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Seminar

About Lying

People will lie, and can lie, at any time in some time of their lives. Even if someone is an honest person, they can, and may lie. People even as young as children know how to lie. Is it easier to know if they're lying? Is there a group of people who will lie more than others? If people are always punished for lying, why are there so many people who continue to lie? People will lie when they have a reason to no matter what age, to get out of trouble, so they won't hurt others or themselves, and learning it by watching or experiencing it through others.

I first searched about people speaking lies, or the act of lying. In *Speech Matter: On Lying, Morality, and the Law, Lying and Freedom of Speech*, Seana Valentine Shiffrin said, "I argue that a lie is an assertion that the speaker knows she does not believe, but nevertheless deliberately asserts, in a context that, objectively interpreted, represents that assertion as to be taken by the listener as true and believed by the speaker."¹ Listeners would most likely to believe what the speaker is saying when the other person is an authority figure, or they found believable information online, but they might not always be right, yet they continue to believe in what they say. Although, the person telling their tale shouldn't abuse their words to make the other person to believe in their lie. Like children listening to adults, adults have the power over children because they are still learning, and don't fully know right and wrong. For example, parents may

¹ Seana Valentine Shiffrin, *Speech Matter: On Lying, Morality, and the Law, Lying and Freedom of Speech* (Princeton University Press 2014), 116.

tell their child that their food isn't a vegetable so they would eat it. Even though that was a small example, if it was something more of an issue, doing it too often, the child would, and may project what they experienced.

Nature vs. Nurture, there are some people who lie compulsively, could be because they have low self-esteem, or they might have a condition where they might not be able to help it, or lying just comes easier than it does the truth. Shiffrin says, "free speech concerns do not require, as a condition of regulation, any showing of actual deception, the risk of deception of the audience, or the intention to deceive; that is, the defendant's lie need not have implanted or reinforced false beliefs in the audience or risked doing so."² It also might have become a habit after constantly purposefully lying as they grew up because they needed to. Or people may lie if they have something they want to hide from others. Some people may just lie because that's the way they are, but it could get them into trouble.

It's like listening to two sides of a story, one person said this happened, and the other said that happened, but they're both convincing. Yadlapati also said, "Consider the fear in that moment—*what if he had been wrong!* ... In faith, we must recognize that we may in fact be absolutely and totally wrong."³ They would start doubting and overthink the situation. The listener must choose a side, so by choosing one person, they are putting faith to the person they chose, to believe that, what they said was the truth. If humans doubt every time whatever someone speaks to them, nobody would trust anybody.

People also have fears once they start doubting. Without doubt there is no faith, because faith is believing that it will be, or what is, true. In *Against Dogmatism: Dwelling in Faith and*

² Shiffrin, *Lying and Freedom of Speech*, (Princeton University Press, 2014), 118.

³ Madhuri M. Yadlapati, *Against Dogmatism: Dwelling in Faith and Doubt* (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 90.

Doubt, Madhuri Yadlapati said, “In other words, *true faith*, or the state of being *truly ultimately concerned* with what is *truly ultimate*, will always include a negative judgement over any attempts to fully reach and take hold of that ultimate. Faith must always include uncertainty or doubt. If it does not, it is no longer true faith and may be idolatry instead.”⁴ It reminded me of what Shiffrin said that “many lies also cause or attempt wrongful deception, by violating the speaker’s duty of care toward the listener not to cause or risk the formation (or confirmation) in her of a false belief.”⁵ The speaker can convince the listener of what they are saying by planting ideas, and the listener makes the decision whether to believe them or not. If the speaker doesn’t lie often, the listener will believe the speaker without doubt. If the speaker does occasionally lie that the listener would doubt them, they would have to have faith in them, that they weren’t lying.

Some people say those who lie want to receive more attention and the only way is lie, or they lie for another reason. There are similarities between reason and motive but there is a difference between reason and motive. In *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do*, Gert says, “Motives are related solely to an explanation of an action. Although they serve to make an action understandable, they need do nothing to show that the action is either objectively or personally rational.”⁶ A reason for doing something is because of their motive/intention, and want to get something to achieve their goal. They have an idea in their mind, and achieving it is their motive, so they intend to do complete, so then, their following actions are steps to achieve it. Their motive is the reason their doing the actions and vice versa, the reason they are acting upon it is to achieve their motives.

⁴ Yadlapati, *Against Dogmatism*: (University of Illinois Press, 2013), 89.

⁵ Shiffrin, *Lying and Freedom of Speech*, 116.

⁶ Bernard Gert, *Common Morality: Deciding What to Do*, (Oxford University Press 2004), 103-4.

Whether they think it's right or wrong, there will be consequences. Children are taught that by lying, they will receive punishment. But at the same time, some might think that by lying, they get to get away from trouble, or receive more attention. Yadlapati says, "Responsible parenting involves being fully cognizant of these risks and our own uncertainties about whether we are doing the right thing day to day and courageously affirming our values and our faith in our children's potential, and realizing their futures, even while we repeatedly re-evaluate and adjust ourselves lest we go astray and cling to the wrong priorities."⁷ Adults should know right and wrong, and teach it to their children. But even adults will lie to them to make things easier for themselves, children are smart to pick it up and use it themselves.

There was one video on TED Talk, showing what would happen if an adult leave the room with one card from a deck of cards face down, and when they come back, ask the child if they looked at the card. They tested if the child will lie, saying they didn't look at it or not. In the video, they showed two side by side on the screen, and the audience had to try guessing which child lied. Most in the audience chose the child who squirmed or giggled rather than the child with the straight face.⁸ But why did they choose the child who was moving than the child who wasn't moving? Did they think the moving child looked guiltier? There are many signs people could pick up as they're observing the person.

There's a painting by Archibald J. Motley Jr. called *The Liar*.⁹ It shows a one group of five black men wearing varied kinds of suits, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and playing pool. The painting is like a mystery movie, where they make everybody look suspicious by wanting something to hide from everybody else, but the most unexpected player is the bad guy.

⁷ Yadlapati, *Against Dogmatism*, 91.

⁸ Kang Lee, *Can you really tell if a kid is lying?*, TED Talk.

⁹ Archibald J. Motley Jr., *The Liar*, (Howard University Gallery of Art, 1936), Oil on canvas.

It's like a photo, where everybody looks like they're having a good time, but then when you look at the photo, it's like you can see small clues. Some of the guys look like their looking at each other like they're giving secret glances as they're playing along. At the same time, they guy at the top right, who looks like a dealer looks like he's giving a hand gesture to someone. For example, he can be showing something to the person sitting at the bottom left, who is looking up, but he could be quickly glancing over and play it off that he wasn't intentionally watching out for his signal. The guy in the middle's hat reminds me of a stereotypical detective on a mission, listening to his surroundings, and figuring out the truth. Like this painting, the mystery genre likes to build more suspense as it goes deeper into the story and makes you question what's happening.

Also, like movies, lying always start when someone wants to hide something, and doesn't want others to know. Gert said, "The only facts that are reason for an action are facts about the action helping someone (including oneself) to avoid or prevent (avoidable) death, pain, disability, loss of freedom, or loss of pleasure, or helping someone (including oneself) to gain or increase consciousness, ability, freedom, or pleasure."¹⁰ Some reasons that at times, people would have to lie to others to avoid giving pain to others or showing others they are in pain. Although there are situations where a person may have to lie, like telling someone they're ok, or "it'll be fine", later, the truth will come out eventually, and they might hurt more or just as much than it would telling them right from the start.

Especially in court, where consequences are much higher for the crimes someone may have commit, for example, lying under a promise, an oath or by their word, they are committing

¹⁰ Gert, *Common Morality*, (Oxford University Press 2004), 104.

perjury.¹¹ But how is just saying that they promise to not lie keep them from lying? If there are so many people who continue to lie, how do people continue to trust? If they do get away with their lie, they will be changing their and other people's lives. This reminded me of Searle said in *What is a Speech Act?* when he said, "How can a promise create an obligation?"¹² Making a promise that they will do something, they are expected, and trusted, to follow through in what they said.

There isn't a real way of knowing if someone is lying unless they have a machine that will tell you they are lying, or if someone else confesses or rats them out. People can lie for fun, to get out of trouble, for others so they don't get hurt and help them, but others can lie to help themselves so others won't hurt them. People can also lie faster than they can speak the truth. There are multiple reasons why a person might want to, or must lie in their life, but nobody should overstep their boundaries.

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¹¹ Thomson Reuters, *Perjury*, Findlaw.

¹² John Searle, *What is a Speech Act?*, 4.

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