-when you don't want to hurt someone's feelings
- lying to someone who will use the information to harm others: lying
-

Main claim: lying is inherently wrong (prima facie)

THE MORAL PRESUMPTION AGAINST LYING

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I

MOST of us feel an aversion to lying and believe that it always stands in need of justification. One expression of this is to say that there is a prima facie duty not to lie. Another is Sissela Bok's "Principle of Veracity"[1] which holds that lying has an "initial negative weight" so that there is always a presumption against telling a particular lie. Still a third variation can be found in Arnold Isenberg's "constancy principle"[2] which holds that what is inherently bad in any lie is the same for all, constant from one lie to the next. While these sorts of view are plausible, the literature on lying provides little in the way of a specific account for the negative weight inherent in all lies—their common disvalue. What follows is proposed as such an account, one which should also help clarify why some lies are worse than others, why some are excusable and others justifiable. Without presuming to be exhaustive, the view offered maintains that there are at least two inherent negative components of all lies; further, each of these inherent disvalues disposes the liar toward a particular, contingent harm. The inherent disvalues and the harms they threaten collectively constitute sufficient grounds for the presumption against lying.

The first inherent disvalue is the immediate restriction of the deceived's freedom. This, subsequently, inclines the liar in the direction of disrespect for people. The second inherent disvalue found in lying is the self-opposition or internal conflict involved in speaking what one disbelieves. This, in turn, contingently threatens the integration of the liar's personality. In both cases, the

[1] Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 32.

[2] Arnold Isenberg, "Deontology and the Ethics of Lying," in *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism; Selected Essays of Arnold Isenberg*, ed. William Callahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

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harm contingently risked pertains to the liar. The inherent disvalue is a "force for" the evil, "disposing" or "inclining" the liar in this harmful direction. This is the sense in which the inherent disvalues contain further "risks" for the liar; they jeopardize his character or personality. While the realization of these risks is contingent, dependent upon variables in the liar's and deceived's lives, the inherent disvalues are not. The way the disvalues are "necessary to" or "embedded" in all lying depends upon language and human psychology and will be explained in the course of the discussion. Before proceeding to it, some preliminary clarification about lying itself is called for.

It should be noted first that lying is a species of linguistic deception. Thus, non-linguistic and non-lying linguistic deception are distinct from lying. It is not obvious what follows from differentiating lying from these other sorts of deception, however, the discussion of disrespect (section 3) raises some germane considerations. The motivation for drawing out the significance of this distinction is simply the fact that we seem to single lying out for special opprobrium.

A person lies when he asserts something to another which he believes to be false with the intention of getting the other to believe it to be true. More precise definitions can be honed,[3] but this should capture the common sense of the concept while allowing for the following sort of important fine point: a person can assert a true statement and still be lying. In such a case, of course, he simply could not believe that it is true.

The following analysis, however, applies primarily to "successful" lies: statements which are indeed false and believed true by the deceived. This may seem unduly restrictive, so that what-

[3] Roderick Chisholm and Thomas D. Feehan (in "The Intent to Deceive," *Journal of Philosophy*, 74, 3 [March 1977]: 143–159) offer a helpful albeit technically elaborate definition, a summary of which follows.

An individual *lies* when he *asserts* a proposition to another which he believes to be not true or false; he *asserts* a proposition when he *states* it under conditions which he believes justify the other in believing that he (the liar) intends to contribute causally to the other's believing that he (the liar) accepts the proposition; he *states* a proposition when he believes that the expression he utters has the standard use in the language of expressing this proposition and he thereby intends the other to believe that he (the liar) intends to utter the expression in this way.

The authors also fruitfully distinguish between deception by commission and deception by omission.

ever is established is too limited in scope, not bearing on all lies. However, this is not the case because the presumption against lying turns upon the inherent negative weight of successful lies. They are the paradigmatic case for our intuition concerning the justifactory burden all lies bear. "Unsuccessful" lies (statements which are either indeed true or false statements not believed by the would-be deceived) are derivatively discredited by being failed attempts at successful lies.[4] (In a similar way do we demand justification for failed attempts to do bodily harm to another.)

That lying can and often does have a wide range of harmful effects either in particular actions or as widespread practice seems obvious. Because Smith is lied to, for example, he fails to do what is needed for him to secure this or that good thing. Or, again, because lying is rampant in this sector of society, great inefficiency is produced as people must check information and so forth. Such

[4] It is interesting to see what happens to my position in the case of unsuccessful lies, but we should keep in mind the specific bases of failure. If the failure is due to the would-be deceived not believing the false statement, then the first inherent disvalue (restriction of the deceived's freedom) is reversed. The attempted lie backfires on the liar and *he* loses freedom due to lack of trust just as he would when an initially successful lie is eventually "uncovered." The second inherent disvalue (self-opposition) still obtains, but briefly. Because the would-be deceived does not believe the statement, the opposition between what the liar says and believes dissipates, to be replaced, perhaps, by negative self-appraisal such as shame.

If the failure is due to the statement being true, again, the first inherent disvalue is reversed. The would-be deceived carries on believing a true statement. The "liar" however has two false beliefs: concerning the content of the statement *and* the would-be deceived's beliefs. Now, of course, the liar is no worse off after the lie with regard to the content of the conveyed belief; he thought it false before the lie and still does. But, believing that the would-be deceived now possesses a false belief could rather easily restrict the liar's freedom. The liar has become his own deceived due to the truthfulness of the statement. The second inherent disvalue obtains since there is still opposition between what the liar believes and what he says.

Whether the contingent dangers are still risked is, of course, another question. If the "deceived" is not taken in by the lie, perhaps the liar risks self-loathing or resentment of the deceived (for not being an easy mark) rather than lose the respect for the deceived. If the statement is indeed true, perhaps the liar risks personality rift. He will still conceal his real beliefs; insulated from open discussion (in a way different from one who simply holds a false belief), the liar still has opposed himself in speech. The details of this discussion should be clarified by the subsequent examination of the two inherent disvalues and their risks to the liar.

harmful consequences may or may not be produced by any particular lie or practice of lying. But the presumption against lying has a deeper base than this very general danger. Lying always includes the two inherent disvalues of freedom restriction and self-opposition. Their weight must always be added to the lie's purely contingent bad consequences in our deliberations and evaluation of particular lies. The lie's contingent good consequences must, therefore, overshadow not only contingent bad consequences, but the inherent disvalues and the specific respective harms they dispose us to: the habit of disrespect and personality disintegration.

II

Immediate restriction of the deceived's freedom is inherent in all (successful) lies because they limit the practical exercise of his reason: reasoning about possible courses of action. Believing true what is false or vice versa, the deceived's perspective on the world and his possible futures in it are distorted. As a result, his choices of action concerning that future are circumscribed. By limiting the horizon or content of his practical reasoning, the lie restricts the choosing and subsequent acting of the deceived. He reasons within a more or less false view of the world; misinformed, his practical conclusions and the actions they motivate are misdirected.

The lie misdirects the deceived's reasoning about future conduct in two complementary ways: it may suggest choices that are not available or eliminate from consideration live options. Both the illusion and elimination of choice limit the deceived's freedom. The first makes this reasoning practically fruitless, thereby retarding or postponing the deliberations necessary to the exercise of freedom. The latter excludes options from the scope of his volition; they are "shielded" from his view. In this respect, lying establishes "conditions of unfreedom . . . [which] restrict choice by making alternatives unavailable or ineligible."[5]

Both the illusion and elimination of choice have the net effect of deflecting the deceived's reasoning. Unwarranted inferences are drawn; barren plans of action laid; irrelevant course of inquiry

[5] S. I. Benn and W. L. Weinstein, "Being Free to Act and Being a Free Man," *Mind*, 80, 318 (April 1971), p. 197.

opened. The lie not only determines what the deceived thinks about, but it skews *how* he thinks of things, e.g., whether he sees something as a threat or a boon. Misinformed and misdirected, the deceived's practical reasoning and thereby his freedom are restricted.

In lying, the deceived's thinking is channelled through a distorted view of the world as lying always aims to misrepresent the way things really are. But the more we see things the way they really are the more free our choices and subsequent actions. In offering a criterion for freedom as autonomy, Benn and Weinstein speak to the issue of one individual controlling the thinking of another. Though not specifically about lying, what they say is clearly germane to it: "it [criticism, choice, eventually freedom] . . . requires that B's sources of information shall not be controlled by A, for then B's view of reality is what A chooses to make it."[6] Lying is clearly a way of choosing another's view of reality for him.

It is important to underscore the significance of the deceived's reasoning and the liar's motivation in all this. Lying presupposes that the deceived has enough reason and memory to be affected by what people tell him, whether true or false. *Attempting* to get another to believe a false proposition true requires that that person have the capacity to understand, believe, and so forth. As for the liar, his speech is purposeful—aiming at an end beyond mere deception or constraint of freedom (this is to be developed shortly). The deceived's rational competency together with the liar's purposefulness explain the sense in which restricting reason (and freedom) is "inherent" in or "necessary to" lies. Lies being what they are, the restriction is "practically" necessary—necessarily part of the practice. Lies being purposeful endeavors at getting someone capable of reasoning to hold a false belief, restricting that person's reasoning is simply how lies "work." And since restricting reasoning necessarily restricts freedom, restriction of freedom is inherent in lying.

In all cases of lying, the liar[7] is trying to channel the thinking and subsequent choosing of the other by his utterance, though this is rarely the *only* thing he is trying to accomplish. The restriction

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[6] Ibid., p. 210.

[7] I am using the word simply to distinguish the one who lies from the deceived or other parties. Strictly speaking, only those habituated to lying are properly considered "liars."

is usually thought to serve some further purpose. As Isenberg points out, "it is impossible to understand why, without ulterior purpose, anyone should wish another to believe a proposition, P, when he himself thinks that P is false."[8] It is a rare liar who seeks simply to deceive. But regardless of ulterior or ultimate purpose, the lie always *immediately* limits the particular deliberations and choosing of the deceived. "Immediately" is important here, since it is possible to enhance the other's freedom in the *long run* by lying. Similarly, lying may benefit the deceived in other ways as well, such as prompting him to think and choose intelligently for himself. These and considerations like them are what enable us to excuse or justify some lies.[9]

Even excused or justified lies however immediately restrict the deceived's freedom by circumscribing the exercise of his reason (the general *ability* to reason is not usually impaired, rather its particular exercise is limited).[10] What enables us to excuse or justify a lie are its "material conditions": the *content* of the lie and the *situation* in which it occurs. These material conditions provide a basis for excusing and justifying lies because of their bearing on the way lying restricts the deceived's freedom. Either the content or the situation in which the lie is offered are so related to his loss of freedom that we excuse or justify the lie. Let us consider the paradigm cases of the excused "white" lie and the justified "defen-

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[8] Isenberg, "Deontology and the Ethics of Lying," p. 260.

[9] Contrary to some philosophers, e.g., Bok, we see an important difference between excusing and justifying actions (including lies). We excuse the *person* for committing the act; he is exonerated because of circumstances or some state he is in. Being misinformed about a danger, for example, might excuse someone for lying. But the fact that the lie occurred is nevertheless lamentable or unfortunate. The *act* is still wrong and is excused *after* the fact.

On the other hand, we *justify* an *action*: after *and* before its performance. Circumstances or relationships make morally permissible what might otherwise be prohibited. Lying might be justified, for example, by an individual's manifest intentions to do harm. The act is not wrong, though we might decry the circumstances which permit it.

The distinction between excuses and justifications will be developed specifically in connection with the way lying restricts freedom.

[10] The ability to reason might well be impaired in the extreme sort of case: a lie *about* the reasoning process itself. Thus, a seemingly farfetched lie about the harmfulness of inductive reasoning (in deference, perhaps, to divination) would likely undermine the deceived's reasoning capacity itself.

sive" lie. These should reveal the centrality of freedom in the relationship between liar and deceived.

The reason we are usually so quick to forgive or excuse white lies[11] is that as a group they usually do not restrict the deceived's freedom very much. Because of their content, typical situation, or both, lies considered "white" tend to be innocuous, not limiting the deceived's freedom seriously or for long. One reason for this is somewhat trivial: the deceived is familiar with the social convention (standard responses to questions such as "Do you like my new tie?") and so does not take the speech as straight-forward assertion.

On the analysis offered by Chisholm and Feehan, because of the implicit conventions governing linguistic practice, such an assertion might not even count as a lie. More important is the fact that we categorize a lie as "white" precisely because it does not limit freedom very much—not just *any* good, such as the securing of pleasure or the like, but *freedom*. The deceived's reasoning and subsequent choices are not seriously limited by the white lie. Conversely, knowing the truth in that situation or about that subject (material conditions) simply would not immediately enhance his freedom. It seems similar to borrowing a friend's possession without his permission: borrowing his pencil typically limits his choices less than borrowing his car does. But perhaps more refinement is needed.

Perhaps we really ought to distinguish between non-white lies which just do not *happen* to limit the deceived's freedom much and white lies which could, through unforeseen and untoward events, restrict his freedom quite a bit. The difference is a matter of probabilities—probabilities determined by the material conditions of content and situation. The probabilities are that a white lie will not have a serious impact on the deceived's freedom. Pebbles have less capacity for serious harm than guns even though in a particular instance the former may in fact do more damage. So, a lie is properly classified as "white" because its impact on freedom is expected to be minimal due to its content or situation.

White lies, as a class, tend to be about matters that are not

[11] I do not mean to suggest that white lies are the only or main cases of excused lies. But their frequency and demarcated "classification" makes them compelling examples. A *serious* lie could, of course, be excused, e.g., because of an excusable error on the part of the liar.

very serious or to be so situated as not to speak seriously to important matters. The restriction of freedom should vary proportionately with the seriousness of the lie's content or situation. By focusing on freedom, we are able to see clearly one way the material conditions of lies provide for variation in their severity. This is necessary in order to account for excusing lies. However, one more aspect needs mention.

When excusing a lie we actually excuse the *liar*; his state or circumstance mitigates the blame. We excuse the "white liar," therefore, for lack of imagination or linguistic facility in being kind, generous, or simply evasive. White lies might not be needed if we could express ourselves more gracefully on the spur of the moment. Or, if we had sufficient foresight to plan more imaginatively, for example, a surprise party. Combined with the mildness of the lie's content or situation, we excuse the white liar for common human deficiencies. Yet what of the case when we *justify* a lie under serious material conditions?

Consider, as a paradigm of justified lying, the "defensive" lie: a lie which aims to defend one's (or another's) freedom. The material conditions of a lie may justify it because we are sometimes justified in restricting another's freedom: in particular, when an individual tries to constrain our freedom as in the use or threatened use of force. When this occurs, practices that are otherwise questionable come to be candidates for morally permissible response. The usual regard we ought to have for another's freedom is altered, perhaps enough and in such ways to permit (or even require) lying.

The limitation or attempted limitation of our freedom changes the moral boundaries which usually confine lying precisely because lying itself is anti-freedom. The content of the lie may provide an appropriate response to a coercive situation. The unjustified restraint of our freedom may "free" us to lie even as it may justify the use of force, intimidation, or otherwise prohibited behavior. This is not to suggest that we are thereby freed of our moral responsibility, only that we may be freed of moral constraints that usually obtain. The restriction of another's freedom through lying may in fact be justified because of his threat to our freedom. It cannot, of course, be said a priori or in what degree the moral boundaries shift, but simply that threat of or actual limitation of freedom is always a relevant consideration in assessing the per-

missibility (or even obligatoriness) of lying.[12] The invasion of freedom inherent in lying is morally defendable, then, as a response to such an invasion by another.[13]

The cases of white and defensive lies are clarified by this account. Excusing the former and justifying the latter are thoroughly understood only if we appreciate the freedom restriction inherent in lies. Our understanding of excuses for some lies and justifications of others is broadened, moreover, by considering how the lie's restriction of another's freedom poses a contingent threat to the liar's character.

III

By limiting the deceived's freedom, lying does not respect it. In addition, lying immediately alters the relationship between the liar and the deceived. The liar's freedom increases vis-à-vis the deceived's with regard to the subject matter of the lie. Lying enhances the liar's position relative to the deceived by limiting the latter's options (even though, in the long run, the liar's options and his reasoning about them may well be more limited than the deceived's—see section V). Relative advantage is itself usually in need of justification regardless of who or what is causally responsible. (Imagine, for example, a teacher giving only one student suggestions on what to study for an examination). But the fact that one of the two involved parties brings about the alteration in

[12] It is because Kant has an abstract view of freedom, unindividuated and unaffected by concrete conditions, that his strictures on lying (among other practices) cannot take coercion into account. Yet coercion provides just the sort of cases which make his moral conclusions seem counterintuitive.

[13] In deontological language: the unjustified threat to my freedom mitigates my "prima facie" duty not to lie or the presumption of such a duty. Prima facie or presumptive duties are the deontologist's formulations of prohibitions which may be overridden in particular cases. The deontologist, however, bases duty on the concept of freedom. Freedom is the ground of duty. Therefore, the jeopardization of freedom is not on a par with other considerations of duty. Freedom reaches "deeper" than any particular duty, such as not to lie, since it grounds them all. Thus, defending my freedom is not on the same moral level with my particular duty not to lie. It takes precedence over such particular duties.

relative freedom is morally germane. It is one thing unwittingly to receive advantage which may not be deserved (the fortunate student above); it is another to initiate it. Responsibility for the change in the relationship endangers the liar's character. Specifically, altering the relationship by lying disposes the liar toward the general habit of disrespect.

Two things need clarification here: the sense in which both inherent disvalues "dispose" the liar toward a harmful condition, and the sort of habit which presently concerns us.

Each inherent disvalue moves the liar in a harmful direction. Here we are concerned with the way in which restricting the deceived's freedom disposes the liar toward disrespect (later we will discuss the tendency of self-opposition toward personality disintegration). But the relationship between the inherent disvalue and the contingent harm is the same in each pair: the inherent disvalue disposes the liar to harm in the same way improper rest disposes us to mental error or irascibility. The harm is more than "accidentally" produced by the inherent disvalue, but does not *necessarily* follow from it. The inherent disvalue—restricting the deceived's freedom, here—is *always a force* in the direction of the respective harm. Human nature being what it is, the fact that lying restricts freedom moves the liar in a definite direction, even though he may not arrive at the destination.

This notion of contributing cause or disposing factor is exemplified daily. Treating a child with suspicion, for example, tends to generate in him furtive, duplicitous behavior. Giving reasons for our actions disposes others toward reasonableness in a way that arbitrary use of superior force does not. While this is hardly a complete account of either habit or personality development, it should clarify the sort of claim made when we say that lying endangers the liar's character or personality by means of its inherent disvalues. How does the first disvalue, restriction of the deceived's freedom, promote the habit of disrespect? And what sort of habit is it?

This sort of habit is a character defect or vice. The relationship established through the lie, altered freedom with regard to the subject at hand, always invites in us the general disposition to place ourselves above others in either thought or action. The deceived is immediately less free relative to us because of our action. The propensity toward this sort of relationship involves regarding the

other as less worthy or capable of wielding freedom than ourselves. We are thereby encouraged by the lie to see ourselves as superior to others. This involves loss of proper perspective on ourselves as we esteem ourselves too highly, becoming arrogant. For lying is to arrogate to oneself the truth about the matter at hand as well as the truth about *oneself*, what the liar really believes. Such loss of perspective and denigration of others is a character failing.

"Character" refers to sets of habits and dispositions; of special moral significance are those of interpersonal prominence such as courage or honesty rather than technical varieties such as those making up driving competency. In discussing the implications of lying for the liar's character we are considering one kind of contingent consequence. But it is not obviously of the utilitarian stripe, not a matter of calculating satisfactions or other transitively ordered mental states. Character is not a momentary plus or minus to be weighed against other moments of positive or negative interest. Rather, considerations of character illuminate what we are as people; they penetrate to the level of identity. We might say that they unite the ontological and moral realms by taking a stand on what way of being is itself good.

It is interesting to notice how this claim of contingent danger to the liar's character bears on the "white" lie excuse and the defensive" lie justification. White lies arise out of concern for the other's welfare. We are trying to avoid embarrassing someone or are trying to bring some pleasure into his or her life. The impetus toward disrespect is therefore mitigated by our concern for the other's well-being (though it is possible to have little respect for those you try to help). More importantly, the tendency toward disrespect is dampened by the fact that there is little gain in freedom vis-à-vis the deceived as a result of white lies. Because white lies typically do not involve serious restriction of the deceived's freedom, therefore, they do not move us greatly toward disrespect.

Neither are we in danger of becoming disrespectful as a result of lying in defense of our freedom. When justified, someone else either already has or is trying to constrain our freedom. Being put at a relative disadvantage is either actual or in the offing. Unjustified constraint of our freedom mitigates the danger lying poses to our character by altering the usual context in which virtue (and vice) is displayed or nurtured. It is not disrespectful to prevent another from unwarranted incursion on our freedom; he has already

shown disrespect for us. Respecting others hardly demands conspiring in treating ourselves with disrespect. On the contrary, there is considerable strength in the argument that self-respect demands defending one's freedom, perhaps by means of a lie.

Before proceeding to the inherent disvalue of self-opposition, it is instructive to note how the lack of respect shown in lying suggests several ways in which lying is distinct from and perhaps distinctively worse than other forms of deception. It may be that lying demonstrates greater disrespect than these sorts of deception or demonstrates it in a particularly insulting way.

First of all, the lie addresses another as a language user and then abuses that capacity. Lying *must* immediately abuse a dimension of human beings that is decisive to their humanity. Charles Fried points out that language is shared and communal in nature. Lying can succeed (as Kant's universalization procedure reveals) only against a backdrop of widespread truthfulness. The disrespect, then, is not merely for the deceived but for mankind in general since the lie trades upon a communal practice and human interdependence. In explicating Kant's claim that a lie "does wrong to men in general," and "injures humanity," Fried states: "Every lie violates the basic commitment to truth which stands behind the social fact of language."[14] This seems to be true and to help account for our repugnance at lying, but it is not enough to distinguish lying from non-lying linguistic deception.[15]

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[14] Charles Fried, *Right and Wrong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 68.

[15] An example of non-lying linguistic deception might be helpful. Suppose that I am asked whether I expect to attend a meeting tomorrow and I reply, "No, I'm leaving for Chicago tomorrow." Although I *am* leaving for Chicago tomorrow, my departure in no way interferes with attending the meeting: I could easily do both. The questioner quite reasonably and simply "fills in" that the departure would interfere with attending the meeting and infers the false belief that attendance is impossible *because* I am leaving town. He takes me to be offering a *reason* when I have literally only laid the statement about leaving town *alongside* my negative response.

It might be, however, that this and all other non-lying linguistic deception can plausibly be analyzed as an implicit or elliptical lie in which the deceived reasonably fills in the false belief (which the liar never explicitly states). Thus, in the above example, the deceived questioner infers that I won't be attending the meeting *because* I will be on my way to Chicago. On this analysis of non-lying linguistic deception, it escapes the

The social nature of language, however, may provide grounds for such differentiation. Lying is disrespectful to the deceived by being a kind of "treachery." Fried suggests that lying not only attacks the deceived but does so with an *instrument* (language) *that belongs to him*: the indignity of being struck with one's own property! But this is also true of linguistic deception in general. In lying, however, the treachery is greater because the deceived is attacked directly and completely with the shared linguistic instrument. Lying offers a complete falsification; the deceived is required simply to accept it passively. In both non-linguistic and non-lying linguistic deception, the deceived must actively make an inference from some outward behavior. At least some deference is paid to the deceived's reason as he is given some "reasoning room" in which to complete the attack on him; he must be somewhat of an accomplice to the deception process. In lying, however, we abuse language more flagrantly, using it to produce completely the opposite of what we believe true. Perhaps it is the flagrance with which we disrespect the deceived as language user that gives indignation to the phrase "boldfaced lie." Lying requires a boldness and coldness of purpose in order that we confront the other with a falsehood "complete-in-itself."

In a more pointed consideration of disrespect, Chisholm and Feehan return us to the particular relation between the liar and the deceived. They offer a quick suggestion as to why lying is thought worse than other kinds of deception. The deceived has a right to expect that the liar himself believes what he asserts.

> If a person L *asserts* a proposition p to another person D, then D has the *right to expect* that L himself believes p. And it is assumed that L knows, or at least that he ought to know, that, if he asserts p to D, while believing himself that p is not true, then he violates this right of D's. But analogous assumptions are not made with respect to all other types of intended deception. . . . Lying, unlike the other types of intended deception, is essentially a breach of faith.[16]

Violating any right of another's exhibits lack of respect. But if Chisholm and Feehan are correct and lying involves a right with regard to expectation about the *liar himself*, then the disrespect

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label "lie" on a "mere technicality"—a difference without much difference. If cogent, we should not chafe at the lack of a strong basis for differentiating the sub-species of lies from linguistic deception as a whole.

[16] Chisholm and Feehan, "The Intent to Deceive," p. 153.

seems heightened. The liar trades upon a trust placed in him as a speaker. The deceived is encouraged to believe that the liar is revealing his self and this aspect of falsely leading another "into" one's self amplifies the element of disrespect in cases of lying.[17]

IV

With consideration of how lies misrepresent the liar's person we come to the second disvalue inherent in lying: the self-opposition or distancing from the self necessarily generated by repudiating in speech what we believe. Recall that lying always involves intending for the deceived to believe *two* propositions which are false: one pertaining to the specific matter at hand, the other pertaining to the liar's belief(s). The deceived has a mistaken belief about what the liar believes, and by extension, who the liar is. But this is to look at the situation from the deceived's viewpoint, rather than the liar's mental state. By disguising himself from others the liar is perforce put at a distance from who he really is and in opposition to what he really believes.[18]

When we lie we are not "following through" on what we truly believe. Thus we are separated *in action* from our beliefs. It is as if the actor were a different person, one acting on a different set of beliefs. The act does not present the real self, for the real self is identified with and by the beliefs held to be true. The beliefs held to be true interlock with the individual's character and conduct in a way that those thought false do not. The beliefs held true by a bigot or saint, for example, are inseparable from her attitudes, dispositions, and actions: together they define who and what she is. The content of the lie, therefore, is antagonistic to what the individual is.

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[17] If lying shows greater disrespect than other forms of deception (including non-lying linguistic deception), then it should follow from my position that lying has a greater tendency to engender disrespect as a character trait, or a tendency to engender a greater degree of disrespect.

[18] The liar's self-opposition imitates the deceived's false belief. The deceived believes something opposed to the way the world is, whereas the liar believes something opposed to what he says. Similarly might we consider lying a lack of *respect* for who the *liar* is—mirroring his lack of respect for the deceived. In false self-representation the liar does not respect in deed what he believes.

> A man who lies, in a sense, opposes himself: he denies what he affirms or affirms what he denies. And this is no wrestle of legitimate natural impulses, for there *is* no autonomous impulse to lie.[19]

According to Isenberg, speaking what we believe has a "natural" force. It is simply true of human psychology that there is no "inherent motive force" to make someone believe what one does *not* oneself believe. On the contrary, there is a natural (and healthy) transition between belief, thought, and speech. The suggestion is that this natural transition bespeaks a unity or continuity of self which is undermined by lying. When we lie, "The thought that has been naturally prompted by the question is suppressed."[20] The self-opposition, then, is "necessary" to lying because of human psychology and the place of language in it.

Saying something *other* than what we believe almost always calls for either a reason or an explanation. Saying what one *does* believe is not odd. We take "consistency" of this sort for granted, as the norm. "It is absurd to ask why a man who thinks that today is Tuesday should say that today is Tuesday."[21] But what is the weight of this fact and what does it indicate? It indicates that consistency between belief and speech is what a psychologically healthy individual exhibits in the ordinary course of events. Social intercourse and joint activity demand that speech be a rational extension of belief. When speech fails to express what is believed, we reasonably expect either a justification in terms of a reason, or an explanation such as momentary distraction, memory failure, or a more severe disorder.

Now there *does* exist a reason for saying what one believes, but we typically are not required to have or produce it (extreme or emergency situations, when lying may be justified or demanded, however, might in fact require that we produce it). When we say

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[19] Isenberg, "Deontology and the Ethics of Lying," p. 262.

[20] Ibid., p. 260. Now suppression in general is not a constructive way to reestablish psychic order when we face a dilemma or try to resolve conflict. It is not a genuine harmonization of the opposed internal factions. In the case of lying, the body appears to give isomorphic evidence of the psychological rift occasioned by such suppression. Changes in the electrical conductivity of the skin, increase in heart rate and breathing indicate a somatic playing out of the more subtle psychological conflict.

[21] Ibid., p. 261. Saying something *other* than what we believe, however, *need* not call for reason or explanation. Specific contexts, such as joking, drama, debate and the like carry with them such reasons and so they are not usually "called for" except by or for the uninitiated.

what we do not believe, on the other hand, we should "have" a reason for saying it. It is not enough merely that one exists. "I do not believe it," does not carry the weight of an initial reason the way "I believe it," does because of the way we use language.

An inherent end of speech is the communication of belief. On this teleological view, explicating part of what Isenberg means by "natural," lying runs counter to this natural end of language. Kant puts it this way: the liar "has a purpose directly opposed to the natural purposiveness of the power of communicating one's thoughts."[22] Since the liar necessarily *shares* in this "natural purposiveness" of language, he opposes himself by lying. He opposes himself as a language user and as a thinker dependent upon the cogency of his language use. Language is that through which we think, with ourselves as well as others. Lying sets language against the linguistic fabric on which the effectiveness of the liar's thinking depends. It thereby jeopardizes the coherence of his beliefs and his self-knowledge.

V

The self-opposition generated by lying contingently endangers the integration of the liar's personality[23] because of the insulating effect of the lie. Because the lie insulates the liar's beliefs from others, his self-opposition can deepen and enlarge. Maintaining integrated personality is an on-going effort which, for most of us, is more or less successful. There are a variety of obstacles to such integration, ranging from competing interests to elaborate self-deceptions, but lying is especially important because so evidently within our control. Perhaps claiming that lying risks personality disintegration sounds too strong or alarmist. "Disintegration" is, after all, an extreme condition. The claim, we recall, is not that lying usually produces disintegration of personality, but only that it clearly *works* in that direction. It does so by interrupting social,

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[22] Immanuel Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 428.

[23] I am using "personality" to indicate "personhood" or "selfhood." As such, it is an inclusive term, including character as well as such "other aspects of a man as his interests, endowments, sentiments, and temperament." See Maurice Mandelbaum, *The Phenomenology of Moral Experience* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), p. 141.

linguistic processes whereby *opinions are integrated and self-knowledge furthered.* Both opinion-integration and self-knowledge are ingredients in an integrated personality. Lying obstructs self-integration first by generating self-opposition, and then shielding it from remedy.

Just as a hovering, interfering parent is an impediment to his child's learning without being either a necessary or sufficient condition for the child's failure, so lying is an impediment to personality integration. Lying makes more difficult a difficult process by isolating the liar from others. As a result of this isolation, lying separates the liar's beliefs from one another and the liar from himself.

It is a commonplace that the liar is often restricted by his lie(s). The lie, to his immediate advantage, often results in an overall net loss of freedom in what he can do or say.[24] (Consideration of this may include the psychic cost of keeping clear about the tangled web the lies have woven.) The liar must be circumspect in his speech and action, guarding against the emergence of his real beliefs. The need to maintain the deception binds him. Such a loss of freedom is "circumstantial"—outward; it is the inverse of the deceived's loss which is a restriction of reasoning and inward. The circumstances of the lie limit the way the liar interacts and speaks with others. The social, lingustic isolation obstructs personality integration because social intercourse is needed to organize our opinions and know ourselves.

Integrity of self or personality depends, in part, on how well our beliefs cohere. The more our opinions "fit together," the less they contradict one another, the more they are "our own." They are more ours by virtue of belonging together, forming a whole, subsequently, the more unified we are as people. Here, we obviously

[24] There is an obvious irony in the liar's restriction of the deceived's freedom, viz., that the liar stands a good chance of losing more freedom for himself in the long run. Perhaps not so obvious is the fact that such irony is not merely an accidental feature of lying. Irony always involves the juxtaposition of opposites (only when Jones finally stops trying for a promotion, for instance, does he get one). Ironic situations involve opposition: between past and present; desire and action; thought and deed; and so forth. Practices in which opposition is a defining feature, then, especially lend themselves to the creation of irony. It should not be surprising that lying helps produce irony to the extent that it does since in lying we say the opposite of what we believe. The opposition of lying is conducive to a variety of ironies.

endorse the Platonic suggestion that the relations among our beliefs are integral to our personalities. Disorganized speech and thought is constitutive (and not merely indicative) of a disorderly psyche. Integration of opinion is an important ingredient in integrated personality, but it requires social intercourse. The circumstantial constraints imposed by lying keep the liar from exposing certain of his beliefs. He cannot permit other people to respond to them, yet such response is necessary to their assessment and eventual integration with the rest of the liar's thought. Lying disjoins what is believed from what is said. As a result, what is believed is severed from the integrative process furthered in speech.

The isolation of belief from the social world is also an impediment to the liar's self-knowledge. Because self-knowledge is important to integrated personality, lying jeopardizes integration in this second way. Lying is a misrepresentation of who and what we are, a misrepresentation that also seals something of ourselves off from others. By disguising ourselves from others we can easily lose sight of ourselves as well.[25] Lying deprives us of others' response to this closeted part, yet we depend upon their responses to criticize and understand ourselves. Lying conceals the individual's true beliefs from himself by restricting their social disclosure. The barrier to integration of opinion is perforce an obstacle to understanding what we truly believe and therefore are. It appears evident, moreover, that the less integrated our opinions the more difficult it is to know what we believe.

As with integration of opinion, however, the degree to which self-knowledge is obstructed by lying depends upon the lie's two material conditions: content and situation. These determine the

[25] This yields another, somewhat perverse irony. Once sufficiently out of touch with his real beliefs, the liar is no longer *technically* lying since he believes what he asserts to be true (the "natural transition" from belief to speech totally corrupted). This pathological state, of course, confirms rather than weakens my claim concerning the danger posed by lying to well-integrated personality. A pathological liar of the sort just mentioned is in the process of "disintegrating" since increasingly out of touch with what he genuinely believes. The tension between what is believed and what is said appears to have dissolved. He has come to believe what he once knew to be intended falsehoods. We might be tempted to think of this as a *new* self to be identified with the new set of beliefs. But this seems wrong-headed. If pressed, the "convinced liar" would discover himself confused over what he *really* believed since the hitherto "lies" would not jibe with other of his beliefs.

importance and extent of the liar's linguistic, social isolation. Lies involving fundamental beliefs are more disruptive since more pivotal to opinion integration and more decisive to our identity. Similarly, depending on how the lie is situated, the liar may be relatively free to expose his real beliefs. The scope of concealment demanded by the lie determines the degree to which whatever is concealed becomes obscured from us or separated from other belief.[26] Variability in the material conditions therefore determines the degree to which lying endangers integration of personality.

But it might be objected that lying can actually *promote* self-knowledge (and thereby self-integration). The practiced, incisive liar, like Shakespeare's Iago,[27] might in fact know himself better than most people know themselves since in order to perpetuate his duplicity he must scrutinize his inclinations, monitor his impulses, and prepare his speech. Robert Audi put this eloquently: "If one does not know the subjective territory well, one is unlikely to succeed in camouflaging the traces of its buried skeletons." The fact that the effort needed to keep the lie working may in some cases further the liar's self-knowledge does not weaken the claim made here, rather, it indirectly (and surprisingly) supports it!

The first thing to notice about the "Iago case" is this: it is precisely *because* Iago has put himself at a distance from himself by lying that he must work so hard at the self-monitoring which subsequently yields the self-knowledge. From the standpoint of personality integration, this is a favorable outcome of the initial schism inherent in lying. Nevertheless, the general tendency of such divisiveness is disintegration even though an exceptional liar may confront the danger thus posed in a constructive way. Loss of hearing is a force *destructive* of one's ability to compose music even though an exceptional composer may surmount the obstacle.

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[26] The situation thus *also* determines the degree to which the self-opposition created by the lie is *perpetuated.* Lies in general create a self-perpetuating opposition between thought and speech because the former must be concealed. Contrast this with opposition in thought which is not self-perpetuating (because not self-enclosing): we pose an objection to our own thesis or deliberate over competing lines of action. In such cases there is a lack of integration of opinion but it is not located within a mechanism for perpetuation or exacerbation.

[27] I am indebted to Robert Audi for his "Iago" objections to the earlier, sketchier version of this paper which was presented at the Western Division Meetings of the APA in Detroit, in the spring of 1980.

More analogous might be the individual who insults another, then establishes a fast bond of friendship in the ensuing effort to make amends. Insulting is, nevertheless, a disturbance which works in the direction of unharmonious further relationship. Precisely *because* lies obstruct self-knowledge (the way insults obstruct friendship) can the exceptional liar exercise the capacities needed to surmount their obstruction. The fact that an impediment or handicap has been overcome does not make it less an impediment or handicap.

In considering the Iago case, we should go a bit further. To what extent is he likely to have overcome the opposition to and isolation from self so as to maintain self-knowledge? Iago's real beliefs cannot be examined by others and constructively criticized. The successful self-monitoring liar is still enclosed in a private world. (We might say that others cannot mediate the liar's relationship to himself with respect to the content of the lie.) Lacking the testing and insights others can provide, the Iago-like individual is still susceptible to doubt and error about his self-appraisal. Perhaps more important is the *sphere* of the supposed self-knowledge.

Iago has become an expert on a narrow portion of himself. Has he not been put at a distance from his love and esteem for Othello? Because of the disrespect generated, Iago ceases to know that part of himself which was the very spring for the lies. Iago knows himself only within the narrow circumference of his lies. The lies, the subsequent self-monitoring, as well as the circumstantial restrictions, freeze development of further relationships and extinguish the growth of incipient tendencies in the liar. This results in an overall *loss* of self-knowledge. The Iago-like liar knows himself primarily as the lies define him. So much more of what he is and could be is lost to Iago because he is lost in a *portion* of himself. Aspirations, emotions, would-be relationships and projects, all of him that falls beyond the net cast by his lies must be neglected. Another way to put this is to say that Iago does not know himself as potential, as a host of possibilities unconnected to the lies with which he is preoccupied. What is integrated in his self-knowledge is therefore both narrow and static. While he might, indeed, come to know (something of) himself better *because* of lying, however deep it be, it is knowledge of a limited and limiting facet of his self.

Self-knowledge seems to be a value that spans the intellectual and moral virtues. While clearly a virtue of the mind it also seems inescapably part of the moral man, if only because so many moral virtues depend upon it. This potential loss of self-knowledge, together with the lost opportunity to integrate opinions, represents a considerable risk to the liar's personality and, subsequently, to his character.

VI

The purpose of this discussion has been to exhibit what are claimed to be conjointly sufficient conditions for the presumption against lying. The grounds are claimed to be sufficient, if not exhaustive, and universal: all lies immediately restrict the deceived's freedom and create self-opposition in the liar. Each of these always tends, respectively, to generate disrespect and personality disintegration in the liar. It may be fairly asked, however, why this presumption should be thought moral, especially since three of the four conditions pertain directly to the liar. This merits some explanation. Let us look at our first pair of inherent disvalues-contingent threats.

The restriction of the deceived's freedom together with the disrespect it tends to promote in the liar would seem to be of obvious moral relevance. Each has a distinctly immoral practical significance for people other than the liar. The limiting of another's freedom seems always to require justification. At the very least because freedom, and the reasoning aspect of it which is affected by lying, is the ground of moral agency itself. Of course, the deceived's welfare or happiness may also be threatened by the restriction of his freedom—but this is tangential to the argument. The connection between freedom restriction and moral responsibility, then, yields a moral presumption against lying. What of the disrespect to which such restriction inclines the liar?

Disrespect is morally relevant in two ways, the second perhaps parasitic upon the first. The first is simply that people who treat others with disrespect fail in numerous ways to accord their freedom its rightful scope. Disrespect as a disposition, then, is morally bad because by definition it contributes to denying people their due,

their moral right to be treated in specific ways. Perhaps this is why, secondly, we judge the disposition or attitude of disrespect to be a character failing—a vice. A disrespectful person usually has the "compensatory" or "supplanting" trait of arrogance: an overestimating of his own worth. At any rate, it hardly seems objectionable to claim that restricting another's freedom and disposing oneself to disrespect are, by themselves, morally bad.

Self-opposition and its potential for personality disintegration seem less obviously embedded in the moral world. They would appear rather to support a prudential presumption against lying. Admittedly, self-opposition by itself is not morally significant.[28] Because of its contribution to personality disintegration, however, it makes a moral difference. What, then, is the moral import of personality-disintegration? Why is it not like jeopardizing one's health? The risk of psychological disruption would seem to be more a matter of the liar's own well-being than grist for a moral mill.

While personality integration is not equivalent to moral goodness or resolution of moral quandries, it is a condition for them. Without some level of personality coherence it makes no sense to speak of someone either beset by moral difficulties or in a state of moral anguish. It even becomes questionable to attribute moral vice to such an individual since lacking a stable referent for the attribution.

To the extent that the individual lacks personality integration, to that extent he is less of a moral agent. Where restriction of reason misleads moral agency in the case of the deceived, for the liar the loss is deeper. The deceived's deliberations are simply skewed or distorted by the lie. But the liar's very ability to deliberate, decide, and act so as to implement decision is threatened by the lie. Personality integration is fundamental to these functions which are constitutive of moral agentry. In Kantian language, loss of personality integration makes one less a member of the Kingdom of Ends: less able to originate his own ends and share in those of others; less able to formulate principles and then act on them.

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[28] It is *indirectly* of moral significance since it makes more difficult the discharging of moral obligation. But, as Kant pointed out, those many things which detract from or contribute to our overall happiness have a similar indirect moral relevance. Thus does prudence indirectly support morality.

VII

The bulk of this discussion has concerned the danger of lying to the liar. Self-opposition, personality weakening, and disrespect damage either his person or character. There is yet another way in which lying promotes bad character—one which does not flow from those just discussed. Lying is an "auxiliary" to specific vices, a likely and viable instrument for their development and deployment. Focusing on how lying can facilitate two such vices may suggest its complicity with others.

First of all, lying is well-adapted to the coward's repertoire of modus operandi. This is not to say that all or only cowards lie or that lying might not on occasion require courage, but it often provides an easy way of avoiding confrontation or a convenient means of postponing occasions which require strength. Lying is a tempting way of giving in to fear, and thereby supports a cowardly disposition. It avoids what would otherwise demand strength by concealment or deflection and affords a mode of hiding or fleeing. In general, cowardice seems more augmented by lying than by its opposite—veracity or honesty. It is interesting to note, moreover, how cowardice, irrespective of actual augmentation through lying, shares its structure and reinforces its tendencies.

Just as lying is not conforming one's speech to what one believes, so cowardice is not fitting one's deeds to one's convictions or values. The coward, like the liar, is in self-opposition; he does not fit his action to his belief. Because cowardice includes not standing up for what we are committed to, it harbors lack of self-respect. To the extent that we do not defend what matters to us in our cowardly flight, we fail to treat ourselves with respect. The irony here is that this loss of respect for who we most fundamentally are comes about because of over-concern for our safety or security. Afraid of some personal loss such as position or wealth, we sacrifice what our person stands for. In cowardice, we are unrestrained by concern for the defining principles of our personality. Like cowardliness, lying seems to bespeak weakness. Perhaps this is because of its affinity with lack of self-restraint.

Lying is related to this second character deficiency in a twofold way. First, lying *is* a lack of restraint. In lying we are not restrained by what we believe to be true. We break free of the con-

fines of truth, but not *merely* free of its confines. For we "break" what we believe to be true by our lying assertion and oppose the latter to the former. This is more than lack of self-restraint; it seems to be a defiance of such restraint. It is like not simply disobeying a command, but rather flouting it by doing the opposite of what is commanded.

Lying is also related to lack of self-restraint, promotion of self-indulgence, in another way: by serving it as in serving cowardice. For in lying we can try to get what we want when no way which respects the other's freedom has much hope of succeeding, or when such a way would be arduous. Rather than do without or take our chances with the other's free choice (which options call for self-limitation), we try to satisfy our desires by lying. Of course, by allowing our desires to take precedence, we fail to treat others with respect.

As in its relation to cowardice, lying need not abet self-indulgence, but it is nonetheless eminently suited to play this role. Indeed, the suitability of lying as an auxiliary to such vices as self-indulgence and cowardice[29] would seem to be an additional reason for thinking it morally dangerous for the liar. In this way, it provides ancillary support for the moral presumption against lying.

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[29] Of course, to a certain extent it is correct to say that lying can abet the formation of *any* vice—malice, sloth, and so on. However, we can employ *veracity* as well as lying in order to hurt another or avoid exertion—which seems to indicate no special connection between such vices and *lying*. But this is not so with either cowardice or self-indulgence. In these cases, lying seems much more suitable an auxiliary than its opposite, truth-telling practice. If this discussion is to suggest the complicity of lying with other vices, the connection should be at least as strong as that shown for cowardice and lack of self-restraint.