

'Lying is wrong' Discuss

There are many different approaches and points of view towards lying as a whole and also in specific circumstances. This essay will cover philosophical and moral structures regarding lying; legal implications of lying in a multitude of scenarios, situations in which society can deem lying as acceptable and also examples of types of lies and the outcomes of these, which all allow us to identify reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the statement and eventually reach a balanced conclusion.

The existences of laws in a country are for the overall protection of the public to prevent what are generally seen as moral wrongs and endangerment to people (Judicial Learning Center, 2015)¹ (murder, rape, theft) for example. The very fact that lying isn't actually illegal could lead one to conclude that it isn't seen as of great importance when it comes to morality and protection, although lying to someone can cause great emotional and psychological damage² (Zander, 2017). However it can then be argued that although lying is seen as wrong due to the damages it can cause; it most likely cannot be made illegal due to expected backlash and concerns over liberty and freedom of speech. Outlawing lying will make a government appear extremely authoritarian and will undoubtedly lead to protest and dissidents. Therefore, it is clear that although lying is legal, it doesn't necessarily make it right. However in a courtroom, lying is in fact illegal under the crime of perjury³ (Act, 2018 (revised)), showing that in certain situations lying is wrong and therefore punishable under the law. Lying is seen as wrong in the case of perjury because it undermines the integrity of the justice system, preventing an individual from receiving a 'fair trial'. False testimonies and lying while under oath are very significant actions showing that lying is a bad course of action to undertake (reflected in its legal status). Lying in this circumstance during a legal case is bad because it means that justice cannot be carried out properly due to the fact that misinformation is spread which questions the trustworthiness of the entire legal proceeding.

There are many philosophical and moral viewpoints over history regarding the use of lying, if it is ever acceptable and if so, the situations in which it is. Famous philosopher Immanuel Kant advocates for the total prohibition of lying, arguing that lying is always wrong.⁴ (The Philosophy, n.d.). His argument is that lying prevents humans from fully acting rationally. In a way it does, because it limits the information an individual is able to possess and utilise to make a rational decision, showing that lying is wrong in the way that it manipulates the actions and thought processes of people based on false information. However these types or arguments for universal truth telling come with many flaws. A well-known counter argument is the necessity of lying to protect someone. For example if a known killer is asking you for the whereabouts of a close family member, it is rational to not tell the truth in this situation to protect the wellbeing of yourself and the life of your relative. Therefore there are times where lying is not only the natural response but also can be seen by some as a morally righteous action in order to protect someone from harm. As a result, lying can be seen as needed in this circumstance.

¹ <https://judiciallearningcenter.org/law-and-the-rule-of-law/>

² <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/how-lying-affects-your-physical-emotional-health>

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/1-2/6

⁴ <https://www.the-philosophy.com/kant-right-to-lie>

Thirdly, there are different types of lies including 'white lies'. These are often trivial and unimportant lies which bear no major significance upon inhibiting the physical and emotional wellbeing of the recipient of the lie. Common examples would include phrases such as responding 'yes' to a teacher when asked if they have completed homework despite not doing so or telling a friend that their new haircut is nice even though you think otherwise. These types of lies aren't hugely significant in terms of causing harm and societal drawbacks, leading one to believe that these actions are not bad. In fact, the latter can be seen as a 'good' lie to avoid social conflict and divisions. There are three other types of lies⁵ (Types of lies and liars, n.d.) that can be categorised: beneficial, deceptive and malicious lies. Beneficial lies can be seen as good lies also because they are lies intended to help others. The earlier example in this essay of lying to protect a close relative is an example of this. Deceptive lies can be argued as wrong because they intend to harm the victim through concealing information/falsifying it. Therefore it causes damage emotionally and be thought of as morally wrong. As well as this, malicious lies are similar and involve spreading false information to discredit someone or attack their character. This can be seen as a 'bad' lie because it intentionally causes harm and is therefore seen as wrong. As further legal precedent to the argument, malicious lies are considered as crimes under certain circumstances⁶ (Defamation Act, 2013) which show that legally it can be seen as wrong.

Finally, actions involving lying such as fraud⁷ (Fraud Act, 2006) and tax evasion⁸ (Criminal Finances Act, 2017) are illegal. This is because it all stems from lying about something which directly leads to social harm and negative externalities. In the case of fraud, ordinary people may lose money as a result of being lied to, for example bank fraud and in the case of tax evasion, the government lose out. Therefore in this case, lying is bad because these crimes directly harm society.

In conclusion, there are different types of lies and situations which would require lying in order to create a positive impact on society. From a legal perspective, lying is only wrong when it threatens integrity in the judicial system (perjury), causes personal gain from societal misfortune (tax evasion & fraud) and when defamation causes "serious harm to the reputation of the claimant". From a moral and philosophical perspective, lying is seen as both good and bad ranging from universally bad (Kant) and beliefs that beneficial and white lies cause no harm to society and are therefore acceptable and even desired in certain situations. Overall, lying is wrong to the extent that it only involves illegal forms of lying, malicious and deceitful lies. White lies are morally acceptable and beneficial lies are sometimes necessary in society.

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⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/26/enacted>

⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/35/contents>

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/22/contents/enacted>

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