, a lie is an abuse of trust. No matter how small or unimportant the lie may be, it undermines the level of trust held by those who are lied to. Trust is incredibly important and as humans, we rely on trust every day. From getting in the car with someone else driving to simply holding a bank account we need to be able to have trust. Once a lie is told and trust breaks down, the relationship between the liar and those lied to suffers greatly and the trust can never really be restored to how it was prior to the lie. For me, the fact that lying is so damaging to something as valuable as trust means that it can't be justified.

Having said this, there are some exceptions where lying could be more justified. For example, when lying is done with the intent to protect others the benefits of lying become greater. Every lie comes with a cost (the breakdown of trust and discomfort caused when the lie is discovered) but certain circumstances mean that the costs and benefits begin to balance. By not telling a young child the real reason why their brother has been jailed could give them the opportunity to reach a stage where they are mature enough to cope with the news effectively, saving them from being completely overwhelmed at the time of the incident. This is a very short term viewpoint, however. Overall, in the long term, the costs of lying begin to build up. They may even cancel out any benefit gained from protecting someone from the truth at an inconvenient time. People may struggle to understand why the truth was kept from them and this could lead to a breakdown in relationship between those who told the lie and those who were lied to. Trust may be lost. Arguably, a loss of trust is costlier than a poor reaction to upsetting news delivered at an uncomfortable time. Therefore, I think that even in the interest of protecting others, lying should be avoided and is wrong.

Furthermore, lying (including the use of white lies) is inefficient. When the truth is avoided and people act on false information the correct / best outcome is not often reached and time and resources can be wasted. When a doctor has a patient that has a condition affected by the actions of the patient, not disclosing the full severity of the condition could be catastrophic. If the patient doesn't understand the scale of the measures that need to be taken to improve their health then they may never take the right action to get better. People

¹ (2018) 'Lie' [online] Oxford Dictionaries. Available at : <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/lie> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2018].

have to know the full story. The case is the same with those who have undesirable personality traits. Telling an unpleasant person that they are unpleasant may provide them with the stimulus needed to try and be nicer, thus stopping them from upsetting multiple people in the future. A good example of resources being wasted by lying in the real world is when a plea of not guilty is given when a subject is guilty. This lie means a jury is needed which, according to Lady Justice Hallet, could cost the state £20,000 for a case as small as the 'stealing of sweets from a supermarket'². Even when a defendant is not guilty and a trial is genuinely needed, this seems like quite a large figure. When a jury is required as a result of a lie being told this avoidable waste of resources seems even greater and more outrageous. For me, lying generally slows our journey to correct outcomes, wastes our resources and our progression as people.

Some may argue that lying can be justified when those who are trying to obtain the truth seek to cause considerable harm with it. This could include those with access to certain sensitive information who, when being questioned, answer falsely to an individual who seeks to use the information to harm others. I think that although it is more justifiable in this case than in others, lying is still not right and still can be avoided. When a lie is told, people can still act on the information given to them and can still cause harm. Even with this case being the most justifiable (in my opinion) I still think that lying is the wrong option and is a mistake.

In conclusion, I think that lying is always wrong. The act of lying itself is painful to those involved but with the additional pain and angst caused as time progresses I think it becomes even more wrong. I also think that it is disruptive to our social networks that we rely so heavily upon. When trust is broken it is much harder for us to interact with people and therefore, like I mentioned earlier, we get less done and progress slower. I believe that because lying damages trust so much, it can't be justified and therefore it is wrong.

² Rudgard, O. (2017). Senior Court of Appeal judge: Remove right to jury trial for petty criminals. The Guardian, [online] Available at : <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/22/senior-court-appeal-judge-remove-right-jury-trial-petty-criminals/> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2018].