

Patrick, 17 years old, invited Aristotle and his other friends to his dinner party.

Aristotle, who has just been elected the President of his school's Student Union, wore to school a T-shirt which is estimated to cost £800. What surprising is that, despite ostensibly complimenting the new shirt, most people, including Aristotle's close friends, degrade it at his back. This poses a question to Patrick: Is lying wrong?

He went to sleep that night bearing that confusion in mind. In the dream, he finds himself in a strange living room, where Immanuel Kant was contemplating philosophy. Startled by his presence, Kant offered him a sit and some tea. Patrick introduced himself and briefed his concerns, while Kant listened in focus with a gentle smile.

Kant: "I understand. What do you think lying is?"

Patrick: "Does 'lying' mean 'not telling the truth'?"

Kant: "In this postmodern world, absolute truth<sup>1</sup> is nearly impossible to obtain. Instead, I would like to define lying as a process of information giving in which one person (the liar) gives another person(s) the information he believes to be false with the intention of deceiving

I will attempt to show that lying is wrong by proving that it is detrimental to the victim of the lie, the liar himself and it corrupts the society. We will also discuss to find whether lying is justifiable".

Kant, after a small drink of tea, slowly explained: "Lying corrupts the liar because it makes him distrusted by people. To the 'victim', it disrespects that person, because the liar treats them

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<sup>1</sup> Marian David, 'The Correspondence Theory Of Truth' (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>> accessed 12 June 2018.

merely as a means to achieve something. How would Aristotle feel if he discovered that many of his friends were taking advantage of him?”

He walked to the nearby bookshelf, took out a newspaper and passed it to Patrick.

Settling down, the philosopher continued: “This is illustrated in the example of human smuggling. Cầm was a girl from a poor ethnic minority in Vietnam’s northern border. She was fortunate to get herself a smartphone, with which she used to flirt with Long, a boy she knew through Facebook. When they met after chatting for a while, he turned out to be a member of the human trafficking network, chloroformed and attempted to sell her to China<sup>2</sup>. In this extreme example, the poor girl was seen as nothing more than a commodity, an instrument of getting revenue, and therefore is not treated the way humans are supposed to treat one another. Cầm was lucky to be rescued five days later, but the stigma would probably follow her for a lifetime. Long fled the country to escape the shame and legal allegations, but above all, people would never trust him again”

Patrick, stunned by the outrageous fact: “Are there any other reasons why lying is wrong, sir?”

Kant: “Lying is also wrong because *ex ante*, it corrupts all the moral foundations of the civilised society. All the values we uphold are partially or entirely based on trust. Friendship, for example, is the result of a long process of trust and belief. People become true friends only when they trust each other in hard time to get advice; confess with each other when they make mistakes to be forgiven. Without that, friendship is unattainable. Therefore, *xin* (faithfulness), as argued by

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Hodal, 'I Hope You'Re Ready To Get Married': In Search Of Vietnam's Kidnapped Brides' (*The Guardian*, 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/aug/26/ready-married-kidnapped-brides-vietnam-china>> accessed 10 June 2018.

Confucius, is one of the *Five Constants Regulations*, the most important core values of the society<sup>3</sup>.”

Patrick: “It must be justifiable in some cases. Suppose a friend was hiding in your house, and a murderer came to the door looking for him. Wouldn’t it be right to lie to the murderer?”<sup>4</sup>

Kant: “No it wouldn’t. Benjamin Constant argued that because the murderer has no right to the truth, I am exempted from the duty of being honest to him. Nonetheless, if I lied to the murder, I would be responsible to whatever consequences happen ex post, may it be my friend escapes the murder, or he is caught in the nearby shop because the murder has turned there as a result of me, unnoticed of the friend’s sneak out, telling that he was not in the house”.

Patrick perplexed: “Are you suggesting exposing your friend and praying that he has sneaked out?”

Kant laughed: “You may, but I would not recommend that.

The solution is clearer in the following case. In 1998, Bill Clinton was accused of having sex with an intern, Monica Lewinsky, in the White House. This scandal remarks one of his most famous denials: ‘I did not have sexual relation with that woman’. It was later revealed that the President did have ‘inappropriate relationship’ with Lewinsky<sup>5</sup>. Despite having misled the public, the information given was not wrong, but rather a carefully worded denial. Similarly to what Clinton did, I can tell the murderer: ‘I saw my friend in the supermarket 3 hours ago’, which is true. Hopefully this would mislead the murderer to search the supermarket in vain while I am exempted from any moral, and legal, responsibility of not telling the truth.

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<sup>3</sup> Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction To Confucianism* (1st edn, Cambridge University Press 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, Mary Gregor and Allen Wood, *Practical Philosophy* (1st edn, Cambridge University Press 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Sandel, *Justice* (2nd edn, Penguin Books 2010).

This is different from the lie, because albeit their similar purpose. With the misleading truth, Clinton might have been discredited to some extent, ex post. However, ex ante the American public does not cease to believe him, but instead ‘learn to listen like lawyers and parse such statements with an eye to their literal meaning’, as put by Harvard Professor Michael Sandel<sup>6</sup>. Most importantly, this type of true statement does not manipulate people as mere instruments but rather, leaving a chance for a careful listener to recognise”.

Kant finished his tea: “In conclusion, lying is wrong because it coerces the victim, corrupts the liar and demoralise the society. In military operations, sometimes the misleading truth does not work, and lies must be employed, but that does not make lying right. The ideas of right and wrong only regard the moral aspect of it, not its practicality”

Patrick suddenly wakes up now. He believes he has found out how to compliment Aristotle’s new shirt properly.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.137