

Indeed, Why Not Lie?

YOU ARE A LIAR! Admit it. You are not the only one. We all are! Each of us tells lies from casual little fibs to gigantic world-class whoppers. Falsehoods are an integral part of our daily lives. We stretch, bend and otherwise conceal the truth to protect our images, positions, relationships, possessions, loved ones, friends, associates, businesses, and nations. Existence in an orderly organized society demands it. Civilization as we know it would disintegrate into utter chaos if everyone in every instance spoke nothing but the absolute truth. Families would separate; friends would cease speaking to each other; commercial enterprises would falter into bankruptcy; and, no one would gain or retain public office if it were not for those necessary mitigating lies.

Indeed, lying is a normal human endeavor. It is an extension of our natural survival mechanisms. We instinctively seek to protect ourselves from anything which threatens to do us harm; and, when that threat is posed by the truth, we defend ourselves with a lie. Therefore, stop castigating yourself and admit you are a liar. Despite all of the claims to the contrary, when circumstances warrant it, you not only have the right, but the obligation, to tell a lie!

Is it moral to lie? Of course it is! Given circumstances and motivation, we are obligated to speak the untruth. For example, the texts of Judeo-Christianity endorse propitious falsehoods. In the Old Testament, Jehovah encouraged Moses to verbal deception by commanding him to ask the Pharaoh of Egypt for a three day sojourn in the desert to worship when both Jehovah and Moses knew beforehand the Israelites did not have the slightest intention of returning to Egypt. (Exodus 3:10 and 18) Moreover, Jehovah also commanded the Israelites, as a collective body, to 'borrow' silver, gold, and raiment from the unsuspecting Egyptian populace for that alleged three-day sojourn and to leave town without repaying that deceptively secured loan. (Exodus 3:21 and 22) Obviously, even Jehovah enjoyed a righteously profitable lie ... a thought that should be a source of immense solace for several television evangelists.

Is it proper to lie? Of course it is! We rarely condemn lying in general. Instead, we discourage only our own deception. For example, as parents, we readily encourage our children to lie to others but not to ourselves. "Junior, go tell the man at the door I'm not at home" is rightly proper, but "Junior! Don't you dare lie to me!" Indeed, we encourage the necessary deceptions ... Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy, notwithstanding. In fact, only an obviously cheap (unbelievable) falsehood upsets us. It belittles our intelligence and affronts our dignity. "How could you tell me such a blatant lie and expect me to swallow it?" On the other hand, most of us appreciate a well-executed deception. "Well, I'll be, that's really a good one on me." Con men almost are national heroes. Which of us has not marveled at or admired a clever well-contrived

scam? Therefore, is it proper to lie? Definitely, provided we strive for excellence in the art. Like a fine wine, no truth should be served before its time.

Of course, lying is a matter of conscience. It could be a potential source of guilt ... could be, because no guilt evolves from a justified or good lie. What secret agent in wartime would feel guilty over deceiving the enemy, especially if the deception saved many lives? Such lies elicit national honor! Indeed, guilt solely evolves from the perceived badness of the perpetrated falsehood. In other words, contrary to the popular misconception, lying is not patently evil. Instead, it spans the spectrum of moral values. There are good, bad, and neutral lies. Good lies benefit our existence. They protect our persons, loved ones, friends, associates, communities, or nation from harm. Police officers in sting operations tell such beneficial falsehoods which everyone except the criminals involved endorse because they reduce the oppression of crime. On a more common level, beneficial lies spare the feelings of others. "That hat you purchased, dear, looks fabulous! (on that other dummy in the store window)" is a good casual lie. It is an act of charity, the noblest of human virtues. Who would condemn such a selfless lie? Indeed, not many. The same holds true for neutral falsehoods. "You should have seen that trout I almost landed..." is neither good nor evil. Enhancing conversation by entertaining is its only redeeming virtue. Society is left no better and no worse as a result. (Besides, no one really believes that fish story sort of lie.) However, "I saw your husband out with another woman..." (when he was not) is most definitely a despicable falsehood. One should feel the pangs of conscience in perpetrating such a vicious lie. It bears false witness against another, violating the only commandment on the topic of lying received by Moses on the Mount. Obviously, malicious gossip is not sanctioned even by the Divine.

How should we feel when we lie? Relieved and gratified, if the deception is justified and successful. After all, there is no real trauma intrinsic to a good lie. Secret agents and police glory in their successful deceptions in battle with their respective adversaries just as each of us does in our own humdinger lies. ("If you're good, Junior, Santa will bring you oodles of toys.") Instead, trauma in lying is caused by the fear of discovery. Discovery of what? The truth, of course! And only when it is an uncomfortable truth. Yes, we fear the truth and not the lie! Naturally, that is why we chose to deceive in the first place! And whether we lie or not, we remain coping with that fear. If discovered in our falsehood, we merely are back to openly dealing with that fearful truth; that is, unless we can successfully evolve a more acceptable variation of our original lie. Besides, what does happen to us if we lie? Nothing! Not if we skillfully manage the deception. The truth will out is an old adage but not the necessary fact. And who can say, if we sufficiently delay its debut, the odds are no one will really give a damn. Even if ensnared in our falsehoods, we lose nothing. Not really. Everybody lies and everybody knows it! At its worst, we prove ourselves to be human (and not so clever liars), and others readily forgive and forget; that is, if our falsehoods were not vicious lies and we submit ourselves to the required modicum of groveling. In fact, if managed properly, discovery can be profitable! Witness examples like the Watergate lies. A famous lie will propel you into national

prominence and will sell a million plus copies of your otherwise unpublishable drivel. To be sure, many bestsellers evolved from a discovered lie.

In the practical course of our daily existence, when someone ensnares us in a lie, we brighten their lives. We give them a sense of immense personal satisfaction. They have caught us! Match point in the battle of wits. Take note of how superior and rewarded they feel. You owe it to some people to lie! Indeed, liar trapping is a social sport more exhilarating than big game hunting. It is a foray of stratagems in which, with the intensity of chess masters, each of us participates. We roam the social jungles like blood lusting predators, seeking to flush out a falsehood. Remember the last time you added a liar to your trophy case? You felt oh so-o-o smug and elated in having caught whomever, especially if it was a rather ingenious lie or a liar who normally made you feel insecure. It really made your day! "Gotcha!" Ahh, how the feeling is savored by our minds. In fact, liar trapping enjoys such universal appeal, the news media have turned it into a spectator sport, ensnaring prey of status for the rest of us to vicariously enjoy. Each evening at six and eleven, we sit before our television sets demanding, "Please, give us a whopper to go!" One flame broiled politician served, hopefully, with the traditional grain of salt. Thus, why should we deny others this personal satisfaction by sadistically telling the truth? They secretly will despise us for it. "The very least he could have done was to lie!"

What is a lie? Generally speaking, it is a suppressio veritu - a concealment of the truth by some overt act on our part. And by logical extension of this definition, we must be aware of the truth in order to commit a lie. If we are not, we merely engage in assumptions. Notwithstanding our intent or belief, the lack of proven certainty makes any statement no more than speculation on our part. Religious doctrines never are lies! Indeed, we must be certain of the empirical truth to perpetuate a genuine falsehood. Telling a friend, "No, I don't have twenty dollars to lend you." when you are not sure of how much money you have in your billfold, is not a lie, even if you believe you have fifty. You may or may not have the money. Either way, it is no more than guesswork on your part. To lie, you must ascertain and conceal a fact. (Ah ha, I have fifty dollars but I'm not lending this deadbeat a dime of it!) "Sorry, old buddy, but I'm all tapped out right now." Now, that is the essence of a lie.

What is a lie? It is a communication. It is a transmission of false information to one or more other individuals via speech, the written word, or gestures such as nodding (yes) or shaking one's head (no). It involves more than one person because, technically speaking, we cannot lie to ourselves. The so-called 'self deceptions' are delusions. We consciously believe we are acting on the truth as we choose to verbally define that truth to ourselves. Thus, without a clear awareness of the distinction between fact and fiction, we are not engaged in perpetrating a falsehood upon ourselves. On the other hand, when we are aware of the truth and intentionally seek to conceal it from another, we commit a bona fide falsehood. "I am the world's most deserving person" is a delusion. "I feel there are others who are more deserving than I" is the expected social lie.

Lies can be separated into two general categories: blatant falsehoods and plausible untruths. A blatant falsehood is a lie beyond the realm of probability. It is the common cheap attempt at deception that dupes only the most naive individuals. "Politicians are honest" is a blatant lie. Based upon past experiences, no one except P. T. Barnum's acclaimed sucker would accept the proposition that all elected representatives never commit a dishonest act. It is beyond the realm of probability (and gullibility). Self-respecting liar trappers simply ignore this shallow type of lies with a knowing sympathetic smile. Plausible untruths differ. They are deceptions that, though false, possibly could be fact. "Yes darling, you are the father of the baby I'm expecting", when the gentleman is not, is a plausible untruth. It is within the realm of probability. However, fortunately, in this instance, the issue is contestable in civil court.

Further, a lie can be active or passive. It can be overt or covert. An active or overt lie is an outright falsehood used to conceal a given truth. "I was working late at the office", when you were not, is an active falsehood. It is an overt falsification of the facts. Conversely, a passive or covert lie is an evasive statement that, in itself, is not a falsehood. "I just went somewhere to unwind a little before coming home" is a passive lie if, by unwinding, the gentleman means having an illicit rendezvous he wishes to conceal. In itself, the statement is true but, by its careful wording, it conceals the pertinent fact, the illicit affair. Generally, passive lies are more effective. They address generalities that are much easier to convey and defend because, in themselves, they are statements of fact. Governments thrive on lies of this sort.

All lying is perpetrated in the present moment and involves only present or past activities. Projections into the future do not constitute lies. "I did that", a past occurrence, and "I'm doing this", an ongoing activity, when you did not or are not, are falsehoods. "I will do that", a potential or future activity, is a promise. You might or might not perform the act at some future date. Even if you now intend not to do that promised thing, you might change your mind. Thus, the statement is, at best, speculative and not a lie. There are no before-the-fact falsehoods. Accusations to the contrary are no more than cheap shots taken by inept liar trappers who languor in unfulfillment and vindictiveness, and in breach of promise suits.

Finally, within the spectrum of lying, there are two abnormalities: mythophobia, the fear of telling a lie, and mythomania, compulsive lying without regard to circumstance, occasion or impact. Notwithstanding the hand wringing of misguided psychotherapists, a socially (and mentally) healthy individual falls somewhere between those two pathological extremes. He (or she) is not afraid to embark upon a falsehood when circumstance warrants it, but possesses sufficient self-restraint whenever there is no need to proffer a lie. Such an individual does not consider truth to be so precious a commodity that he uses it sparingly, but conserves his talent for deception for those truly marvelous and necessary lies. For liar trappers, such an individual is a most elusive quarry. He waits in the underbrush of truthfulness for that propitious moment when he springs forth with an overwhelming falsehood. Rarely is he ever ensnared.

Within the repertoire of society, there is an unlimited variety of lies. New mutant strains evolve daily, propagated by the ever-ingenuous human mind. Thus, it is impossible to provide a complete catalog of falsehoods. However, for the benefit of the novice mendacismatist (lie collector), the following constitute a few of the more prevalent basic types:

a. Fabrications: A fabrication is an outright undisguised falsehood. It is an overt proposition contrary to the truth. "I pay my fair share of taxes" is a fabrication. It expresses and communicates the notion that you have never and will never cheat the IRS - a proposition which, besides being patently false, no one will believe. Only the most destitute and desperate liar trappers will stoop to ensnaring you in this particular form of lie.

b. Aspersions: An aspersion seeks to deceive by innuendo. Most often, it is a defamatory falsehood in the guise of a leading question that seeks to evoke a false assumption on the part of the deceivee. Aspersions commonly are delivered in two parts, often, with an extra prod thrown in at the end to stimulate the false assumption in the presumed denser mind - a setting of the hook, so to speak. Part one - the planting of the seed: "I'm not saying he cheats on his wife but..."; Part two - the adding of the fertilizer in the form of pure manure: "...what else could he be doing, staying out to all hours of the night..."; And for the denser minds, Part three - the extra prod to irrigate the crop: "...you tell me, huh?" Casting aspersions literally is a form of throwing the bull.

c. Omissions: An omission, like an aspersion, relies on innuendo. However, it consists of a technically correct statement that implies a falsehood to conceal the unspoken truth. "No police officer has ever caught me speeding" is an omission. It implies "I do not speed" - the false innuendo, while the truth is, "I usually speed but have never been caught in the act to date". Thus, while the statement is indeed accurate, the conclusion one seeks to elicit from the deceivee is false. We often categorize these as half-truths without fully acknowledging they also are half lies. Omissions are favored by optimists who also see the glass as being half full.

d. Misrepresentations: A misrepresentation is the stating of carefully selected facts to convey, by association, an intended falsehood concealing a specific truth. Indeed, it is an intricate sort of lie. "I can honestly swear that the majority of people residing in this great state are hardworking and trustworthy individuals and that I am proud to be a resident of this great state", when rendered by a lazy deceitful politician, is a misrepresentation. Each statement made is accurate. However, the speaker conveys, by association, the notion that he also is hardworking and trustworthy when, in truth, he is not. Misrepresentations are the stuff mouthwash and beer commercials are made of. Which of us has attracted that delectable person of our dreams by guzzling a potion of either slosh?

e. Exaggerations: An exaggeration is the traditional stretching of the truth to include and disguise a lie. Strictly speaking, it is an almost fact - the proverbial fish story - extended to any and all topics of conversation. "That trout I caught at the lake last week must have weighed over five pounds" is an exaggeration if, in fact, the fish in question barely was a keeper. However, except for the expanded weight of the lake denizen, the balance of the statement is true. Thus, an exaggeration usually is a harmless, entertaining fib unless, of course, it is rendered by an automobile manufacturer regarding the safety and reliability of your car. In such a case, the lie and not the truth, can hurt.

f. Distortions: A distortion is the commonplace bending of the truth. Like an omission, it conveys a false impression by innuendo. However, a distortion deludes not by omitting pertinent data but by not fully explaining the data presented. "Of the doctors surveyed, four out of five preferred our pain killer over the other leading brands" is a distortion if, in fact, the survey was selective. It is a factual statement used to convey the notion that the overwhelming majority of doctors preferred the particular brand, the implied lie. In all probability, the actual case was, the five doctors surveyed were on the company payroll and the one who chose another brand of painkiller is no longer in their employ.

g. Evasions: An evasion is a barrage of extraneous or irrelevant statements used to conceal the truth. Thus, to the average individual, an evasion is not a real falsehood but a tactful sidestepping of the issue without resorting to an actual lie. However, the intent and result is to conceal the truth. Thus, in practice, an evasion is a lie. "You think I've forgotten our anniversary, don't you? Especially with me not bringing home a gift and all. Sure, I've forgotten our anniversary in the past ... many times. But, that was in the past. I've had a very busy day today. Worked overtime, in fact. No point in trying to shop for a gift at this late hour ... especially with all the good shops closed. But, you wait and see. I'm getting you something really special tomorrow." Need we say that this is an evasion of the truth? You forgot! However, the most this evasion will garner is a strained bit of sympathy from someone other than your spouse. Spouses are notorious liar trappers whenever birthdays and anniversaries are concerned. They can be found dusting off their trophy cases weeks before the anticipated event.

h. Misinformation: Misinformation is the stringing together of plausible untruths to promote an overall blatant falsehood. "I left the office late this evening after working overtime and, as usual, the darn motor died ... again. So, I went into this motel to use the pay phone to call the garage and, would you believe, the darn pay phone was out of order. Well, this woman ... what's her name? She offered to let me use the one in her room. That's why you found me in here sitting on her bed" is mis-information that the Mrs involved will never believe. If she does, there are more than a few persons out there just dying to sell her several slightly used bridges.

i. Subterfuges: A subterfuge is a cover story. It is a falsehood offered as justification for a condition, event or activity in order to conceal its real nature or intent. Generally, the cover story is utilized to make something which otherwise would be unacceptable or improper appear acceptable or proper under the given (false) set of circumstances. "But darling, having my personal secretary readily available on this trip to Chicago is an absolute business necessity" is a subterfuge if the only business intended is the proverbial monkey business. While the alleged need for a secretary generally is a business necessity, for this couple, it is an outright lie that further conceals an illicit affair. Thus, a subterfuge could be called a fabrication-plus. However, to date, no spouse has ever fully believed such fabrications. They are inherently distrustful of any competition within a hundred yards of their mates. Besides, the executive in question is leaving himself (or herself) open to a massive sexual harassment suit.

j. Obfuscations: An obfuscation is an obscuring of the truth, similar to both omissions and evasions, except that it utilizes a double entendre to promote the falsehood. "Sir, I have never loafed while at work" is an obfuscation. At first glance, it implies the employee is a conscientious worker. Yet, upon closer inspection, while being technically correct, it obscures the truth and promotes a lie. The word "work" is the key to this falsehood. It could mean either one's place of employment or the act of engaging in one's job. While at work (engaging in one's job), one cannot be loafing. Thus, the employee states a fact. He does not loaf while engaging in his job. However, he does loaf at his place of employment. Therefore, the impression conveyed is utterly false. Obfuscations are lies you tell with your fingers crossed.

k. Ambiguities: An ambiguity is a vague statement to conceal the truth, thereby, promoting a technical lie. Some argue these are evasions or misinformation; however, those categories deal with some element of truth whereas an ambiguity involves statements that are neither true nor false. "If stealing is a sin and if my accepting your love without giving mine in return was stealing, I would be a sinner, wouldn't I. So, how can you say I don't love you? That should tell you something, shouldn't it? The question is, do you love me? Well, do you?" That is an ambiguity of the personal sort. It places the deceiver on the defensive without ever addressing the issue of one's personal feelings. Clever ambiguities are extremely difficult to detect, especially when rendered by government officials. However, the novice liar trapper can be certain of the presence of a potential quarry whenever the rendered statements evoke the question, "Huh, what'd he say?"

l. Fictionalizations: A fictionalization is a falsehood that is advertised as such. It opens with a disclaimer, advising the listener to expect the soon to follow lie. Literary fantasies, movies, television soaps, and the like are commercial fictionalizations presented as entertainment. However, not all fictionalizations are commercialized. "I don't expect you to believe this, but..." introduces a noncommercial fictionalization. Caveat emptor. Let the listener beware! The speaker has forewarned you! If and when confronted by a

liar trapper, the deceiver merely scoffs, "Well, I said I didn't expect you to believe me, didn't I?" It is almost like saying, "Sorry, but I'm out of season game".

As evidenced by the above brief listing, lying is indeed a complex social art. There are endless nuances to explore, not to mention the mastering of the various physical postures, facial expressions, and voice intonations necessary to the effective delivery of a convincing lie. Without doubt, proficiency in lying requires education and not merely practice. It is an art form too critical to social existence to be left to chance. Everyone should be instructed in the how, and when, to properly utilize falsehoods. Special classes in deceptive communication should be mandatory at every institution of learning, from kindergarten to post graduate school, and degrees in prevarication (sophisticated lying) and disinformation (professional lying) should be awarded. At the least, lawyers, corporate executives, televangelists, stockbrokers, and political office holders should be required to prominently display their BS degrees.

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