

'Lying is wrong.' Discuss.

Bernard Williams claims that a lie "is an assertion, the content of which is made with the intention to deceive the hearer with regard to that content." In essence, a lie must be told with the intent to deceive the recipient. These lies appear constantly within our society, in everyday interactions between two people and even online or in the media. The statement that 'lying is wrong' raises questions surrounding the morality of lying, and its effects on both the liar and the recipient. Effectively, 'lying is wrong' as it is a form of manipulation which leads to the recipient of the lie believing that the lie is a truth. The recipient may then take action on the information he has just received, thus acting under false information.

There is no doubt that 'lying is wrong' on a moral level. Williams continues that "we find it particularly natural to think deceiving people is an example of using or manipulating them, and that that is what is wrong with it". As lying involves the process of manipulating a person, it is effectively immoral to lie under any circumstances. Moreover, Emmanuel Kant believed that lying was always wrong, as we should treat each human being as an 'end in itself', thus questioning the morality of lying with the intent to deceive that person. By lying, the truth and the circumstances are misrepresented to the recipient; on a basic humane level that compromises the morality and integrity of the liar.

However, there are some that believe that lying is almost necessary under certain circumstances. Therefore, they argue that in some cases, lying is the moral thing to do as it spares the feelings of the recipient or aids them in achieving their goal. Those that argue this follow consequentialist theories, in which they believe that as the lie brings about better consequences, it is the correct decision. However, a duty based ethicist would argue that regardless of the consequences, lying is always morally wrong. The concept of a 'white lie' suggests that lying is acceptable when it is done with the intention to ease the emotions of the recipient. For example, if someone gives you a present that you have no intention of using, lying and showing gratitude is the social norm. However, even in this case the lie is told with the intention to deceive the other person, and so you are openly manipulating their emotions and thoughts. This is why lying can never be truly justified, even if it is done with the intention of sparing someone's feelings.

We must also explore the harmful effects of lies in order to fully grasp why lying is always wrong. It is clear that lies are the most harmful to the actual recipients of the lies, who are led to believe that the false information given reflects the actual truth. The recipient could then take action on the lie he has just been told, thus acting whilst being totally unaware that it was a lie. Furthermore, once the lie has been revealed, the recipient will feel hurt and unable to trust what people will tell him from then on, thus impacting the future of the recipient. Lying can only lead to harmful consequences for those involved, and thus lying is evidently wrong.

Equally, lying has negative implications for the liar involved. Assuming that the person who has lied understands the gravity of their choice to lie, they will possess what is known as a 'guilty conscience'. This may lead to personal suffering and doubt over their integrity, thus

having great implications on the liar. In the case that the liar and the recipient are in a form of relationship, this will also be damaged at the hands of the liar as soon as the lie has been found out.

Overall, it is undoubtable that whatever viewpoint is taken, lying is ethically and morally wrong, as it involves the deceit and manipulation of others who may be undeserving of it. Going by Kantian principles, by lying the liar is acting in their own personal interest, and thus fails to consider the impacts upon the recipient and how they are treated. Many people may concede that in some scenarios it is almost better to lie as it leads to better consequences, thus telling a 'white lie'. However, in reality there can be no such thing as a white lie, as every lie represents a compromise in the integrity and honesty of the liar. To conclude, lying is always wrong, regardless of the circumstances and intentions involved, and thus there should be no justification for the telling of a lie.